

GORGONE CHECKERSPOTS IN GEORGIA REVISITED

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When last we wrote of Georgia's intrepid Gorgone Checkerspots (*SLS News*, Vol. 33 NO. 2, 2011), we left readers to ponder two cliffhangers: would a second flight follow their initial spring emergence; and what was the true identity of their mysterious helianthus host plant? Happily, both questions have now been answered.

On June 6, 2011, Sara Bright and I re-visited the Cooper's Furnace Day Use Area to look for a second flight of Gorgone Checkerspots (*Chlosyne gorgone*). Conditions were extremely hot and dry, and little was blooming streamside or along the roadway. The power easement's lower elevation was virtually flowerless but as it ascended, blossoms of daisy fleabane (*Erigeron* sp.), Butterfly Milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), Whorled Tickseed (*Coreopsis major*) and Slender Mountain Mint (*Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*) began to dot the landscape. Pearl Crescents, Variegated Fritillaries, and Buckeyes were visiting these flowers. We were excited to see that five Gorgone Checkerspots were also in their company. The gorgones were nectaring on Slender Mountain Mint.



Giant or Tall Sunflower (*Helianthus giganteus*)

Establishing the identity of the sunflower used as the checkerspot caterpillar host at this site required us to call in reinforcements. Fortunately James R. Allison, botanist extraordinaire and self-described "novice butterflyer," was willing to help. When he visited Cooper's Furnace Day Use Area in early October, he found the plants in full bloom and identified them as *Helianthus giganteus*—commonly called Giant or Tall Sunflower. Although this species ranges throughout the eastern United States, its presence on this steep power cut is somewhat puzzling. Habitat is typically described as swamps, wet thickets, moist woods, and marshes. Jim commented that he is "accustomed to seeing it in moist sunny places with calcareous soil." So how and why did it end up here? Will it continue to thrive? Will the Gorgone Checkerspot population persist over time? Once again, we are left with cliffhangers!

The authors are grateful to Jim Allison for sharing his botanical expertise to this project; and to wildflower expert Jan Midgley, who contributed plants as well as her own wealth of native plant knowledge.

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