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Baltimore Checkerspots: Butterflies of Privilege

by Ernest H. Williams

Some butterflies seem more regal than others. Medium to large size, bright colors, and calm and confident flight are their characteristics. Baltimore Checkerspots certainly fit this description, for they are large enough to be seen easily, stunningly colored, and, for butterflies, unusually tame. Although colonies of these wondrous creatures are hard to find, once you do see the butterflies, they may be abundant. Furthermore, they're easy to follow as they fly from flower to flower, back and forth over a meadow; even when disturbed, they glide rather than rush about like other butterflies.

Baltimore Checkerspots have an unmistakable appearance: red-orange and white patches on a black background. While their mosaic of colored patches gave them their second name, their black and orange colors earned them their first name. Black and gold were the colors of George Calvert, the first Lord Baltimore, who worked for King James I in England in the 1600s and later received a grant of land in America from James's son Charles I. Calvert died without coming to the New World, but his sons helped establish his colony, named Maryland, in the Chesapeake Bay area, and one son subsequently became

Historically, Baltimore Checkerspots were completely dependent upon turtlehead.

*Above and right: Turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*). September 16, 2006, Kirkland, Oneida Co., NY.*

Opposite page: An Adult Baltimore Checkerspot nectaring at swamp milkweed. July 8, 2006. Chappaqua, Westchester Co., NY.