
Conservation Notes

Day Conservation District
600 East Hwy 12, Suite 1
Webster, SD 57274
Phone: 605/345-4661



Butterfly Watching and Gardening in Northeast South Dakota

Butterfly Watching

Butterfly watching is very similar to bird watching. A butterfly watcher needs a good field guide to identify species and binoculars to gain a closer view of the subject. Like birds, butterflies occupy different habitats and can be found on grasslands, in forests, and even your own backyard garden. Some butterflies are generalists and occupy several different types of habitats. These species tend to be very common like the Orange sulphur. Other butterflies are specialists and require very specific types of habitats. These species are less common and harder to observe. The Compton tortoiseshell butterfly is a specialist found only in the deep woods of Sica Hollow State Park and other wooded coulees located along the eastern slope of the Prairie Coteau in Marshall and Roberts Counties. Some butterflies are becoming rare due to the loss of native habitat. The Dakota skipper, a prairie specialist found in northeast South Dakota, is a candidate for the Endangered Species List due to the continuing loss and degradation of native tall-grass prairie. In our area, adult butterflies are active from late March through early October with peak flights around the beginning of July. Adults live from 6 to 20 days during which time they must mate and lay eggs. Butterfly eggs are typically laid on a host plant that will serve as a food source for the caterpillar once it hatches. At around thirty days the caterpillar forms a chrysalis in which the adult butterfly will



form. This pupal stage can last from one to two weeks for species that have more than one brood per season, or the pupae may over winter to emerge as an adult in the spring. Only a few species of butterflies over winter as adults. The Brush-footed family of butterflies spend the winter hibernating under piles of leaves or other debris and are the first butterflies to be seen in the spring. The Monarch is the only North American butterfly that over winters by migrating to a warmer climate.

Northeast SD Butterfly Watching Hotspots

Day County

- Pickerel Lake State Rec. Area (forest, prairie, wetland)
- Waubay National Wildlife Refuge (forest, prairie, wetland)

Marshall County

- Jensen Waterfowl Production Area (prairie, wetlands)
- Sica Hollow State Park(forest)

Roberts County

- Hartford Beach State Park (forest, prairie)
- Wike Waterfowl Production Area (prairie, wetland)

177 species and subspecies of butterflies have been recorded in South Dakota. 93 species have been recorded in the Northeast South Dakota counties of Day, Grant, Marshall and Roberts.

Common Butterflies of Northeast South Dakota

| | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Black swallowtail | Variiegated fritillary | Red-spotted purple |
| Eastern tiger swallowtail | Great spangled fritillary | Viceroy |
| Cabbage white | Regal fritillary | Common wood-nymph |
| Clouded sulphur | Meadow fritillary | Monarch |
| Orange sulphur | Pearl crescent | Common checkered skipper |
| Bronze copper | Question mark | Tawny-edged skipper |
| Coral hairstreak | Mourning cloak | Long dash |
| Eastern tailed-blue | Red admiral | Northern broken dash |
| Melissa blue | Painted lady | Delaware skipper |

Butterfly Gardening



A butterfly garden is similar to a bird feeder. By providing a variety of foods in the form of plants and flowers, several species of butterflies can be attracted to your backyard. Butterflies prefer bright colored flowers that provide abundant nectar, their only source of nutrition. The best flowers for attracting butterflies are red, yellow, orange, or purple colors with short flower tubes, flat topped or clustered blossoms. Both early and late season flowering plants should be cultivated to provide nectar from May through September.

A butterfly garden should be placed in a sunny location protected from strong winds. Butterfly houses or small piles of rocks and logs placed near the garden will provide hiding places for butterflies and sites for hibernating species. Flat stones placed in the garden provide resting and basking sites for butterflies. A small pan of wet sand will provide water. The use of pesticides and herbicides near butterfly gardens is discouraged since these may kill both adult and immature butterflies.

Flowers And Plants for Butterfly Gardens

| | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| Achillea millefolium (Yarrow) | Coreopsis species | Lathyrus odorata (Sweet pea) | Ratibida species (prairie cone-flowers) |
| Althaea rosa (Hollyhock) | Delphinium species | Liastris species (Blazing stars, gayfeather) | Rudbeckia hirta (Black-eyed susan) |
| Aquilegia canadensis (American columbine) | Digitalis purpurea (Foxglove) | Monarda species (Bergamots) | Tagetes species (Marigolds) |
| Asclepias tuberosa (Butterfly milkweed) | Echinacea purpurea (Purple coneflower) | Oenothera species (Evening primroses) | Viola species (Violets) |
| Aster species | Gaillardia x grandiflora (Gaillardia) | Petunia x hybrida (Petunias) | Zinnia elegans (Zinnia) |
| Chrysanthemum species (Painted or annual daisies) | Helianthus species (Showy and Maximillian sunflowers) | Phlox species | |