



Variegated Fritillary “nectaring” an  
Orange Milkwort



Bumblebee horns in on orchid photo op

## **Brunswick Wildlife The Ditches of Brunswick County**

I have a call into Clint Eastwood to see if he wants screen rights to the story of my summer spent roaming Brunswick’s ditch banks. After all, he directed and starred in *The Bridges of Madison County*. As I remember, it was set in Iowa and had something to do with wildlife...or was that wild life. Nothing yet. For now, this story will at least give you a preview.

Coastal birding during the summer is slow. By mid-May spring migrants, singing “See You in September”, have headed north and our breeding birds have all returned. Eventually you find nests, see nestlings, and then you watch fledglings being taught to forage on your lawn. Birders are happy at this point because we have been blessed with great birding, stretching back to the beginning of the previous fall’s migration.

Slow? By July most birds have quit singing so it is hard to find them...not to mention the heat, humidity, drought, biting insects, and other charms of summer birding.

Before discovering the joy of ditches, by mid-summer I often wondered if life was really worth living...that is until the first trickle of the fall migration and the start of pre-season football chased my blues away.

Hey! “The Joy of Ditches” might make a better title for the movie. I need to run that by Clint.

About two years ago, I began taking photos of butterflies and later added wildflowers, dragonflies, damselflies, and other large insects. Next came an interest in macro (close up) photography, the purchase of a macro lens, and acquisition of a small library of new field guides.

I have always been interested in all species; however, except for birds, mammals, and snakes it was a passive interest. My progress, over two years, can only be described as going from “passive thing” to “galloping obsession”.

The Green Swamp, UNCW’s Ev-Henwood Preserve, and central Brunswick in the Governor’s Road area offer great ditches and roadsides that are accessible and loaded with wildflowers. My favorite ditches, however, are found in Boiling Spring Lakes. They offer most of what the other sites have plus very accessible insectivorous plants...Sundews, Venus Flytraps, and Yellow and Purple Pitcher Plants.

My photos were taken in Boiling Spring Lakes on an “anything that moves and some stuff that don’t” field trip. We saw or heard breeding birds such as Great-crested Flycatcher, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Eastern Bluebird, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Carolina Chickadee, Eastern Towhee, Pine Warbler, and Common Yellowthroat. We also had a great look at an Eastern Kingbird on an overhead wire giving its electric buzzing call. Not bad for summer birding!

In addition to the Variegated Fritillary and Bumblebee on the Grass Pink Orchid above, we saw a wide variety of wildflowers and other insects. A couple of “photo firsts” for me were photos of a Variable Dancer damselfly and an adult Antlion.

By the way, mud puddles are great for finding butterflies because mud has needed nutrients not found in nectar. Fortunately, my Mother’s lesson on “staying out of ditches and no playing in mud puddles” was lost on me.

There are always new frontiers...different layers to explore in nature. Although not absolutely needed to start you down a path like mine, close-focus binoculars; field guides; Internet access to the hundreds of helpful websites; and a digital camera are recommended. Almost any digital camera with a zoom will work.

Your initial field guide arsenal might include: the National Wildlife Federation’s field guide to insects and spiders of North America, Kauffman’s *Butterflies of North America*, Glassberg’s *Butterflies Through Binoculars (East)*, and *Wild Flowers of North Carolina* by Justice, Bell, and Lindsey. Also, a good quality magnifying glass is essential to compare your photos with field guide and web photos.

Also, be wary of potential dangers. Three that are easy to overlook when you are concentrating on the little stuff are poison ivy, ticks, and fire ants.

A common protection against ticks is to tuck your pants legs into your socks and spray your socks with insect repellent. One more step should be taken for fire ant protection: wrap duct tape around the tops of your socks. While you are at it, add tape over your shoe laces to protect against those dang sandspurs.

Hope to see you in the ditches and, as the summer progresses; I’ll be back with subsequent scenes. Maybe by then, Clint’s people will have contacted my people and I’ll have an update on the movie release.

John Ennis



**Palamedes Swallowtail joins honey bees  
on a Bull Thistle**



**Palamedes Swallowtails slurping on an aptly  
named Butterfly Weed**