

Beyond the Butterfly Garden

February Issue

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. While the native flowers and plants in the garden are just beginning to emerge, the first warm days of January have caused tiny waiting wildflowers to bloom in places around the refuge.

All butterfly species have life strategies that allow their line to continue even in harsh winter climates. Every species that does not migrate has one life stage that is able to survive freezing temperatures without forming crystals within their cells. For some, it's the adult butterfly that winters over and emerges when the daytime temperatures rise above 55 degrees or so.

These butterflies that hibernate or semi-hibernate make up most of the species we see on sunny winter days or in early spring at the refuge. They survive tucked into a sheltered crevice in a tree or wedged behind loose bark or burrowed into thick leaf litter, protected from ice or snow. **Dainty Sulphur** (below left) and **Little Yellow** (below right) are the smallest butterflies in the Sulphur family and both semi-hibernate at Hagerman. Look for them and other sul-



phurs in areas where grasses have been cut short late in the fall so early spring blooms are exposed. Sandy Point Picnic Area is a likely spot to find them.

The hibernating winter form of **Question Mark** butterflies have unique coloring on their hind wing and can live for several months. They occasionally emerge on warm winter days and mate once the risk of frost is over. You will find them at the edges of forests such as on Oil Field Rd or Sandy Point Rd. They frequently fly to oak trees where the dead leaves provide natural camouflage.



Another hibernator that might be found at the edges of the riparian forest found in the Sandy Point unit is the **Mourning Cloak**. These butterflies may be as large as 4 inches. Mourning Cloaks rarely nectar on flowers, preferring tree sap, especially that of oaks. You may see them walking down the trunk of an oak tree, feeding with their head down.



Look in the open field in front of the visitor's center and in the grassy areas alongside Wildlife Rd for the **Checkered White** butterfly. These are not hibernators—they winter over as a chrysalis and may emerge in the first warm days of late winter to look for any available flowers to nectar on.



Overwintered Southern Dogface finds early Spring Beauty flowers at Sandy Point in January.