

Reawakening Our Dormant Interest in Butterflies

In a world dominated by digital devices, it's easy to forget the wonders of nature that surround us. We often take for granted the beauty of our natural world and the vital role that it plays in our lives. One way to invigorate our connection with what's outside our doors is to learn more about one of nature's most beautiful, delicate, and graceful creatures...the butterfly. Butterflies can capture the human imagination with their bright colors and intricate patterns. They are not only beautiful but also approachable creatures that allow us to observe them closely.



A Meadow Fritillary rests on an observer's finger

Roughly 75 butterfly species call Grafton County home, making them a relatively easy group to study and appreciate. The American Lady, pictured below is one prime example of their beauty, with its intricate reticulated patterns, eyespots, and pinkish-orange color, it can be seen nectaring at flowers in our gardens.



American Lady

The butterflies of our region can range in size from the tiny Eastern Tailed-blue with wingspans that hover around an inch to the Monarch that can have a wingspan that approaches 5 inches:



Eastern Tailed-blue
Monarch

The importance of butterflies goes beyond their beauty. They are delicate creatures that are highly sensitive to changes in their environment. This makes them excellent indicators of the

health of our ecosystems. Butterflies are affected by climate change, pesticide and herbicide use, disease, the invasion of non-native plants, and the destruction and fragmentation of their habitats. Protecting butterfly habitats and promoting their observation can help us monitor and preserve our natural world.

Butterflies also play an essential role in our ecosystem as pollinators. They are responsible for pollinating many of the flowers and plants that provide food for other creatures. By planting butterfly-friendly gardens with more native plants, we can provide both nectar sources for adult butterflies and food plants for caterpillars.

Butterflies are for all ages to enjoy. They can be a great way for families to connect with nature. Capturing a butterfly caterpillar and rearing it to adulthood with a child or grandchild can be a fun and educational experience. Releasing a captively-raised butterfly back into the wild can be an emotional and uplifting moment. Butterflies are also incredibly photogenic and can be excellent photo subjects, particularly when they are sipping nectar from flowers.

The New Hampshire Butterfly Monitoring Network was recently formed to promote butterfly observation, inspire the protection of butterfly habitats, and coordinate butterfly count days across the state. This organization, started by NH Fish & Game wildlife biologist Heidi Holman, in partnership with the Harris Center for Conservation Education, Ausbon Sargent Land Trust, Tin Mountain Conservation Center, Pollinator Pathways NH, NH Audubon, and UNH Extension, encourages citizens to post butterfly sightings to iNaturalist, a networking website with a companion smartphone app that allows you to post any observation in the field. Anyone posting a butterfly observation to iNaturalist provides important information to the scientific community on the health of butterfly species and the potential impact of environmental degradation. The network also promotes educational sessions, butterfly counts, and field days across the state. For more information online, go to www.wildlife.state.nh.us/surveys/butterfly-monitoring-survey.html, or just Google “NH Butterfly Monitoring Network.”

Participation in the Baker Ponds Butterfly Count, centered at Camp Pemigewassett on Lower Baker Pond in Wentworth, is also an excellent opportunity to learn more about the butterflies in our region. The count will be held this year on either Saturday, July 8th, or Sunday, July 9th, whichever day is predicted to have the best weather for observing butterflies. Typically more than 30 species are spotted on count day. Anyone interested in participating should contact George DeWolf at bakerpondsbutterflies@gmail.com. No experience in butterfly identification is required for the count, only an interest in learning more about butterflies.

Butterflies are an important part of our natural world, and we need to pay attention to any decline in their numbers. What impacts them negatively may ultimately affect us. They're beautiful and approachable, and the limits to their diversity make them manageable to study. They can inspire us to cultivate native plants in our gardens as larval food sources for butterfly caterpillars and to attract adults as pollinators. By promoting butterfly observation and inspiring the protection of their habitats, we can help preserve the delicate balance of our ecosystems. Check NH Fish & Game's New Hampshire Butterfly Monitoring Network page regularly for

information on upcoming educational sessions, field days, and counts, and reconnect with nature. Let's awaken our dormant interest in butterflies and appreciate the wonders of our natural world!

Submitted by George DeWolf, coordinator of the annual Baker Ponds Butterfly Count, now in its 20th year.