

Heard it through the Pipevine



Nov /
Dec
2005

Newsletter of the Austin Butterfly Forum • www.austinbutterflies.org

Dan Hardy and Mike Quinn provide our articles for this issue. Check out Mike's photo essay on the Papalotzin visit. Also, we still need a volunteer on the board to serve as Membership VP.

Club Meeting

Monday November 28, 7:00 pm

Zilker Botanical Garden Center

This is our **show and tell meeting**. Members will be sharing their photos and stories from the year. We will have a laptop and LCD projector and slide projector, so people can bring their jpg files or slides. Also, stories of trips or significant or favorite days in the field are welcome. Please limit presentations to 10 minutes or fewer.

Holiday Potluck Dinner

Tuesday December 6, 7:00 pm

Zilker Botanical Garden Center

Our annual Holiday Potluck Dinner is right around the corner. The club provides a ham; everyone else brings dishes. Sign up for dishes at this Monday's show-and-tell meeting.

Membership Policy Change

As of July 2005, club membership has changed from rolling renewal to calendar year renewal. The cost is \$20 per household, as usual, but mid-year and late-year membership fees will be prorated for the remainder of the year. For example, a person joining the club in October '05 would pay \$5 for membership through December '05 and then renew at \$20 for 2006.



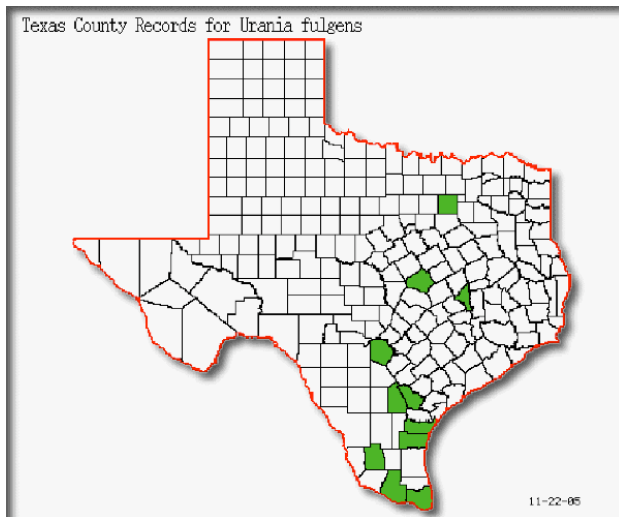
Urania fulgens nectaring on Buddleia
Killeen, Bell County, TX, 11/9/05
(P. Garraway, plus M. Ob.)

Urania Moth Migration Terminates in Texas

by Mike Quinn

Two thousand and five recorded the greatest *Urania* migration to reach Texas since 1939. *Urania* moths are some of the most beautiful iridescently patterned insects in the world. Not only are they gorgeous, but they periodically embark on some of the greatest insect emigrations in all the tropics, rivaling even the Monarchs. Smith (1983) reported that in "Costa Rica and Panama, the first population movements may begin in July and early August and, depending on the year, may be very massive indeed, continuing unabated for as long as five months."

Over 20 *Urania* moths were reported from across five counties in Texas from about August 7th to November 9, 2005. The northernmost (and latest) county record was from a nursery in Killeen and was seen by many observers. The northernmost *Urania* moths ever recorded were two collected in Dallas County in April 1941.



Texas County Records for *Urania fulgens*

The greatest concentration of *Urania* moths this year was reported by Gil Quintanilla from Cameron County near the Sabal Palm Grove Sanctuary south-east of Brownsville on the morning of August 15th.

“Interesting thing about the Sunset moths is that I first spotted them at the entrance to Sabal Palms while waiting for the gate to open at 7 a.m. The border patrol has several portable high powered lights that they operate along the levy. These may have served as beacons for the moths as the lights were still on when I first got there. As the first sunlight appeared, the portable lights were turned off and that is when I noticed what I thought were black swallowtails flying across the levee in a northern direction. As I observed further, their appearance seemed huskier than swallowtails. I confirmed they were moths when they started flying closer to me and they displayed the iridescent green markings. I saw eight in about a 10 minute time frame and later observed another 3 inside the park, including one along the river bank which landed just long enough for me to get a confirmation.”

The only previous similar mass migratory observation from Texas occurred about 25 miles to the northwest, some 76 years earlier. In July 1939 at San Benito, Cameron Co., Texas, Jack B. Prentiss observed a migration of *U. fulgens* during the morning hours, in a pasture behind his home. In a personal communication he stated:

"The flight was rather extensive; there were always a few in sight for the better part of 4 hours. They were all flying in a due north direction. During the height of the flight they were rather numerous; 20 to 30 could be seen at one time. Most were flying too high to be netted and all

were flying fast. Those flying low were most elusive and one had but a single chance to net them. During the course of the flight I did manage to take 2 specimens; one was in extremely good condition, the other only fair. (Kendall, 1978)

One of the more remarkable aspects of these migratory forays into Texas is that the *Urania*'s caterpillar food plant [a member of the Euphorbiaceae family] grows no further north than central Veracruz, over 900 air miles south of the two northernmost Dallas County records!

Kendall, R.O. 1978. Periodic occurrence of *Urania fulgens* (Uraniidae) in the United States. *Journal of the Lepidopterists' Society* 32(4):307-309.

Smith, N.G. 1983. *Urania fulgens* (Calipato Verde, Green *Urania*). in: Janzen, D.H. (editor) *Costa Rican Natural History*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 816 pp.



Orange-barred Sulphur Caterpillar (D. Hardy)

La Invasora: Big Sulphurs Invade Austin

by Dan Hardy

Driving up MoPac a giant yellow and orange sulphur crosses the highway and challenges me to keep my eyes on the road. They are worth extra scrutiny as this has been one of the best years for these large, bold visitors from the south.

Orange-barred Sulphurs (*Phoebis philea*) have turned up at gardens all over town. Males could be found on almost any warm day at Zilker Botanical

Garden, even in the parking lot. Besides being huge, they have a characteristically strong flight that takes them above the treetops and then swooping down to ground level. It is hard to spot the orange patches on the uppersides of the wings, but you can often catch glimpses in flight or, when perched, the orange will show through when backlit.

Orange-barred caterpillars have been found on Candlestick trees and Lindheimer's Senna. The new caterpillar book by Jim Brock that we all bought at the May meeting came in handy identifying them.

I first found a White Angled-Sulphurs (*Anteos chlorinde*) in a spider web at Zilker Garden. Later I found one nectaring on Esperanza flowers. Marvin Lewis and John Ingram and Shawn Ashbaugh saw others.

Chris Durden found two Tropical Whites (*Appias drusilla*). A Mexican Yellow (*Eurema mexicana*) turned up at Zilker Park. Lysides (*Kricogonia lyside*) have been scarce, however.

The season is not over, so watch for those sulphurs.



Lacey's Scrub-Hairstreak (D. Hardy)

Butterfly of the Month: Lacey's Scrub-Hairstreak

by Dan Hardy

When fall comes, I think of the golden-eye and boneset blooming at Mt. Bonnell, and I climb the stairs from the parking lot to search for Lacey's Scrub-Hairstreaks, *Strymon alea*, which seem to materialize every October to nectar on these flowers. Chris Durden alerted me to Mt. Bonnell, which is probably the most reliable place in the United States

to find this rare hairstreak. This is ironic, since it is also the northernmost locale in the Texas..

This tiny hairstreak hosts on *Bernardia myricaefolia*, which is in the Euphorbiaceae family. This bush has small leaves with soft, wavy margins that inspired its common name, Mouse-Ears, or Orejas de Ratón. They grow in the hill country on canyonsides and can be found at the top of Mt. Bonnell along the path to the right of the stairs.

This hairstreak is tricky to identify. It has dull markings on the basal half of the hindwing, unlike other hairstreaks in our area. The postmedian line (possessed by almost all hairstreaks) is jagged. There is a dark black spot at the hindwing corner and a submarginal row of pale marks above the black spot. The combination of the time of year, location near *Bernardia* bushes, small size, and the basal mottling on the hindwing are the tip-offs.

Colonies of Lacey's Scrub-Hairstreaks are localized to areas of *Bernardia* bushes. I have never found a caterpillar, but I have observed egg-laying on *Bernardia* bushes. I found them this fall at two spots in the Barton Creek Greenbelt as well. Whenever you find the hostplant, watch for this hairstreak. They can turn up at other times of the year, but are most reliable in October. This Lacey's Scrub-Hairstreak ranges from Austin south to Costa Rica. Other nearby colonies include Landa Park in New Braunfels and at Government Canyon State Natural Area in San Antonio (recently opened to public).

Need Membership Officer

We still need a volunteer to serve on the ABF board as membership VP. The membership list is computerized on an Excel spreadsheet. As we have gone to a "synchronous membership system" with everyone renewing (hopefully) in January, the job should be less stressful once we get past the first quarter.

Thank You!

Thank you **Doris Hill** and **Myrna Kepford** for decorating the club's tree at the Garden Center. And thanks to any helpers they may have had.



Papalotzin Passes Through

by Mike Quinn

The following headline and paragraph announcing the arrival in Mexico of a plane painted up like a Monarch ran on the front page of the National Edition of The New York Times earlier this month.

To Save Endangered Butterfly, Become a Butterfly

LLANO DE LAS PAPAS, Mexico, Nov. 3

The first waves of butterflies were fluttering into the dense fir forests here as Mr. Gutiérrez landed to a hero's welcome from two governors, representatives of the United States and Canadian governments, several government officials, dozens of school children dressed as butterflies, native American dancers and a Mazahua Indian chief.

Vico Gutiérrez, his plane, nick named Papalotzin, and crew of five made a slightly smaller media splash while passing through Central Texas in early October, though not for a lack of trying. I had a month's notice that they were coming, but almost no specifics on where they were to land and what they wanted to do during their visit.

In the end, they spent a few days of much needed rest and relaxation from their arduous journey by being hosted by Phil and Pat Schappert at UT's Stengl "Lost Pines" Biology Station near Smithville.

At nearly every stop along their route from Quebec to Morelia, Mexico, they offer to take up the local Monarch expert in their ultra-light plane. One has to, I believe, suspend a certain amount of belief in the Law of Gravity to go up in such a small, open plane with no more protection than a helmet and a seatbelt.

Phil Schappert, a braver man than I, went up on day one of their visit. On the very windy day two, a group of us gathered around the plane and (fortunately) Mark Gwin, Associate Editor of the Smithville Times, was selected to be the ... passenger which he readily enjoyed.

The light plane and its two passengers made slow headway into the stiff wind, but climbed rapidly. After they got back down on the ground, I asked Mark if he saw any Monarchs while in the air to which he replied, "Every time I looked up!"

The Papalotzin team made one last stop east of Seguin at the Old Kingsbury Aerodrome, before heading west to Eagle Pass in the heart of the Monarch Flyway. The Old Kingsbury Aerodrome has a grass runway and houses a collection of vintage airplanes.

Roger Freeman, the mastermind of the Aerodrome, took each Papalotzin team member up in a 30 year old biplane constructed from parts of even older planes. The entire crew including Vico with all his experience as a pilot were awed as Roger took them one by one in acrobatic flights in his biplane that included a barrel roll going vertically straight up into a hammerhead with horizon's changing every second as they saw through the skies.

At that moment, perhaps they glimpsed life more as a dragonfly than as a butterfly...





Upcoming Events

We keep a calendar of upcoming events on the austinbutterflies.org web site. Please visit the site to learn of changes and new additions.

Mon Nov 28 - Club Meeting. Member show and tell.
See details in box at front of newsletter

Tue Dec 6 - Club Meeting. Annual potluck dinner and officer installation. See details at front of newsletter.

Please submit newsletter events, corrections, and suggestions to the editor, Joe Lapp:

joe.lapp@pobox.com

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Austin Butterfly Forum Membership Form

Become a member or renew your membership.

Your membership helps support our club activities, but members also receive bimonthly **newsletters** with upcoming events and informative articles, **butterfly plants** that we often give away, and **discounts** on books, T-shirts and more.

Name:	Daytime phone:
Street:	Evening phone:
City: State: Zip:	Email:

Membership is \$20 annually per household, due each January and prorated thereafter.
Make check payable to the Austin Butterfly Forum and send to:

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