Butterflies & Moths of the Eastern Sierra

Sierra Sulphur, a high elevation endemic Sierra Nevada butterfly. Paul Johnson

August 2–4, 2024 ● Paul Johnson

$250 per person/ $235 for Mono Lake Committee members
enrollment limited to 10 participants

Most of us are familiar with large, showy butterflies such as Monarchs and Swallowtails, and maybe even some of the more conspicuous moths such as the Pandora Pine Moth and White-lined Sphinx. But with more than 100 species of butterflies and perhaps 20 times as many moths living in the Eastern Sierra, there is always something new to be found by the careful observer!

Of course, butterflies do so much more than just make us happy to see them. They (and their moth cousins) pollinate many plants, and their caterpillars may convert more plant material into food for predators than any other group of animals. Most butterflies and moths have close relationships with the few plant species their caterpillars can eat, and various biological needs drive them to visit flowers, mud puddles, hilltops, and more. In this class we will learn about these habitat preferences and then use this knowledge to guide our searches at various butterfly-rich locations in the Eastern Sierra. We will likely see some day-flying moths along the way, and we'll also put out black lights at night to attract nocturnal moths that might otherwise go unnoticed as they go about their lives in the darkness.

Paul Johnson has been fascinated by butterflies for longer than he can remember, and has been studying and photographing butterflies and moths for 25 years. He is a Wildlife Biologist with the National Park Service, and author of the *Butterfly Checklist of Pinnacles National Park*. He participates in about 15 butterfly counts every summer, including at Yosemite, Glass Mountain, the White Mountains, Lake Tahoe, Yuba Pass, and Butterfly Valley.

ITINERARY

Friday, August 2 at 7:00pm: Meet in the gallery at the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore in Lee Vining (51365 Highway 395). After brief introductions, we will view a slideshow and discuss basics of the biology of butterflies and moths. We will finish up at 9:00pm with a viewing of living moths attracted to black lights.

Saturday, August 3 at 8:30am: Meet at the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore. We will start out the morning discussing some of the moths we observed the night before. Then we'll preview the diversity of butterflies we may encounter on today's field trip. We will spend the remainder of the day traveling to butterfly habitats ranging from mountains to the shores of Mono Lake. Possible locations include Saddlebag Lake, Walker Lake, and various locations near Mono Lake and Lee Vining. The day will end around 2:00pm. An optional evening moth viewing may be available, weather permitting.

Sunday, August 4 at 8:30am: Meet at the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore. We will start out the morning with more discussion of moths, and then we'll preview the diversity of butterflies we may encounter on today's field trip. We will spend the remainder of the day traveling to butterfly habitats ranging from the mountains to the shores of Mono Lake. Locations will be chosen to maximize our species diversity. The day will end around 2:00pm.

ACTIVITY LEVEL: MODERATE

This seminar's activity level: *moderate*. We will generally be driving to various locations and walking short distances at a leisurely pace, up to two miles per day. Butterfly "hot spots" are often off trail so we expect to do some walking on uneven terrain, stepping up and over obstacles, etc. This type of walking requires good balance, some agility, and stamina.

WEATHER & ALTITUDE

Temperatures in summer will be hot during the day and drop to chilly at night, with possible windy conditions and afternoon thunderstorms. Average temperatures in August in Lee Vining are 83°F (max) and 52°F (min).

This seminar will take place at elevations ranging from about 6,000 to 10,000 feet above sea level. It is a good idea to acclimate at the elevation of Lee Vining for at least 24 hours prior to the start of the seminar. Those with a history of heart, ear, or respiratory problems should consult their doctors before attending. Anyone restricted to lower elevations should not enroll.

Remember to bring (and drink!) lots of water because your body loses more water at the higher altitudes of the Mono Basin. Begin drinking extra water as you drive to higher elevation in order to

prevent dehydration and headaches. Also, the sun is intense at high elevations, capable of burning even on cool and cloudy days, so be sure to protect yourself thoroughly using sunscreen, sunglasses, and hat.

MEALS

Please bring a lunch already packed in the morning plus water and snacks to eat on days 2 and 3.

TO BRING

___ warm clothing (warm enough for snow!)
___ long pants (due to brush)
___ raincoat, just in case
___ hat, sunscreen, and sunglasses
___ daypack
___ plenty of water
___ boots or supportive shoes
___ binoculars/camera (if desired)

RECOMMENDED READINGS

- Brock J. & Kaufman, K. 2003. Field Guide to Butterflies of North America, Houghton Mifflin, New York, NY
- Glassberg, J. 2001. Butterflies Through Binoculars: The West, A Field Guide to the Butterflies of Western North America. Oxford University Press, New York, NY
- Powell, J.A. and P.A. Opler. 2009. Moths of Western North America. University of California Press. 383 pp.
- Pyle, R.M. 1992. The Audubon Society handbook for butterfly watchers. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston. 274 pp.