

ASSOCIATION FOR TROPICAL LEPIDOPTERA

NOTES

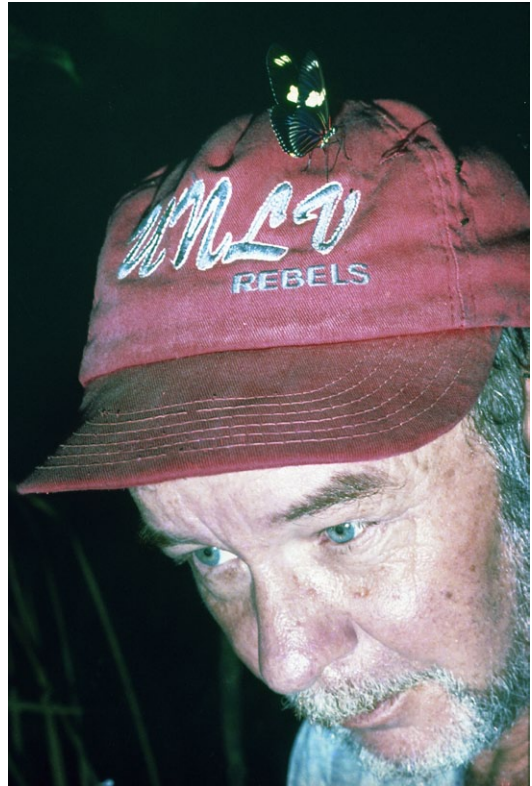
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Getting to Know George Austin: Rondônia, Brazil, August, 1993

On June 30, 2009, my closest colleague and dear friend George T. Austin passed away, unexpectedly. Because of his amazingly prolific career as an ornithologist and lepidopterist, it will take some time to assemble a complete obituary for George, accounting for all of his publications. Until then, we have compiled a memorial webpage for George, listing many of his publications and featuring a number of photos (see: <http://butterfliesofamerica.com/GTA.htm>). The purpose of this note is to share some warm memories of George, from the time I first got to know him. I hope some of you will be able to relate to these memories, since many people first got to know George during trips to the Fazenda Rancho Grande, in Rondônia, Brazil.

In August of 1993, I was a very enthusiastic, perhaps slightly obnoxious and gullible nineteen-year-old, on my first collecting trip to a South American country. George was the trip leader. While I had previously met George on a roadside in southeastern Arizona just before the Lepidopterists' Society meeting in 1991, it was only a brief encounter (Mike Smith was driving me around at the time). I talked with George just long enough to size him up as seemingly rather crusty. However, on the trip to Rondônia two years later, I learned that this crustiness was a unique blend of humor, sarcasm, and seriousness, combined with deep knowledge, all wrapped up into one concise delivery, the way only George could.



The late George T. Austin. Butterflies in Rondônia, Brazil were attracted not only to the saliva on George's Ahrenholz-style lures, but also to sweat on his hat. Photographer - unknown.



The Ahrenholz technique of collecting skippers involves placing tissue saturated with saliva or salt water on leaves. Photo of *Saliana* sp., by Andrei Sourakov, Misiones, Argentina

George was intensely interested in the fauna of skippers (family HesperIIDae) of Rondônia, Brazil, from where he described a large number of new species and various new genera. Part of George's success in discovering so many new skipper taxa was thanks to the (then) recently discovered Ahrenholz technique (Lamas et al. 1993). This technique involves placing saliva-soaked wads of tissue paper on leaves in the forest understory, to attract adult skippers. The skippers apparently mistake the tissue as bird droppings, and will feed at these saliva-soaked wads for extended periods, allowing for photography and/or collection. Through many hours of placing and working lures in the Rondônian forests, over several years, George and colleagues were able to demonstrate that a large percentage of Rondônia's skipper fauna appears to utilize bird feces as a major food source, especially in the company of swarms of *Eciton* army ants and associated ant birds (see Austin et al. 1993

for complete details).

Eager to learn the tricks of the trade, and already a self-proclaimed skipper researcher, I was ready to experiment with the Ahrenholz technique myself. On our first morning in the field, upon reaching the edge of the forest, George described the process and showed me a sample tissue wad or two before bidding me farewell, leaving me alone to figure out the details by myself. George was not one to waste good collecting time. I had fair success on my first day, but collected maybe one fifth of the individuals and species of skippers that George did. Clearly, he wasn't telling me everything... On the second day in the forest, around midday, I encountered George working a set of lures that he had placed immediately above an ant swarm. Aha! I had learned George's trick--lures work best in the immediate vicinity of the ants (George suffered many ant bites while collecting skippers that day). Once I made the connection, and started eyeing some of the great skippers on his lures, George told me to take a hike, so I wouldn't interfere with his data collection.

No problem! Now I knew all I needed to know to be just as good at tropical skipper collecting as George, or so I thought. On the third day in the forest, I scrambled around the trails at the Fazenda Rancho Grande until I found my own ant swarm. It was not nearly as big as the swarm George had encountered the day before, but was treacherous enough to work around. I placed many lures, worked them until dusk, and had some really good success, at last. Yet that evening, while reviewing specimens with the group, it was again obvious that George had beaten my efforts, again by a large margin. This left me determined to figure out what George's secret was. I concluded that, for some reason, his saliva must be "better" than mine at attracting skippers. While the idea seemed a bit ridiculous, it was the only explanation I could muster at the time. Later that evening, I approached George, and explained how his saliva appeared to work better than mine, and asked if he had any idea why; was it perhaps the tobacco in his saliva? George glared at me with a very serious look on his face and stated, "oh, you probably brushed your teeth," before walking off.

Needless to say, I didn't brush my teeth that night or the next morning before heading off into the forest for the day. I proceeded to find an ant swarm, and set out a string of almost one hundred lures. Many good skippers were attracted to the lures, although it still did not seem like I was getting as many skippers as George normally did. During mid-afternoon, as George passed through the area I was working (he hadn't found an ant swarm that day), I proudly proclaimed that I hadn't brushed my teeth that morning or the night before. George must have loved it! As he was walking off, he turned and said, "well, I haven't brushed mine for over a month." He left me frozen in my tracks, as I was trying to determine whether or not he was being serious. Of course, to be on the safe side, I assumed he was being serious, and I refused to brush my teeth for the remainder of the trip. But despite this, George still got more skippers than I did, every day...



George sharing his knowledge of Rondônia butterflies with other trip participants, such as Jaret Daniels (top left) - now Assistant Professor of Entomology at the University of Florida. Photographer unknown.



Bungalotis midas, attracted to tissue soaked in George's saliva at the Fazenda Rancho Grande, Rondônia, Brazil. Photo by Andrei Sourakov.

George enjoyed telling this story on me, especially in my presence, in later years. He would get a sparkle in his eyes each time he relived the tale.

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COMBINED ATL AND SOUTHERN LEP. SOC. MEETING, SEPTEMBER 25-27, 2009

The meeting took place at the McGuire Center for Lepidoptera and Biodiversity at the University of Florida, which allowed for use of the world-class collections, visits to butterfly rainforest and butterfly garden, and many other on and off campus activities. In addition to the field trips, socials and the banquet, which are always the highlights of any meeting, the following presentations took place:

Deborah Matthews Lott: Endophagous Pterophoridae of the Southeast: Diversity and Morphology of the Boring Species; **Brian G. Scholtens & Tom Smith:** Butterflies of South Carolina Inventory Project; **Marc C. Minno:** The Extinction, Loss, and Decline of Butterflies in the Florida Keys; **Jacqueline Y. Miller:** An Update on the Taxonomy, Biodiversity and Biogeography of the Butterflies of the West Indies; **James K. Adams:** The Known Unknowns: Undescribed Macromoths of Georgia; **Matt Lehnert:** Using Color to Map the Transition Zone of Two Eastern Tiger Swallowtail Subspecies in the Southeastern US and to Determine its Correlation with Biological Suture Zone Theory; **Charles V. Covell, Jr.:** Project Ponceanous and Other Lepidopterous Adventures in South Florida, 1963–1993; **Bruce Purser & Daniel LaComme:** Altitudinal Distribution of the Nymphalid *Perisama* in the Cosnipata Valley, S. Peru; **J. Court Whelan:** An Initial Look at the Effects Butterfly Farms May Have on Their Environment; **María Fernanda Checa:** Butterfly Communities from the West Ecuador Biodiversity “Hotspot”: Their Ecology and Conservation; **Mirian Medina Hay-Roe:** Nutritional Ecology and Parasitoid Interaction in Two Ecological Races of the Fall Armyworm *Spodoptera frugiperda*; **Andrew D. Warren:** Taxonomic and Biogeographic Studies on Mexican Hesperiiidae: News and Views from Year Two; **Andrei Sourakov:** Learning About Butterfly Behavior Through Filmography; **Bruce Purser:** The Long Evolution of Neotropical Butterflies; **J. Court Whelan & Thomas C. Emmel:** Entomological Ecotourism: Its Beginnings and Current Progress; **Boyce Drummond:** Survival of the Flittest: Ten Years of Pawnee Montane Skipper Survival in Fire and Drought; **Ulf Eitschberger:** The Taxonomy and Systematics of the Genus *Daphnis* Hübner, [1819] (Lepidoptera, Sphingidae).



2009 Annual ATL-McGuire Center Photocontest



The photocontest attracted 114 entries and was judged by three independent judges in three categories based on scientific and aesthetic merits of the pictures. All winning entries received valuable prizes and are published in this issue of the Notes. Fig. 1. (A) 1st place BUTTERFLIES - *Lerema accius* (Hesperiidae), High Springs, Florida, photo by Kathy Malone; (B) 1st place, IMMATURES - Parasitized larva of sphinx moth, Ecuador, photo by Sebastian Padron; (C) 1st place, MOTH - *Caloptilia* sp. (Gracillarioidea), Nashville, TN, photo by Stephen W. Loftin.



A



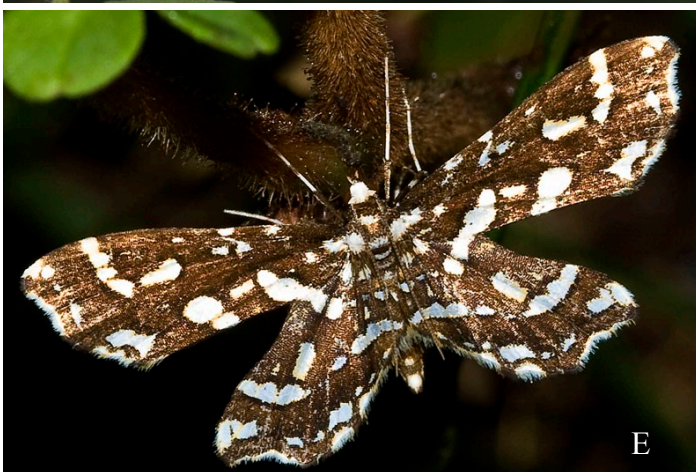
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F

Fig. 2. (A) 2nd place BUTTERFLIES - *Lycaena cupreus snowi* (Lycaenidae), Colorado, photo by Vanessa Schlachta, (B) 2nd place IMMATURES - Gregarious larvae of *Delias pasithoe* (Pieridae) feeding on *Taxillus* sp. (Loranthaceae), Vietnam, photo by Vu Van Lien; (C) 2nd place MOTHS - *Aellopos clavipes* (Sphingidae), Penitas, Texas, photo by Gil Quintanilla; (D) 3rd place BUTTERFLIES - *Vettius coryna*, Peru, photo by Gil Quintanilla; (E) 3rd place MOTHS, Crambidae sp., Ecuador, photo by Sebastian Padron; (F) 3rd place IMMATURES - Papilionidae sp., Ecuador, photo by Sebastian Padron. The next photocontest will take place in September 2010. Submissions can be made starting June 2010. Please, visit www.troplep.org for details.