

Book Reviews

Finding Butterflies in Texas:

A Guide to the Best Sites

By Ro Wauer. 2006.

Johnson Books: Boulder, Colorado.

ISBN: 2-9521620-0-X.

327 pages. \$22.50 at NABA Sales

Review by *David F. Henderson*

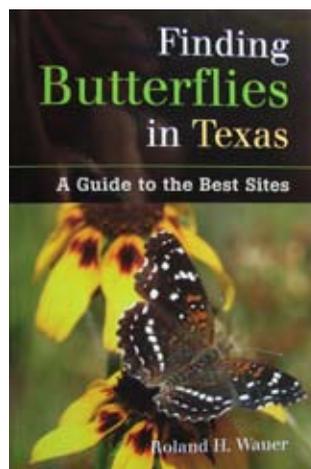
By virtue of its location as well as its size, Texas boasts a diversity of butterflies that is unparalleled anywhere else in the United States. However, the sheer distances involved, as well as the general paucity of public lands, can be frustrating to a butterflyer. Now, with this book, noted Texas naturalist and author Ro Wauer has single-handedly made the butterfly quest in this huge chunk of real estate much easier! Let's see how he does it!

Setting the Scene

Skimming through its pages, it is obvious from the beginning that this book has been a labor of love and devotion! Ro must have taken the better part of five or more flight seasons in preparing this book.

Divide and Conquer

To better deal with Texas' surprising diversity of habitats, Ro divides the Lone Star State into 10 physiographic regions. For each of these regions, a number of publicly accessible sites
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are described in detail, complete with very clear maps, concisely written directions, as well as lists of special butterflies seen in each site and the season in which these can be seen.

Making a List, Checking it Twice

Each regional section ends with a thorough checklist of all species found in all the described sites, as well as a list of additional places to look for butterflies in the area. Next to the maps and directions, these checklists are probably the most valuable feature in this valuable book! They certainly represent the most research! Another useful feature found at the end of each site description is where to find the nearest gas, food, lodging, and camping. The book itself ends with no less than four appendixes, which include a list of plants mentioned in the body of the book, a bibliography, an exhaustive list of checklist resources, and a complete checklist of Texas butterflies. (As an interesting aside, Ro reveals in the checklist resource appendix that much of the data used in compiling the regional checklists came from NABA Butterfly Counts!)

Items for the Second Edition (Bugs in the Ear)

As thorough as Ro has been, he has missed some excellent and publicly accessible sites. Richland Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Freestone County is an excellent place for general roadside butterflying. Another such place is the Interstate 10 rest areas just west of Sonora, in Sutton County. White Oak Creek WMA in Morris County offers what is probably the only place in Texas where all three

Pearly-eye species can be seen in one place in one day. Located a mere 30 minutes from Houston and spreading across Montgomery and Harris Counties, the completely misnamed Lake Houston Park, only recently transferred from Texas Parks & Wildlife to the City of Houston Parks Department, represents a veritable diamond in the rough, as its 5,000 acres of riparian wilderness lies largely unexplored. While I have a huge respect and admiration for Ro's photography both of butterflies and landscapes, I believe the color in this book was misused. There is really no need for the 8 page inset of full-color butterfly pictures. Instead, I would like to have seen this color be put into Ro's excellent landscape photos. Black and white works fine for landscapes at a poster or mural scale, but within the constraints of a book, color is needed to better convey to the reader the feeling of a place.

Putting it to Good Use

Field guides tell how to identify organisms in the field, using field marks. These can be

memorized and a field guide left in the car or on the shelf. Site guides are another matter. When entering a new area on a nature quest for the first time, maps and directions are absolutely vital, especially in a place like Texas where private landholding is the rule, and publicly accessible lands are at a premium. In a recent tour of West Texas, my wife and I were constantly referring to this book's excellent maps and directions as we butterflyed Guadalupe Mountains National Park and parts of the Davis Mountains. Being avid travelers as well as butterflyers, we will no doubt be going through several copies of this softcover book as we further explore this huge state that we call home. For those of you who are planning a Lone Star butterfly adventure, be it in the arid plains of the Panhandle, the surprisingly lush forests of the Pineywoods, the mountain islands and desert sea that is the Trans Pecos, the literal butterfly hotbed that is the Lower Rio Grande Valley, or any of the broad prairies, coastal marshes, or expansive plateaus that lie between, you need to get this book! 

TEXAS Butterfly Festival

Come See Colors in the Wind! Come attend the 12th Annual Texas Butterfly Festival, October 18-21 2007, in Mission, TX, located in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, the most biologically diverse region in the United States. Four ecosystems converge in this four county area; with its sub-tropical climate the area boasts over 300 species of butterflies, some 512 species of birds and approximately 94 species of odonates. Join us this fall, during the peak season of butterfly abundance and diversity, for an unforgettable four days. Visit our website www.texasbutterfly.com/ or call 1-800-580-2700.

