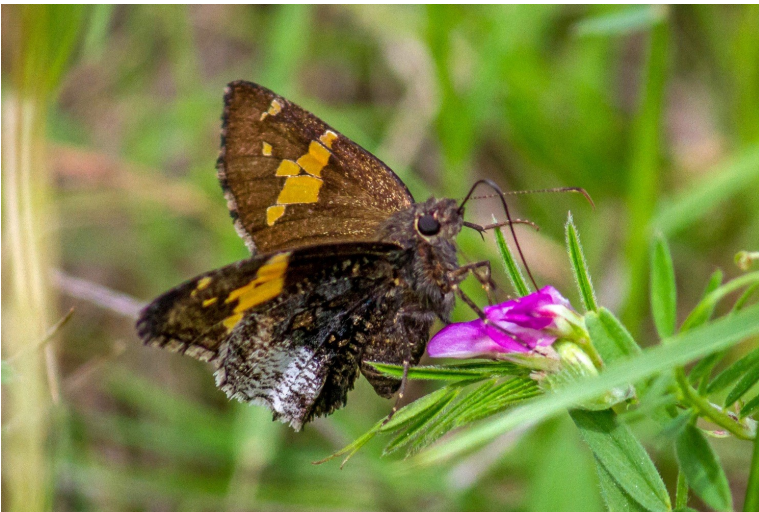


Beyond the Butterfly Garden at Year End - Part II

By Laurie Sheppard

Butterflies can be found at Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge during any month or season, and throughout the year, visitors are encouraged to look beyond the Butterfly Garden to find them. As 2017 draws to a close, 89 species of butterflies have been documented by citizen scientists in Grayson County and of those, 84 have been found and verified on the refuge. In a blog last month, six new species found on the refuge this year were described. Here are seven more.

Perhaps the most unexpected butterfly found this spring is the Frosted Elfin. This butterfly has a conservation status of G3 which means it is localized and threatened throughout its range. The larval host of the Frosted Elfin is Wild Indigo or Lupine which grows throughout the large open area bordering Sandy Point Road. This species flies only in spring, timed to coincide with the blooms of the host plants where it lays its eggs. Frosted Elfin caterpillars feed on the lupine's blooms and seed pods, and their chrysalids hibernate in the litter beneath the plant awaiting the next spring.



The Hoary Edge is typically found from Central Texas to the Atlantic coast. It is a dark butterfly of open woodland and brushy areas and was likely overlooked before at the refuge. Adult males perch on branches about 3-6 feet off the ground and may fly out repeatedly, then return to the same perch. Hoary Edge butterflies are known to frequent Oak woods with sandy soil such as the area between Oil Field Road and Sandy Point Road. Larval hosts are all in the pea family, but adults will nectar on milkweed and buttonbush, among other flowers.

Two very similar species of small, dark brown skippers have been identified on the refuge. Called "Cloudywing", they are often difficult to differentiate. The Confused Cloudywing has more prominent glassy spots than the more common Northern Cloudywing and its spots may not be aligned. Confused Cloudywings are most easily found in open areas and at the edge of woods, nectaring on low flowers in early to mid-spring, although they do produce multiple broods. (Continued on Page 2)



Eastern Comma is another “look alike” butterfly and is difficult to differentiate from the familiar Question Mark. While their territories overlap, the Comma prefers moist woods and riparian edges; the Question Mark is often found in open areas, back yards, parks, and streamsides. Eastern Comma lacks two distinguishing marks seen on the Question Mark. On the forewing, both have a row of three dots extending out from the butterfly’s body, but the Question Mark has a “dash” after the dots. The Eastern Comma lacks the dash. Underneath, both have a curved white line resembling a comma, but the Question Mark also has a white dot, like the punctuation mark for which it’s named.

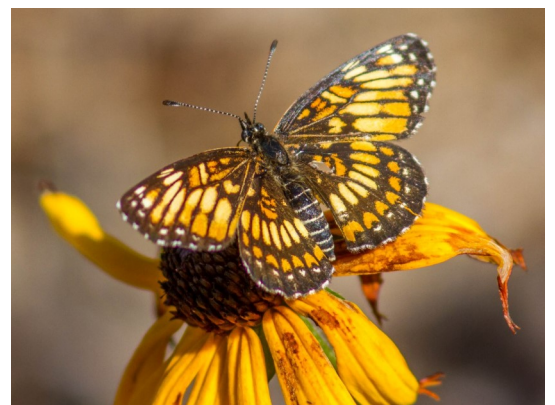


Dion Skipper, at left, below, is an orange-brown grass skipper that is reportedly found in scattered populations along the east coast and infrequently from Kansas City to Dallas. Its distinguishing characteristic is a pair of pale rays extending from its body toward the tip of its hindwing. Like many other skippers, Dion Skipper adults feed on Thistle and Buttonbush but their larval hosts are various sedges. Adults fly only in late spring through summer. Their third-stage caterpillars hibernate in winter, emerging in spring to finish feeding and pupate.

In late summer, some butterflies of south Texas stray northward and find our butterfly garden. This year one such visitor was the Long-tailed Skipper, shown at right below in photo by Dale Clark. Striking first because of its long brown tails, it also exposes a blue-green iridescence on its upper surface when it perches with its wings open. Adults feed on Bougainvillea in the south, but also on Lantana which blooms late in the season in our garden.



Another exciting garden visitor this fall was the Theona Checkerspot. This butterfly is native to Central America, Mexico, and the foothills and canyons of southern Texas and New Mexico. In size and coloring, the Theona Checkerspot is similar to the Phaon Crescent but the wide pattern of cream colored spots and lack of a hindwing border that includes black dots is very different. The underside, if you are lucky enough to see it, is a striking pattern of orange and white stripes. This butterfly is only a temporary stray and may not be found every year.



(All photos with the exception of the Long-tailed Skipper photographed by Dale Clark, are the work of Laurie Sheppard)