

A Cornucopia of Caterpillars!



This past week has been, and will forever be known as, “the week of the caterpillar.” Just over the past seven days I have found more than 10 different species of butterfly caterpillars, and a few of those are species that I’ve never seen before. This may not mean a whole heckuva lot to you but to this butterfly nut this is akin to nirvana!

The whole world seems to be crawling with caterpillars, a virtual cornucopia, if you will, of little larval butterflies eating the bounty resulting from the overabundant spring and early summer rains. Some of the species I’ve seen are common ones around here, species that I see every week, some of them everyday, like the red/orange/purple cats of the Gulf Fritillary (*Agraulis vanillae*) on my passionvines, or the slug-like cats of the Pipevine Swallowtail (*Battus philenor*) on, what else?, pipevine.

The bevy of Large or Cloudless Sulphurs (*Phoebis sennae*), and the abundance and excellent condition of their partridge pea (*Chamaecrista fasciculata*) hostplants, has yielded a remarkable number of their cats, too (though I’ve yet to encounter the bright yellow form). The partridge pea is also the host



A small collection of butterfly caterpillars, clockwise from left: Long-Tailed Skipper (*Urbanus proteus*), Northern Cloudywing (*Thorybes pylades*), Clouded Skipper (*Lerema accius*) and Little Yellow (*Pyrisitia lisa*).

of the Cloudless Sulphurs’ antithesis, the Little Yellow (*Pyrisitia lisa*)—though they’re harder to find because the cats don’t get much bigger than an inch long—and I’ve been seeing quite a few of those.

The fun has been seeing the odd female of uncommon species like

the Dorantes or Green Long-Tailed Skippers (*Urbanus dorantes* and *U. proteus*) laying eggs and then following the growth and fate of their caterpillars. Both species, along with the Northern Cloudywing (*Thorybes pylades*), and the remarkable number of Southern Cloudywings (*T. bathyllus*)—to put it in perspective, I’ve only seen Southern here once

keep telling ya that us lepidopterologist-types aren’t exactly inventive when it comes to naming things), has always been a hit-and-miss proposition, depending more on serendipity than foreknowledge or search-image. But this year I’ve been able to find a few, most likely because there are just more of them out there than ever before, of the more common ones, like the

in the nine years before this year but have seen more than 2 dozen this year—use the aptly-named butterfly pea, *Centrosema virginianum*, as larval hostplants.

Finding “grass skippers,” so named, of course, because they lay their eggs on various grasses (I

Clouded Skipper (*Lerema accius*) and even the little Eufala (*Lerodea eufala*).

What else can a self-professed butterfly nut hope for than that this cornucopia of caterpillars becomes a bevy of butterflies in the coming month? You betcha!