

Butterfly Counting

by Mary Keim

Finding butterflies involves finding the plants they live on.

As Craig Huegel pointed out in *Butterfly Gardening with Florida's Native Plants*, native plants naturally support the more than 160 butterfly species that breed in Florida. Looking for butterflies thus involves looking for plants — food plants for larvae and nectar plants for adult butterflies. Butterflies also have specific habitat requirements; for example, Carolina Satyrs are typically found in wooded areas, while White Peacocks prefer moist, open areas.

The North American Butterfly Association (39 Highland Ave., Chappaqua, N.Y. 10514) was established to educate the public about the joys of non-consumptive recreational butterfly-flying — including listing, gardening, observation, photography, rearing, and conservation. They administer annual butterfly counts throughout the country, including the third annual butterfly count at Christmas in central Florida, held on June 26, 1993.

The Christmas count is organized and compiled by FNPS members Mary Keim and Randy Snyder (1584 Outlook St., Orlando, FL 32806). Most of the other counters are also FNPS members: Fred Harden, Deborah Green, David Marano, David Drylie, and FNPS Executive Director Mike Mingea.

White Peacock



Blue Hyssop

The 15-mile-diameter count area included Orlando Wilderness Park (a sewage plant effluent nutrient removal site), Green Images (David Drylie's native plant nursery), Tosohatchee State Reserve, and Seminole Ranch (a water management district property).

This year's count, totalling 27 species and 142 individuals, included four species of swallowtails (Papilionidae); three species of Whites and Sulfurs (Pieridae); three species of Hairstreaks (Lycaenidae); six species of Brushfoots (Nymphalinae); two species of Wood Nymphs (Satyrinae); two species of Milkweed Butterflies (Danainae); and seven species of Skippers (Hesperiidae).

The most abundant swallowtail was the Black Swallowtail. Thirteen of its caterpillars were found on water

hemlock (*Cicuta maculata*) at Orlando Wilderness Park. Cloudless Sulfur was the most common pierid species. The larvae of this lemon-yellow butterfly feed on *Cassia*. Nine small, gray Red-banded Hairstreaks, whose larvae eat dead leaves of wax myrtle and oaks, were seen mostly in the oak hammocks at Orlando Wilderness Park.

White Peacock was the most abundant adult butterfly of this year's count, with 29 individuals seen. Its larvae feed on plants such as wild petunia (*Ruellia caroliniensis*) and water hyssop (*Bacopa* spp.). Zebra and Gulf Fritillary butterflies were found near their larval food plant, passionvine (*Passiflora incarnata*).

Eight Viceroy butterflies were seen. Their food plant is willow. Paul Opler, in *A Field Guide to Eastern Butterflies*, points out that in Florida, where resident Monarchs are rare, Viceroy's are brown instead of red-orange — mimicking the distasteful Queen instead of the distasteful milkweed-eating Monarch.

The Georgia Satyr was common on this year's count, with 16 individuals seen, but the details about their larval food plants are not well known, listed as probably sedges in Opler's book.

Butterfly watching is a natural offshoot of your enthusiasm for native plants. Find and join a butterfly count next year, and get started on your butterfly garden!

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3/21/94