



Brunswick Wildlife Brunswick's First Butterfly Count

About a year ago I began actively photographing and trying to identify butterflies. Basically I now photograph everything in nature whether it moves or not. I do significantly better with larger, slow-moving subjects like...errrr, lighthouses.

Butterflies? They get in the way when you are watching birds and other wildlife and make you notice. They are beautiful! They are fast! They are a challenge the photograph more so than many birds.

On August 25, I participated in the first Brunswick County butterfly count with experts Jeff Phippen and Will Cook from Duke University, Harry LeGrand from The NC Natural Heritage Program, and John Dole from NC State. I wanted to assist and photograph butterflies; however, as a beginner, I knew I could make a quick personal assessment of my skills. You need to know how much you don't know to form a framework for future study and practice. I now know...give me a few years.

We worked roadsides, golf courses, and fields from the county line at the Waccamaw River on NC 904 to Sunset Beach and Ocean Isle Beach. It could be described as a day at the spa for the financially challenged...a lot of sun plus an eight-hour sauna.

Thirty-five species were observed during the day including the Great Purple Hairstreak and Horace's Duskywing shown above. Historically, just over one hundred species of butterflies have been recorded in our county...the third highest total for all counties of North Carolina.

Skippers make up a large butterfly family that includes approximately a third of the species found in North America. They are really small, very fast, and their identification is very difficult because many are yellowish-orange with brown markings like the Byssus Skipper pictured here.

The Byssus photo is an enlargement...these guys, like many other skippers, are less than an inch long. I still have nightmares of trying to identify skippers; however, I could tell by the frenzy that the experts were overjoyed by the challenge. Someday I will be overjoyed.

The count was officially sanctioned by the North American Butterfly Association (<http://www.naba.org/>) and was a dress rehearsal for the future. Our sightings were great...especially when considering drought conditions in the southeast, time of year, and newness of the count. The volume of northbound butterflies from states to our south has been far less than in past years probably due to drought.

Plans for future counts include changing locations within the county and moving the dates back into September for more nectar-bearing blooms and a greater variety of butterflies. If you are interested in participating in the 2008 count, watch for public announcements late next summer.

John Ennis

Note: The author teaches a birding class at Brunswick Community College. The next class starts September 8 and runs through October. It features six Saturday field trips around the county plus a possible bonus trip to Bald Head Island. If interested, please call the college to reserve one of the few remaining slots.

