

# Heard it through the Pipevine



Sep /  
Oct  
2006

Newsletter of the Austin Butterfly Forum • [www.austinbutterflies.org](http://www.austinbutterflies.org)

*In this issue of the newsletter we welcome a new contributor, Shawn Ashbaugh, whose writing and photos are both wonderful. Shawn tells the tale of how he came to know and love butterflies. We've also included a sampling of his series of Crimsom Patch lifecycle photos. We look forward to more contributions from Shawn in the future. Valerie Bugh provides a helpful reference for all of us trying to make sense of the various N-eyed critters running around, so that we can strive to one day know maybe a fourth of the bugs she introduced in her tour of Austin's arthropods. Also, Dan Hardy tells us of his surprise encounter with a White Peacock in Austin and provides some striking photos. Finally, be sure to check out the calendar, as October is a very busy month for butterflies.*



Monarch chrysalis (S. Ashbaugh)

## How I Came to Know and Love Butterflies

*by Shawn Ashbaugh*

I grew up in a small town in Iowa. There wasn't a whole lot to do. My buddies and I traveled the gravel roads and explored the ag fields throughout Decatur county. We birded mostly – discovering a Mountain Bluebird hundreds of miles east of its range, searching grassy fields for Henslow's Sparrows, scaring up Short-eared Owls from their perch in the tall grass, crawling through thickets chasing Connecticut Warblers, and listening for the sweet whistle of Harris's Sparrows over the crunch of our boots in the otherwise silence of the winter snow. During the spring and summer months, we occasionally stumbled across Monarch and Eastern Tiger Swallowtail chrysalides. We knew nothing about host plants and very little about a butterfly's lifecycle, but it was fun keeping the chrysalides, waiting for the butterflies to emerge and fly from a jar to begin the next phase of their journey.

### Club Meeting

**Monday October 23, 7:00 pm**

Zilker Botanical Garden Center

Carol Malcolm of Captial Area Beekeepers presents an **Introduction to Beekeeping.**

### 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.

Still, I'm new to butterflies.

30 years later, my butterfly garden is a work in progress, but it attracts its fair share of butterflies. This past spring, I discovered around 20 Monarch caterpillars in different instars among the numerous tropical milkweeds in the garden. I watched them carefully over the course of a couple of weeks. Observing them was somewhat bittersweet; it was fascinating to monitor their growth and feeding behavior, but I was shocked at the caterpillars' mortality rate. I was able to track the ultimate demise of 14 of the approximately 20 caterpillars. Between ants, wasps, anoles, mantises, spiders, unknown parasitism, and hail, none of those 14 successfully completed the lifecycle to ultimately emerge as a butterfly. Obviously, there's safety in numbers – the more eggs, the more caterpillars, the more likelihood a butterfly will successfully emerge. Maybe I was a bit naive, but 0 for 14 seemed a bit ridiculous. Either that or my garden was more nurturing to the enemy than the larvae.

Unwilling to let nature take its course, I began to collect caterpillars and bring them indoors. I fed them, cleaned the frass from their Tupperware abodes, and guarded them from my sons' curious little hands. One afternoon, I discovered one of the caterpillars hanging from the top of a container in the shape of the letter "J," and two mornings later, I awoke to find a familiar chrysalis hanging in the caterpillar's place – something I hadn't seen since childhood, but the memories flooded back. I was amazed, and I couldn't figure out how that caterpillar turned into such a sleek little compartment. It was magical – close your eyes to a caterpillar and . . . "Voila! Open your eyes . . . behold the chrysalis!"

I had many questions running through my head, but no research in books or on the internet showed me exactly what had happened while I had been sleeping. I felt cheated, and I was determined to experience the transformation first hand.

One afternoon, I watched a caterpillar making a beeline for the top of the container, so I plucked him from his home for observation. He was my window to understanding. Whether he liked it or not, he was going to reveal the secret to his trick. It was a struggle getting him to set up shop on a horizontal piece of wood trim I found in the garage. He didn't like it, and my son twice found the escapee lumbering across my study floor. Ultimately, he surrendered and stayed put. I set up the camera, and waited . . . took photos periodically . . . waited . . . took some more photos . . . and waited some more. My wife was frustrated. How can a man sit for hours watching a "worm" from behind a camera? I'm telling you I was

determined to see and document the entire transformation for myself.

It happened slowly. After coming to rest upside down under the wood trim, the caterpillar rested for 24 hours, and without much fanfare, hanging from its rear prolegs buried in silk adhesive, it slowly lowered itself into the shape of a "J." It lost weight, shriveled up a bit, turned sort of greenish and remained motionless. I wondered if I had done something wrong, but approximately 24 hours later, it started to move. The surface of its body rippled. One of my sons could have hit me in the back of the head with a golf ball, but it wouldn't have mattered; I wasn't moving. Finally, the caterpillar straightened out and began to swell. This was the moment I had been waiting for. The skin split from behind its head, and the ripples I had been observing running the length of the caterpillar's body pushed the skin to the rear prolegs. The brilliant green, naked pupa gyrated, rid itself of its skin, and slowly morphed into the shape of the chrysalis. Over the next twelve hours, the chrysalis hardened to a glossy finish, and shiny gold medallions formed to finish off what has to be one of nature's most beautiful creations.

Maybe you have sat down to marvel at a butterfly's lifecycle. I hadn't. It is a remarkable sort of ugly duckling story. We can watch him pupate and emerge, but the wings that transform him from landlubber to graceful master of the winds . . . the proboscis that converts him from masticator to nectar sipper . . . and those marvelous colors . . . this is the ultimate reality show makeover that will forever occur behind the closed doors of his clever compartment.

Two long weeks later, much to my wife's chagrin, I was back in my chair awaiting his arrival. I remembered from childhood that the Monarch's chrysalis would change from green to transparent, and the Monarch's black and orange coloration would slowly become visible through the cuticle over the last few days of its curious slumber. The Monarch emerged around noon on the 14th day. It took him around two hours to pump up his wings and express superfluous fluid. I took photos so I wouldn't forget.

When I felt it was time for flight, I offered my finger for a new perch. He climbed on, and I walked him to his new home outside. Almost immediately, he took flight and soared to about 15 feet, gliding between wing beats over my head. He began to lose altitude, and I instinctively held out my hand where he, incredibly, descended back to his perch on my finger. We weren't through being pals quite yet; he sat on my finger for another two hours before he took flight again, and we parted ways for good.

The magician had revealed the secret to his most incredible trick.

Since that time, my sons and I have raised Cloudless Sulphur, Giant Swallowtail, Queen, and Crimson Patch butterflies. We have learned that some chrysalides look like leaves, while others look like the stump of a broken-off twig. We have learned that some species emerge early in the morning and others prefer to emerge later in the afternoon. No matter what their behavioral differences, the end result is a constant – their transformation is simply remarkable and one of nature's most supreme and mysterious achievements.



White Peacock (D. Hardy)



White Peacock caterpillar (D. Hardy)

## White Peacock in Austin

by Dan Hardy

The evening of August 13 I took a walk to the Barton Creek Greenbelt behind my house as the sun was setting. I didn't see any butterflies, I was just enjoying the shade. I decided to check some Frogfruit (*Phyla incisa*) for yet another attempt to find Phaon Crescent caterpillars. I do this a lot, but as yet have never found any.

To my surprise, I quickly found a really large black nymphalid caterpillar, way too big for a Phaon. It was munching away on a frogfruit flower. I wondered if it was Buckeye, but I couldn't remember if they ate frogfruit. I popped it into a Ziploc bag (essential equipment for field trips, as far as I am concerned). Then I saw another caterpillar, same size and color, walking across some rocks nearby. They had two spines in front of the head with knobs at the end. That had to mean something.

At home I ran to get [Caterpillars in the Field and Garden](#) by Allen, Brock and Glassberg but these caterpillars didn't match Buckeye or Variegated Fritillary or Red Admiral, my initial candidates. Wrong host plant for the latter two. I went to the index and looked up verbena and saw that White Peacocks feed on that, but they aren't found here.

But the picture matched. Blackish body, spines with orange bases, and head with long clubbed horns. And the host plant was frogfruit, among others. I saw only one other record of a fall stray on Durden's checklist. White Peacocks (*Anartia jatrophae*) are rather common in the Rio Grande Valley. Other host plants reported include Water Hyssop, various verbenas, and acanthus family plants, such as green shrimp plants.

I raised the two caterpillars on frogfruit. I had to buy some healthy plants at a nursery. One caterpillar promptly died, but the second grew, pupated and on about three weeks later, a White Peacock emerged.

More sightings of adult White Peacocks turned up in August at Hornsby Bend by John Ingram, in the Shawn Ashbaugh's yard., and at Zilker Botanical Garden. In fact, the White Peacock has been seen throughout the Edwards Plateau this year.

# Quick Reference to All Insects

by Valerie Bugh

## Big Orders

Coleoptera (beetles)  
Lepidoptera (butterflies, moths)  
Hymenoptera (bees, ants, wasps)  
Diptera (flies)  
Homoptera (cicadas, leafhoppers, aphids, scale)  
Hemiptera (true bugs)

## Primitive Winged Insects

Odonata (dragonflies, damselflies)  
Ephemeroptera (mayflies)  
Plecoptera (stoneflies)

## Long-winged Insects

Neuroptera (lacewings, antlions, owlfly, dustywing, mantisflies)  
Mecoptera (scorpionflies, hangingflies)  
Megaloptera (alderflies, dobsonflies, fishflies)  
Raphidioptera (snakeflies)  
Trichoptera (caddisflies)

## Orthopteroid Insects

Orthoptera (grasshoppers, katydids, crickets)  
Blattodea (cockroaches)  
Phasmatodea (walkingsticks)  
Mantodea (mantids)  
Dermaptera (earwigs)  
Isoptera (termites)

## Misc. Orders

Thysanura (silverfish)  
Microcoryphia (jumping bristletails)  
Siphonaptera (fleas)  
Collembola (springtails)  
Thysanoptera (thrips)  
Embioptera (webspinners)  
Psocoptera (booklice, barklice)

## Orders Not Covered in Presentation

Mallophaga (chewing lice)  
Anoplura (sucking lice)  
Diplura (diplurans)  
Protura (proturans)  
Strepsiptera (twisted-wing parasites)  
Zoraptera (zorapterans)  
Grylloblattodea (ice insects)

## Some Useful Books

Insects (Peterson Field Guide) by Borror and White  
National Audubon Society Field Guide to Insects and Spiders by Milne and Milne  
The Common Insects of North America by Swan and Papp  
Simon & Schuster's Guide to Insects by Arnett and Jacques  
Insects of the Texas Lost Pines by Taber and Fleenor  
Beetles (Peterson Field Guide) by White  
A Manual of Common Beetles of Eastern North America by Dillon and Dillon  
How to Know the True Bugs by Slater and Baranowski  
Dragonflies Through Binoculars by Dunkle  
Caterpillars of Eastern North America by Wagner  
A Field Guide to Moths of Eastern North America by Covell  
Field Guide to Grasshoppers, Katydid and Crickets of the US by Capinera, Scott and Walker  
A Field Guide to Spiders and Scorpions of Texas by Jackman

## Some Useful Websites

Bugguide.net (<http://www.bugguide.net/>)  
Cedar Creek Insects (<http://cedarcreek.umn.edu/insects/albumframes/orderframe.html>)  
Texas Entomology (<http://www.texasento.net/>)  
Field Guide to Texas Insects (<http://insects.tamu.edu/fieldguide/>)  
Forestry Images (<http://www.forestryimages.org/insects.cfm>)  
Google (<http://www.google.com/>)

## Thank You!

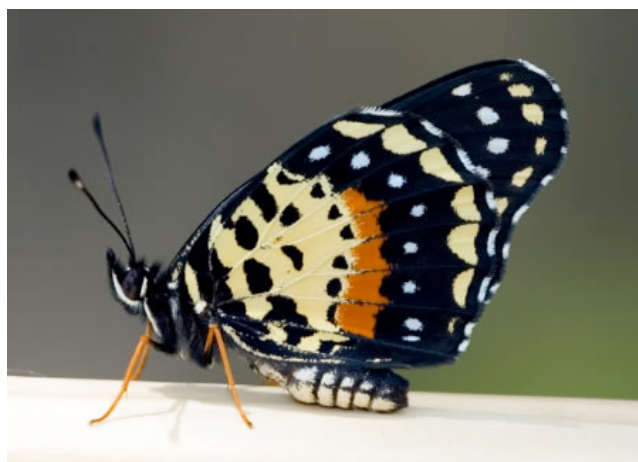
On Saturday September 30 we held a workday at Zilker Botanical Garden's butterfly garden. Thank you **Valerie Bugh, Mary Holland, Mary T. Parker, Mary Quinn, Mike Quinn, Roxie Rochat,** and **Scott Young** for participating.

Highlights included a Double-banded Bycid beetle ([texasento.net/Sphaenothecus.htm](http://texasento.net/Sphaenothecus.htm)) and a yellow-bellied racer. Roxie noted 8 species of butterflies and 12 species of Odonates.

# Crimson Patch Lifecycle

by Shawn Ashbaugh

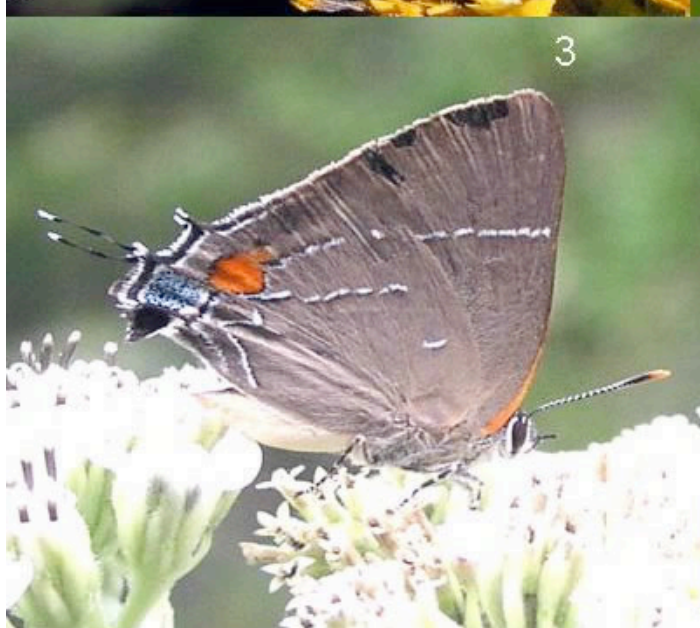
for the full series,  
see [www.shawnashbaugh.com](http://www.shawnashbaugh.com)



## Quiz: Name that Hairstreak

*by Dan Hardy*

(answers in next newsletter)



# 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](http://www.texasento.net/events.htm).*

## OCTOBER

**14 - 15**

**National Wildlife Refuge Week** – Balcones Canyonlands NWR, Austin

The Balcones Canyonlands NWR is celebrating National Wildlife Refuge Week at Doeskin Ranch on RR 1174, west of Austin. There will be numerous activities, including **monarch tagging**, dragonfly and damselfly walks, spider walks, and other nature walks, as well as a pond creatures exhibit and workshops. Visit <http://tinyurl.com/eoafx> for information.

**14 - 18**

**Pre-Fest Butterfly Tour** – El Cielo Biosphere Reserve, TAMPS, Mexico

Annual trip to Mexico preceding the Texas Butterfly Festival. See <http://www.texasbutterfly.com/prefest.html>, or contact the Greater Mission Chamber of Commerce at 1-800-580-2700 or [mission@missionchamber.com](mailto:mission@missionchamber.com)

**16 - 20**

**Rio Grande Prix of Butterflying** – Rio Grande Valley and/or Nuevo Leon, Mexico

Butterfly identification context to benefit NABA International Butterfly Park. Contact Sue Sill at 956-583-9009 or [sill@naba.org](mailto:sill@naba.org). <http://tinyurl.com/56kyb>

**19 - 22**

**Texas Butterfly Festival 2006** – Mission, TX

Yearly butterfly festival in the Rio Grande Valley, with butterflying field trips around the valley, seminars, children's activities, and vendor booths. See <http://www.texasbutterfly.com>, or contact the Greater Mission Chamber of Commerce at 1-800-580-2700 or [mission@missionchamber.com](mailto:mission@missionchamber.com)

**Mon 23**

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

Carol Malcolm of Capital Area Beekeepers presents an **Introduction to Beekeeping**.

## NOVEMBER

**1 - 5**

**El Cielo Butterfly Festival 2006** – Cd. Mante, Tamaulipas, Mexico

Contact Sonia Ortiz at [sortiz@teledinamica.com.mx](mailto:sortiz@teledinamica.com.mx) or 011(5281)8378-5926. See <http://www.elcielofestival.com>

**Mon 27**

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

Member show-and-tell. Details to be announced.

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.

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Daytime phone:</b>
<b>Street:</b>	<b>Evening phone:</b>
<b>City:</b> <b>State:</b> <b>Zip:</b>	<b>Email:</b>

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