

Beyond the Butterfly Garden

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Butterflies can be found at Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge during any month or season, and throughout the year, visitors are encouraged to look beyond the Butterfly Garden to find them. Summer heat has arrived and with it, large flowering plants like native Texas Thistle, Basket Flower, and Buttonbush have bloomed. Tiny Frog Fruit is also in flower and will be through fall.

Texas Thistle is a drought tolerant plant that can easily be found along roadways and in open fields all over the refuge. Its purple blooms are an excellent nectar source for bees, butterflies, and other insects. If you sit by a thistle, you may be rewarded with a **Giant Swallowtail** sighting. These large tailed butterflies are yellow on the underside but viewed from above, they are black with a trailing row of yellow spots and a second row that stretches from wingtip to wingtip.



Skippers are the most populous family of butterflies in the U.S. Most are yellow or brown and characteristically perch upright with wings closed or partially open in a so-called "jet-plane position". They can be very challenging to identify because they are very small and the differences between species are subtle. The most



common skipper found here is the **Fiery Skipper**, shown here on Frog Fruit. This plant grows as ground cover on roads to the oil pumper pads and along other roadside edges. Look down as you are driving or walking and watch for butterflies' movement.

Buttonbush blooms best near water, and many grow along the pad roads. They thrive in very wet soil, so high water levels are of no concern. **Common Buckeyes** are frequent visitors to Buttonbush, but they will also feed on many other plants. In addition, Buckeyes are found pulling minerals from white rock roads and trails. They likely are the most common butterfly seen by hikers.



Also common on the refuge is the **Sachem**. These are very similar to the Fiery Skipper but rather than tiny dark spots on the wings the Sachem has larger softly contrasting areas on their wings. On the upper side, the males have a large black "stigma" that is obvious in flight. That dark area is slightly smaller in the females.



Many butterflies look different above and below, but few use camouflage as effectively as the **American Snout**. The Snout is so named because of the long palpi extending from its face. The underside of its hind wing is brown; when it folds in its forewing and hangs on a twig, it



looks like a leaf. In contrast, the upperside of the Snout shares the colors of the Monarch, with orange patches bordered by dark brown, and white spots on the wing tips. American Snout are often found in flowering trees, but they also feed on Buttonbush and other plants.

Some skippers have no visible markings at all on the underside of their wings and identification can only be done by noting the color of the wings, face, and body, or by viewing them in flight or on the occasions when they open their wings. One of these



unmarked butterflies is the orange **Delaware Skipper** (above) which appears in early summer. Others, like the **Zabulon Skippers** (left) have bold contrasting areas on their hind wings. This latter butterfly is seen from spring through fall and may be found along Oil Field Rd as well as in some more open areas. The female Zabulon Skipper is dark brown.