This count column traditionally has focused on patterns that emerge from data collected through the Seasonal Count program (that’s why it’s called the count column!). For most of the history of the program, count surveys have primarily been conducted during the summer months (June, July and August). Only since 2000 has the number of spring and fall count surveys really begun to grow, although they still make up only a minor portion of the program (pg. 31 top). While NABA continues to encourage count coordinators to survey their count circles during spring and fall, we are lucky that we don’t need to wait for the natural growth of those activities to supply us with information about what’s going on with the butterflies during other times of the year. NABA also has two other programs that collect observations that can be used to track patterns and trends over time.

The Butterflies I’ve Seen (BIS) program (www.nababis.org) is a tool for individual users to be able to track their observations over a lifetime. You can use this program to maintain a life list or keep track of what you’ve seen on different outings and field trips. With 718 users who have logged 19,125 trips since the program began in 2002, NABA has compiled a database of more than 210,000 observation records that span the seasons.

NABA also has a Recent Sightings app (http://sightings.naba.org/) that allows users to log observations made in the field. Intended to be a more causal repository for interesting sightings, many people nevertheless use it to report complete checklists from field trips. This program has also resulted in a substantial database of species observations compiled throughout North America during the year. Under this program, more than 300 users have reported records from 2515 sightings or events, resulting in a database of 28,784 observation records. Combining the records from these three programs gives us access to observations throughout the year and gives us a mechanism to explore patterns throughout the year (opposite page, bottom).

By combining data from these three programs, we greatly expand our ability to track dynamics throughout the year. See our series of panels (page 32) showing month-to-month observation of Painted Ladies during one of their outbreak years (2006). Gray dots indicate sites where observations were made and no Painted Ladies were seen. Even though data are still very sparse during the off-season months, we see a picture begin to emerge. There are many challenges we face before actually being able to integrate these multiple data sets into a more formal analysis. The biggest is that, unlike the seasonal count program, Sightings and BIS trips don’t account for effort. Indeed, it’s difficult to tell the difference between the case