



Heard it through the Pipevine



Apr/May/June
2008

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

Butterfly Count

Sat Jun 28

Meet at the Zilker Botanical
Garden Center parking lot at
8:00 am

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Mike Quinn, club president, presents a gift to Marvin Lewis, at the May meeting.

July Meeting

A Trip to the Monarch Sanctuary

7:00 pm Monday July 28, 2008

Zilker Garden Center

Mon Jul 28 - Club Meeting: A Trip to the Monarch Sanctuary, presented by Marguerite and Vince Hirsch, along with Mike Quinn. Marguerite and Vince are new members who recently visited the Monarch's Mexican wintering grounds. They will share pictures and stories of their trip. Mike Quinn, the club's president, will discuss current issues in Monarch conservation.

Retirement of Marvin Lewis

Marvin Lewis will retire this summer. He is moving to family property near south of Dallas. Marvin has been a club member since the early 1990s, a member of the board of the Austin Butterfly Forum, and the gardener for the city of Austin garden in charge of the Zilker Butterfly garden.

The ABF board presented him with a print by artists Nan Wilson, which shows life cycle of the Zebra Heliconian. A lot of us identify Marvin with Zebras because he raised them in the butterfly house and kick-started a population comeback.

Marvin has a degree in chemistry. He was a carpenter and organic gardener before working part time at the Zilker garden. He later became full time and started taking care of the Butterfly Garden. He had a background

and appreciation for nature, but he built his butterfly knowledge from scratch. He has been the board's representative to the AAGG meetings for years. He has been a hard working, faithful member of the Forum. He was made a Life Member years ago.

Marvin took very good care of the garden, picking out plants and trees that would be hostplants, as well as keeping nectar flowers available. The garden was an oasis when the rest of Austin was in drought. Dan Hardy recalled: "When I visited the garden I always sought Marvin to ask him what kind of butterflies were around. One time he showed me a caterpillar on the passionvines that he didn't recognize. It was not a Zebra Heliconian. It turned out to be a Mexican Silverspot, the first time one had been found breeding in Austin.

Doris Hill remembers the following: "One winter Marvin "overwintered" a group of Zebra Heliconians in one of the big greenhouses. They do well in confinement. Every once and a while someone would leave the door open and some butterflies would escape. But this gave us a headstart on the next spring and summer, since we usually have to wait for Zebras to come up from Mexico at the end of the summer. That year there were Zebras all over town and Marvin had a part in it."

"He used to give me a hard time because I didn't have email. I finally pointed out that he didn't have a phone, so I thought we were even."

"I can't believe he's really going to leave Austin, but I know he'll have fun on family land out on the prairie planting butterfly plants and keeping his own schedule."

Cool Caterpillars

In April we were honored to host Dr. David Wagner, one of the foremost experts on caterpillars. David used part of his time to collect caterpillars for his research and we took advantage of it by tagging along.

Although our weather can be a bit unpredictable at that time of year, we were lucky enough to get two very good days for our expeditions. Storms on Sunday made it necessary to cancel the planned outing, but Saturday and Monday provided great conditions. Caterpillars are collected by using "beat sheets" which look like poorly designed white kites. However, when a square yard of fabric stretched over a simple wood frame is held under a branch while it is hit with a stick, all



April speaker, David Wagner, finds caterpillars by beating on trees and collecting the insects that drop off in his beat sheet.

manner of odd creatures will fall into sight. Many larvae are cryptically colored and so it is very difficult to find them by just looking into the leaves (not to mention hard on the neck). By repeatedly striking the branches and making the caterpillars fall out, we found dozens of fascinating species in a very short time.

Dr. Wagner explained that many butterfly caterpillars are found on herbaceous plants and low-growing shrubs, while moth caterpillars are more likely to be found on more woody vegetation. Some caterpillars look like sticks with the same color and pattern as the bark where they live. They are almost impossible to tell from twigs on the beat sheets, but David showed us that if you tilt the beat sheet and jiggle it a bit, the leaves and twigs will slide down. Anything that looks like a twig that "sticks" is a caterpillar!

One unfortunate incident happened on Saturday. Mike Quinn, professional entomologist and president of our club, was enthusiastically whacking the branches above his head when a large buck moth caterpillar fell, not into the sheet as intended, but onto his arm. While most caterpillars are harmless, a few possess poisonous spines for defense, and the buck moth is one of them. Mike's skin reacted almost immediately with a painful, swollen rash, but there was no need to call EMS.

Most of the time, though, was spent more pleasantly, finding and learning about all the unusual larvae that inhabit our central Texas environment. David was generous in sharing his vast knowledge and helping us learn more about immature lepidopterans, as well as being very personable and a joy to be with. We couldn't have asked for a better guide.

—Note and caterpillar photos by Valerie Bugh



David Wagner knocked this rarely-seen Juniper Hairstreak caterpillar from an Ashe Juniper with his beat sheet. us



One of these is a caterpillar mimicking a stick.



Unicorn Caterpillar (Notodontidae: Schizura unicornis)

In Search of Moths 101

If there are ten times as many moths as butterflies, one might think that there should be ten times as many books on moths as there are on butterflies. Much to my disappointment, when I finally got around to looking for a field guide for moths more detailed than my ancient version of the **Golden Guide to Butterflies and Moths** (160pgs), I found almost nothing at my admittedly low scholarly level and price targets. The **Kaufman Field Guide to Insects of North America** (Eaton and Kaufman) is a terrific overview book but only contains about 30 pages of moths. David Wagner's **Caterpillars of Eastern North America** has some wonderful background information about each species, but focuses on the caterpillars and shows all adult moths as pinned specimens, which is frustrating when you're a rank beginner and looking at an adult in what you suspect is a diagnostic pose. bugguide.net is terrific, but web pages are hard to "thumb" through when you have absolutely no idea where to start.

My search finally led me to a delightful book titled **Discovering Moths: Nighttime Jewels in Your Own Backyard** by John Himmelman. Copyright 2002, its 232 pages contain 24 color plates and numerous black and white illustrations of the moths (plus a few caterpillars) he describes throughout the book. John is a passionate amateur with a passion for moths, an impish sense of humor, and a gift for sharing his sometimes hard-won knowledge with others. Of special interest to me was the account of his encounter with David Wagner, who had visited us the week before. John provides a great introduction to moth families and shares personal encounters with various members of each family, which really make them come alive.

Other highlights are his descriptions of how to attract moths with bait and lights, how bug zappers kill more beneficial insects and mosquito-predators than mosquitos, and how to disable their electrifying grid to attract moths safely. The final chapter contains an insightful look at the pros and cons of collecting versus observing or photographing and an unsettling look at how and where we draw our own personal lines in the "to kill or not" debate. He shares his recent insights about the fact that insects do feel pain and that even when we adopt a Catch and Release policy, we often amputate the feet and antennae, their major sensory organs.

I would highly recommend this book to anyone who is interested in learning about moths. It provides a lot to learn and a lot more think about, sprinkled with liberal doses of humor.

—Roxie Rochat



Geyata Ajilvsgi spoke to the Forum at the May meeting. She opened up the floor to Questions and Answers and we had a lively discussion. We look forward to her next book on butterflies of the hill country, due to come out in a few years.

Austin Yahoo Butterfly group

New Butterfly Forum members and anyone who isn't already spending enough time at their computer will want to join our local online forum for Austin-area butterflyers: austinbutterflies@yahogroups.com. The current membership volume has been extremely low recently -- an average of 6 messages a month.

Unlike TX-Butterfly, with a membership of around 250 from across the state and nation who often use full scientific names and debate subspecies, this is an informal discussion group. We especially welcome beginners and would be delighted to hear about what's happening (or not) with the butterflies, caterpillars, host plants, and anything bug-related in your backyard.

If the weather cools off and the butterfly activity increases this fall, we will be announcing some informal field trips via this forum. In fact, anyone is free to post a "Come join me at Hornsby on Sat. at 9am" invitation.

Membership in the ABF is encouraged but not required.

Check out the full description from a link on our home page or go directly to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/austinbutterflies/>. To join, just click the "Join this Group!" button. If you don't already have a Yahoo ID, you'll be asked to create one, but the process is simple and easy and doesn't require any credit card information.

Through your yahoo account, you can set preferences for reading messages. You can read them all on-line or have them delivered to an email account (either your yahoo account or forwarded to any other email address). You can get individual messages or the digested version (daily messages are grouped into a single email).

Butterfly Workshop

by Anne Bellomy

On Saturday May 3rd, about 15 of us enjoyed the Third Annual Butterfly Workshop put on by the Austin Butterfly Forum. Dan Hardy and Mike Quinn were the instructors while Jeff Taylor handled the coordination and registration. It went from 10:00am to 4:00pm and was full of helpful information. Topics covered identification of common butterflies of our area, host plants, strategies for butterfly and caterpillar survival, as well as books and resources about this rapidly growing hobby. What a difference close-focus binoculars, digital cameras, and colorful butterfly and caterpillar identification books have made to the growth of this hobby! It's now possible to easily pursue curiosity about butterflies without having to catch and pin them.

The workshop had presentations, but it also was "hands on". We started by looking at caterpillars on host plants that were being home raised. Even when you knew the caterpillar had to be somewhere on the plant, you might have found yourself asking "where exactly is it"? After lunch there was a walk to identify butterflies and caterpillars in the garden. And at the end, participants were given plants to take home to begin attracting butterflies to their own gardens.

A couple of interesting "take-aways" for me were:

- 1) It's helpful to be a bit of a botanist if you want to learn about butterflies. The more you know and recognize the host plants, the more easily you will find the eggs, caterpillars, and butterflies.
- 2) The general public is "adult centric" when it comes to butterflies. They focus on the adult stage, but the other stages – eggs, caterpillars, and chrysalis – are equally beautiful.
- 3) Plant the host plants and you will have a much wider variety of butterflies in your yard.
- 4) Fall is the best time, in Austin, for seeing butterflies.
- 5) Butterflies and caterpillars have fascinating strategies for survival. Mimicry, tasting awful, camouflage, having larger wings than are really needed for flight, coloration that leads the predator away from critical organs are all possible strategies.
- 6) Most important: What a fun hobby, and how satisfying to have butterflies in your home garden!

Butterfly Trip to El Cielo

I am already dreaming about all those butterflies in Mexico this coming fall. Join me for the El Cielo Butterfly Festival from October 19—23, 2008. Last year there were 7 people from Austin on the trip. This year Derek Muschalek and I will be the Butterfly Leaders.

Mexbirds and Sonia Ortiz has offered this trip for many years now and they have the arrangements down pat. This is an excellent introduction to Mexican butterflies. I am hoping that some of us can car pool to the valley.

Although this trip is not part of the Mission Butterfly Festival, you could dovetail the trip with the 13th Annual **Texas Butterfly Festival**, October 16th to 19th 2008, in Mission, TX For more information go to web site:
www.elcielofestival.com/id37.html

—Dan Hardy

Butterfly Count

Austin's annual "Fourth of July" Butterfly Count is this Saturday, June 28. To participate meet at the Zilker Botanical Garden Center (2220 Barton Springs Rd.) parking lot at 8:00 am. Everyone is welcome, including all skill levels. We count butterfly adults and caterpillars within a 15 mile diameter circle centered at Mount Bonnell. In addition to Zilker, we visit many of the best butterfly spots around town, including the Barton Creek Greenbelt and St. Edward's Park in NW Austin. We usually work as a single group, although if we have enough participants, we may be able to cover multiple areas in parallel.

This is the butterfly equivalent of the Audubon Christmas Bird count, with results turned into NABA (North American Butterfly Association). Last year we had a record number of species (63) and observers (25) for Austin. See <http://www.austinbutterflies.org/counts> for reports from prior years. All levels of interest and skills are welcome.

Be prepared for walking through brush and wet areas. Wear long pants, hat, sunscreen, and insect repellent. Bring water, snacks, close focusing binoculars, and (optionally) butterfly nets. The count typically lasts until late afternoon, although you may leave at any time. We have lunch at a restaurant between stops.

If it rains Saturday, we might re-schedule to Sunday, June 29th. For questions, contact Dan Hardy at dhh787@yahoo.com or 656-5848

Where have all the butterflies gone this spring?

Just about everyone's noticing a distinct lack of butterflies this spring. It was even a topic of discussion at the start of the last two ABF general meetings.

The same phenomena is afflicting North Texas. On June 9th, the Dallas Morning News interviewed extension entomologist Dr. Mike Merchant and Dallas County butterfly farmer (and former ABF speaker) Dale Clark who both noted that the numbers of butterflies are way, way down. Dale said, "This year it's just barren."

Following the Morning News article, Jim Swift of KXAN spent the better part of June 13th at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center filming critters and interviewing staff and visitors to the Center as well as myself.

While Jim found a few butterflies, mostly he shot various predators such as spiders, ants and dragonflies. I suggested that the drought and the high predator population that built up at the tail end of last year's butterfly bonanza both are contributing to this spring's lack of butterflies.

Go to [KXAN.com](http://www.kxan.com) if you want to see the three minutes of video that Jim pared down from four hours in the field. They also provided a link to our website.

<http://www.kxan.com/Global/story.asp?S=8490799>

—Mike Quinn



The May 4 field trip to Enchanted Rock, State Natural Area.

Have Presentations, Will Travel

If you're looking for a speaker for your homeowner's association or other group to turn people on to butterflies, we can recommend presentations by two current members.

Anne Bellomy, inspired by the ABF workshop on Butterfly Gardening and recent talks at the general ABF meetings, has put together a short talk for people with little or no knowledge of butterflies. The PDF presentation takes about 50 minutes, including audience participation. It is colorful, entertaining, and draws on slides and photos from Dan Hardy and Roxie Rochat, as well as photos from her garden. It makes a few basic points:

- These amazing butterflies and caterpillars are from your area and you can see them if you know how to look for them
- You can draw them to your garden if you plant host plants as well as nectar plants
- Butterflies are important for pollination and as food

for birds and other species

They need your protection – there has been major loss of habitat.

These are obvious points, but when the adult butterflies, caterpillars, and host plants are shown together, the audience makes the connection about the importance of taking care of the full life cycle from egg to adult. She has given the talk several times at work and it has been well received. She would be glad to give it to gardening groups or other groups that have a concern about the environment and loss of habitat. Contact Anne for further information – anne.bellomy@sbcglobal.net, or 419-1877.

Doris Hill is the current ABF treasurer and experienced butterfly gardener who enjoys getting other people excited about butterflies. She has a projector and set of slides that provide an excellent introduction to common Austin butterflies and their caterpillar host plants. The handouts she provides with butterfly and host plant lists have inspired many people to go home and plant butterfly plants. Please contact her at 452-7325.

Thank you, Anne and Doris.

Calendar

Sat Jun 28 - Butterfly Count. Austin's annual "Fourth of July" Butterfly Count. Meet at the Zilker Botanical Garden Center (2220 Barton Springs Rd.) parking lot at 8:00 am.

Mon Jul 28 - Club Meeting: A Trip to the Monarch Sanctuary, presented by Marguerite and Vince Hirsch, along with Mike Quinn. Marguerite and Vince are new members who recently visited the Monarch's Mexican wintering grounds. They will share pictures and stories of their trip. Mike Quinn, the club's president, will discuss current issues in Monarch conservation. [Zilker Botanical Garden Center](#), 7:00pm.

Mon Aug 25 - Club Meeting: True Bugs - Overlooked and Underrated. Presentation by **Val Bugh**, a club member who is a marvelous photographer with wide-ranging interests in the insect world. [Zilker Botanical Garden Center](#), 7:00pm.

The true bugs constitute a large, conspicuous, and diverse insect group. Although frequently encountered, they are often misidentified or passed over as being too confusing. Their size ranges from the minuscule to some of our largest insects. Their appearance can be cryptic or gaudy. Besides basic identification of common species found in the Austin area, Val will provide captivating insights into unusual bug behaviors, survival strategies, and an intimate look at bug life history.

Mon Sep 22 - Club Meeting: Enchanted Rock State Natural Area. [Zilker Botanical Garden Center](#), 7:00pm. **Lance Allred**, Austin-based photographer, will discuss his book project on one of Texas' favorite parks, Enchanted Rock State Natural Area. The project covers the history, geology, weather, flora, and fauna,

with the goal of producing a comprehensive multi-disciplinary guide to the park. Join him as he discusses some of the ongoing research on its origins, and shows some of his image portfolio, including 55 butterfly species, 90 moths, flowers, damselfly and dragonfly, spider, insects, mammals, and birds. See the [Enchanted Rock web site](#) for more information. activities, with the goal of producing a comprehensive multi-disciplinary guide to the park.

October 16-19, 13th Annual Texas Butterfly Festival, in Mission, TX,

October 19-23, El Cielo Butterfly Festival (see page 5).

Mon Oct 27 - **Club Meeting**: Identifying Common Jumping Spiders. Presentation by Joe Lapp ([Spider Joe](#)).

Thanks to Peg Wallace

We are delighted to welcome Peg Wallace to our newly created post of Coordinator of Refreshments. Please contact her at pegw@mail.utexas.edu if you would like to help with food, drinks, or help with the prep and/or cleanup.

Job opening: Newsletter Editor

Dan Hardy would like help editing the newsletter. He uses Microsoft Publisher to put it together and then he emails it to Office Max. They print it and club members pick it up and fold, stamp and mail it. Contact Dan at dhh787@yahoo.com to discuss editing or future article contributions.

2008 Directory

The Austin Butterfly Forum bylaws require the distribution of a printed directory of membership. The directory will include the names of members, their address, phone number(s) and email address. To verify your contact information on file or to have some or all of the information excluded from the directory notify Bob Bene-ski (Membership) by email (austinbutterfly@yahoo.com) or by phone (512-567-1457). The directory will be distributed only to paid up members. There currently are 81 household memberships paid up for 2008.

Welcome to New Members:

Margaret Adie, Robert Corbin, Bill Dodd, Kelly Figueroa, Shirley Koeller, Gene & Debbie Luhn, Christine McCulloch, Virginia Montgomery, Margaret Moodey, Christy Nance, Annie Peterson, Christine Powell, Roy & Cecelia Stapp, and Phyllis Warren

Website Makeover is a Hit!

www.austinbutterflies.org/

Since the end of February, the Austin Butterfly Forum has made significant improvements to its website. We're now getting roughly 500 pageviews per day. Original content additions include a new two-page Travis County butterfly checklist, PDFs of past newsletters, and a Central Texas nectar plant list.

We are working on improving our butterfly gardening section to make it as user-friendly and informative as possible. We welcome suggestions.

Austin Butterfly Forum, Inc.

866 Castle Ridge Road

Austin, Texas 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