



All Aflutter

New Hampshire has about 100 species of butterflies, and whether you're hiking up Mount Kearsarge or just relaxing in your backyard, you'll see a variety of them.

By Laurie D. Morrissey

Photography by Jim Block

It is one of the prettiest sights of the summer: a colorful butterfly bouncing over the garden or warming its wings on a stone wall. Beautiful, yet fragile, hundreds of thousands of these ephemeral creatures light up the landscape of the Kearsarge region. Fortunately, butterflies don't hide from us as birds often do, or even fly away when we approach. New

Hampshire has about 100 species, and whether you're hiking up Mount Kearsarge or just relaxing in your backyard, you'll see a variety of them.

Even though they are so common, many of us do not know much about butterflies and can identify only one or two species. A bit of knowledge can enhance your enjoyment of these insects



Monarch butterfly perched on Queen Anne's Lace



— and, if you become an avid butterfly spotter, you can contribute to the database that allows ecologists to protect them.

Back from the brink

Almost everyone in New Hampshire has heard of the Karner Blue, a rare species that became the official state butterfly in 1992. Efforts to restore its habitat and bring the species back from the brink of extinction are part of an ongoing effort that has proven successful. The Karner Blue in New Hampshire can only be found in the Concord Pine Barrens, where they rely exclusively on wild lupine for nectar and breeding sites.

In our region, you are likely to see an Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, a large, yellow-and-black butterfly with two black tails on its hindwings. It is one of a half dozen Swallowtail species in the state. If you're hiking up the slopes of Mount Sunapee on a sunny day, you might spot a Yellow or Orange Sulphur, a White or Red Admiral, or one of several species of Skipper. Often, they are seen in groups drinking from a puddle or wet sand, a behavior known as "puddling."

Ski slopes like Mount Sunapee, Ragged Mountain and the former King Ridge, are great places for butterflying, according to Richard



The rare Karner Blue butterfly

BUTTERFLY BASICS

- There are around 20,000 species worldwide (700+ in North America).
- A group of butterflies is called a kaleidoscope, swarm or rabble.
- A group of caterpillars is an army.
- They have four wings: two forewings and two hindwings.
- They taste with their feet.
- The life cycle has four stages: egg, larva (caterpillar), chrysalis and adult.
- The "dust" you feel when you touch the wing of a butterfly (not recommended) is actually tiny scales.

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COMMON SPECIES IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

Canadian Tiger Swallowtail
Clouded Sulphur
Cabbage White
Common Ringlet
American Copper
Eastern-tailed Blue
Spring Azure
White Admiral

Hummingbird Moth

Gray of Enfield, N.H., who refers to himself as an amateur lepidopterist.

“There are huge amounts of flowers and huge amounts of butterflies,” he says. “You can see more than 30 species on a warm, sunny day.” (Butterflies can only fly when their temperature is above

81 degrees Fahrenheit.) In the past 30 years, Gray and David Elberfeld of Dunbarton, N.H., have collected information in every town in New Hampshire.

Two of the state’s butterfly experts, Heidi Holman and Vanessa Jones, live in the Kearsarge area. Holman of



Warner, N.H., is a wildlife diversity specialist at the New Hampshire Fish & Game Department.

“Watching butterflies is exciting because they’re so colorful and so varied,” she says. “Butterflies love sunny, open areas with a diversity of flowers and

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Black Swallowtail

grasses. The edges of wetlands, and agricultural areas that are not mowed regularly, are good spotting sites.”

The species that attract the most attention, she says, are large ones like the Mourning Cloak and those that have unique traits, like the Monarch. Monarchs are the only butterflies known to make a two-way migration, traveling 50 to 100 miles a day on their journey. They also are known for their reliance on milkweed plants for food and breeding sites. There has been a population decline of around 90 percent, due to habitat loss and other factors. The Fells Estate in Newbury, N.H., is a designated Monarch Way Station, and has an exhibit and

educational program for children. The staff of its Hay Ecology Center has raised Monarchs, tagged them, and released them into fields where milkweed is abundant.

Where are they?

Jones of Hopkinton, N.H., is the director of conservation with New Hampshire Audubon. Like Holman, she is involved in efforts to determine exactly what butterfly species live in New Hampshire, and where.

“We have been trying to get a statewide butterfly survey up and running for several years, without successfully obtaining a large grant to anchor this work,” she says. “Neighboring states and provinces

have already conducted multiyear butterfly surveys. New Hampshire is a ‘hole’ in butterfly information in the Northeast region. We need baseline data in order to find out if there are species we should be concerned about.”

Butterflies have a critical role in the ecosystem, she says. “Along with bats and birds, butterflies can be important pollinators, and their larvae can be major herbivores. Many are specialists on one or a few host plants and, in this context, can serve as indicators of environmental change.”

Anything that affects a butterfly’s host plant, such as pesticide use or changes in land use, affects its population, she points out. Climate change could also be



Painted Lady





WHAT YOU CAN DO

Want more butterflies? Here are some tips for homeowners.

- Leave part of your lawn unmowed or create a meadow
- Reduce or eliminate pesticides
- Plant and encourage native flower species and milkweed
- Provide food for caterpillars, such as dill and parsley
- Place water for hydration and flat stones for butterflies to warm up

Silver-bordered Fritillary Butterfly seen along the shore of Waukeena Lake



Tiger Swallowtail butterfly seen along the shore of Waukeena Lake

causing range shifts. “Species that were not seen in New Hampshire are now present in the southern part of the state, and some that used to be seen in northern New Hampshire are not here at all,” she says.

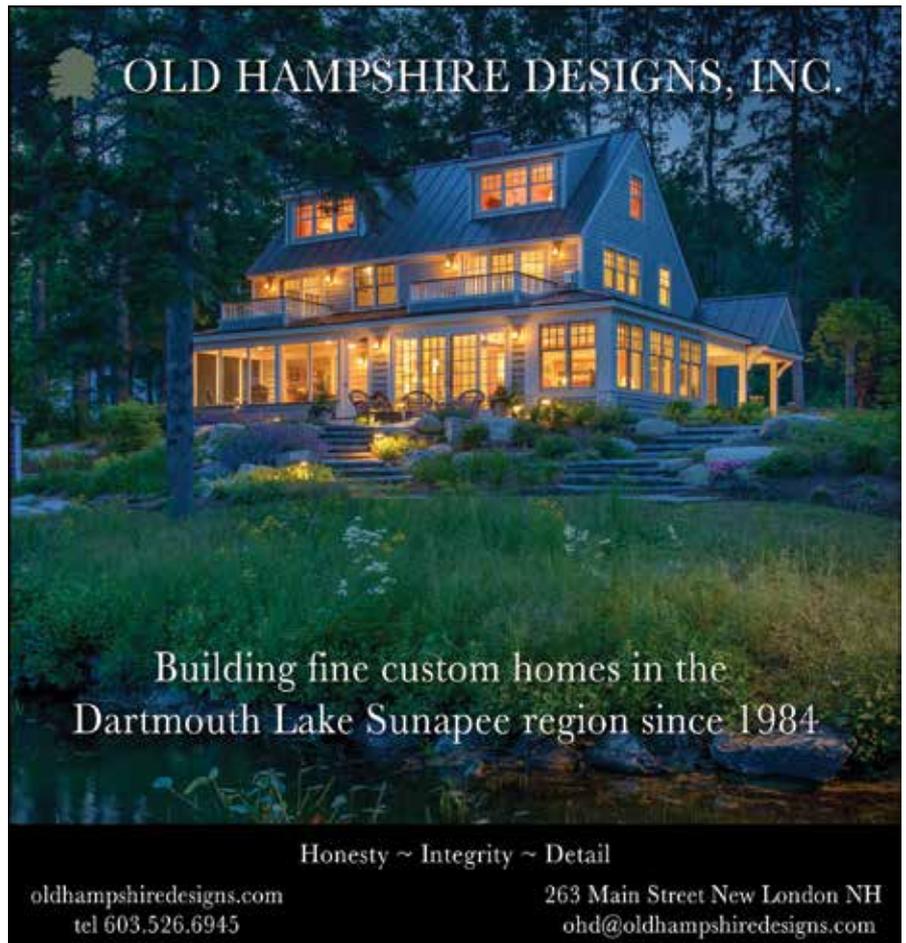
The North American Butterfly Association (NABA) coordinates an annual one-day butterfly count that helps scientists spot trends, both good and bad. New Hampshire’s count started in 2004 in Wentworth, where participants typically count up to 40 species within a 15-mile radius of Lower Baker Pond. The count is always scheduled for the weekend closest to July 10.

Another way to add to the knowledge base is to contribute observation data to eButterfly, a public program that trains and coordinates hundreds of volunteers across North America.

“When the sun is shining and the wildflowers are blooming, I’m out in the field with my net at the ready,” the Audubon naturalist says. She admits to having favorites. For obvious reasons, she is partial to the Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*), Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*), and American Lady (*Vanessa virginien-sis*). “It would be hard for me not to like them,” she says. KM

Laurie D. Morrissey is a writer who lives in Hopkinton, N.H.

Jim Block enjoys photographing almost anything: children, adults, families and celebrations; nature and wildlife; sports and action; buildings and businesses. His clients range from publishers to businesses to individuals. Explore his website at jimblockphoto.com



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