

Beyond the Butterfly Garden

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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. Although it seems the heat will never end, the blooming of Snow-on-the-Prairie signals a change. Thistle still blooms and Frostweed is a popular nectar plant on roadside edges.

Some butterflies can be found throughout the United States, while others are only seen in a localized area. A few stray into a different geographic area to feed but not to deposit eggs. While climate is a key factor in where a species is found, more important is the presence of a preferred food source for caterpillars and adults.

In Grayson County butterfly watchers have documented 87 different species and most of those have been found on the refuge. The **Painted Lady** is a frequent visitor to all parts of the refuge because the adults are willing to nectar from a wide variety of blooms. They lay eggs on Thistle, Mallow, and many other plants. As you might imagine, this makes them one of the most common butterflies found, not only in the U.S. but around the world!



The **American Lady** looks very similar but it has a smaller range because of its nectaring habits and larval food sources. You might find both feeding in the same location, especially if there is thistle in the area. The two primary ways to tell them apart are

the number and size of the spots on the hindwing (Painted Lady has four equally sized spots) and the presence of a white dot in the orange area near the forewing's edge on the American Lady. Look for "ladies" wherever you see flowers.

The **Southern Broken-dash** is an uncommon butterfly in Grayson County. As its name implies, it is found in southern states and only in the east. It is one of the many skippers found on the refuge but may be difficult to identify without a photo. The adults feed on low flowers and their caterpillars feed on grasses. Look for them in the Sandy Point unit where grasses are not mowed and fall flowers grow undisturbed.



The Skipper family is widely varied in color and characteristics. The **Common Checkered-skipper** is the most widespread because it adapts well to any environment. These are found in nearly all habitats but their larval food source is Mallow. Look for them in disturbed areas along roadsides, especially on any of the pad roads off of Oil Field Road.

Reakirt's Blue is common throughout Texas and northward into Oklahoma and Kansas. Its range extends somewhat westward but is primarily found in the center of the country. It is in the family of Gossamer-winged butterflies and is easily identified by the four dark spots on its forewing. As with many hairstreaks and blues, look for these anywhere Frog Fruit and other low flowers grow, including along the Auto Tour.



Another western blue is the **Marine Blue**. These are found from Texas to California, but since Hagerman NWR is near the eastern edge of their range, they are not always seen. However, they are far from rare and it's worth a close look at every small grayish butterfly to see how many varieties you can find. As with most hairstreaks and blues, the pad roads are good places to look, where low flowers are abundant.



The strikingly colored **Great Purple Hairstreak** is also a Gossamer-winged butterfly, although it could never be mistaken for its gray cousins. It is only found in the south, from coast to coast, because its larval host is Mistletoe. Look up in the trees to catch a glimpse of one laying her eggs.

