

Big Thicket Butterfly Count

It was to be a terrific count. Situated as it were - squarely in the center of the most biodiverse area in the entirety of Southeast Texas – or much of the eastern U.S., for that matter – one should expect no less. So it was on Saturday morning, May 5, the large crew of Steve Abbey, Jennifer Backo, Karen Cambias, Carlton Collier, Anissa Curtis, Dan Day, Don DuBois, David Henderson, Pat Lee, Diane Milano, Kelly Walker, and Hugh Wedgeworth were all looking forward to scoring a triple crown – seeing three new species never before seen on a BEST count. So despite a late start and a later-arriving sun, our hopes remained high – and we were not disappointed, only surprised.

First, Diane, in a vain search for Little Metalmarks, found Twin-spot Skippers instead! Then, disappointed in not getting to go to the Pitcher Plant Trail for the Georgia Satyr, she instead found one in a roadside ditch! Later it was Don's turn as he turned up a Mourning Cloak. The rest of the crew, divided as we were into 3 parties, did a good job of covering the circle fairly well. Aside from the three new additions, other highlights included a tour of Watson Pinelands Preserve by Mrs. Watson herself; a huge ligustrum grove replete with American Ladies; Georgia Satyrs dancing in the sedges; and a Swallow-tailed Kite soaring languidly over the town of Warren.

So, despite being cut short by an hour on each end and being teased by a very coy morning sun and pummeled by some strong southerly winds, the crew gathered at the Tree Restaurant in Hillister. Over mouthwatering rib eyes and southern fried chicken, we tallied up 342 individuals of 44 species – not a bad number considering the circumstances, and a very good beginning for a count that holds huge promise. Here is what we saw...

Papilionidae (another swallowtail sweep!)

Pipevine Swallowtail *Battus philenor* 19
Zebra Swallowtail *Eurytides marcellus* 10
Black Swallowtail *Papilio polyxenes* 12
Giant Swallowtail *Heraclides crestaphontes* 1
Eastern Tiger Swallowtail *Pterourus glaucus* 3
Spicebush Swallowtail *Pterourus troilus* 8
Palamedes Swallowtail *Pterourus palamedes* 24

Peiridae

Checkered White *Pontia protodice* 4
Cloudless Sulphur *Phoebis sennae* 29
Little Yellow *Eurema lisa* 2
Dainty Sulphur *Nathalis iole* 1

Lycaenidae (a pathetic showing!)

Gray Hairstreak *Strymon melinus* 2

Nymphalidae

Gulf Fritillary *Agraulis vanillae* 1
Phaon Crescent *Phyciodes phaon* 3
Pearl Crescent *Phyciodes tharos* 8
Eastern Comma *Polygonia comma* 1

Question Mark *Polygonia interragationis* 1
Mourning Cloak *Nymphalis antiopa* 1
American Lady *Vanessa virginiensis* 43
Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta* 1
Red-spotted Purple *Limenitis arthemis astyanax* 1
Goatweed Leafwing *Anaea andria* 3
Tawny Emperor *Asterocampa clyton* 1
Carolina Satyr *Hermeuptychia sosybius* 3
Georgia Satyr *Neonympha areolata* 18
Little Wood-Satyr *Megisto cymela* 1
Monarch *Danaus plexippus* 3

Hesperiidae

Silver-spotted Skipper *Epargyreus clarus* 2
Horace's Duskywing *Erynnis horatius* 67
Funereal Duskywing *Erynnis funeralis* 4
Common Checkered-Skipper *Pyrgus communis* 1
Swarthy Skipper *Nastra lherminier* 10
Clouded Skipper *Lerema accius* 3
Least Skipper *Ancyloxypha numitor* 1
Fiery Skipper *Hylephila phyleus* 5
Whirlabout *Polites vibex* 18
Southern Broken-Dash *Wallengrenia otho* 4
Northern Broken-Dash *Wallengrenia egeremet* 1
Little Glassywing *Pompeius verna* 3
Yehl Skipper *Poanes yehl* 1
Dion Skipper *Euphyes dion* 1
Dun Skipper *Euphyes vestris* 4
Eufala Skipper *Lerodea eufala* 1
Twin-spot Skipper *Oligoria maculata* 3

Dark Swallowtail sp. – 8

Orange Skipper sp. – 1

Caterpillars observed:

12 Spicebush Swallowtail on Sassafras
1 American Lady (?) on Cudweed
1 Saltmarsh Moth on pavement

Egg observed

1 Goatweed Leafwing on Croton

Odonates of interest:

Ebony Jewelwing
Lilypad Forktail
Common Whitetail
Blue Dasher
Slaty Skimmer
Great Blue Skimmer
Eastern Pondhawk
Calico Pennant

Herps of Note:

East Texas Toad

Eastern Narrow-mouthed Toad (heard)

Cottonmouth

Broad-headed Skink

Eastern Fence Lizard

Area Covered:

Northern Hardin and southern Tyler Counties in East Texas

Big Thicket National Preserve (Turkey Creek and Hickory Creek units)

Kirby State Forest

Watson Pinelands Preserve

Various roadsides