

# Wings on Edge: Endangered & Threatened Butterflies of New Jersey

“I understand that you know a location for Bronze Copper,” the unfamiliar voice said over the telephone. Not knowing enough to suspect that this voice might belong to a collector, Wade responded that he did indeed and that he would be happy to show the caller the spot. And this is how Wade first met Jeff Glassberg. (Unfortunately no photograph documented this rather dubious Stanley-meets-Livingstone moment in New Jersey Lepidopteran history.) They did not find Bronze Coppers that early June day, but Wade suggested that they take a little detour to a fen in the quaintly historic town of Ogdensburg. He and Sharon had seen flowering flat-topped white aster there — the caterpillar foodplant for Harris’ Checkerspot, and now the time of year was right for adults to be flying. Well, no sooner had they fought their way out the back side of a jungle of common reed, than Jeff espied a Harris’ Checkerspot. Wade’s first ever — and as it turns out, one of the last sightings in New Jersey of this spiffy butterfly.

That was 1992. It wasn’t until 2002 that the State of New Jersey adopted a list of Endangered, Threatened and Special Concern species of butterflies. Even though New Jersey is a very small state, thanks to its great habitat diversity — from coastal salt marshes to Pine Barrens forests and cedar swamps to

Piedmont old fields and grasslands to “high elevation” bogs and mountain balds — we enjoy a wonderful diversity of some 145 butterfly species (among the highest number of species per square mile). But owing to the sprawling development (and myriad other impacts) associated with being the most densely populated state, alarming declines have occurred in many of our native wildlife and plant species. Like most states, New Jersey first established lists of Endangered and Threatened (E&T) birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians, and plants, before recognizing that invertebrates face similar threats. Alarmingly, many states still do not have lists of E&T insects — perhaps because the overwhelming diversity of insects, together with the lack of user-friendly field guides, intimidated naturalists from elevating their game. But, beginning with *Butterflies through Binoculars*, this has changed. *BTB* made butterflies — the one kind of insect that almost everyone likes — so much easier to identify and enjoy. So within the past 15 years or so, we have seen a minor explosion of interest in, and field guides for, butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies, moths, tiger beetles, and insects in general. Undoubtedly this evolution of interest — allowing many more people to become quite knowledgeable about the

Opposite page: Acadian Hairstreaks haven’t been seen in New Jersey since 2005. This one was photographed in on July 18, 2008 at Goshen WMA, Litchfield Co., CT.

by Sharon and Wade Wander

distribution, abundance, and ecological importance of butterflies — factored into New Jersey’s decision to develop a list of E&T butterfly species. It was done using a somewhat dizzying process called the Delphi technique.

The Endangered and Nongame Species Program (ENSP) organized a small committee of experts, including Wade and NABA Vice-President Jim Springer, who, operating with a pre-selected group of species, determine which ones merited Endangered, Threatened, Special Concern, or Stable status. To avoid bruised egos (to say nothing of noses) the committee

members never met face-to-face and remained anonymous, conducting all communications via email. First, every member selected a status for each species on the list, indicated how confident (on a scale of 1 to 8) he or she was of their determination, and provided a brief explanation. In Round 2 the evaluations were shared and the committee members reconsidered their determinations in light of this information. After Round 3 (we told you it was dizzying) those species for which 75% of the members agreed on a status were submitted to the New Jersey Endangered and Nongame Species Council for approval,



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