This issue of American Butterflies initiates a continuing series that will document the caterpillar foodplants of North American butterflies. Although there are thousands of reports of particular butterfly species using particular plant species as a caterpillar foodplant, most of these reports are not accompanied by photographs demonstrating the accuracy of the foodplant identification. In addition, many reports are based upon sightings of a butterfly laying eggs on a particular plant, and it is well known that butterflies sometimes lay eggs on plants that will not successfully support the full development of caterpillars through to adults. Lastly, some reports of foodplants are based upon capturing a female and then enclosing her with a potential foodplant. Although the resulting caterpillars may develop through to adults, the artificial nature of the induced egg-laying precludes concluding with certainty that the butterfly uses the plant species in the wild.

In order to more stringently document North American caterpillar foodplants, we have decided to require the following. 1. An egg(s) or caterpillar(s) must be found on a particular individual plant in the wild (this includes gardens). 2. A photo(s) of the actual individual plant (not a generic photo of the assumed plant species), including a view(s) of features that distinguish the plant species from similar species, on which the egg(s) or caterpillar(s) was found must be provided so that the identity of the plant species can be assured. 3. The resulting caterpillar(s) must be fed the same plant species through to adulthood. 4. Photos of the caterpillar(s) and chrysalis must be provided; 5. A photo of the adult that emerges must be provided so that the identity of the butterfly species can be assured.

The foregoing series can be completed either by netting a particular plant in the wild following the discovery of an egg(s) or caterpillar(s), and revisiting the plant over time; or by taking the egg(s) or caterpillar(s) to another location, rearing the caterpillar(s) on the same plant species, and then releasing the adult(s) at the same location where the egg(s) or caterpillar(s) was found. We would like to document each plant species used by each North American butterfly species, as well as plant species usage for each state or province.

In addition to appearing in American Butterflies, the results of this project will be posted to the NABA website. Please send us any butterfly species/plant species/state or province trio that is not already posted. For the next issue of American Butterflies, we are especially interested in documenting the use of different milkweed species as caterpillar foodplants by Monarchs.

Southern Dogface
on Low Prairie-Clover (Dalea scandens)(Legume family)
in Hidalgo County, Texas

by Jan Dauphin

Below: On Sept. 16, 2011 a Southern Dogface laid an egg on the Low Prairie-Clover in Jan Dauphin’s garden in Mission, Hidalgo County, Texas.

Left: This photo of the same plant was taken on Sept. 25, 2008.

The caterpillar that hatched from the egg and fed on the Low Prairie-Clover. This photo was taken on Oct. 1, 2007.

This photo of the same caterpillar was taken on Oct. 6, 2007.

The caterpillar pupated on the same plant on Oct. 16, 2007. This photo of the chrysalis was taken on Oct. 24, 2007.

The adult Southern Dogface emerged on October 24, 2007.