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Butterfly buffs

National organization
comes to Western Mass.
to discuss hobby,
'collect' rare local species

An Eastern Tiger Swallowtail
butterfly alights for a tasty
meal of nectar somewhere in
the North Quabbin.

Mike Phillips photo

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Butterfly buffs

National organization comes to Western Mass. to discuss hobby, 'collect' rare local species

By PAULA J. OWEN
Recorder Staff

Like the migratory monarch that travels thousands of miles to Mexico to find a mate, enthusiasts from around the world flew to Massachusetts recently for the 7th biennial meeting of the North American Butterfly Association to see native butterfly species from the area.

They call it "elephant hunting" to catch people's attention, but they are actually out "elfin-hunting." An elfin is a type of butterfly and the 170 or so convention attendees from 35 states and three different countries were hoping to catch a glimpse of the bog elfin and other species only found in the Northeast.

The event was hosted by the Massachusetts Butterfly Club

(MBC) and was held in West Springfield.

"The convention had a good, North Quabbin centricity about it," says Dave Small, nature enthusiast and president of the Bird in Nature Club in Athol.

Three of the event's top coordinators — Small, Carl Kamp, president of the MBC, and Sue Cloutier — are from the North Quabbin area.

"In spite of the weather — 'iffy' at best and rainy at worst — everybody was very pleased," Small added.

Nature lovers and butterfly enthusiasts come from all over to attend the conventions, which are held once every two years, and have previously been located in other parts of the United States, including Florida, Oregon and California. This moving about gives attendees a chance to spot species indigenous to those areas.



Dave Small photo

The fog and rain on Mount Greylock didn't deter the participants from enjoying the bird sounds and wildflowers on the mountain.

Kamp, 60, of Royalston, is a classical guitarist and owns a music store in Worcester.

He volunteered at the Massachusetts Audubon Society

from 1988 to 1992, helping put together a bird atlas and later, a butterfly atlas.

"Butterflies fit my lifestyle bet-
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This bedstraw hawkmoth (*Hyles gallii*) was spotted on the Mount Greylock hike.

Dave Small photo

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ter than birds," Kamp explained.

"The optimal time for birds is early in the morning and I sleep late when I can. Butterflies don't start flying until the sun is out and it is warmer."

Also a photographer, Kamp takes photos of specimens for identification.

A music and business major in college, Kamp's interest was fostered while taking an entomology course.

He never really liked "pinning" his specimens, he said, but preferred to take pictures of them or observe them through binoculars.

"Scientists have a legitimate argument for catching and killing specimens," he said.

"But, for us it is for the enjoyment. Few species are so similar

you need them 'in hand' to identify them."

Butterfly hunting also helped Kamp meet his fiancée, Alyce Mayo from New York City, while at a convention in Florida.

The MBC holds some 30 field trips each year, during the butterfly season from spring to fall.

The third year president of the club participates in many of those.

"I like to think that we live in a natural world and share that with the natural community," Kamp said.

"It's scary a lot of people don't see it that way. Children are less concerned with the wilds than they used to be.

"We spend so much of our life in car or office and don't appreciate the outdoors."

Butterfly hunting, he believes, increases appreciation of the outdoors, is an enjoyable pastime and

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a way to be connected with the natural world.

Small agrees.

Though he said he made some dragonfly converts out of the group that traveled across the country to see specialty butterflies, there are many good reasons to check out butterflies.

"There a couple of good reasons," he said.

"First, you don't have to go anywhere to see them. You can attract them to flowers and they are easy to see.

"There is a lot variety right here and it is fun to take pictures of them.

"Butterflies are good to observe with binoculars, too, and there are terrific field guides for identifying them."

Butterfly hunting has changed a lot over the last 20 years now that field guides are available, Small

said.

The first, put together by Jeffrey Glassberg, a founder of the NABA, was the "Field Guide to Butterflies — Boston to Washington."

Small said it all started in the Northeast with a butterfly guide to western Massachusetts, pinpointing butterfly locales throughout the state by MBC members.

One interesting species only found in North America that can be spotted in the area is the Harvester — the only totally carnivorous butterfly throughout its entire life that exists. The Harvester lays its eggs in colonies of woolly aphids — small, green insects found commonly on roses.



Dave Small photo
Early Hairstreak, seen on Graylock.

The Harvester caterpillars feast on the aphids and later, as adults, sip the honeydew the aphids produce rather than nectar from flowers.

During the convention, 33 species of butterflies were identified.

The group went looking around

Springfield and into New York for elfins, Hessel's, early hairstreaks and the endangered Karner blue — scouting through Petersham, at the top of Mt. Greylock and in fields and swampy areas throughout the region.

The North American Butterfly Association is the largest, non-profit organization in North America interested in butterflies working to

increase public enjoyment and conservation of butterflies. The group is also working to save butterfly species throughout North America and develop educational programs about butterflies for schools and park rangers and naturalists.

For more information on the NABA visit:

www.naba.org

Did you know ...?

- that butterflies' and moths' wings are actually transparent? The iridescent scales, which overlap like shingles on a roof, give the wings the colors that we see.

- that butterflies taste with their feet? Their taste sensors are located in the feet, and by standing on their food, they can taste it!

- that butterflies don't have mouths that allow them to bite or chew? They, along with most moths, have a long straw-like

structure called a proboscis, which they use to drink nectar and juices. When not in use, the proboscis remains coiled like a garden hose.

- that a caterpillar grows to about 27,000 times the size it was when it first emerged from its egg? If a human baby weighed 9 pounds at birth and grew at the same rate as a caterpillar, it would weigh 243,000 pounds when fully grown!