Butterfly Conservation

This double issue of *American Butterflies* focuses on butterfly conservation. The largest issue of *American Butterflies* ever published, I’m sorry to say, that it doesn’t paint a pretty picture. While not as dire as much of Europe, the situation for butterflies in North America continues to deteriorate.

As you can learn from this issue, the two major ecosystems that are most in danger are the South Florida subtropical hardwood hammocks and pine rockland (see the article by Dennis Olle on page 4) and the tallgrass prairies of the Midwest (see the article on page 64 by Ann Swengel). Almost nothing remains of either of these amazing habitats and so the many butterfly species that depend upon them are also teetering on the edge, or have already fallen over the edge.

There are also some very localized species that are in danger, with Hermes Copper probably the most important example, even though it is inexplicably not federally listed as endangered (see the article by Daniel Marschalek and Michael Klein on page 20).

Over a larger scale, butterflies are also declining. In the percentage of butterfly species depend upon transitional habitats. These butterfly species inhabit areas which, if left to themselves, will, over time, become a woodland. Thus, species such as Coral Hairstreaks and Meadow Fritillaries need a constant replenishing of habitat as their old habitats disappear (see the article by Ann Swengel). Butterfly species that are least impacted by changes in agricultural practices is the Monarch. Agriculture in the Midwest has changed from family farms to corporate farms and from small-scale farming to large-scale farms that succeed in eliminating almost all “weeds,” including milkweeds, the only caterpillar foodplants for Monarchs. The resulting decline in milkweeds available to Monarchs is almost certainly a major factor in the greatly declining number of Monarchs present in North America. (See the article by Karen Oberhauser on page 56 of this issue.)

OK. Enough about the bad stuff! What can you do to be positive? Well, by joining NABA you have already done something positive, helping to create a constituency (this includes you!) that vitally cares about butterflies. You can come to the Members Meeting in Chattanooga, TN this June to join with other butterfliers! Without people who care about them, butterflies will be gone.

You can also help NABA change the pattern of home plantings in North America. You can start by creating your own butterfly garden and certifying it as part of the NABA Program for Butterfly Gardens and Habitats. Then you can help NABA convince others also to take part in the program.

Single family houses in the U.S. sit on somewhere between 25 million and 50 million acres of plantable land. For most people, the plantings mean a few exotic shrubs and a non-native lawn. If we can convince people to plant native grasses, wildflowers and shrubs around their houses, this would create millions of acres of habitat for many different butterfly species.

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and Conrad Vispo, respectively, explore the relationship of agriculture to butterflies. One issue of *American Butterflies* that has been most impacted by changes in agricultural practices is the Monarch. Agriculture in the Midwest has changed from family farms to corporate farms and from small-scale farming to large-scale farms that succeed in eliminating almost all “weeds,” including milkweeds, the only caterpillar foodplants for Monarchs. The resulting decline in milkweeds available to Monarchs is almost certainly a major factor in the greatly declining number of Monarchs present in North America.

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