

Butterflies

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 6 years, entomologists have made significant progress with their understanding of the distribution and abundance of South Carolina butterflies. Brian Scholtens has sampled in the State over the last 20 years, but much more intensely during the last 6 years because of Tom Smith's presence as an undergraduate and then graduate student working with him.

Together, they have put together an extensive specimen-level database (more than 13,500 records) of known collection and observation records, by visiting major museum and private collections in the state and nearby. They have also started gathering records from the National Museum, but have significant work left to do there. In addition they have done much exploring in the state to re-document known occurrence of species, as well as locate new populations. Tom, especially, has put in many hours and miles visiting locations, not only for his thesis work on coastal wetlands skippers, but throughout the state. In addition, Dr. Dennis Forsythe (The Citadel, ret.), has become an avid butterflyer. He has also committed a great deal of time and effort to repeatedly visiting possible localities for rare or unusual species. His efforts have added many county records to the database and have excited other interested individuals in the state, who are also now regularly contributing interesting records. This effort builds on the early experience of Ron Gatrelle, who explored the coastal area of the state extensively, and Billy McCord (SCDNR, ret.), who spent many years collecting and documenting butterflies throughout the state.

Even with these recent efforts, knowledge of the butterflies of South Carolina is still mostly in its infancy. We lack extensive distribution information for most species and only have a general idea of when and where most species in the state fly. Host plant records for the state are even more poorly known. Recent experience has allowed researchers to determine that a handful of species deserve immediate attention, including some species that may be extirpated from the State (e.g. Two-spotted Skipper and Loammi Skipper), others that are likely here, but have not been recently documented (e.g. Hessel's Hairstreak, Arogos Skipper, Carolina Roadside Skipper, and Aphrodite Fritillary), and some species that should be looked for in the mountains of the Upstate (where not much time has been spent) (e.g. Dusky Azure, Appalachian Azure, and Early Hairstreak). More complete knowledge of the distributions and abundances of these species may enable researchers to make more informed conservation recommendations, particularly with regard to management approaches and the need for protection.