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Butterflies in South Eastern Utah USA, June 2009

Jason Sargerson

South Eastern Utah is famous for its Red Rock Country, especially Arches and Canyonlands National Parks and Monument Valley. As a naturalist and being especially interested in butterflies, I have found the best places to visit are the mountain ranges that stand out as green oases. In the south east of Utah these are the La Sal Mountains and the Abajo Mountains. Here at a suitable altitude and time of year - end of June and beginning of July - butterflies can be found enjoying the summer sunshine.

I visited Utah in June of 2009 staying in Monticello (pronounced Montisello by the locals). This is a good base to visit the national parks and the mountains.

Sunday 21/06/09

I arrived in Monticello at about 1 pm and decided to proceed straight on towards Moab and up into the La Sal Mountains. The road into the La Sal Mountains is paved all the way now and it is about 14 miles from the main road to the first butterfly site at Oowah turnoff. This is where the main road makes a switchback up the hill and the side road to Oowah lake is normally sheltered and sunny. I arrived at Oowah to find it was cloudy and dull so I carried on to Miners Basin about another 6 miles further. This is a long sunny sloping stretch of road where there is a turnoff and place to park. Here although it was quite windy I found Mourning Cloaks on the road, both in the new season colours and some in the more faded colours of last year. Also seen were Western Tiger Swallowtail and blues that I couldn't identify without a good photograph. Back at Oowah I found a species of duskywing that I think I have identified correctly as Persius Duskywing.



Mourning Cloak

Photo © Jason Sargerson



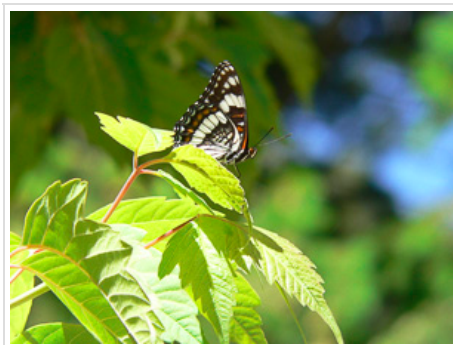
Persius Duskywing

Photo © Jason Sargerson

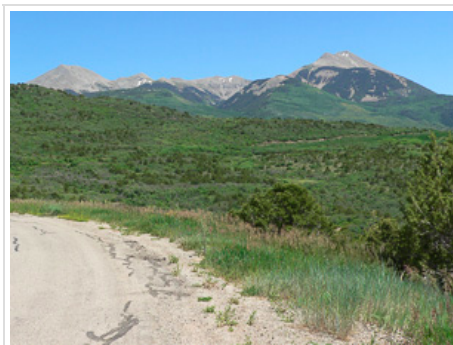
Monday 22/06/09

This morning I set off into the nearby mountains the Abajo Mountains or the 'Blue Mountains' as the locals call them - they do have a blue colour in a certain light. The road is paved for the main loop in the mountains and is a gentle climb up past the campgrounds and the Monticello Lake. My destination was the Foy Lake which is a dead end off the loop with a superb lake and views of the La Sal Mountains and Canyonlands National Park. Here I saw Weidermeyer's Admiral, Tiger Swallowtail and Mourning Cloak.

In the afternoon I headed for the La Sal Mountains again. At Oowah I found this Weidermeyer's Admiral perching on the aspen by the road. At Miners Basin I was rewarded with the sight of a Field Crescent on the roadside aster. Weidermeyer's Admiral, Tiger Swallowtail and Mourning Cloaks were all in evidence. Carrying on further on the La Sal Mountain Loop, there is a ridge with thistles growing all along the road. Here I found a 2 Tailed Swallowtail nectaring above the fire damaged Castle Valley and views towards Castle Rock.



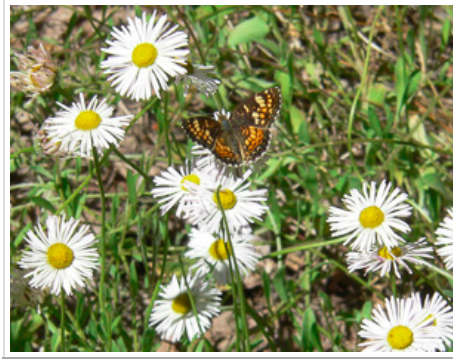
Weidermeyer's Admiral
Photo © Jason Sargerson



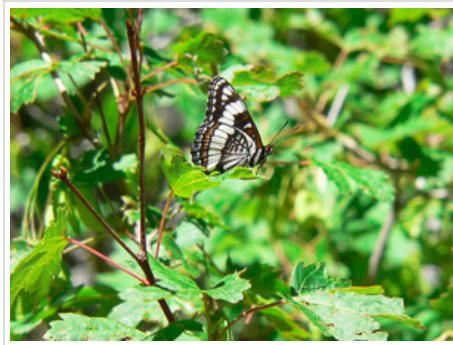
La Sal Mountains
Photo © Jason Sargerson



Miners Basin
Photo © Jason Sargerson



Field Crescent
Photo © Jason Sargerson



Weidermeyer's Admiral
Photo © Jason Sargerson



2 Tailed Swallowtail
Photo © Jason Sargerson

Wednesday 24/06/09

I looked in at Moab Golf Course. It was very hot at midday and I didn't see any special butterflies. I took some photos of the course looking back toward Moab. Up in the La Sal Mountains, at Miners Basin found a lot of Mourning Cloaks chasing one another. Eventually found a feeding point on a tree where woodpeckers had drilled holes. The Mourning Cloaks seem to love this tree and sipped the sap from the holes with relish. A Pale Swallowtail drifted by while I was enthralled with the sight of the Mourning Cloaks. Back to Oowah and I saw another blue species, Arrowhead Blue. I managed to startle a Pale Swallowtail that flew some way off to settle. The photographs had to be taken at maximum range of the camera.



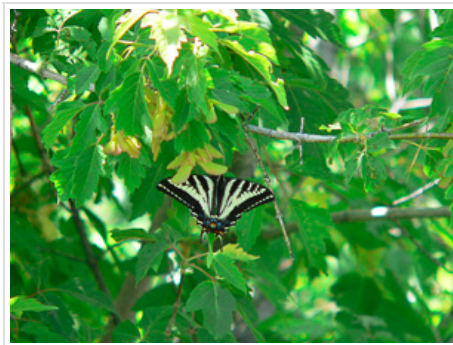
Moab Golf Course
Photo © Jason Sargerson



Mourning Cloak group
Photo © Jason Sargerson



Mourning Cloak
Photo © Jason Sargerson



Pale Swallowtail
Photo © Jason Sargerson



Arrowhead Blue
Photo © Jason Sargerson

Thursday 25/06/09

I went to play golf at the Hideout Golf Club - Monticello Golf Club. Of course I took my camera and was rewarded with the sight of a Two Tailed Swallowtail taking salts and water on the ground.



2 Tailed Swallowtail.jpg
Photo © Jason Sargerson

Friday 26/06/09

This morning I set off for Newspaper Rock via the Abajo Mountain drive. Newspaper Rock is a large flat faced rock with various carvings or messages on it from ancient and modern times. After photographing the rock I managed to spot a Checkered White and a very fine specimen of Western Tiger Swallowtail. I took quite a lot of photos of the swallowtail as it nectared on the Sulphur Buckwheat.



Newspaper Rock
Photo © Jason Sargerson



Checkered White
Photo © Jason Sargerson



Western Tiger Swallowtail
Photo © Jason Sargerson

I went back to Monticello via the Foy Lake. After a little searching I found Silvery Blues sheltering from the wind. At the Hideout Golf Club I found this hard to see butterfly- Canyonland Satyr.



Foy Lake
Photo © Jason Sargerson



Silvery Blue

Photo © Jason Sargerson



Canyonlands Satyr

Photo © Jason Sargerson

Saturday 27/06/09

I set off for the La Sal Mountains a little earlier today planning to arrive by midday. At Oowah I was very lucky to find an Anise Swallowtail by the road warming up on the gravel. I used an old trick of slowly moving my shadow over the butterfly to prompt it to open its wings. I also managed to get a reasonable photograph of a Melissa Blue by the roadside. At Miners Basin I found the usual Mourning Cloaks, Weidermeyer's Admiral, Pale Swallowtail, Northern Cloudywing and Persius Dustywing.



Anise Swallowtail

Photo © Jason Sargerson



Melissa Blue

Photo © Jason Sargerson



Weidermeyers Admiral
Photo © Jason Sargerson



Northern Cloudywing
Photo © Jason Sargerson

Sunday 28/06/09

I went to play golf again at the Hideout Golf Club. I found some skippers this time - Checkered Skipper and this Common Branded Skipper:



Monticello Golf Course
Photo © Jason Sargerson



Common Branded Skipper

Photo © Jason Sargerson

Monday 29/06/09

This was my last day before heading back to Durango and the flight home. I took the road up into the Abajo Mountains via Foy Lake and Newspaper Rock. Then I set off for the La Sal Mountains. At Oowah I found my Anise Swallowtail again in the company of a Tiger Swallowtail - sipping salts from the water by the road. I also found Common Ringlet - like our Small Heath. At Miners Basin I took some more photos at the feeding tree with Hoary Comma and Red Admiral joining the Mourning Cloaks.



Oowah Turnoff

Photo © Jason Sargerson



Anise and Western Tiger Swallowtails

Photo © Jason Sargerson



Mourning Cloak and Hoary Comma

Photo © Jason Sargerson