



Heard it through the Pipevine



July /
August
2006

Newsletter of the Austin Butterfly Forum • www.austinbutterflies.org

This has been an exciting summer for bug lovers. Snouts took over south Texas and then dominated the media, as Mike Quinn reports. Mike also reports on a six-legged relative of Godzilla—the Giant Cicada—that marched out of the tropics to zap us with its ear-piercing noises. Dan Hardy shares the story of how our NABA butterfly count metamorphosed from misery into glory and lists the final count tally. And beware those who think the newsletter is bedtime reading, as Joe Lapp has surprised us with a pop quiz on spiders.

Club Meeting

Monday August 28, 7:00 pm
Zilker Botanical Garden Center

Valerie Bugh will present "**Besides Butterflies - Austin's Other Arthropods**," which is a survey of the insects, spiders and other related creatures that are found in our central Texas area. Due to the large number of species involved, the emphasis is primarily on a general overview, with plenty of photographic examples of the major groups, including most of the insect and arachnid orders as well as myriapods and terrestrial crustaceans. By covering these diverse animals in a systematic way, the intention is to show how our beloved butterflies fit into the larger picture, review the scope of common insects, and introduce several less known species such as webspinners, barklice, and jumping bristletails.

Membership Reminder

Membership is now paid per calendar year with quarterly prorating after the first quarter. The cost is \$20 per household. If your membership has expired please don't forget to renew.



American Snout (M. Quinn)

Ink Spilt on American Snouts

by Mike Quinn

A lot of ink has been spilt across Texas on the American Snout butterfly lately... Most of the articles published in the popular press have been pleasingly accurate. This happy reflection is probably in part due to the fact that snouts are neither iconic insects such as monarchs (which incidentally are having one of their best summers ever) nor are they pests such as the gypsy moth. There are neither 'save the snout' nor 'control the snout' movements that I'm aware of (nor any 'save the spiny hackberry' societies for that matter). Few will decry next year's inevitable plunge in snout numbers.

And even though most of the press articles mentioned the fact that the butterfly can (and does) mess up the front of ones car on occasion, mostly such references were made in passing and certainly weren't the central focus of the article or TV segment. Case in point, Jennifer Owen, a park ranger at Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park in Mission, TX was interviewed for NBC Nightly News about the

damage the snouts had done to her new car. Ms. Owen was *truly smiling* when recounting needing over an hour to clean the snouts off the front of her car!

(By the way, when was the last time the national media flew to the Rio Grande Valley not to cover an ominous border issue, but to cover a butterfly?)

In addition to few people deifying or denigrating the snouts, the other reason that such an accurate picture of the butterfly's life history is being painted is no doubt due to the excellent snout research conducted by Drs. Raymond Neck and Lawrence Gilbert. These two scientists worked out much of the cause and effect of the species' phenomenal periodic population explosions. Specifically, they determined that prolonged drought followed by widespread summer rains triggers the explosions, with the drought knocking out the insect predators and parasitoids that would normally keep the snout population in check and the summer rains inducing their primary host plant, the spiny hackberry (*Celtis pallida*) to immediately put on new leaves on which the female snouts oviposit. With most of the predators at low ebb due to the drought, the majority of the snout larvae survives to adulthood and can quickly start another even larger generation.

Having access to the research published by these two and other scientists as well as historical accounts of sky-darkening snout migrations has really helped me when working with the media. Austin hasn't actually had that many snouts this year, but since I worked with various reporters on monarch issues over the years, I got a call from Anton Caputo of the San Antonio Express-News about a snout swarm he drove through southwest of San Antonio. After exchanging a bit of email, his story ran on the Friday, July 21 front page. Then the Associated Press picked it up and Anton's article ran around the state over the weekend. That caused my phone to start ringing.

Come Monday, the New York Times was calling. The next day, I logged over 500 miles on a state vehicle with a NYTimes reporter and photographer looking for the snout mother load around Choke Canyon Reservoir. We didn't exactly find the mother load, but the Times story ran on Thursday, Jul 27. Then my phone *really* started ringing.

By the weekend, I actually got a call from the British Broadcasting Corporation. We had a preliminary chat after which they were to call back for an on air interview. Unfortunately, the President chose that exact time to give an important speech on the situation in the Middle East, thus preempting my interview...

What's been a bit more surprising to me than the media frenzy has been how this small gray-brown insect has exceeded the bounds of natural history and entered our cultural history. In San Antonio, not only were they featured on the front page of the Express-News, but they were mentioned in the lead sentence in a sports article plus they were featured or mentioned in no less than four editorial cartoons by two different artists. The editorial cartoons referencing snouts had topics ranging from the situation in the Middle East to global warming.

In short, I think most people genuinely (or at least grudgingly) respect a critter that can survive and at times succeed fabulously in the often parched south Texas plains...

Austin Butterfly Count Saturday, June 24, 2006

by Dan Hardy

The morning began ominously, with darkening clouds and rain, but after waiting a while in a coffee shop, it let up, and rest of the day steadily improved. Sixteen people showed up, including three from out of town: Janet Rathjen from Houston, Derek Muschalek from Yorktown, and Willie Sekula from Floresville.

Initially we walked through the Zilker Butterfly Garden using umbrellas. Here we found a Spicebush Swallowtail caterpillar wrapped in a leaf nest, and a perched Comet Darner—a first for some of the dragonfly enthusiasts.

The rain had stopped by the time we reached our second count destination, the Barton Creek greenbelt at Barton Springs. We argued over the identification of several metalmarks. It helped to net them and examined them alive in a Petri dish or clear bag. We found a caterpillar wrapped in the leaf of a Velvet-Leaf Mallow. It was photographed and we used the Brock and Kaufmann's caterpillar book to verify that it was a Texas Powdered Skipper. Unlike other skippers, it does not have a constriction at the neck, a feature that confused me at first.

The next stop was the greenbelt entrance at 360. It features a large stand of blooming Buttonbush in the creek bed. There were numerous Northern Cloudywings and several Rawson's Metalmarks. An Eastern Tiger Swallowtail fed slowly and allowed itself to be photographed. We compared Pearl, Vesta, and Phaon Crescents.

After a lunch stop the caravan moved on to St. Edward's Park, in the Bull Creek greenbelt on the north side of the count circle. By this time it was sunny, hot and humid, and we had forgotten about dreary start of the day. Spicebush Swallowtails were photographed as they mudpuddled. We also found Red-spotted Purple, Northern Cloudywings, Lyside Sulphur, and lots of Ceraunus Blues.

Finally, we revisited Zilker Butterfly Garden and the Barton Creek Greenbelt, but only added Scallopwing species, Little Yellow and Dainty Sulphur.

The day ended with 50 species, and 279 individuals. Here are the results for the last three years:

2006:	50 species	279 individuals
2005:	53 species	339 individuals
2004:	35 species	140 individuals

Although 50 species seems like a lot, none were truly rare. With good weather and a favorable spring we could get over 60 species. Some species, like Silvery Checkerspots were not found, but that is because they were between flights. Just two weeks earlier I had hundreds of Silvery Checkerspot caterpillars on Frostweed. In a few weeks they were flying again. Some species, like White-striped Longtail and Laviana White-Skipper, used to be rare in Austin, but are now found regularly (the latter breeds and the former probably does, too). Misses and disappointments: Hardly any hairstreaks; no Bordered Patches; only one satyr species; no Ladies.

Participants: Lauren Bauer, Val Bugh, Liz Cooper, Robert Corbin, Dan Hardy, Joe Lapp, Julia Marsden, Derek Muschalek, Mike Quinn, Barbara Ribble, Janet Rathjen, Larry Shaw, Willie Sekula, Ramona Urbanek, Scott Young, Joan Zahornecky.

NABA Butterfly Count 2006

compiled by Dan Hardy

Date: 24 June 2006

Observers: L. Bauer, V. Bugh, L. Cooper, R. Corbin, D. Hardy, J. Lapp, J. Marsden, D. Muschalek, M. Quinn, B. Ribble, J. Rathjen, L. Shaw, W. Sekula, R. Urbanek, S. Young, J. Zahornecky

Adults (50 species, 279 individuals):

Pipevine Swallowtail (11)
Black Swallowtail (6)
Giant Swallowtail (9)

Spicebush Swallowtail (6)
Eastern Tiger Swallowtail (3)
Orange Sulphur (1)
Cloudless Sulphur (4)
Large Orange Sulphur (1)
Lyside Sulphur (1)
Little Yellow (1)
Sleepy Orange (2)
Dainty Sulphur (1)
Juniper Hairstreak (1)
Gray Hairstreak (2)
Hairstreak species (1)
Rawson's Metalmark (4)
Fatal Metalmark (4)
Metalmark species (1)
Ceraunus Blue (25)
Reakirt's Blue (2)
Snout Butterfly (1)
Gulf Fritillary (11)
Zebra Longwing (2)
Texan Crescent (37)
Vesta Crescent (11)
Phaon Crescent (6)
Pearl Crescent (3)
Question Mark (3)
Common Buckeye (10)
Tropical Leafwing (1)
Leafwing species (2)
Hackberry Emperor (4)
Tawny Emperor (2)
Satyr species (1)
Queen (3)
Laviana White-Skipper (1)
Silver-spotted Skipper (21)
White-striped Longtail (1)
Northern Cloudywing (14)
Texas Powdered Skipper (4)
Horace's Duskywing (3)
Common/White Checkered-Skipper (2)
Desert Checkered-Skipper (1)
Scallopwing species (Staphylus sp.) (1)
Clouded Skipper (9)
Orange Skipperling (2)
Southern Skipperling (2)
Southern Broken-Dash (4)
Fiery Skipper (3)
Sachem (3)
Dun Skipper (7)
Celia's Roadside-Skipper (11)
Eufala Skipper (7)

Immatures (4 species, 10 individuals):

- Pipevine Swallowtail caterpillars (5)
- Spicebush Swallowtail caterpillars (2)
- Northern Cloudywing caterpillars (2)
- Texas Powdered Skipper caterpillar (1)

Giant Cicadas March on State Capital

by Mike Quinn

There's a new cicada in town. It's the Giant Cicada (*Quesada gigas*) and its song matches its name! It's loud, whining, piercing call is primarily heard at dawn and dusk at the northern edge of its range in central Texas, but further south, it sings all day and well into the night.

In my capacity as invertebrate biologist for Texas Parks & Wildlife, I have been getting multiple reports of this beast-of-an-insect from Austin, Bastrop, New Braunfels, San Marcos, San Antonio, and Seguin since mid June. Reports are also being directed to Texas Parks & Wildlife's ornithology and herpetology staffs as some folks think the sound is emanating from a new bird or frog in the area.

South Texas residents should all be familiar with the call of the giant cicada (known locally as chicharra grande), but most south Texans are likely unaware of its interesting life history. This insect usually calls from the tops of tall trees and otherwise spends most of its multi-year life underground as an immature insect feeding on tree roots, primarily Huisache and other members of the Legume family.

Unlike crickets and grasshoppers which make sounds by rubbing their wings and legs together, male cicadas produce sound by vibrating special membrane-like structures on their abdomens. The male's enlarged abdomen is mostly filled with an air sac that functions as a resonance chamber thus greatly amplifying their song. (Cicadas are the world's loudest insects.)

Male giant cicadas call to attract females from May to October in south Texas. The height of the calling season occurs in June and July. Like many other singing insects, cicadas synchronize their calls. There are over 40 species of Cicadas in Texas but none are as large or as loud as the giant cicada. When these giants get tuned up, they can make an almost deafening racket that has been likened to the steam-whistle of a locomotive engine! A more modern analogy might liken their call to a revved up model

airplane. Translated into words, their call sounds like: chic-chic-chic-chic-chic, zwEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE-EEEEEEEE... and can be repeated several times without pausing.

There are historical records of the giant cicada in San Antonio from the 1930's but over the decades (possibly due to the 1950's drought) they died back. Why they are suddenly back (with a vengeance) is unclear, but many insects, birds, and other animals are expanding their ranges northwards, but few make their presence as well known as the giant cicada.

For more information on these fascinating insects (including a recording of their song), visit the following link: <http://texasento.net/Cicada.htm>



Note the enlarged abdomen of the male giant cicada (above), which serves as a sound chamber (Photos courtesy C. Bordelon)

Thank You!

We owe Dan Hardy a big thank you for organizing our 2006 NABA Butterfly Count. It was a tremendous success and great fun. It began with rain, but somehow it only took Dan an hour to make the rain go away and get all the butterflies to come out. Thank you Dan!

Spider Pop Quiz

by Joe Lapp

Okay, everyone, pop quiz today. But don't sweat—it's open book and open notes. You can even cheat if you want; there's no wrong way to correctly identify a spider. This isn't being graded, either, as spiders offer their own consequences for false identifications.

You'll find the answers at the end of the newsletter, following the Entomological Calendar.



Spider C



Spider A



Spider D



Spider B



Spider E



Spider F



Spider I



Spider G



Spider J



Spider H



Spider K

Entomological Calendar

Mike Quinn brings you a more extensive calendar of entomological events, focusing on events of possible interest to us bug-lovin' folks here in central Texas. For an even more complete listing, see the calendar on his web site at www.texasento.net/events.htm.

AUGUST

26 - 27

Dragonfly Festival 2006 – Roswell, New Mexico

Annually since 2001. Held at the Roswell Convention & Civic Center in Roswell, New Mexico. (505) 622-6755 ext 16 or dragonflyfest@hotmail.com See <http://tinyurl.com/qzxej>

Mon 28

Austin Butterfly Forum Meeting – Zilker Botanical Garden Center, 7 - 9pm

Valerie Bugh will present "Besides Butterflies - Austin's Other Arthropods." See the box at the front of this newsletter for more information.

SEPTEMBER

Sat 9

Mexican Independence Day NABA Butterfly Count – Mexico

The Mexican Independence Day Count is Mexico's equivalent of the U.S. 4th of July Count. The count is held in Chipinque/Estanzuela. Last year 146 species and 4,538 individual were counted. If you are interested in participating, contact Dan Hardy (ddh787@yahoo.com).

Mon 25

Austin Butterfly Forum Meeting – Zilker Botanical Garden Center, 7 - 9pm

Mike Quinn presents a program on beetles, showing representative examples of the major beetle families. Discussion will include tips for identifying beetles to the family level.

Pop Quiz Answers

(see quiz on pages 5 and 6)

- A. Black widow (not adult female, probably male).
- B. Orbweaver (Spined Micrathena). C. Crab Spider.
- D. Spitting Spider. E. Jumping Spider. F. Wolf Spider.
- G. Hackle-band Orbweaver. H. Jumping Spider.
- I. Brown Recluse. J. Lynx Spider.
- K. Crevice Weaver (Southern House Spider).

Austin Butterfly Forum, Inc.
1701 Spyglass Dr. #11
Austin, TX 78746



Austin Butterfly Forum Membership Form

Become a member or renew your membership.

Your membership helps support our club activities, but members also receive bimonthly **newsletters** with upcoming events and informative articles, **butterfly plants** that we often give away, and **discounts** on books, T-shirts and more.

Name:	Daytime phone:
Street:	Evening phone:
City: State: Zip:	Email:

Membership is \$20 annually per household, due each January and prorated thereafter.

Make check payable to the Austin Butterfly Forum and send to:

ABF c/o Doris Hill, 1605 Broadmoor Drive, Austin, TX 78723