



An eastern blue-tailed butterfly, a common, small member of the gossamer wing family, can be found on weedy lawns as well as in fallow fields.

*Rick Cech*

## It's a Date: Learn About Lepidoptery

# Where Have All The Butterflies Gone?

For more than 10 years; Rich Cech combed the woods, fields, and roadsides, taking photographs and ruminating on the life cycles of lepidoptera as a co-author of the lavishly illustrated "Butterflies of the East Coast: An Observer's Guide."

On Friday, July 14, Mr. Cech will be at the Nature Conservancy Center for Conservation in East Hampton to talk about the elegant evolutionary interplay among plants, caterpillars, and these winged beauties. He will also show a selection of his highly detailed photographs.

As Mr. Cech describes it, butterflies have spent the last several million years choosing which plants to call home. That choice makes all the difference to a butterfly species, he has said, and influences every aspect of a butterfly's life. For host plants, it is not all fun and games: Many have developed ways to combat the predation of wandering caterpillars.

Many butterfly species are under threat, Mr. Cech wrote in an Op-Ed piece in The New York Times on June 25. Among them is the small, bright green Hessel's hairstreak that once thrived in Long Island's cedar swamps. What to blame for their shrinking numbers is difficult to say, he wrote. Among the suspects are deer, which gobble up

many of the plants to which butterflies are inextricably tied.

Nonnative plants, such as fox grape, purple loosestrife, and black swallowwort, which are choking many parts of the state, can dangerously alter butterfly habitat. And the ratcheted-up application of pesticides on Long Island to control mosquito swarms may leave butterflies as collateral damage.

Butterflies will not disappear from the earth, Mr. Cech wrote in The Times. They have been around for 40 million to 50 million years — a lot longer than our own species. "But some species will continue to decline sharply as humans continue to lumber forward, ever faster, through butterfly meadows and other habitats, still clumsy and reckless," he wrote.

Mr. Cech's appearance at the Nature Conservancy is part of its summer speaker series, which is intended to inspire visitors to notice nature in their own backyards. A \$5 donation to the group has been suggested to attend the talk, which starts at 5 p.m. Reservations have been suggested and can be made by phoning the Center for Conservation.

The Nature Conservancy occupies a renovated house left to it by Jack M. Kaplan, a philanthropist who died in 1987. Its address is 142 Route 114 in East Hampton. D.E.R.