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## Where Have All the Butterflies Gone?

— an Essay —

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チョウはどこへ行ったのか  
—英文エッセイのひとつの試み—

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This is a personal reflection on a natural feature of the past in the face of its present transformation.

Every year, as the sunshine got brighter and warmer, the boy expected to witness the first Small White (*Monshiro-chō*) begin to flit over the desolate fields around his house. His place was in a small basin village surrounded by hills and mountains, through which ran parallel a river, a railway and two roads, old and new. Of course, even in winter, when warm enough, he might occasionally be greeted by a ragged-winged Chinese Comma (*Kitateha*) suddenly taking wing from where it had been hibernating. But what made him realize the arrival of spring was the sight of that common white butterfly which must have been born only that morning. And as the number of the Small White increased, the spring would gradually grow to her prime.

When rape and radish blossoms were at their best, he was to see little white butterflies of another kind, Yellow Tips (*Tsumakichō*), fly softly in a horizontal straight forward way. The boy liked them very much, and it was his happiest time being in the fragrant rape blossoms thronged with Yellow Tips, Small Whites, honey bees and many other small insects.

Like the Yellow Tip, the *Luehdorfia*

(*Gyūfuchō*) appears only once in the year, about this time, and that only in certain limited parts of Japan. The base of its wings is pale yellow streaked by velvet dark brown, and the rear edge of the hind wings is speckled with light blue and bright orange. Indeed, it is a real beauty deserving the title "The Goddess of Spring."

The boy was once told that several *Luehdorfias* were collected in a mountain near his house, and for the next successive years he continued to visit it when the season came. But he could not find a single *Luehdorfia* to his disappointment. As a result, what he might call the "goddess" had become the Yellow Tip, that lovely springtime butterfly in the genus *Anthocharis*, literally, "flower goddess." The greenish cloud patterns of the wrong sides of its wings are peculiarly graceful, and the front tips of the fore wings are hooked and unique. Probably the name Yellow Tip comes from the bright yellow spot on the male's hook, which the female lacks.

By the way, the butterfly's male generally wears the brighter and more beautiful attires than the female, as is often the case with birds. For example, when the boy first saw a female of the Oriental Hairstreak

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(*Ōmidorishijimi*) slowly flying along a mountain path, he mistook it for a small Chinese Bushbrown (*Himejanome*). So sober and quiet was the color of its wings, while that of the male's is brilliant silver green. There are indeed not a few butterflies that display this kind of remarkable contrast between the two sexes.

On the river banks near his house towered several large zelkovas and hackberry-trees, and every June would have swarms of Japanese Circes (*Gomadarachō*) shooting about over their tops and around their sides. About this time of the year, the boy would go out with a catching net and make his way for the nearby woods of black alders and oak trees. He was now hoping that he might find numbers of Green Hairstreaks (*Midorishijimi*) flitting over or resting on the tree leaves there.

This species also appears only once in the year, and the opened wings of its male are brilliantly green and beautiful. The female is quite different and less beautiful, but is very famous for its four distinct hereditary wing patterns. For this reason or that, there are many lovers of the species and the Hairstreak group, usually known as *Zephyrus* among them.

The boy was one of them. However, he could not go out into the woods so easily and frequently, because this was also the season for planting rice fields which forced him to help his family mentally as well as physically. "What a boy," they would often complain, "to go out for butterflies when we are all this busy and tired out every day!" Thus the collecting walk of Green Hairstreaks was extremely thrilling.

For it was also on one of these secret wanderings in the woods that he was excited with his first Zebra Hairstreak (*Uranami-akashijimi*), an orange-colored little butterfly with zebra-like streaks on the wrong sides of its wings. He had been beating about the bush and trees with his net shaft, when the butterfly flew up. And he had caught it without difficulty after it rested again on a

leaf of the alder trees.

One of the boy's pastimes during the summer vacation was to go to the bamboo grove along the river. There he could occasionally come across a couple of Chinese Windmills (*Jakōageha*) flying softly through the bamboo pillars. This was the only species of the swallowtails he knew whose male and female have apparently different colors and wing patterns. The female is unusually beautiful with grayish-brown wings hemmed by velvet black, while the male, resembling the black-winged Long-tail Spangle (*Onaga-ageha*), has unique vermilion marks on the body, and gives out a unique fragrance from which comes its Japanese name.

At darker places in the same grove he would sometimes find a Gray-veined White (*Sujiguroshirochō*) sucking nectar from a purple-colored thistle flower. Though it looks like the Common White, this species flies more slowly and is easier to catch, and when you take it up with your fingers you cannot escape from its peculiar odor. Meanwhile, to camphor trees in the sunny part flew, from time to time, females of the Common Bluebottle (*Aosujiageha*), a stout brisk-flyer with a translucent sky-blue stripe running straight through the fore and hind black wings. And they would continue to lay an egg on the back side of a young leaf of the camphor with the accuracy the boy could not help wondering at.

When the harvest season came, *Manjusaka* with scarlet clusters of starlike flowers shot out on the foot-paths between the rice-fields and made parts of them look as if they were on fire. Then, to these flowers flew Common Yellow Swallowtails (*Kiageha*) and High Brown Fritillaries (*Uragin-hyōmon*), which would often display a splendid contrast of green, red and yellow under the blue sky. Being involved in this atmosphere during the harvest work was one of the things the boy relished most. And when he saw lovely Painted Ladies (*Himeakatateha*) flitting around cosmos flowers in his school garden, he had the feeling that the autumn was far

advanced and another winter was near at hand.

In this way, you could enjoy various kinds of butterflies throughout the year in the village where the boy lived. Even within the limits of his garden it was somewhat possible. For example, when the big old myrica-tree began to drop its berry-like small red balls onto the ground, Chinese Bushbrowns and Japanese Labyrinths (*Kimadarahikage*) used to swarm on and over the fallen fruit. Rotten persimmons on his back yard used to attract occasional Blue and Red Admirals (*Ruritateha* and *Akatateha*); though footsteps drove them up away, they would soon return and rest on the earth or on the persimmons, with their wings opening and closing in a slow repetitive manner. Moreover, one fine October afternoon the boy even witnessed a stray Chestnut Tiger (*Asagimadara*) fluttering over his house slowly and softly like a falling petal of the cherry blossom.

But alas! the wonderful nature described above is now dead and gone, and you can no longer appreciate the passing of the seasons with butterflies. The recent widening of the newer road that runs through the village has

forced the boy's house to be moved away, bulldozers noisily uprooting that big old myrica-tree, the persimmon trees and others. Riparian works have made the river, in which you could once swim, too shallow, and cleared the bamboo groves on the old river banks, also chopping down the zelkovas and hackberry-trees. Thus deprived of their food and residence, many of the butterflies have disappeared and others come to be seen only occasionally.

If you go into the nearby hills, you are to be shocked to find wide cuttings run through, a third expressway which is also parallel with the older two! And many parts of the hills and mountains are exposing their gray or brown surfaces instead of their former green, sooner or later to turn into residential or industrial areas. As a result, those woods of black alders and oak trees where the boy collected Green Hairstreaks and the Zebra Hairstreak have naturally disappeared, leaving no trace of butterflies whatever.

Could it be possible, then, that this kind of transformation of nature is called a "development"? I should say it's a devastation. Anyway, where have all the butterflies gone?