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## THE DECLINE of MARYLAND'S STATE INSECT

If you're like me, I never focused on whether Maryland had a state insect and if so, what it is. Recently I read an article in the Bay Journal regarding the troubling decline of insect populations. In reading this article, I learned that a concern for Marylanders is the decline of its state insect – the Baltimore Checkerspot butterfly!

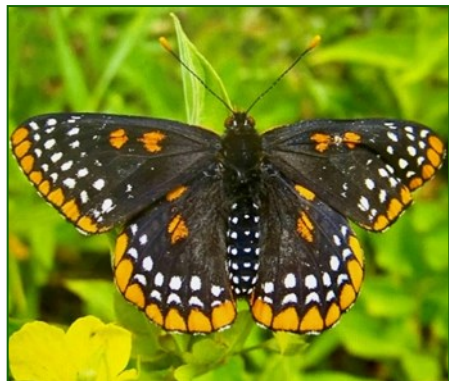


The Baltimore Checkerspot butterfly was made the state insect in 1973. The colors are much like our state bird, the Baltimore Oriole, black, white and orange. It used to be seen in most counties of Maryland, but now it is seen only in the seven northern and western counties. The MD Dept. of Natural Resources has given it the conservation rank of S-2, being very rare in Maryland. Though it is generally found in the eastern third of the US, its decline in Maryland is linked to the decline of its host plant, the native White Turtlehead perennial, (*Chelone glabra*).



The White Turtlehead's natural habitat is damp, rich soil areas near swamps, riverbeds, and roadside ditches. As a perennial, it can be planted in rain gardens, pond edges, woodland gardens and other damp, adequately watered areas. It is named from the shape of its creamy white to light pink flowers which bloom on spiked stems in late summer to early fall. It has shiny, dark green leaves and grows from rhizomes to a height of 2-4 feet. The Turtlehead is imperiled from development, influx of invasive species (phragmites), pollution, climate change and herbicides. Thus, the Baltimore Checkerspot is also imperiled.

The Baltimore Checkerspot has only **one** generation a year. It lives as a butterfly for only a few weeks in June and early July, during which it lays several hundred eggs on the leaves of the Turtlehead plant. Once hatched the 'tiny caterpillars' build a communal web for protection. While living on the Turtlehead plant, they pass through four larva stages from mid-August to the end of October. They will then form a litter of rolled-up leaves in which they will winter over



amongst ground debris. In mid-April they will emerge and resume munching until they reach full size, at which time they will form a chrysalis, its final stage. About two weeks later, the adult butterfly emerges to repeat the cycle...

On the Eastern Shore, we can plant White Turtlehead, but this won't help our state insect to flourish. Hopefully, as part of their conservation measures, gardens clubs in the northern and western counties might encourage the planting of the White Turtlehead which will in turn expand the habitat of the Baltimore Checkerspot butterfly.