

Meadowlands new hot spot for butterflies

By **SCOTT FALLON**
STAFF WRITER

LYNDHURST – The Eastern Tiger Swallowtail was the first one spotted Sunday morning.

Then came the Broad-winged Skipper, followed by the Pearl Crescent and the somewhat elusive Painted Lady.

Soon, nine more butterfly species were identified by some of the 270 or so people who descended on DeKorte Park for the region's first festival on all things butterfly.

As the Meadowlands continues to slowly emerge from decades of industrial pollution, illegal dumping and the opening of landfills, it has begun to again attract wildlife ranging from migrating birds to tiny crustaceans integral to the food chain. Add butterflies to the list.

"They take a hit on the chin with habitat destruction," said Don Torino of Bergen County Audubon, who was manning a booth on how to attract butterflies to backyard gardens. "They like large open meadows. We like them, too ... to build things on them. But that's changing."

Officials at the state Meadowlands Commission want the area to become a hot spot for butterflies much like parts of the Highlands and South Jersey where hobbyists descend from late spring to late summer to catch a glimpse at nature's prettiest insect.

The commission recently published a free butterfly guide to the Meadowlands with color photos of the most prevalent species.

On Sunday, small groups roamed around a butterfly garden named after Jill Ann Ziemkiewicz, a Rutherford resident who died

in the crash of TWA Flight 800 off the coast of Long Island in 1996.

Butterflies sipped nectar from coneflowers, bachelor buttons and black-eyed Susans. Some of the more diehard hobbyists took pictures with trumpet-sized telephoto lenses.

They learned about butterflies' contributions to the ecosystem. They pollinate plants, but not as well as bees. They are a food source for birds. And they are an environmental gauge.

"If butterflies are around, something right is going on in that area," said Glenn Mahler, a member of the North American Butterfly Association, who was giving tours Sunday.

Torino loves butterflies so much, he has a few tattooed on his forearms.

"Who doesn't love them?" he said. "They're a great part of nature."



CHRIS PEDOTA/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

An American Lady butterfly dazzling spectators at DeKorte Park. The Meadowlands is emerging from years of neglect and attracting a variety of wildlife, including butterflies.