

Massachusetts Butterflies



Fall 2025, No. 65

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Contents

2	2025 4th of July Counts	Karl Barry & Bill Benner
21	The Butterfliers of Massachusetts	Kristin Steinmetz
24	Northern Broken-Dash: This “grass skipper” is pickier than its cousins	Matt Pelikan
28	Memories of Tom Gagnon	Tom Tynning and Friends



Dion Skipper (*Euphyes dion*), 7/6/25,
Arlington, MA, Peter Loshin

Cover photo: Arctic Skipper (*Carterocephalus palaemon*),
5/30/25, Berkshire County, MA, Paul Seaman

4th of July Counts 2025

Karl Barry and Bill Benner

After a couple of years when the weather bounced around from wet to very dry, the count period for 2025 turned out to follow a very wet spring leading into a hot midsummer, with occasional rains for some areas. During the count period, at least, there didn't seem to be prolonged times of either drought or cold rains. While this might be expected to lead to larger numbers of butterflies, the count season could perhaps best be described as "average". While number of species (73) was tied for last year, and higher than some years, the number of individuals on the counts (8,476) was definitely down, though not as low as the recent slow butterfly years of 2021 (7,923) and especially 2023 (5,785).

Some of this decrease in numbers might be due to the wet spring, which may have delayed emergence for some species. Some of the counts seemed on the early side for various species that were emerging a few days later than usual. But butterfly numbers also fluctuate quite a bit from year to year, both for individual species abundances as well as for overall butterfly sightings. Still, there is some evidence that the number of butterflies is slowly declining year after year, and this year could be part of that trend as well. In any case, we personally can attest to fewer butterflies in the garden and an overall sense that there just weren't as many butterflies on count days, even when the weather conditions were great and the fields were full of flowers, though as always there were exceptions to this general trend.

The Central Franklin count had the highest number of species, with 49. The Northern Berkshire count blew everyone else out of the water in number of individuals, with 2,548, more than three times as many as the next closest number of 803 on the Central Franklin count (see below for why!) The Concord count led the way with the most number of participants, at 25. The Northampton count had the fewest, with only 3 of us (though we still managed to see a respectable 33 species.)

Only one butterfly this year was completely new for the counts: Checkered White, with 5 seen on the Central Berkshire count. This southern species rarely occurs north of Long Island, and even there only as a later summer immigrant or rare stray, so this was a very good sighting. There were 9 species which had their lowest counts of the last six years: Black Swallowtail, Spicebush Swallowtail, American Copper, Banded Hairstreak, Pearl Crescent, Painted Lady, Red Admiral, Common Ringlet, and Common Sootywing. Conversely, for 12 species, 2025 was their highest count over the past six years: Mustard White, Baltimore Checkerspot, Northern Pearly-Eye, Appalachian Brown, Little Wood-Satyr, Southern Cloudywing, Wild Indigo Duskywing, Peck's Skipper, Little Glassywing, Zabulon Skipper, Dion Skipper, and Black Dash. This perhaps illustrates more than anything else that this was a somewhat middling year, with many species recording numbers neither terribly low nor remarkably high, but with exceptions.

Both Black Swallowtails and Spicebush Swallowtails recorded their lowest counts in the past 6 years. There were 38 Spicebush, only slightly fewer than the 42 seen in 2021. But for Blacks, this year's 28 was considerably less than the average of 55 over the previous 5 years. Tiger Swallowtails fared somewhat better, with a more normal count of 96, combining both Eastern and Canadian reports together. As usual, no Giants or Pipevines were recorded on any of the counts this year; Pipevines are rare strays, and Giants tend to turn up in the state most frequently starting in August, after the count period.

Whites and sulphurs fared somewhat better. The aforementioned Checkered Whites were remarkable, given how rarely they are ever seen this far north, especially away from the coast. Cabbage Whites were seen in average numbers, but 36 Mustard Whites on the Northern Berkshire count was an encouragingly high number, much better than the single digits of the past 5 years. Cabbage Whites, Clouded Sulphurs, and Orange Sulphurs were all about average.

Lycaenids, on the other hand, had a somewhat poor year overall, with a few exceptions. Only 187 American Coppers were seen, which may not seem that low, but is the fewest ever reported on the counts. This is lower even than the totals for the early and mid-1990's, when there were only a half dozen counts reporting. Likewise, the 193 Bog Coppers seen rivaled 2023's low of 188, many fewer than the thousand or more that were recorded for many years in the past. For the third year in a row, no Hickory Hairstreaks were recorded. But other hairstreaks had about average numbers, with Coral (46) doing the best, followed by Edward's (18) and Striped (17).

Banded Hairstreaks (8), on the other hand, had their worst year on the counts in many years, the first time since 2010 (when 8 were also recorded) that they failed to be seen on the counts in double digits. Their numbers have actually been decreasing on the counts for the past few years: 19 in 2023, only 11 in 2024. Perhaps this is a species in some sort of trouble? Consider that ten years ago, during the 2015 count period, 242 Banded Hairstreaks were tallied, including 62 on the Northern Berkshire count and 81 on Northern Essex! Even back in the earlier 2000's, there had been 44 in 2009, and 104 in 2011, bracketing that poor year of 2010. Some of these high numbers seem amazing to us just 10 years later; it's a bit difficult to imagine seeing hundreds of Banded Hairstreaks today. Considering that the counts take place over late June to late July, which coincides perfectly with this species' flight period, it's hard to believe that every count is somehow too early or too late to be finding them. Every year is different, so it would be nice to be wrong and see a big flight of Banded Hairstreaks next year, but it is worrisome.

Gray Hairstreak numbers (18) were also relatively low, but 2 Juniper Hairstreaks were seen on the Brewster count, better than many years for this species that is often between broods and missed during the count period. Eastern Tailed-Blues (76) and 'Summer' Azures (84) both were seen in relatively average numbers, a bit low for ETB's and slightly high for Azures

compared to the 5 previous years.

Fritillaries, on the other hand, had a pretty good year, with at least average numbers for all of the fritillary species. Looking over the past 6 years, Great Spangled had its second highest count with 341; Aphrodite had a relatively low year with 9, but not as low as 2023 and 2021, when only 5 were seen. Atlantis and Silver-bordered both recorded 18 individuals, and 17 Meadows were seen, all of these somewhere in the middle of the usual count numbers for these species that tend to fluctuate from year to year. There were even 2 Variegated Fritillaries seen on the Concord count – good spotting for a southern immigrant species that is often missed on the counts.

Pearl Crescents, meanwhile, had a “low” count of only 349. Their previous lowest count was 469 in 2023, and those numbers pale against the 1,646 seen last year! However, your editor can attest to the fact that Pearl Crescents started appearing in better numbers shortly after the counts were finished, suggesting that the second brood of Pearls was just a few days too late to be picked up, during the western MA counts at least. Baltimore Checkerspots, on the other hand, had their best count of the past 6 years, with 640 seen, a remarkable 520 of those on the Falmouth count alone, where 400 were also seen on their 2024 count. 2025 had the most Baltimores seen since 2006, when 654 were seen, including 326 on the Northern Essex count alone. (The Northern Essex Baltimore phenomenon seems like it was relatively short-lived: there were 47 on that count in 2004, 55 in 2005, then the high of 326 in 2006, and 307 in 2007. After that, Northern Essex saw only 22 in 2008, 0 in 2009, and has been in single or low double digits since.)

This was generally a poor count year for anglewings, ladies, and admirals. Question Marks (9) were about average for this uncommon species, but Eastern Commas (13) were the fewest since 2021. The Gray Comma phenomenon of the mid- to late-2010’s seem to be truly over; none were seen this year, and there have been none since 2020. One Compton Tortoiseshell on the

Central Berkshire count was nice for a species that is often missed, though as in many years, there were no Milbert's. Seven Mourning Cloaks was at the low end of normal. The irruptive vanessids were recorded in low numbers if at all: American Ladies numbers (19) were the lowest since 2020 (12) and 2021 (15). And there were no Painted Ladies at all! the first time that has happened since 1998. Their numbers fluctuate from year to year, however. For example, there were 12 last year; only 1 Painted Lady were recorded in 2018, but 38 in 2019, then only 2 in 2020. Red Admirals were also especially scarce this year; only 2 were seen, on the Southern Berkshire count, the fewest since 2013, when none were recorded.

Common Buckeyes "bucked" this trend, with 6 overall, good for this uncommon stray. Two were on the southeast's Falmouth count, where they might be more expected, but the other 4 scattered around central MA, with 2 on the Northern Worcester count, and one each for Northampton and Central Franklin. A combined 24 individuals for Red-spotted Admirals, as well as the count of 18 Viceroys, were in the middle of the range for past years. Two Hackberry Emperors on the Southern Berkshire count was nice for this oft-missed species, but once again this year there were no Tawny Emperors. The loss of their lone big breeding Hackberry tree in the Holyoke Range of South Hadley a few years ago really seems to have been the final straw for detecting this species within any count circles, at least during the count period.

Satyrids, conversely, seemed to have a pretty good count season. Numbers of Northern Pearly-eyes (20), Eyed Browns (23), Appalachian Browns (141), and Little Wood-Satyrs (223), were all average to above-average. However, Common Ringlet numbers (29) were quite low, lower even than the 37 seen in 2021. Likewise, the 283 Common Wood-Nymphs rivaled the low number of 275 seen in the relatively poor butterfly year of 2023. But, like with Pearl Crescents, it did seem that we were a bit early on some of the counts for the main emergence of Wood-Nymphs, as the few individuals that were seen were extremely fresh, and numbers built up in the days after the counts. Monarch numbers (290) were

about average for recent years.

Skippers were a mixed bag, as they often are. Silver-spotted Skippers' 169 individuals tied the count for 2023, less than last year's 264, more than 2022's 112. Only 2 Hoary Edge's were seen, though this species is usually recorded in single-digit numbers. But another of the year's remarkably good counts was the number of Southern Cloudywings – 23 were seen, ten times the number in any of the previous 5 years. Most of these (16) were seen on the Falmouth count, but Central Franklin also boasted a respectable 7. This was the highest count for Southern Cloudywings since the 32 seen in 2003; that year 12 were seen on the Central Franklin count and 11 on the Northern Worcester count, with the others scattered around.

Six Horace's Duskywings this year was a more expected number of that species, after last year's high of 37. Wild Indigo Duskywings seem to be slowly increasing, with 54 being more than last year's 43, and the most since the 62 seen in 2019. Only 2 Common Sootywings were reported, 1 each on the Central Franklin and Northampton counts.

The folded-winged skippers generally seemed to have an average count year, without any particularly poor numbers. The amazing exception to this is the high number of 1,950 Peck's Skippers! Almost all of these (1,880) were seen on the Northern Berkshire count, accounting for 76% of the individual butterflies seen on that count, and almost all of those Peck's were seen by your editor in one field. It was an incredible explosion of skippers – we moved step by step, at first trying to count individual butterflies, but eventually settling on counting by 10's in some areas of the field. Incredible! Given that the field also had multiple other skipper and butterfly species, it was a few hours of fantastic butterflying that seems increasingly hard to find these days. The Brewster count's 15 Sachems are also notable, perhaps a temporary (or permanent?) overwintering population, given that 14 were also seen on that count last year, plus 3 in Truro.

One more indication that the butterflies might have been somewhat delayed this count season is the 12 Hobomok Skippers that were recorded, the most since 2020. In many years, this species is mostly gone by count season, but this year there were still some decently intact specimens around. And finally, Zabulon Skipper seems here to stay. One each was recorded in 2024 and 2020, and were considered remarkable; 2020 was the first time it was recorded on any of the counts. This year there were 3, and not even in the southeast: one on the Central Franklin count, and 2 in Northern Worcester. And your editor can attest to the fact that they are the most common August skipper in my garden, every year now, and appear every spring in the garden as well – pretty clearly breeding and double-brooded here in the foothills in western MA, and apparently throughout much of the state.

We want to give a shout out to all of the hardworking compilers for the counts: Tom Tynning, Rene Wendell, Mark Fairbrother, Wendy Howes, Jay Shetterly, Simon Perkins, Russ Hopping, Mark Rosenstein, Tom and Cathy Dodd, Andrew Griffith, and Mark Faherty. It is a mostly thankless job, and they do a great job of organizing and collecting the data (and the participants!) and making sure everything is correctly submitted in a timely manner. The counts couldn't happen without their good work.

And finally, congratulations to all of us, who make the counts possible with our many hours of volunteer service, hiking through fields and forest and marshes in heat and humidity (and sometimes rain showers) to count every single important individual butterfly. It is a commitment, but it's also tremendous fun. If you haven't joined in on a count yet, there's always next year. All of the counts could use the help – again note that only 3 people worked on the Northampton count this year, as well as only 4 on Northern Essex and 5 on Brewster. Helping out on a count day is a great way to get to know the butterflies as well as some new friends. You also get the satisfaction of knowing you are a valuable Citizen Scientist.



July Count 2025	Black Swallowtail	Eastern Tiger Swallowtail	Canadian Tiger Swallowtail	Spicebush Swallowtail	Checkered White	Mustard White	Cabbage White	Clouded Sulphur	Orange Sulphur	American Copper	Bronze Copper
Total count	28	80	16	38	5	36	630	805	73	187	1
Northern Berkshire	4	21	7				50	89	2	3	
Central Berkshire	1	13	4		5	36	47	78	8	14	
Southern Berkshire	4	4					46	72	12		
Central Franklin	3	8		1			88	132	5	21	
Northampton	4	9		6			64	116	18	15	
Northern Worcester	4	19	5	8			91	141	5	28	
Concord	3	3					64	94	6	3	
Northern Essex		1					23	21	4		1
Blackstone Corridor				3			8	22	5	15	
Falmouth	4			10			1	40	2	11	
Truro		1		4			10		2	51	
Brewster	1	1		6			138		4	26	

July Count 2025	Bog Copper	Coral Hairstreak	Edwards' Hairstreak	Banded Hairstreak	Striped Hairstreak	Juniper Hairstreak	Gray Hairstreak	Eastern Tailed-Blue	Summer Azure	Variegated Fritillary	Great Spangled Fritillary
Total count	193	46	18	8	17	2	18	76	84	2	341
Northern Berkshire		23						9	18		65
Central Berkshire		3			1			7	19		55
Southern Berkshire				1				3	3		70
Central Franklin	188	6					2	4	16		60
Northampton				3			1	8	2		15
Northern Worcester							2	6	12		49
Concord							1	13	3	2	5
Northern Essex									4		
Blackstone Corridor		1		2				10	5		22
Falmouth		3	18	1			7	16	1		
Truro	5	1			14		3		1		
Brewster		9		1	2	2	2				

July Count 2025	Aphrodite Fritillary	Atlantis Fritillary	Silver-bordered Fritillary	Meadow Fritillary	Pearl Crescent	Baltimore Checkerspot	Question Mark	Eastern Comma	Compton Tortoiseshell	Mourning Cloak	American Lady
Total count	9	18	18	17	349	640	9	13	1	7	19
Northern Berkshire			3	10	7	17	1				
Central Berkshire	2	15			1	44		3	1	3	1
Southern Berkshire		3	4	1		2	3	6		3	
Central Franklin	5		6	6		16	2	2		1	2
Northampton			4		236	2					
Northern Worcester	2				3	9		2			
Concord					57						
Northern Essex			1			4					
Blackstone Corridor					3	26	2				2
Falmouth						520					10
Truro					10		1				2
Brewster					32						2

July Count 2025	Red Admiral	Common Buckeye	Red-spotted Admiral	White Admiral	Red-spotted Purple	Viceroy	Hackberry Emperor	Northern Pearly-Eye	Eyed Brown	Appalachian Brown	Little Wood-Satyr
Total count	2	6	2	8	14	18	2	20	23	141	223
Northern Berkshire				1		1		12	15	6	
Central Berkshire				5	6	3		3	1	3	2
Southern Berkshire	2		2	1		3	2	2		6	17
Central Franklin		1		1	1	2			7	16	51
Northampton		1			1	7				7	3
Northern Worcester		2			4	1		2		34	38
Concord										31	35
Northern Essex										5	4
Blackstone Corridor					1	1		1		6	64
Falmouth		2			1						2
Truro										27	7
Brewster											

July Count 2025	Common Ringlet	Common Wood-Nymph	Monarch	Silver-spotted Skipper	Hoary Edge	Southern Cloudywing	Northern Cloudywing	Juvenal's Duskywing	Horace's Duskywing	Wild Indigo Duskywing	Common Sootywing
Total count	29	283	290	169	2	23	1	1	6	54	2
Northern Berkshire	7	51	21	13							
Central Berkshire	9	27	26	1							
Southern Berkshire	4	19	15	15							
Central Franklin	1		16	22	2	7	1	1			1
Northampton	2	15	88	20						53	1
Northern Worcester			44	29							
Concord	2	94	30	8						1	
Northern Essex	3		9	2							
Blackstone Corridor	1	17	10	24							
Falmouth		2	9	6		16					
Truro		41	2	11							
Brewster		17	20	18					6		

July Count 2025	Least Skipper	European Skipper	Peck's Skipper	Tawny-edged Skipper	Crossline Skipper	Long Dash	Northern Broken-Dash	Little Glassywing	Sachem	Delaware Skipper	Mulberry Wing
Total count	98	208	1,950	27	27	54	244	151	15	66	69
Northern Berkshire	1	43	1880	9	2	22	40	2		10	
Central Berkshire	29	55	20	3		26	11	3		5	
Southern Berkshire	20	46	33	1		4	20	72		2	3
Central Franklin	2	15	1	5	1		12	12		11	16
Northampton			1	2			31				7
Northern Worcester	13	34	1	1			4	11		7	
Concord			1		1		18	2		1	26
Northern Essex	12	10	13			1	1	45			
Blackstone Corridor	3				1	1	2	3		11	17
Falmouth		5		6	22		3	1		18	
Truro							27			1	
Brewster	18						75		15		

July Count 2025	Hobomok Skipper	Zabulon Skipper	Broad-winged Skipper	Dion Skipper	Black Dash	Two-spotted Skipper	Dun Skipper
Total count	12	3	41	15	30	4	335
Northern Berkshire	6			12	2		63
Central Berkshire	4				15	3	10
Southern Berkshire	1			1			32
Central Franklin		1			4	1	18
Northampton			2		4		28
Northern Worcester		2					9
Concord			5		3		24
Northern Essex	1				1		
Blackstone Corridor			2	2	1		21
Falmouth							7
Truro			2				68
Brewster			30				55

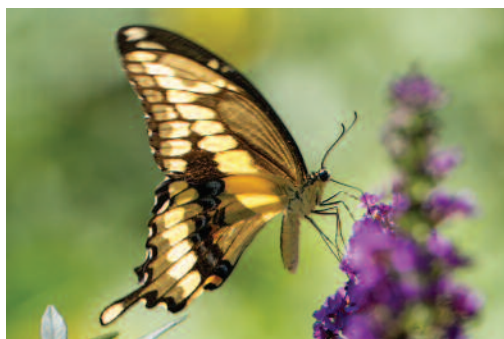
July Counts 2024 Summary	No. of Individuals	No. of Species	No. of Participants	Party Hours	Date	Compiler
Total	8,476	73	-	-	-	-
Northern Berkshire	2,548	38	14	31	July 13	Tom Tynning
Central Berkshire	631	45	11	17	July 6	Tom Tynning
Southern Berkshire	560	40	15	27	July 3	Rene Wendell
Central Franklin	803	49	8	32	July 4	Mark Fairbrother
Northampton	776	33	3	14	July 19	Mark Fairbrother
Northern Worcester	626	33	9	30	July 5	Wendy Howes
Concord	536	28	25	18	July 13	Jay Shetterly / Simon Perkins
Northern Essex	166	21	4	n/a	June 29	Russ Hopping & Mark Rosenstein
Blackstone Corridor	315	34	6	n/a	July 7	Tom & Cathy Dodd
Falmouth	744	28	6	n/a	June 29	Andrew Griffith
Truro	291	22	6	11	July 13	Mark Faherty
Brewster	480	22	5	14	July 21	Mark Faherty



Broad-winged Skipper
(*Poanes viator*), 7/25/25, Middlesex Co., MA, Ashley Gross



Appalachian Browns (*Satyrodes appalachia*),
7/5/25, Sterling, MA, Alan Rawle



Giant Swallowtail (*Papilio cresphontes*),
8/16/25, Arlington, MA, Peter Loshin



Variegated Fritillary
(*Euptoieta claudia*), 7/12/25,
Concord, MA, Linda Graetz



Monarchs (*Danaus plexippus*),
8/17/25, Williamsburg, MA,
Carol Duke



Mottled Duskywing (*Erynnis martialis*),
7/19/25, Albany, NY, Garry Kessler



Founding members of NABA-MBC (left to right): Dave Small, Tom Dodd, Jeff Boetner, Tom Gagnon, Gail Howe, Karen Parker, Tom Tying, Madelaine Champagne, and First Member Brian Cassie. (photo courtesy Karl Barry)



(seated, from left): Elise Barry, Beth Herr, Bruce Callahan, Sharon Stichter, Tom Gagnon, Marvin St. Onge, Dolores Price, Dee Kuerzel, Randy Kuerzel, Joe Wicinski; (standing from left): Karl Barry, Elaine Pourinski, Tom Murray, Joe Stichter, Eric Nielsen, Betsy Higgins, Ron Cloutier, Rick Walker, Barbara Walker, Bill Benner, Sue Cloutier, Joyce Prince, Mike Walker, Kerry Walker, Steve Moore, and Tom Prince. CT Lakes NABA-MBC trip, Pittsburg, NH, 2006.



(left) Barbara Volkle, Secretary, NABA-MBC, West Whately, MA, 8/16/25 (Carol Duke)



(left) Dolores Price and Marvin St. Onge, 8/9/25 (Barbara Volkle)

(right) Caterpillar Lab's Sam Jaffe and NABA-MBC President Peter Loshin (Barbara Volkle)



(right) Tom Gagnon, 6/20/23, Pittsburg, NH field trip, (Tom Tying)



(left) Tom Gagnon and Betty Wauer, Wyoming trip (Elise Barry)



(above) Steve Moore, past President of NABA-MBC, 8/9/25 (Barbara Volkle)



Barbara Walker Butterfly Festival, Broad Meadow Brook, 8/9/25 (left to right): Kim Deandreade, RoseAnne La-Barre, Andrew Griffith, Lauren Griffith, Kristin Steinmetz, and Peter Loshin. (photo courtesy Barbara Volkle)

Juniper Hairstreak
(Callophrys gryneus) adult
 (above), and egg
 (below) on Eastern
 Red-Cedar, 5/11/25,
 Woburn MA,
 Garry Kessler,



Broad-winged Skipper (*Poanes viator*), 7/17/25, Arlington, MA,
 Lisa Wolfe



Bog Copper (*Lycaena epixanthe*),
 7/4/25, Shutesbury, MA,
 Alan Rawle

Butterflies of Massachusetts

Kristin Steinmetz

NABA-Massachusetts Butterfly Club

Vice President - East



Can you tell us a little bit about where you grew up?

I was an urban kid and grew up in Trenton, NJ. My family was not outdoorsy, but my earliest memories are of feeling an almost mystical connection to “nature.” I couldn’t identify a black-capped chickadee – and I didn’t know anyone to teach me these things – but I remember sitting outside with my arms outstretched, willing the birds to land on me, or reading a book in a dogwood tree and feeling so in tune with the tree.

You’ve made a career out of working with nature and wildlife – how did that come about, and is that something you always wanted to do?

I would say it was luck and kind people that made it happen. In college, I somehow managed to get a summer job working on a trail crew in Washington state. That experience gave my scrawny,

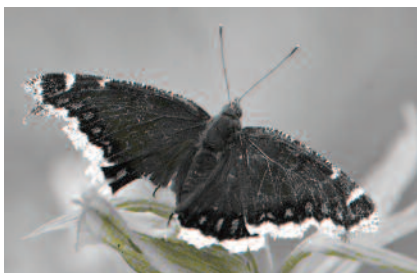
urban self some muscles and outdoor skills. I stayed out West and became a middle school teacher but spent every free moment in the mountains. When I moved to Worcester, the very first place I visited was Mass Audubon's Broad Meadow Brook. Amazing teachers there (like MBC star Gail Howe) mentored me and taught me enough natural history that I could combine teaching with my love of nature and the outdoors. I'm grateful I got the opportunity to work for Mass Audubon, in one capacity or another, for over 20 years. I still feel like a neophyte, eagerly learning something new each day and annually forgetting as much as I learn!

When did you first start getting into butterflies and butterfly watching? Was there something, or some butterfly, that really sparked your interest?

This answer will disappoint some Club members, but my interest really grew after my then-young daughters and I raised mail order painted ladies in that cup of goop - so sorry! Witnessing the transformation was awe-inspiring for us, and I think a good reminder that people come to butterflying in all sorts of ways. After that, my husband gave me childcare as a birthday gift, so that I could attend the MBC's Butterfly Institute taught by Barbara Walker, Madeline Champagne and others. We met on week nights for a butterfly lecture followed by field trips on the weekends. I loved every minute.

What is your favorite Massachusetts butterfly, and why?

I have to say the Mourning Cloak. Not only is it a beautiful butterfly, but its life history is so amazing. I'm in



Mourning Cloak (*Nymphalis antiopa*),
7/7/25, Savoy, MA, Paul Seaman

awe of any butterfly that survives a New England winter. When I worked at Broad Meadow Brook, it was also the only butterfly that I could reliably see in the early spring on the Holdredge cut-off trail AND the only butterfly that would occasionally land on my

upraised hand to wow the school kids on their spring field trips to the sanctuary.

How do you think we can include more people, especially young people, into the club and into butterfly conservation in general?

I'm reading a book on communication and one of its mottos is: have something to learn, not something to prove. I'm finding this motto tremendously helpful in our politically polarized world, but it could also be applied to our less-conflicted butterfly world. Welcome everyone. Smile. Ask questions about their interests and find ways to support them. Invite people to walks and meetings. Share your love of butterflies and conservation with the young people in your life. You never know what seeds you are planting. Keep an open mind about what people may have to contribute. Collaboration with other groups - land trusts, native plant societies, garden clubs, hiking clubs, butterfly/pollinator gardeners, schools and libraries – can expand our circles. Outreach events are key to connecting with new audiences. Club members already do all this, but I think members should feel encouraged and confident that their efforts do make a difference. That young child tolerating your excitement over a butterfly sighting today might just become the Club President 30 years in the future!

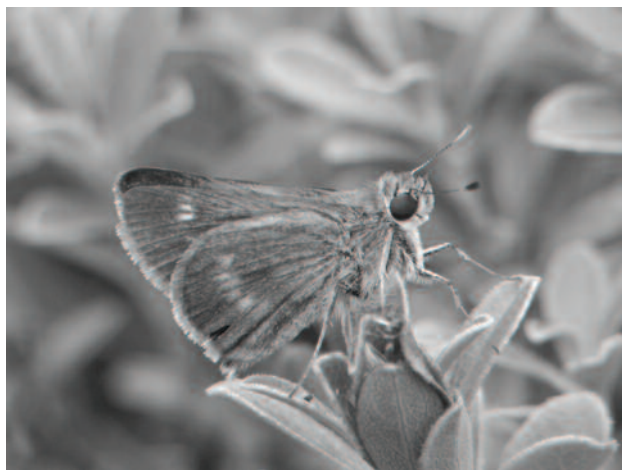
Can you share something about yourself that no one is likely to know?

I have a strange, but enduring, interest in ancient religions. In graduate school, I studied Sanskrit so that I could read the Ramayana in the original. (Don't ask me to remember any of it now.) When I was a middle school teacher, I got a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to study ancient monasticism, and – along with other teachers – I stayed at the Abbey of the Genesee in Geneseo, NY and lived the daily Trappist life of physical work, meditative reading, psalm-singing, and silence. Very cool experiences!



Northern Broken-Dash: This “grass skipper” is pickier than its cousins

by Matt Pelikan



A Northern Broken-Dash [*Wallengrenia egeremet*]
visiting the author’s yard in July 2014.

The northern broken-dash is a tiny brownish butterfly, not much over a half-inch long. Its peculiar, hyphenated name comes from the stigma on male individuals – a bar-shaped, scent-producing organ on the forewing that is, in this species, distinctively divided into two pieces.

The northern broken-dash is a member of a subfamily known as the “grass skippers,” since their larvae feed exclusively on grasses, and the adults prefer dry, open habitats dominated by grass. While common on Martha’s Vineyard, the northern broken-dash is fussier than some of its relatives about habitat: It doesn’t require high-quality native grassland, like some other skippers do, but neither does it tend to occupy low-quality sites dominated by exotic grasses. The species used to be common in my yard, but it no longer is. What happened?

First, the evidence. Since my arrival in Oak Bluffs 22 years ago [*written in 2019, ed.*], I’ve recorded virtually every butterfly I’ve

seen on Martha's Vineyard, including (indeed, especially) ones that turned up in our yard. During my first decade or so on the Island, my records show northern broken-dash appeared quite commonly. Counts of four or five were pretty routine during the latter half of July, which sees the peak of abundance for this species. Over the past five years, in contrast, I've missed this species entirely in three years, and never recorded more than a single individual.

Part of the difference, I suppose, may stem from observer coverage. I worked from a home office in those good old days, making multiple sweeps through the yard to look for butterflies nearly every day. But coverage has not exactly been bad in recent years, and this season, when I was home most of the time as a result of being unemployed, more frequent observation did not produce more northern broken-dashes. The decline is real.

You can't blame the condition of our yard for the decline. Starting with a meager lawn hydroseeded onto compacted subsoil, I've gradually converted my lawn into a meadow. It features a rich mix of grass species, both native and introduced, a variety of native and exotic wildflowers, and tall herbaceous vegetation (I mow it just once each year, in late fall) of the kind that makes grass skippers happiest. So the decline must stem from conditions around my yard — its landscape context, as an ecologist would say.

And indeed, while it has happened so gradually as to have been hard to notice, development has steadily filled in my section of town since we moved here. Formerly vacant parcels now have houses; old houses with disorderly "Vineyard lawns" have changed hands and been "upgraded" to more conventional landscaping. And if one looks farther back, the changes have been even more pronounced. Longtime residents have told me that our neighborhood, not too many decades past, was much more rural in character — not just with fewer houses, but with small-scale commercial gardens, and much less landscaped area.

Viewed with a 40-year perspective, the dearth of northern broken-dashes in my yard makes sense; indeed, it seems inevitable. At the start of that sweep of time, local conditions favored insects like this one. Small populations occupied snippets of remnant grassland along roadsides, next to truck gardens, or in vacant lots. Like all small populations, these were probably temporary eradicated after a few years by predators, poor larval survival, or sundry other forms of bad luck.

But these localized extinctions didn't matter. There were other small populations nearby, and individuals dispersing from those discovered and recolonized the sites that had lost their skippers. What ecologists call a "metapopulation" probably existed: Multiple small populations loosely linked to one another in a larger, constantly shifting, but basically stable configuration.

Probably before I even arrived on the scene, this system was breaking down, undermined by conversion of habitat and fragmentation of the landscape that made it harder for dispersing individuals to find new homes. The metapopulation weakened. During my first years on the Vineyard, I suspect I was the beneficiary of the waning remnants of a once robust system. Northern broken-dashes from small local populations found my yard regularly. But the populations they came from were doomed, too small to persist, too isolated to be recolonized. Today, my meadowized yard could probably support northern broken-dash as a breeding species. But our property is now too remote from other populations for the yard to be effectively colonized — or even just visited regularly.

This process is a small version of what is happening across the Island, indeed across much of the continent. Alteration and fragmentation of habitat (mostly as a result of residential development, in the case of the Vineyard) degrade the numbers and connectedness of wildlife populations. The process is masked, for a while; the persistence of relict populations helps you pretend that nothing is wrong. But the writing is on the wall: A metapopulation

of a particular species has broken down into small, isolated populations that aren't viable on their own, and gradually blink out.

Then one day you wake up and realize that a formerly common species is gone.

[Reprinted from the *Martha's Vineyard Times*, 'Wild Side' feature, July 24, 2019, with permission of the author.]

And a more recent update:

“Northern broken-dash remains quite scarce in and around my yard, so I feel like the piece still accurately describes the local status of the species and the process by which that status has developed. A vacant lot directly across the street from us has finally been developed – big house and the yard completely stripped and replanted with non-native stuff – so the decline in local habitat continues. Happily, northern broken dash is doing okay in some other parts of the island, and this past summer [2024] was an especially good one for the species; it was quite common for a while there in Correllus State Forest, in the center of the Vineyard.”

Matt Pelikan

September 28, 2024



Northern
Broken-Dash
(*Wallengrenia
egeremet*),
7/21/21,
Edgartown, MA,
Matt Pelikan

**Memories of Tom Gagnon,
an unsung hero and one of the great naturalists of our time
May 1, 1944 - July 6, 2025**

by Tom Tynning and Friends



Few people have had such an impact on so many others than Tom Gagnon, forever from Florence (and not Northampton), Mass and always from Western Massachusetts. Many readers will be reminded of his unwavering effort to get them to see the right bird, butterfly, wildflower, or even the right location that takes him back over and over again, even if it was out of “his” region.

And so it was, when this high-school kid, interested in local natural history, was introduced to Tom by Rudd Stone, Curator of Natural History and Science of the Wistariahurst Museum in Holyoke and columnist for the Holyoke Transcript. I was focused on non-feathered reptiles, then, but birds were a growing interest. And, it was on field trips with Rudd and Tom, and even sometimes with Sam Elliot, that I began to realize the incredible variety of native wildlife that they had already been recording. One of the earliest excursions that Tom took me and my friend Rick Lafontaine (now, in Australia) was to follow the long, uphill trip on Rt 2 to the west. It was a cold, gray day and it was my first Pileated

Woodpecker, picked out by Tom at the edge of the Berkshire Plateau. He was happy we got to see it, just as he was when we made the “big trip” to Plum Island where (and I don’t know just how, even today) he picked out a Saw-whet Owl in the Pitch Pines that was at eye level. I still think of this, many decades later.

Tom’s interest in all things beautiful, from birds to wildflowers, mammals and eventually to butterflies was a natural progression, encouraged by local and regional naturalists and his great many friends. After a morning in the field, he would be on the phone with any of us from all edges of Massachusetts. He loved to talk about nature as much to see it first-hand. His records of birds and other organisms are remarkable. When I got to Umass and took an undergraduate course in Mammalogy, the professor who had for years brought students to a site where bats spent the winter had stopped doing that the year before. Friends of mine in the Wildlife Department were able to convince him to take me there and to continue counting; when Tom Gagnon heard I was doing this he asked if he could visit and with the professors permission, we went the following winter. It was the beginning of nearly 24 years of hiking the hill, no trail in existence, often with snow two to four feet deep. Inside, right from the start, Tom brought out his little notebook and began to count every individual. In the early days he was astounded with the 3 to 5 thousand bats and near the end was devastated by the reports that this colony was nearly down to a dozen individuals due to the White-nose Syndrome disease.

Like most of us he lamented the loss of species, their habitats, and changes over time that made some disappear. His excitement never wavered, however, when he was in the field including his backyard, seeing bears and bobcats and in quiet places for the rarest of butterflies. He was good friends with Edna Dunbar who discovered the first population (in almost 100 years) of Early Hairstreaks on Mt. Greylock and accompanied her on several trips. After her passing, Tom was compelled to keep the interest and knowledge of this population in all our minds. And to keep track of every individual. His keen eyes spotted one on his last visit there with the Butterfly Club and most of us still don’t

know just how he found that cryptic little thing. But he did and that was a joy for everyone.

While his last few years found him a little slower and a bit more willing to take breaks Tom never lost a minute of fascination for the natural world. His almost annual trips to Pittsburg, NH took a varying number of people over the decades to see some remarkable wildlife, from butterflies to moose. His last excursion in June of 2024 was incredible, as usual. While he had some trouble sleeping, his memory of which roads to turn onto and where the best chance for an uncommon bird might be was right on. He loved this voyage and, as usual, kept detailed notes of what was seen.

In all his life, Tom's love for the Connecticut Valley clearly never depleted. For over 40 years he took vacations from his job every September to be atop the Goat Peak tower on Mt. Tom to record migrating raptors, and everything else that went by. He loved the public gardens in Northampton, sighting rare and common butterflies as he did at the dinosaur tracks along the Connecticut River and nearby. He traveled back roads and meadows, forests and wetlands. He went to where he was most likely to see the arrival of a returning bird, the blossom of a rare plant, the time of day to hear a nearby owl, or to get up early and watch what was at the feeder. And then, to tell us all what was fabulous about our local natural history. Thank you, Tom.

Tom Tynning

It was a sad day when I heard of Tom's passing. I have fond memories of butterfly trips that Tom was on, starting with my first NABA convention in Texas back in 2004. Then the 2006 club trip to the Connecticut Lakes in northern NH, and in 2007 at the Great Dismal Swamp and Arizona.

Tom loved leading trips and sharing nature with all of us. I especially liked the Early Hairstreak trips to Mount Greylock. And one time before white nose disease hit the bats, Tom took a few of

us to an abandoned mine in western Mass to see over 5,000 bats overwintering.

Tom Murray

Elise and I escorted Tom on his last trip to the National Butterfly Center (NBC) in Texas in 2022. Fourteen friends contributed toward an engraved bench specially made for Bruce Callahan and Tom to be permanently placed at the NBC. We had to get him there to surprise him, and timed to include all contributors. We had an early morning flight (6:30am) out of Bradley Airport. We were scheduled to arrive in Dallas at a gate in terminal A with the connecting flight four gates away with three hours between flights. It wasn't going to be easy. Our arrival gate was changed to terminal C. The Skytrain between Terminals A and C was out of order. We did a lot of walking. Tom's "shuffle", and many rest stops, made for a one-and-a-half-hour trek to the next gate. It was all worth it to see Tom's face when he saw the bench. Later that trip Tom got a lifer butterfly, Clench's Greenstreak. Tom talked about that trip often.

Karl Barry

I am sure that everything positive anyone says about Tom Gagnon is true. I only wish that Tom could be here to read them. He would be ever so pleased.

I'd like to add to compliments about Tom's butterfly field trip leadership. It was very important to Tom that every person on his outing saw the target butterflies and the special unexpected ones. If the trip didn't produce the species as anticipated, Tom felt badly. It was important to him that everyone left happy. One of the things that I really enjoyed about Tom was his great sense of humor. He loved to be playful. You'll always be with us, Tom.

Elise Barry

It's hard to overstate the influence that Tom had on me and my

“new” life here in Massachusetts. When I moved here from Long Island in 2004, Joe and I knew no one in the area – we were just looking for a different life, following up on plans to get out of New York City after 9/11. In 2004 we took the plunge, left our vet practices, and moved to the Happy Valley, renting a house in Granby for a year before buying our home in West Whately.

I had become an avid butterflyer in NY, and had been a long-time birder as well. We started exploring the local area as soon as we moved to MA, and also started posting to the Masslep listserve. Within days, we got an email from Tom and his partner Bruce Callahan wondering “Who are these two guys from Granby?”, and so we met them a few days later at our first Hampshire Bird Club meeting, and immediately we became part of Tom’s extended natural history family.

Tom seemed to know everyone (and have lots of opinions about many of them!) He was generous, knowledgeable, and very entertaining, introducing us to so many people who we count as terrific friends to this day. We started going on his field trips, and learned about many hot spots. He loved showing us places and habitats, plants and butterflies and birds – just not snakes! We shared so many interests, including also orchids and both indoor and outdoor gardening, and he was always freely offering pieces of plants and orchids, along with all of the stories behind them. He had so many wide-ranging hobbies, from *a capella* and Irish folk music to his barbed wire collection - many fascinating things.

We also got to travel to further places around the U.S. on butterfly and natural history trips with Tom, often with other friends in Tom’s circle of outdoor companions. Several times I got to accompany him and Bruce to northern New Hampshire, a part of the world that he loved, as well as trips to South Texas, Arizona, California, and once to his beloved Yellowstone National Park. Always Tom’s excitement at seeing the butterflies and other critters was so infectious; no matter how many times he had been to the same spots and seen the same things, he never got tired of doing it again.

Tom loved his lists, and tallying everything we saw, from butterflies, birds, and mammals to license plates and hummingbird feeders!, was a necessary and fun part of all of our adventures. I like to think that Tom's soul is somewhere out there, tallying every creature he can find and showing them all to anyone who will look.

Bill Benner

Too many fond memories of Tom to even begin to describe here. Thanks to him: we got involved in the local birding and butterfly scene; were shown all kinds of special critters, flora and sites; got introduced to many, many wonderful people, naturalists and nature freaks; enjoyed many trips (local and far afield); enjoyed cultural events; gained invaluable information and insights, and simply had the pleasure of knowing him.

I will miss his knowledge, wit/humor, playful “cantankerousness”, dietary oddities, and friendship. He leaves a void that can never be filled.

Joe Wicinski

Tom was a big part of my life growing up and I learned many, many things from him. I was just reading the September Hampshire bird club news letter (hampshirebirdclub.org/newsletter). Those comments about Tom were spot on, and made me laugh. He taught me so much, from just being around him. Let me say I was always on his good side. He is someone I truly miss.

Craig Allen, Hampshire Bird Club member

Tom really loved bats. I remember climbing a hill in western Mass to count bats with Tom in an old mine, back before White-nose syndrome. We also went to the old observatory on the Prescott peninsula, where there were 1” openings at eye level in the base of the building. Tom would shine a light in them and count every bat.

He loved nature. He was always running here and there and

everywhere on his trips, checking everything being seen and making sure he didn't miss anything.

Tom never liked to travel, and he said he didn't like boats. But one year we went to Roanoke, VA and got on a 1600 hp boat that held 16 people and went out past the barrier islands and across the Gulf Stream on a birdwatching trip. Tom sat in the bosun's chair at the bow the entire trip and got soaking wet, counting birds.

Harvey Allen

I believe that the first time I met Tom was when I was fourteen, and it was on a Holyoke Wildlife Club Trip to the Quabbin Reservoir (East Quabbin Trip) in May of 1975. David Fischer (back then the bird class instructor for Continuing Education for the Town of Amherst) brought a few of his beginning birders with him that day. David and Tom were good friends and did a lot of hawk watching together on Mt. Tom. I remember the look on Tom's face when the fourteen-year-olds got out of David's car. It was a 'What is Fischer doing to me!' look.

Later, at Fishing Area 43, I got on Tom's good side when I found an adult Red-headed Woodpecker at the top of a tree and I was able to get him on it along with the others. After that success, I'd say I was on probation, still with some work to do before I got his stamp of approval.

As time went on I did get his approval and we became close friends. Over the years we birded extensively together throughout Western Massachusetts and took extended trips to Arizona, Texas, and Wyoming. No doubt, back home, Western Massachusetts was Tom's domain, and he rarely traveled outside of it. During the fifty years I knew Tom, we only made one trip to the Massachusetts coast, and that was to Plymouth for the Ivory Gull, which we saw on a brutally cold day.

Tom's birding skills were exceptional, but his knowledge of mammals, butterflies, and plants was equally impressive, making

him a superb all-around naturalist. I learned many things over the years from my friend, but what always impressed me was the way he led field trips. He took pride and worked hard to make sure everyone got to see the bird, mammal, or butterfly. My friend is gone, but every time I see a Common Nighthawk or a Broad-winged Hawk, I know he's with me.

Scott Sumner, past president Hampshire Bird Club (quoted from HBC newsletter, with Scott's permission)

A day in the life of Tom Gagnon in Texas:

Up at 6 am for a bike ride over to Bentsen State Park to look for birds, in particular Cave Swallows, near the dike.

One day at 8 am Buck Cooper announced an Amazon Kingfisher had been found in Brownsville. We quickly headed over there, with Tom and Bruce in their own car. It was during the Birding Festival. The usually quiet Texas Route 100 (like Route 2 here in Massachusetts) had a hundred or so birders, looking for the bird. They were coming in by the bus. The bird flew from the south side of the view out of sight. Tom refound it on the north side of the highway, leading to a surge of birders charging across, followed by "oohs" and "ahhs" and applause. We all had wonderful looks.

Another time, while butterflying at the National Butterfly Center in the lower garden, I heard Tom yelling from the nearby the Hackberry Trail. I ran over. He'd found a Yellow-tipped Flasher, a very rare visitor to South Texas. The word quickly spread, with Barbara driving over to pick up the above-mentioned Buck Cooper, for whom this was his most-wanted butterfly. It stayed about 2 hours, with folks charging in from all directions, thoroughly happy to savor this discovery.

Another time, at the Texas Butterfly Festival, he found a Smudged Hairstreak in Roma, Texas. Everyone up in that area for the festival saw it, but it later was not relocated.

Around dinnertime, Tom was ready to head to Logan's Roadhouse, his favorite restaurant. He loved the dinner rolls, always requesting more and taking some home for breakfast the next morning.

Tom would head to sleep at 8 pm, so that he could be ready for that early morning bike ride in the morning

Steve Moore

My Mom was a birder, so I learned a lot from her growing up, but lost track of birding through high school and college, and for a number of years. When I moved to Florence in September 1984, I put up some bird feeders and put some seed on the ground. That year, in November, I saw a bird that I puzzled over for 3 days. I finally decided that I thought it was a Clay-colored Sparrow. I had just joined the Hampshire Bird Club, but didn't know anyone yet.

I called a random person in Northampton who was on the bird club member list. I don't remember who that was, but he told me he wouldn't know a Clay-colored Sparrow, but that I should call Tom. I called him and he came over. Now, knowing Tom, I often imagine him grumbling that "this woman thinks she has a Clay-colored Sparrow" (which was somewhat unlikely!). Happily it was a Clay-colored Sparrow, and so began my years long friendship with Tom. He became a mentor for me and took me on many, many jaunts in the hills and valley, looking in all of his special places for birds and butterflies and plants that he knew should be in a certain place, at a certain time (and they usually were!) I am lucky to have known him and I will miss him terribly.

Betsy Higgins



Submission of Articles, Illustrations, and Season Records

We encourage all members to contribute to *Massachusetts Butterflies*. Articles, illustrations, photographs, butterfly field trip reports, garden reports, and book reviews are all welcome, and should be sent to the Editor by August 31 for the Fall issue, and January 31 for the Spring issue.

Send NABA Fourth of July count results to Karl Barry at:

karl@massbutterflies.org by **August 15** for inclusion in the Fall issue. Send your season sightings and records to Mark Fairbrother at:

mark@massbutterflies.org, by **December 15** (or earlier if possible!) for inclusion in the Spring issue. Records may now be submitted via the online checklist and reporting form, which is available for download from our website at: <http://www.massbutterflies.org/club-publications.asp>

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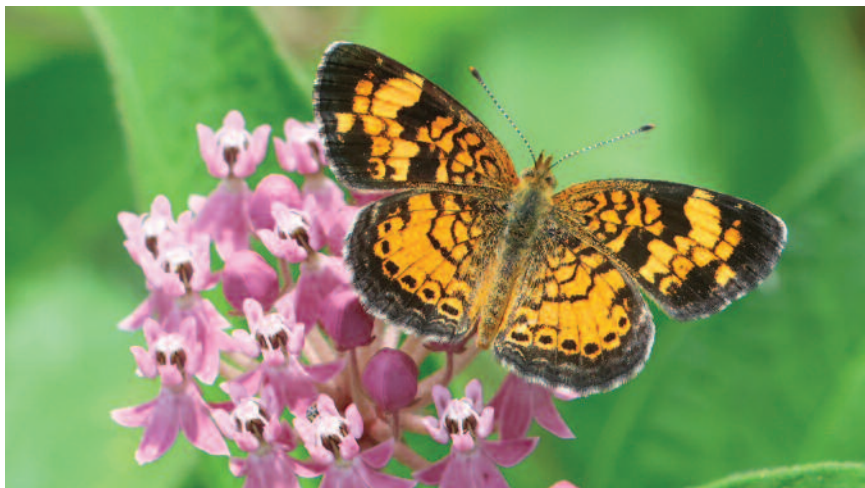
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Pearl Crescent (*Phyciodes tharos*),
7/13/25, Concord, MA, Garry Kessler



Common Wood-Nymph (*Cercyonis pegala*),
8/10/25, Rowley, MA, Bo Zarembo