

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Mulligan 202/343-5634

TROUBLED BUTTERFLIES GET PRIORITY LOOK

Butterflies in trouble? Butterflies? Will those birdbrained bureaucrats never run out of spendthrift projects?

But before an editor hard up for a feature turns his funny rewriter loose on this latest raid against the taxpayer, etc., etc.--he might consider that a number of these beautiful little creatures are possibly threatened or may even be in danger of extinction.

Forty-one species of possibly endangered or threatened butterflies will be the subject of intensive studies by the Federal Government, 26 States, Cuba, Canada, and Mexico. The study is being requested by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to determine each butterfly's status.

Most of the butterflies under consideration in the study owe their reduced populations to two related problems--dependence on one primary food and land development. The Apache silverspot, a strikingly beautiful butterfly with a cinnamon brown top and silver spots underneath, for example, is located in the Owens Valley and Mono Lake areas of California. It thrives on a type of violet which requires moist growing conditions. As the demand for water by nearby Los Angeles grows, drainage of water from Owens Valley will probably dry and the marsh where the delicate violet grows, thereby reducing the Apache silverspot population.

A Florida butterfly, the Atala, which sports a velvety black and iridescent blue upper portion and orange and gold markings underneath, occurs only in the United States, even though it is a member of a group

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of tropical butterflies. In its caterpillar stage the Atala depends on a primitive plant related to the sego palm--known as the coontie. Current land development in Florida has destroyed several areas where coontie was available and now the Atala appears only sporadically and unpredictably.

It is believed that butterfly collectors have not contributed to declining populations because collection usually takes place at a time of year after most females have laid their eggs and because males are most frequently the gender caught. Interestingly, the male butterfly is more frequently caught by amateur collectors because of its flamboyant tendency to flit about open meadows and marshes "looking for the action" while the female of the species maintains a somewhat more sedate posture nearer the ground.

This is the first attempt by the Fish and Wildlife Service to study butterflies. Several States have developed their own endangered species lists--some of which include butterflies--but this Federal study may result in the first national list of threatened and endangered butterflies.

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 directs the Department of the Interior, through the Fish and Wildlife Service, to conduct a review of those species which are "threatened" or "endangered." A notice of this review is being published in the Federal Register and will affect the following 26 States: Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Washington. The Fish and Wildlife Service notified the Governors of these States, and the Governments of Cuba, Canada, and Mexico of this review. All interested parties are requested to submit any factual information which is germane to this review to the Director, Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

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