



Progress at the

by Mary Ritch

National Butterfly Center



*Left:
Entering the
National
Butterfly
Center is now
smooth sailing!
Sept. 14, 2009.*



*Above: A heart-leaved
hibiscus, used by mallow-
feeders such as Gray
Hairstreak, nestles into a
purple sage (Leucophyllum
frutescens)(cenizo in Spanish),
caterpillar foodplant for
Theona Checkerspot.
Sept. 15, 2009.*

Butterfly Park Drive,

the previously dusty and bumpy entry road of the National Butterfly Center, has now been paved by the City of Mission, Texas. The newly smooth surface leading into the National Butterfly Center is emblematic of the progress that we are making!

After five years of “rooting in,” both the National Butterfly Center (NBC) and its plants are branching out with new growth in all kinds of directions. From the addition of new garden areas, to the blazing of a new gully trail,...from the development of a bird watching corner, to the paving of the road,...from hosting birthday parties to hosting service learning groups...it’s been a wonderfully busy 2009.

The annual 4th of July Butterfly Count reported 55 species at the NBC, despite a particularly hard year of drought. The increased numbers of host and nectar plants put in during the year, along with the existing gardens, would certainly have been a critical factor in helping them survive this difficult year. A circle of native ash trees was planted in an open area of the field,

providing refuge for butterflies, as well as future shade for school group activities. To display its usefulness as a hedge plant, the native manzanita, aka Barbados cherry, was planted in an arc near the parking area. This species hosts four different butterflies, and is an invaluable plant for pollinators. It typically reaches 6 feet high, and produces beautiful pink flowers with an attractive spray of red berries. Rows of whitebrush and kidneywood were planted along the canal fence, to serve as a wind block for the increasingly popular southeastern mistflower/turk’s-cap garden area. Whitebrush is a tall rather spindly native shrub, whose bloom produces an unforgettable perfume. It’s a favorite nectar source for many

butterflies. Kidneywood’s bloom scent rivals that of the whitebrush, and like whitebrush, it will grow into a narrow tree-like shrub. Kidneywood is the foodplant for Southern Dogface caterpillars. On the northern side of the gardens, 2009 saw an explosion of one of the most valuable groundcovers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley — frogfruit! This 6-inch plant is not only a foodplant for White Peacocks and Phaon Crescents, its nectar draws in a variety of checkerspots, blues, skippers, hairstreaks, and crescents. Frogfruit self-spreads, and the northwestern garden bed was completely filled with Texas frogfruit by the end of the summer. It’s cousin, silkyleaf frogfruit, expanded four times its size in this



A view of the northern portion of the National Butterfly Center from the top of the levee on the south side of the Mission Main Canal. Just to the left of center is the John F. Wible Pergola. To the left and rear of it is the Comfort Station, with its spectacular butterfly gates and floating butterfly roof. May 18, 2009.

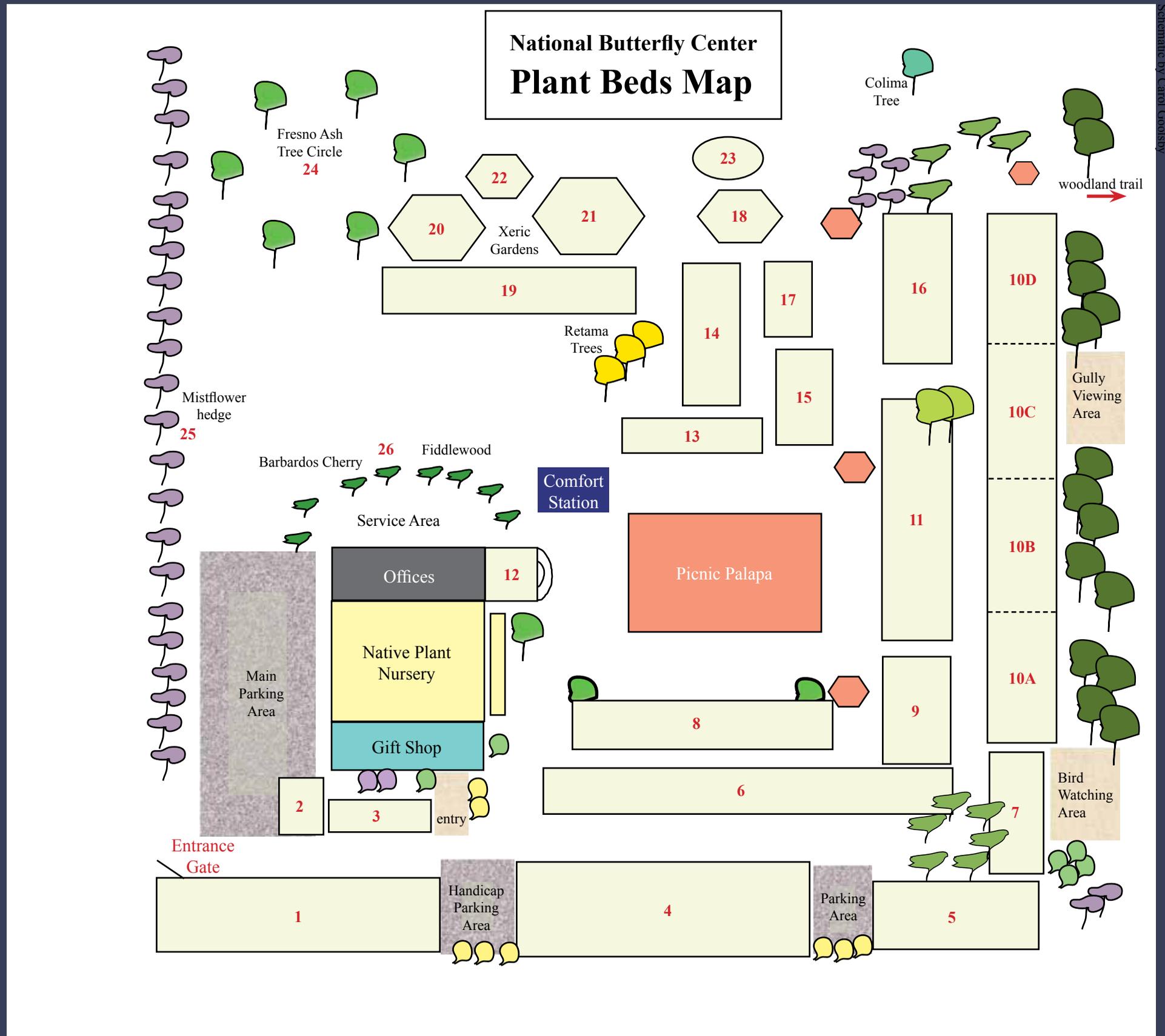
Help us maintain the gardens at the National Butterfly Center.

We have created spectacular gardens that are a magnet for, and home to, literally thousands of butterflies of hundreds of species. The gardens at the National Butterfly Center have been created using plants native to south Texas and northern Mexico. In fact, we believe that the gardens at the National Butterfly Center are the largest gardens in the United States that exclusively use plants native to the region of the gardens arranged in formal beds.

Since planting these demonstration gardens, almost 200 kinds of butterflies have been seen at the NBC and many thousands of adults and school children have come to the NBC to see, and to learn about, native butterflies.

Maintaining these gardens requires a tremendous amount of work, continually weeding, pruning and providing water for the plants (especially during the current drought). To help us maintain the gardens, please adopt a particular bed for 1 year or 5 years by donating the amount indicated for that particular garden bed. In return, we will place an attractive plaque in the bed you are maintaining saying "This bed maintained by the generosity of _____" or "This bed maintained in memory of _____" or "This bed maintained in honor of _____." along with a short statement of your choice.

See pg. 10 for a list of gardens shown on these pages and the donation required to maintain each garden. Send your donation to NABA, 4 Delaware Rd., Morristown, NJ 07960, indicating the number of the bed, years of mainenance, and exactly how you would like the plaque to read.



Donation Yielding Naming Rights for	1 year	5 years
1. Buttonbush/Ruellia/Water Willow Bed	\$1250	\$3750
2. Red Sage/Reullia Bed	300	900
3. Texas Lantana/Baby Bonnets Bed	750	2250
4. Betony Mistflower/Hibiscus Bed	1250	3750
5. Lantana/Hachinal/Kidneywood Bed	1000	3000
6. Blackbrush/Wedelia/Cenizo Bed	1250	3750
7. Turk's-cap/Mexican Olive Bed	600	1800
8. Tubetongue/Cowpen Daisy/Kidneywood	1000	3000
9. Low Croton/ Baretta/ Guamuchil Bed	750	2250
10. Spring Mistflower/Brushy Lippia Bed		
Section A	750	2250
Section B	750	2250
Section C	750	2250
Section D	750	2250
11. Vasey's Adelia/Coral Bean/Snake Herb Bed	1250	3720
12. Passionflower/White Plumbago/Frogfruit Bed	600	1800
13. Betony Mistflower/Blue Sage/Tenaza Bed	750	2250
14. Manzanita/White Plumbago Bed	750	2250
15. Mexican Nickerbean/Texas Lantana Bed	750	2250
16. Butterfly Mistflower, Red Sage, Hibiscus Bed	1000	3000
17. Butterfly Mistflower/Crucillo Bed	500	1500
18. Butterfly Mistflower Bed	500	1500
19. Native Grasses/Flor de San Juan/Leatherstem	750	2250
20. Bush Sunflower/Zinnia/Allionia Bed	400	1200
21. Walker's Manioc/Damiana/Jeffea Bed	600	1800
22. Manfred/Crucillo Bed	300	900
23. Texas Frogfruit Bed	300	900
24. Fresno Ash Tree Circle	750	2250
25. Butterfly Mistflower Hedge	1000	3000
26. Fiddlewood/Manzanita Arch	1000	3000

Right: A wild petunia (*Ruellia* sp.) at the NBC is a caterpillar foodplant for Texan Crescents, Common Buckeyes and White Peacocks. June 14, 2009.

Opposite page top: A schoolgroup at the NBC. April 21, 2009.

Opposite page bottom: Members of the Student Council of La Joya High School visit the NBC to both learn and to help. May, 2009.



Jeffrey Glasberg



Jeffrey Glasberg

year of drought, creating an exciting butterfly garden near the Comfort Station area at the center of the park. And if this weren't pleasing enough, two new 100-square foot patches of frogfruit planted themselves just 20 feet north of all the formal gardens, creating a new walkway area, now dubbed "Frogfruit Meadow." During the heat of the summer, when not much else was happening, one was always sure to see a refuge of butterfly activity at any of the frogfruit patches.

In the opposite direction, perhaps the most exciting development of the year has been the establishment of a bird-watching corner. Volunteers Jan and Dave Dauphin



Carol Goolsby

worked tirelessly late last fall and early this year to set up a line of bird-feeders and water fountain drippers, to lure the native brush birds out into view. Green Jays, Greater Kiskadees, cardinals, and Altimira Orioles now work like a rainbow splashing out deep bright colors from the gray-green forest. The new bird-watching corner had one picnic table and became so popular that we had to add another picnic table for everyone. This corner has not only attracted quite a few birders, but it is also a favorite gathering spot for sharing butterfly-watching info as well.

Just a few feet away, and 8 feet down, begins the new "Gully Trail." The old irrigation ditch on the eastern side of the park was cleared of fallen trees and branches. A trail was forged and mulched, and soon school groups began "walking into the earth." A magic moment seems to happen every time. Whether it is Mexican Bluewings or Malachites hovering above in the trees, or sulphurs stirred up from feeding in the grassbanks, the gully walk provides children a unique experience — one that seems to have had far greater affect on them than we had anticipated. At the end of the day, school children now report the gully walk as their favorite part of the field trip! One student even remarked that it was his favorite place to go in the entire Valley!

And one new development on the western side of the park has heralded cheers from the entire community! Late this summer, Butterfly Park Drive was finally paved. Our once pot-holed, mud-prone, caliche entry road is now covered with fresh blacktop, all the way to the canal. (Plans to pave all the way to the entrance gate of the National Butterfly Center are in the works.) In addition to paving Butterfly Park Drive, the northward continuation on the other side of Old Military Rd. now is paved and goes all the way to Business 83. Beyond the NBC, visitors will be pleased to know that in the same time period, Old Military Road (from which one enters Butterfly Park Drive) was also paved. The drive, connecting Bentsen State Park to

Inspiration Road, had been previously vexed by deep potholes. Our deep thanks to the county and city for providing these much-needed road improvements.

2009 has also been the year of "Service Learning" at the NBC. From one mile away, students and staff at the IDEA Academy of Mission began incorporating "service learning" into the curriculum. Once a week, on Wednesdays, a different age group comes to the park to spend the morning giving service. Teams of mulchers, weeders, planters, and hedgers can be found throughout the NBC, working away, while learning about butterflies, plants and the land in a way they would never have been able to learn in the traditional classroom. And the impact on the gardens has been tremendous!

Other groups also come to provide volunteer service — Mission High School Science Club, La Joya High School Student Council, and Sharyland High School Environmental Club — over 200 students throughout the first part of the year! All in all, nearly 1000 students and parents have visited the park so far this year, and nearly half of them for "Service Learning."

Probably the most exciting development of 2009 is that after a year of unavoidable delay (due to the financial crisis), we are now looking to break ground for the newly designed Welcome Center by January, 2010! The almost 5000 square foot building will be the gateway to the NBC and will house an exhibition area, a conference center, a gift shop and a cafe.

Like the explosion of self-propagating frogfruit, this year, the National Butterfly Center has branched out in a variety of new directions in 2009. Our roots are embedded even more deeply now, and with each new student who comes and goes, every new birder, every new butterflyer, changed by their happy experiences here, we reach higher into the sky. The National Butterfly Center is undoubtedly sprouting new support all over our community. We can't wait to see how we grow in 2010! Come see for yourself! 

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