

NABA International Butterfly Park: 2007 Update

by Sue Sill



Since its dedication in the fall of 2004, NABA's Butterfly Park in South Texas has matured into an attractive destination for butterflyers and nature enthusiasts, as well as for local families. Although the park is not yet fully developed, butterfly enthusiasts from across North America, and as far away as England and Australia, are finding their way to this butterfly oasis on the Rio Grande.

Butterflies who arrive at the Butterfly Park are invariably rewarded with large numbers of butterfly species. And it is not unusual for several of these species to be lifers. Recent sightings include Two-barred Flashers, Guava Skipper, Silver Emperor, Banded Peacock, Crimson Patch, Many-banded Daggerwing, Rudy Daggerwing, Ornythion Swallowtail, Red-bordered Pixie, and Common Banner. Gil Quintanilla's recent sightings and photographs of a Dingy Purplewing (June 30, 2007) and a Tiny Checkerspot (July 7, 2007) bring the Park's list of butterflies to 172 species.

A typical day of butterflying at the Butterfly Park will often yield as many as 60 to 70 species, with a recorded high of 96 species for a single day. The major reason for the diversity of butterflies at the Park, is the

New butterflies continue to be found at the Park!

broad diversity of native plants in the gardens. To enhance this diversity, the plants are cut back after flowering to force denser growth and maintain the desired shape and size. They are also irrigated during periods of drought to encourage more flowers and an abundant nectar supply. The native plants that thrive in the gardens at the Butterfly Park are treated like prized plants at a botanical garden.

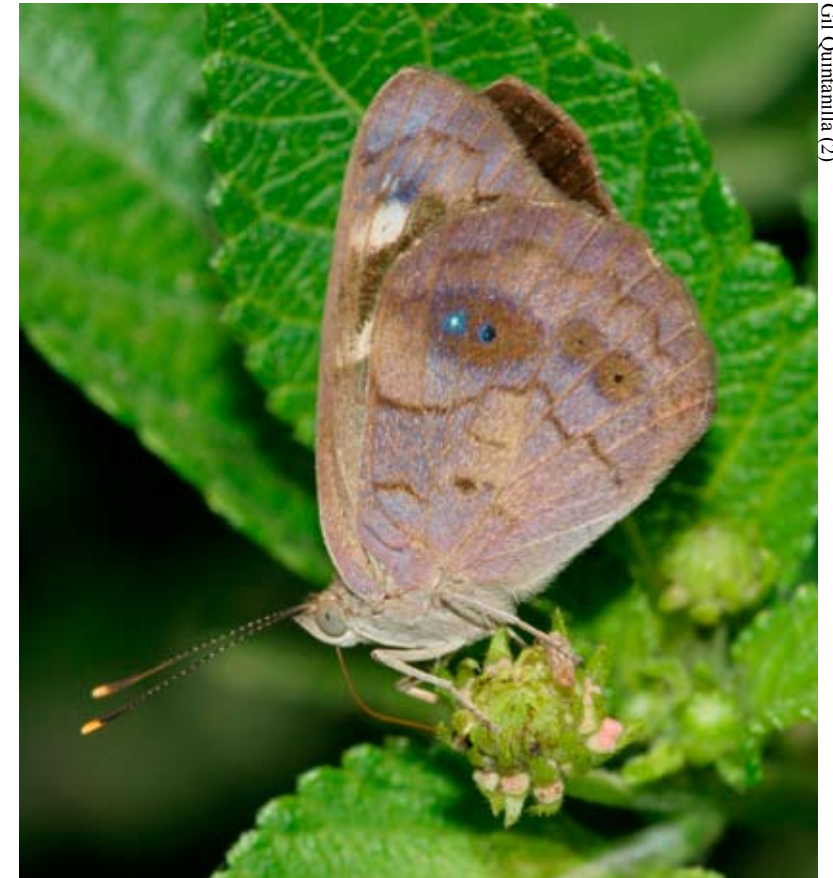
The Butterfly Park staff continues to enhance the Park's biodiversity by visiting sites throughout the Lower Rio Grande Valley and identifying and then propagating additional native plant species that have potential as butterfly gardening plants. The Park's new native plant nursery was made possible through a grant from the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust. Javier de Leon, until recently the Park's naturalist, is managing the project with the help of Carol Goolsby, the Park's Education Coordinator, and the volunteer assistance of Ann Vacek, the former Restoration Ecologist. Rio Grande Valley plant species, which are not found in cultivation, are grown, tested, and introduced into the Butterfly Park. Those that prove to be easy to cultivate, valuable as garden plants and as butterfly host and/or nectar plants, will be propagated for distribution to the public (see article about the Park nursery on page 50 of this issue).

The rich diversity of butterflies that can be found in the Rio Grande Valley ensures the success of the Butterfly Park, and has helped garner nationwide publicity for NABA's

A Dingy Purplewing (right) on June 20, 2007

and

a Tiny Checkerspot (below) on July 7, 2007 brought the total number of butterfly species seen at the Park to 172.



Gil Quintanilla (2)



New plants continue to be introduced into the Park!