

## On the Wing at Kirby Nature Preserve

-Dr. Glenn B. Crisler II Recap

It was such an amazing day to be outdoors!

As we began the hike, we discussed butterfly conservation, especially as it deals with monarchs. This can be a very touchy subject as the emotions of many are involved (as it should). It is important though, that in our pursuit assisting the monarchs, that we first do no harm. In the USA, that means **NOT** planting tropical milkweed, as this has a detrimental effect on the migratory butterflies. The best thing we can do is provide good habitat including NATIVE milkweeds and AUTUMN blooming plants. This supports the entire lifecycle for these butterflies from caterpillar to adult. For more information about Monarch conservation, check out the Xerces Society. They are a reputable organization that advocates for monarch conservation in a way that aligns with current science.

<https://xerces.org/monarchs>

Our constitutional began in Kirby's prairie area. We noticed Cabbage Whites, Cloudless Sulfurs, Monarchs, Silver Spotted Skippers and Pearl Crescents. In addition, we saw Wild Senna (host plant for Cloudless Sulfur) as well as Swamp and Common Milkweeds (host plants for monarchs). Good quality nectar plants included ironweed and compass flower. Black Eyed Susan was also present in the prairie. Although Black Eyed Susan may not be a great butterfly magnet, it does provide support for many native bees.

We approached the wooded areas and found a Silver Spotted Skipper caterpillar tucked away in the leaves of a black locust tree. Upon closer inspection- there were 2 Silver Spotted Skipper eggs. Also, we saw a male Zabulon Skipper patrolling the forest edge. In the wooded areas, we saw hackberry trees (host plant for Hackberry Emperor and Tawny Emperor Butterflies). Unfortunately, we did not see either butterfly on the wing. We did, however, see an Eastern Tiger Swallowtail that was missing a good portion of its hind wings. This indicates that it survived a bird attack. No need to feel sorry for the butterfly, as it SURVIVES to conceive future generations. Joyce Richter from Western Wildlife Corridor pointed out an annual cicada's shed exoskeleton. This was fitting as cicada songs permeated the air for the duration of our forest trek. As we were leaving the treed areas, we noticed an extra special caterpillar find, a dimorphic macalla moth caterpillar. This caterpillar specializes in eating POISON IVY!

Upon return to the prairie, we noticed a few more butterflies including a Peck's Skipper and a Horace's Duskywing. Hanging out in the parking lot after the hike- I saw a Common Buckeye, Gray Hairstreak, and a Summer Azure.

In total, our group saw 12 butterfly species.

Butterfly walk species highlights are shown in the photos below (Not necessarily pictures from the actual walk).



1) Zabulon Skipper 2) Peck's Skipper 3) Common Buckeye 4) Cabbage White 5) Cloudless Sulfur 6) Monarch 7) Horace's Duskywing 8) Pearl Crescent 9) Gray Hairstreak 10) Silver Spotted Skipper Egg 11) Silver Spotted Skipper Caterpillar 12) Silver Spotted Skipper Adult



Stephanie Paeg

13) Wild Senna 14) Compass Plant 15) Swamp Milkweed 16) Eastern Tiger Swallowtail that survived a bird attack 17) Black Eyed Susan 18) Ironweed 19) Black Locust (not in bloom at time of hike) 20) Common Milkweed 21) Annual Cicada Shed Exoskeleton 22) Dimorphic Macalla Moth Caterpillar 23) Summer Azure