



ZOO
knoxville

Tennessee Butterfly Monitoring Network



The North American
Butterfly Monitoring Network

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we monitor butterflies?

Butterflies, bees, beetles, flies and many other animals play an important ecosystem role as pollinators for both wildflowers and crops. Pollinators visit flowers for the nectar and sometimes the pollen, which requires a wide variety of wildflowers throughout the flight season. But butterflies also require host plants to lay their eggs on so their caterpillars will have leaves to eat. Since different groups of butterflies require different host plants, a greater diversity of plants potentially can support a greater diversity of butterflies. A high diversity of butterflies indicates a high diversity of plants which is then an indicator of better habitat health. Butterflies are also relatively easy to identify compared to other pollinators and are approachable and harmless.

Who can monitor?

Any adult or teen that can commit to monitoring at least 7 times during the monitoring season for at least several years, follow data collection and entry protocols, and learn to identify butterflies can be trained to be a TBMN volunteer.

How and when do we monitor butterflies?

We walk fixed routes that are surveyed in a consistent manner (pace, time, detection area) multiple times in a flight season. Our monitoring season is from April 15 through July 31 each year. Routes usually take about 30-60 minutes to walk. Volunteers are asked to monitor their assigned route at least once every two weeks during the season. We prefer that volunteers monitor the same route every year to get the most useful data.

Do I need to know how to identify all the butterflies?

We'll help you learn the most common butterflies. With some practice you'll eventually be able to identify the majority of the butterflies you see.

Do I need special equipment?

A pair of binoculars, especially ones that can focus on close objects, is very helpful. A net can also be helpful if allowed on the particular public land, but isn't essential.

Where can I monitor?

If you don't already have a location you'd like to monitor, we'll try to find a public land near you that you can monitor. Either way, we'll make sure we have permission from the landowner and the proper permits before we start.

How do I find out more?

Contact Steve McGaffin, TBMN Director at ZKCommunity@zooknoxville.org or 865-637-5331 ext. 1360