DCLS News

May, 2004 Number 56

The Dallas County Lepidopterists' Society Est. 1995

Purpose: To provide a forum where people may gather who share an interest in butterflies and moths, whether that interest takes the form of collecting, gardening, photography, study or casual observation.

Admission is free.

Next DCLS Meeting Saturday May 1 at LBJ Grasslands, Wise County

The next field trip for the Dallas County Lepidopterists' Society will be this coming Saturday to the LBJ Grasslands just north of Decatur (Wise County), Texas. We will meet at 10:00 a.m. in the parking area beneath the overpass of Hwy 380 and FM 730. From this point we will caravan to the location we will be visiting at the grasslands. **Please be prompt.** For directions, please see page 7.

A trip this week to the grasslands turned up well over 40 species in a couple of hours under less than ideal circumstances — including several California Sisters, numerous Red-Spotted Purples and scores of Southern, Northern and Confused Cloudywings.

If your schedule permits, feel free to pack a lunch and we'll have a "tailgate party" (there are no picnic tables at our destination) at noon.

As always, field trips depend upon the weather. ***Be sure to check your email and/or the DCLS website on Saturday morning.*** Should we need to cancel for Saturday we will plan on rescheduling on Sunday, May 2nd. Keep your fingers crossed for clearing skies on Saturday morning!

Future DCLS Field Trips and Meetings

Please note the revised list below. While the locations for all field trips have not been finalized, the dates are set. Please mark your calendars.

May 1st - LBJ Grasslands (Rain date: May 2nd).
June 12th - Location to be announced.
July 10th - Location to be announced.
August 14th - Field trip to Glenn Heights, Texas (just south of DeSoto) to Dale Clark's home, the site of Butterflies Unlimited, a working butterfly farm.
September 11th - Location to be announced.
October 9th - Monarch tagging field trip.
November 13th - Dallas Museum of Natural History
December 11th - Dallas Museum of Natural History

Stunning amber butterflies hint at ancient origins

From NewScientist.com news service

Butterflies may be far more ancient creatures than previously believed, reveals a new study of fossil specimens exquisitely preserved in amber.

The oldest known butterflies fossilised in rocks suggest the winged insects date back to about 40 or 50 million years ago. But evidence from the five stunning amber specimens now suggests it is possible butterflies may have even fluttered around the heads of dinosaurs, which were wiped out 65 million years ago.

The amber pieces come from the Dominican Republic and each contains a perfectly preserved metalmark butterfly, which is now extinct. "It was just incredible," says Robert Robbins, one of the researchers at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC, US. "It's no different than if you took a modern day butterfly and put it under a light microscope."

The detail seen is comparable to looking at a modern butterfly under a microscope But it is Voltinia dramba's relationship to its closest living relative in Mexico which gives vital clues to the evolution of butterflies.

"It would appear it diverged from its closest living relative almost ago [40 to 50 million years] ago," Robbins told New Scientist. "That would mean that the major families of butterfly already existed, so it would appear butterflies are somewhat older than that."

The evolution of many animal groups took off after mass extinctions annihilated the dinosaurs at the end of the Cretaceous period. "It means the precursors of butterflies were already there. Whether butterflies actually existed in the Cretaceous is a pretty interesting question," he says.

Robbins and fellow entomologists Jason Hall and Donald Harvey came across the first intricate amber fossil after it was spotted by a scout at a gem show in the early 1990s.

Over the next few years, four more such fossils were found, enabling the group to understand the butterfly's evolutionary development better. When its closest living relative, Voltinia danforthi, was discovered in Mexico, they were able to draw their conclusions.

The amber fossils themselves are between 15 to 25 million years old. But theories about how the Caribbean islands formed and the current distribution of metalmark butterflies helped the team pinpoint when the two species diverged.

Today, only one living species of metalmark butterfly remains in the Caribbean islands. But central and south America have over 1200 species. Metalmarks prefer wet areas and typically live in the interior of Amazonian rainforests or cloud forests, says Robbins, and are poor at travelling over water.

"We know from our recent work that the species in Mexico and in the amber fossil are sister species - each is each other's closest relative," explains Robbins. "We also know it's at least 15 to 25 million years since they diverged. But, because they are so poor at dispersing across anything other than rainforest, we are pretty certain that the amber butterfly must have essentially ridden on the islands as they moved from central America to the Caribbean with plate tectonics."

The movement of Hispaniola - the island on which the Dominican Republic and Haiti sit side by side - would date the separation of the butterfly species to around 40 to 50 million years ago.

The gems are probably the best-preserved fossils of any butterfly (Image: Royal Society)

Butterfly and Moth Collection in Brownsville

A world-class collection of butterflies and moths will be on display beginning Monday, April 12. "Butterflies and Moths of the World" is on display at the Alonso Building at 510 E. St. Charles in Brownsville

Sponsored by the Gorgas Science Foundation, the exhibit features the Glick Lepidoptera Collection, which includes thousands of butterflies from around the world.

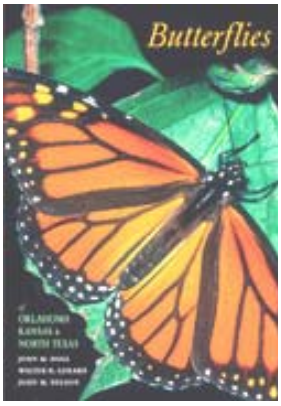
Violet Springman of Brownsville gave the collection to the university in1994 in memory of her longtime friend, Perry Aaron Glick. A remarkable entomologist who had a great understanding and special love for insects, his collection spans 80 years and six continents.

A student collection, a free flight cage with butterflies in various stages of development, educational videos and fun activities will also be availlable.

Exhibit hours are Monday thru Thursday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Fridays from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. and on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The exhibit ends Friday, April 30.

For information or to schedule large groups, call the Rancho del Cielo Office at 554-5050 or Gorgas Science Foundation at 504-6862.

New Butterfly Book of Special Interest to North Texans



Butterflies of Oklahoma, Kansas, and North Texas

by

John M Dole,

Walter B Gerard,

John M Nelson

A new butterfly book that will be of particular interest to people in North Texas is now available from the University of Oklahoma Press. *Butterflies of Oklahoma, Kansas, and North Texas* (ISBN 0-8061-3554-9)focuses on one hundred butterfly species common to the southern plains, a crucial crossroads region of the central United States. Each species is illustrated with one to four color photographs of butterflies in free flight and other natural settings. These candid shots are a welcome departure from the dried-and-pinned specimen photographs of some field guides. Photographs are placed alongside each butterfly's physical description and natural history, eliminating the need to flip between galleries and text. Other unique features include:

— descriptions of twenty prime butterfly spotting sites in the tri-state region;

—information on how to raise butterflies from larval to adult stages;

—an extensive bibliography of additional resources.

Price: $24.95

The European Paper Wasp - A New Threat to Butterflies?

This note was in the latest MonarchWatch update by Chip Taylor.

As you may recall, the Update for December 2003 contained a brief summary of the biology of the introduced European paper wasp, Polistes dominulus and a discussion of its possible impact.

Whitney Cranshaw, an economic entomologist and specialist on garden insects at Colorado State University, recently (6 April) made the following observation on ENTOMO-L, a list serve for entomologists:

"I don't think there has been any introduced insect that I have observed in my 20 years here that has so rapidly spread and impacted insect life in Colorado than Polistes dominulus (a.k.a., the European paper wasp). First observed in the state 5 years ago it is now found in every town, on both sides of the Continental Divide, and is extremely abundant. It has extirpated essentially every caterpillar in Ft. Collins by mid-July in the past 2 years and I am sure is having a major ecological impact."

The European paper wasp is spreading rapidly and could significantly impact monarchs and butterfly populations in general, especially in cities. If you see this insect

please report it to us and we will see that the scientists that are tracking this species receive your sighting. Field studies of the impact of this caterpillar predator on butterfly populations are badly needed.

photograph © Alex Wild 2003

House of Butterflies opens at Scarborough Faire

The House of Butterflies is a seasonal living ecosystem located on the grounds of Scarborough Faire Renaissance Festival. The exhibit was developed to provide enjoyment and education to butterfly enthusiasts both young and old. This 1200 square-foot habitat features Texas native butterflies in all stages of the butterfly life cycle.

The 2004 season opens April 10 and runs through Memorial Day, May 31, 2004. The habitat is open to the public throughout the day on regular festival days with no appointment necessary.

The habitat is also available for private showings on weekdays by special appointment only. Private showings are held for groups of 15 or more and must be scheduled in advance.

Admission: Saturdays, Sundays and Memorial Day 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Admission to Scarborough Faire required. Butterfly House admission is $2.00 per person, under 5 only $1.00. For more information visit ***www.houseofbutterflies.org .***

The Butterfly Garden

Virginia Sweetspire for the Question Mark Butterflies!

by Tina Dombrowski

It is always a visual feast and a proud accomplishment to the butterfly gardener to notice a plant which seems to live up to the oft exclaimed "The flowers were **covered** with butterflies!" Most recently, Virginia Sweetspire 'Henry's Garnet' lived up to this lofty acclaim. An attractive small shrub in full bloom in late April, the flowers were discovered with numerous Question Mark butterflies. Usually such populations of Question Marks are observed frequenting a fetid fruit dish, however the Sweetspire blooms were baiting them just as well as the working compost pile.

Virginia Sweetspire 'Henry's Garnet' (Itea virginica 'Henry's Garnet') is a deciduous shrub, three to four feet tall by 6 feet wide. The long pendulous, mildly fragrant flower (racemes) appear in late April - May. A native plant to the east coast from New Jersey to Florida, west to Louisiana, it grows well in shade, partial shade or full sun. While adaptive to various soil types, it really thrives in rich, amended soil with regular watering. It is tolerant of wet locations or low, slower draining areas. There are no serious pest or disease problems to contend with.

Frequently used as a shrub border, as a specimen in a woodland style garden, or at the edges of ponds, Virginia Sweetspire is under utilized in the Metroplex. Henry's Garnet, a cultivated variety of the species Virginia Sweetspire, derives its name from the vibrant garnet autumn color of the leaves which can remain on the plant until December. Propagation is achieved by division of root suckers; the plants can slowly colonize a landscape if left unchecked.

The horticultural attributes of Virginia Sweetspire along with the nectar attraction to Question Marks and other butterflies, places this plant on the 'extraordinary' butterfly nectar list.

Butterfly Gardening Workshops at TDG

Two upcoming events are noteworthy for people interested in butterfly gardening in the Dallas Fort Worth area. The Texas Discovery Gardens, located in Fair Park, will be holding its annual butterfly gardening workshop. Interested individuals can register for one of two dates: May 5th or May 8th, from 9:00a.m - 12:00 noon.

Participants will learn how to use host and nectar plants to attract butterflies and create a butterfly garden in their yard. Each person attending the workshop will receive a flat of specially selected nectar and host plants grown in the greenhouses at Texas Discovery Gardens. In addition to the classroom portion of the workshop, participants also will tour a certified butterfly habitat to see the plants, butterflies and caterpillar in a demonstration garden. The workshop will be conducted by Tina Dombrowski, director of horticulture at Texas Discovery Gardens, and Dale Clark of the Dallas County Lepidopterists' Society. Cost: $35 per person for Texas Discovery Gardens members; $45 per person for non-members. The fee includes the flat of start plants. Limited class size. Paid advance registration is required (deadline April 30th). For more information or to register, call (214) 428-7476. Texas Discovery Gardens is located in Fair Park, 3601 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., Dallas, Texas 75210.

DCLS Membership Directory

2004

Due to popular demand, a Directory will be compiled with names, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of DALLAS COUNTY LEPIDOPTERISTS' SOCIETY members. If you want to be included in the Directory, you will need to fill out this form and return it to Wanda Rubrecht or Dale Clark OR fill out the form on line at the DCLS web site - www.dallasbutterflies.com. We can include your mailing address, OR phone number OR your e-mail address OR all three. Print below the information you want to appear in the Directory:

_____

Name (as you want it listed)

_____

Mailing address

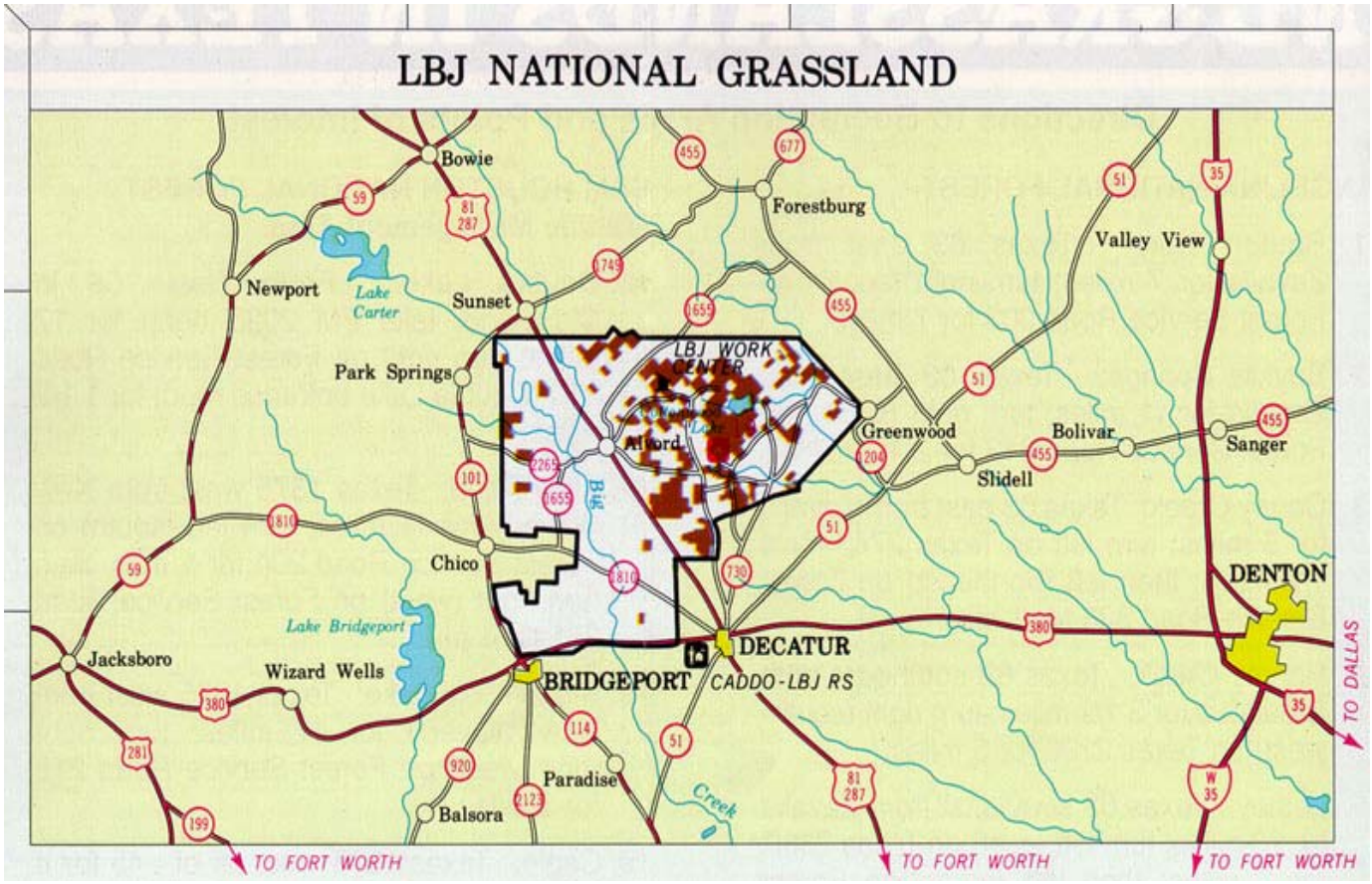
_____

Telephone number

_____

E-mail address

The Directory will be delayed two or three months in an effort to give everyone the opportunity to sign up. Copies will be available to members of DCLS only.



Directions:

From Dallas, take I-35 north to Denton, then take Hwy 380 west to Decatur. We will meet at 10:00 a.m. in the parking area beneath the "intersection" of Hwy 380 and FM 730 (take the FM 730 exit from Hwy 380). Be sure to make any necessary "pit-stop" at the Shell Station on Hwy 380 as there are no restroom facilities at our destination at the Grasslands (although there are lots of bushes). Also, while it is still too early to worry about chiggers, the ticks are out, so be sure to bring your can of OFF. I'd also advise long pants and plenty of water. If your schedule permits, join us for a "tailgate" lunch at 12:00 noon.

Field Trip Etiquette:

Thankfully, this has never been an issue in the nine years we've been having field trips, but it probably doesn't hurt to make it "official". Please be aware of why other members are on a field trip. If you are collecting, please make sure that your swinging net isn't going to interfere with someone else's photo attempt. While some groups only tolerate collecting, or ban it all together, DCLS supports people who are collectors, whether it is for enjoyment or serious study. Collectors and watchers can and do get along quite harmoniously as long as each respects the others interest.

Check the Website and/or your email:

Before each field trip it is always best to check your email or the DCLS website (www.dallasbutterflies.com) to make sure that the field trip is still a "go". Weather in North Texas is famous for changing at the last minute. Butterflies do not get out in the rain and neither do we. Unless you want to be standing in a field by yourself, check the website!