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Reflections on the Butterflies of the High Desert Field Course (July 12–14, 2019) *Dana Ross, Siskiyou Field Institute Instructor*

A visit to Steens Mountain and the Alvord Desert is always worth the time and effort. This past July, I taught a new 3 day course for the Siskiyou Field Institute (SFI) on the butterflies of the region. SFI Program Director Kathy Pyle and SFI Host Linda Kappen assisted with the inaugural Malheur Field Station based class. As a group, we stayed in one of the recently renovated dorms that provided for a rich social experience as well as bedroom privacy.

DAY ONE. On Friday afternoon, we gathered inside the main Malheur Field Station building for an introductory presentation on the area and its butterflies. Afterwards, we briefly explored the field station grounds (with nets of course!) for a first look at the local butterflies of summer. Wandering out the long driveway we encountered a plethora of white butterflies on the flowering roadside shrubs and forbs. Among them were large numbers of the



The view from the summit of Steens Mountain includes Wildhorse Lake. Photo by Dana Ross

Western White (*Pontia occidentalis occidentalis*) and the occasional Checkered White (*Pontia protodice*), a somewhat sporadic Oregon visitor that is not seen every year. Also in the mix were a few Small Wood-Nymphs (*Cercyonis oetus oetus*), Queen Alexandra's Sulphurs (*Colias alexandra emilia*) and a fresh Coronis Fritillary (*Speyeria coronis snyderi*).

DAY TWO. After breakfast Saturday morning we drove south through Frenchglen to begin our butterfly adventure with a first stop at Blitzen Crossing near South Steens Campground. While there we encountered Two-tailed Swallowtails (*Pterouras multicaudata pusillus*) and Western Tiger Swallowtails (*Pterouras rutulus*) as well as the silver and greenish underwing patterned Callippe Fritillary (*Speyeria callippe nr harmonia*) and the palest subspecies of the Zerene Fritillary (*Speyeria zerene gunderi*). Each new species was placed in a viewing jar and passed about. And then there was an unexpected encounter with Oregon dragonfly guru Cary Kerst, who just happened by in his red pickup while working his way east towards aquatic habitats less explored. It appears that people with nets attract the attention of other people with nets.

We continued the slow climb upward, stopping now and then where the butterflies beckoned and pullouts allowed. Blue Coppers (*Lycaena heteronea rava*), California Hairstreaks (*Satyrium californicum*) and a few small "buckwheat blues" (*Euphilotes glaucon?*) visited flowering buckwheats while Boisduval's Blues (*Icaricia icarioides pembina*) inspected the local lupines. We also encountered the locally uncommon Pale Tiger

Swallowtail (*Pterouras eurymedon*) in the vicinity of its blooming *Ceanothus* hostplant. After making our way up the long, sage-dominated ridge between the Little Blitzen and Big Indian gorges, we arrived at our lunch stop.

The landscape was rocky and somewhat barren so soon after snowmelt, yet freshly eclosed tiny buckwheat blues (a different *Euphilotes?*) and grass green hairstreaks (*Callophrys affinis?*) shared the landscape there with worn, post-hibernant Milbert's Tortoisells (*Aglais milberti subpallida*) and equally dilapidated Zephyr Anglewings (*Polygonia gracilis zephyrus*).

After lunch we turned south, parked, and made the short, steep walk to the summit of Steens Mountain (9,733 feet). From there we enjoyed an exquisite view of Wildhorse Lake, nestled within the large cirque below us. All around us small, blooming "cushion buckwheats" hugged the ground, offering nectar and refuge from the wind for yet more tiny *Euphilotes*. And then...the day's second unexpected encounter. A fresh hilltopping Indra Swallowtail (*Papilio indra indra*) suddenly appeared. I moved into its path and when it came within reach I swung hard...and missed! I followed it as best I could for about 100 feet before watching it suddenly drop to the ground. Apparently, I had not spooked the butterfly and it had spotted a favored nectar flower that it could not resist. I quickly moved within reach and netted this rarely seen Steens Mountain species. My declaration of victory caught the attention of the class, allowing for another show and tell opportunity.

There was one butterfly that I had promised to the class that we



The class takes a first look at Malheur Field Station butterflies. Photo by Dana Ross.

had yet to locate—the fiery orange Lustrous Copper (*Lycaena cupreus cupreus*). The season was too early up high where I had seen it on previous visits. After a quick stop at the Kiger Gorge Overlook, we continued our counterclockwise loop via Fish Creek Road. Before long, we encountered a small headwater stream in a subalpine meadow adjacent to an ancient grove of aspen trees. Several species of blues, including our first Silvery Blue (*Glaucopsyche lygdamus oro*) mud-puddled, while Common Ringlets (*Coenonympha tullia ampelos*), Field Crescents (*Phyciodes pulchella inornatus*), worn Juba Skippers (*Hesperia juba*) and a fresh Anise Swallowtail (*Papilio zelicaon*) did their best to elude capture. And then there was the cry of “I got one!” from a member of the group—the Lustrous Copper could now be appreciated and checked off the list.

We made a final stop at Lily Lake. The surrounding meadow hosted many of the butterflies that we’d seen previously that day (including more Lustrous Coppers) as well as a few new ones for the list: Common Checkered Skipper (*Pyrgus communis communis*), Persius Duskywing (*Erynnis persius* ssp.), Mourning Cloak (*Nymphalis antiopa*). It had been a long day and a good one. We’d observed over 40 species of butterflies, including some “firsts” for virtually everyone in the group.

DAY THREE. Recent reports suggested that the Alvord Desert area on the back side of Steens Mountain might still be a good destination for the class. Starting at the north end (Folly Farm Road), I pointed out the “type locality” for Sullivan’s Sulphur (*Colias occidentalis sullivanii*) before leading the small convoy to our first stop at Mann Lake. It was mid-July and the Alvord Desert was heating up and drying out quickly. Yet since the retreating lake had left a well-watered periphery that hosted the larval hostplants for the Melissa Blue (*Plebejus melissa melissa*) and Ruddy Copper (*Lycaena rubidus rubidus*), we found both butterflies to be fresh and abundant.

A variety of pierids – including Orange Sulphur (*Colias eurytheme*), Queen Alexandra’s Sulphur, Becker’s White (*Pontia beckerii*) and Checkered White – moved through the area, pausing only occasionally and briefly to take nectar from scattered clumps of blooming thistles. I hoped that the Pike Creek Trail might offer us the requisite moisture and flowers for decent butterflying, so we paid the private access fee, parked, and worked our way slowly up the trail in the intensifying mid-day heat. It ended up being too dry, too hot and too uphill, so we cut the hike short. The nine species of butterflies there included nothing new, although cicadas, cicada killer wasps and Pacific Spiketail (*Cordulegaster*



SFI Program Director Kathleen Pyle (facing camera) and Butterflies of the High Desert class participants explore the sage-steppe slopes of lower Steens Mountain. Photo by Dana Ross.



Melissa Blue (*Plebejus melissa melissa*). Photo by Heather Brown.



Ruddy Copper (*Lycaena cupreus cupreus*). Photo by Heather Brown.

dorsalis) dragonflies kept things interesting.

Just south of the Catlow Valley Road—a route that would take us back to Frenchglen and the field station a bit later that afternoon—is the tiny town of Fields. The general store and gas station provide essential resources for the outdoor explorer. We gassed up and sat in the shade while we consumed fruit popsicles. The massive milk shakes are even better and go well with cheeseburgers and fries, but we didn't have the 30–40 minutes it might take to have them made for everyone since we had one more stop on the itinerary.

Arizona Creek sits a stone's throw north of Denio, Nevada, on the east slope of the Pueblo Mountains. It and the adjacent canyons offer the lepidopterist a chance to see an unusual hybrid

population of Lorquin's (*Limenitis lorquini burrisonii*) and Weidemeyer's (*Limenitis weidemeyerii latifascia*) Admirals, known as Friday's Admiral. Individuals run the gamut from nearly pure Lorquin's to nearly pure Weidemeyer's, with everything in between. A bit of creekside "hunting" resulted in the capture of two individuals from each end of the spectrum.

My impression was that everyone thoroughly enjoyed the course—a bit of desert heat and some locally pesky mosquitoes aside. The Siskiyou Field Institute is offering this course with an additional day to explore the area, July 10–13, 2020 under the title of Great Basin Butterflies. It will once again be my pleasure as class instructor to introduce participants to the area and its butterflies as we explore Steens Mountain and the surrounding area.



Weidemeyer's Admiral or Friday's Admiral at the far end of the hybridization spectrum? Photo by Linda Kappen



Instructor Dana Ross amidst blooming cushion buckwheat atop Steens Mountain. Photo by Heather Brown.

Spotted Lanternfly (*Lycorma delicatula*)

The Spotted Lanternfly is a non-native lanternfly (Homoptera: Fulgoridae) that has been damaging crops on the east coast of the United States, among them grape vines.

A preemptive search for natural enemies that could be used to fight this invasive species when it reaches the west is being conducted by Mark Hoddle and others at University of California Riverside's Center for Invasive Species Research in southern California.

A collecting trip to southern Arizona to find natural predators was written up recently in UCR Magazine 14(4): 10–17 (Fall 2019). The issue is available under the archives at <https://magazine.ucr.edu>. There is also a short video.

Sialomorpha dominicana—a species of “mold pigs”

George Poinar (Oregon State University) and Diane Nelson (East Tennessee State University) write about their discovery of a new family of microinvertebrates found in Dominican amber in a recent issue of *Invertebrate Biology*. A brief note about their discovery can be found in the Oregon Stater, Winter 2020 issue, on page 47 at <https://www.osualum.com/stater>.

New IPM Quarterly Publication

The Oregon Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Center at the Oregon State University Department of Agricultural Sciences recently published the first issue of its new quarterly newsletter—Oregon IPM Insider. Faculty and staff will provide information about ongoing research, extension activities and insights, as well as links to recent articles and IPM publications to people interested in IPM in Oregon and the Pacific Northwest.

The newsletter is available as a PDF from https://agsci.oregonstate.edu/sites/agscid7/files/ippc/oregon_ipm_insider_-_spring_2020.pdf,

There is a brief introduction to new faculty and staff. Of particular interest to readers will be the addition of entomologist Dr. Navneet Kaur (<https://entomology.oregonstate.edu/users/navneet-kaur>) to the Crop and Soil Science program.

Amy Grotta

Amy Grotta, Associate Professor in the Department of Forest Ecosystems and Society and Extension Forester serving Columbia, Washington and Yamhill Counties, passed away December 24, 2019.

Amy obtained her MSc degree from Oregon State in 2002 with a thesis titled “Competitive Interactions in Young, Coastal Douglas-fir/Red Alder Mixtures: Implications for Wood Quality.” She joined the faculty at Oregon State in 2008.

Amy developed the Oregon Forest Pest Detector Program in 2014 and was the instructor. The program was created to improve the likelihood of early detection and rapid response to the possible future introduction of forest pests in Oregon. Participants were trained to recognize the signs and symptoms of target pests and report suspected infestations. (For more information, please visit the website <http://pestdetector.forestry.oregonstate.edu>.) In May 2019, Amy received the Vice Provost Award for Excellence, OSU Outreach & Engagement for her work. In the video of the awards ceremony (https://media.oregonstate.edu/media/t/0_wowru5so), Amy's presentation about the program begins with her introduction around time marker 1:07:25 and runs to time marker 1:11:36. In conjunction with the program, Amy was also involved in the creation of a number of public information pamphlets on exotic forest pests (e.g., Asian Longhorned Beetle, Emerald Ash Borer, etc.), and co-authored an article on an exotic buprestid beetle recently found in Oregon (Westcott, Williams and Grotta 2019c).

Recently she participated in the Oregon Bee Atlas project with a survey in the Matteson Demonstration Forest in Washington County, Oregon (Grotta 2019a, Grotta 2019b).

Her obituary and a tribute by her friend and co-worker, Brad Withrow-Robinson, can be found at <http://blogs.oregonstate.edu/treetopics/2020/02/07/remembering-amy/>.

References

- Grotta, A. 2019a. Learning about forests and native bees. *Tree Topics* February 22, 2019. (Access the article at <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/pollinators/learning-about-forests-native-bees>.)
- Grotta, A. 2019b. Forests and native bees: the Season 1 recap. *Tree Topics* September 19, 2019. (Access the article at <http://blogs.oregonstate.edu/treetopics/2019/09/19/forests-and-native-bees-the-season-1-recap/>.)
- Westcott, R.L., Williams, W., and Grotta, A.T. 2019c. The exotic *Agilus cyanescens* (Ratzeburg) (Coleoptera: Buprestidae) is discovered in Oregon. *Insecta Mundi* 0724: 1–5.

Insect Classes in 2020

Classes from the Siskiyou Field Institute

The Siskiyou Field Institute (SFI) is located in Selma, in the Illinois Valley about 20 miles south of Grants Pass off Highway 199. The course catalog is available from their website, <http://www.thesfi.org>. **Date changes and/or course cancellations will be announced on their website.** Most of the programs run out of the Selma facility and involve a fee.

Mud Springs and Flattop: Mary Paetzel's Butterfly Bog

Instructor: Lee Webb, M.S.

Date: Saturday, June 27, 2020

Location: Meet at SFI in Selma, Oregon

In honor of the late Siskiyou naturalist Mary Paetzel's 100th birthday, we'll visit one of the locations she loved the most, a *Darlingtonia* fen at Mud Springs. Here, Mary discovered the Siskiyou subspecies of the Mariposa Copper butterfly that now bears her name. We'll explore and botanize the Mud Springs–Flattop area with Lee Webb, talk about Mary's observations of the natural world in the Siskiyou and read from some of her works. (Catalog page 22.)

Great Basin Butterflies

Instructor: Dana Ross, M.S.

Dates: Friday–Monday, July 10–13, 2020

Location: Malheur Field Station, Harney County, Oregon

From Steens Mountain to the Alvord Desert, from alpine to meadow to sagebrush steppe, butterflies and moths abound in this hotspot for Northern Great Basin species. We will base our studies at Malheur Field Station, where we'll learn both the typical and rare species historically seen in southeast Oregon in a classroom session and by examining collected specimens. Then we'll foray over the weekend and into Monday, exploring desert canyons, lakes and roadsides and Steens Mountain streams, canyons, steppe and summit. Findings may include swallowtails, checkerspots, coppers, admirals, fritillaries, blues and whites. (Catalog page 14.)

Watch the 2019 video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30UoLPqe0ZY&feature=youtu.be>.

Birds, Blooms and Bumbles on Mt. Ashland

Instructors: Frank Lospalluto and Kristi Mergenthaler

Date: Sunday, July 19, 2020

Location: Ashland, Oregon

We'll spend a few hours birding the beautiful montane and subalpine chaparral, forests and meadows on Mt. Ashland and will likely see Greentailed Towhee, White-headed Woodpecker and Cassin's Finch. Then the class will catch bumble bees and learn

about pollination ecology, followed by meeting rare and endemic flowers (Mt. Ashland lupine and Henderson's horkelia) as well as more common – but just as beautiful – native plants in bloom. (Catalog page 22.)

Dragonflies of Siskiyou County

Instructors: Dave and Kathy Biggs

Dates: Friday–Sunday, July 24–26, 2020

Location: Meet in Stewart Springs, California

Fens, lakes and creeks are home to a diversity of gorgeous dragonflies. Species we'll likely see on this weekend include the Petaltail, Clubtails, and Cruiser. We'll start by searching for dragonflies in and near Parks Creek on the Flowing Waters land. On Saturday, we'll explore dragonfly habitat in and near Yreka after a morning introduction to dragonfly biology, life cycles and identification. Sunday's half day session will focus on Gumbboot Lake.

Our headquarters is a serene retreat center near the Mt. Eddy road. We'll be lodged in Namaste House, which accommodates 13 people in double- and triple- bed rooms and queen-sized beds for couples. Flowing Waters also features a deck overlooking the creek, a refreshing swimming hole and many rare plants on the land. (Catalog page 23.)

Alpine Pollinator Ecology in Eastern Oregon

Instructor: August Jackson

Dates: Friday–Sunday, August 14–16, 2020

Location: Malheur Field Station, Harney County, Oregon

The unique mingling of desert and alpine plant communities makes Steens Mountain a hotspot for insect diversity. In some years, large migrations of butterflies and dragonflies can be observed along the summit ridge. We'll explore Steens Mountain's varied habitats, identifying pollinators and their associated plant species with a particular focus on regional bee fauna. More than 300 species of bees are likely to be found on Steens, including more than a dozen bumble bee species. We'll spend most of our time observing insects in the field, with some time for lecture and specimen observation at the Field Station. (Catalog page 15.)

Classes at the Malheur Field Station

For information and registration details on classes at the Malheur Field Station, please visit <https://malheurfieldstation.com/programs>. Three Insect-related classes are currently listed: Great Basin Butterflies and Alpine Pollinator Ecology in Eastern Oregon (both from the Siskiyou Field Institute) and Entomology in the High Desert scheduled for September 2–5, 2020 with Matt Medeiros.

Xerces Society Information

For events being held online or locally, please check the Xerces web page, <<http://www.xerces.org/event/>>.

If you are interested in working on a project, please visit their citizen/community science page at <<http://www.xerces.org/community-science/>>.

For other materials of interest, please check out their blog, <<https://xerces.org/blog/>>.

Oregon State Extension Citizen Science

For programs, projects and events presented by the Oregon State Extension Service, please visit <<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/about>>. Click on the “GET INVOLVED” tab to bring up a menu with some general links. Click on the link of interest to bring up a page with the specific offerings. For instance, clicking on the Program link will produce a page with all the programs; you can then use one of the filters to narrow this down. The Programs page has the links to the Oregon Forest Pest Protector program as well as the Oregon Bee Atlas program.

Note that activity schedules are being adjusted as necessary; some have been postponed, others have been canceled.

Training for the Bumble Bee Atlas Project

Training events are currently scheduled for:
Olympia, Washington on May 16, 2020
Seattle, Washington on May 23, 2020.

For more information, please visit <<https://www.pnwbumblebeeatlas.org/events.html>>.

Pacific Branch 2020 Meeting Canceled

The meeting of the Pacific Branch of the Entomological Society of America scheduled for Spokane, Washington in April has been canceled. See their website for details.

Lepidoptera Activities Currently Planned for 2020

Northern and Central California

For the latest information on count dates in Central and Northern California, please refer to the website <http://www.sfbaywildlife.info/activities/butterfly_counts.htm>. As of the preparation of this publication, the planned dates for 2020 have not been posted.

Joseph Smith organizes 3 butterfly counts in Northern California—North Warner Mountains, Lava Beds National Monument and Lassen Volcanic National Park.

North Warner Mountains

Date: Saturday, June 27

Lava Beds National Monument

Date: Monday, June 29

Lassen Volcanic National Park

Date: Saturday, July 18

If you would like more information or wish to participate, please contact Joseph Smith at <foxglove1985@yahoo.com>.

Oregon

North American Butterfly Association (NABA) Eugene–Springfield Chapter

The field trip and meeting schedule for the Eugene–Springfield

Chapter including the results from some of their past outings can be found on their website at <<http://www.naba.org/chapters/nabaes/>>. As of the publication date, the field trip and meeting schedules for 2020 have not been posted.

Other Oregon Butterfly Counts

Sue Anderson is planning 2 butterfly counts: Saturday, June 29 for the Ochocos and Friday, July 12 for the Metolius area. Please contact Sue at <celastrinasue@gmail.com> for details.

The butterfly count for the Cascade–Siskiyou National Monument is scheduled for Saturday, June 20. Please contact Dianne Keller (<diannekeller18@gmail.com>) if you want to participate.

Washington

Washington Butterfly Association (WBA)

For the latest information on WBA meetings, field trips, and citizen science projects please click on the EVENTS tab on their website, <<http://wabutterflyassoc.org/>>.

The annual study weekend is currently scheduled for Dayton from June 10–13.

While our society is in disarray . . .



All photos from Oregon, Coos and Curry Counties. Photos by Ron Lyons.