







One of the most beleaguered reptiles in the southeast has to be the gopher tortoise. Pineapple Press has published *The Gopher Tortoise A Life History* by Patricia Ashton and Ray Ashton. If the photograph of a male “gopher” on the cover of the hardback edition doesn’t win your heart, then you need a cardiologist! Gopher tortoises are truly endearing creatures, I say, though they don’t occur in our immediate area. (Check out <http://www.ashtonbiodiversity.org/book.php>).

As interesting as vertebrates are to us (considering we *are* one), it’s earth’s invertebrates that really run things. (Consider, for instance, how much we spend trying to control insects.) Insect guides, while nothing new, are now heading in some interesting directions. There must be a dozen or so good butterfly field guides to choose from: the little Golden Guide, the Peterson Guide (for east or west), *The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Butterflies* by Robert Michael Pyle (Alfred A. Knopf, 1981) (highly recommended) and now the acclaimed *Butterflies Through Binoculars, The East* by Jeffrey Glasberg (Oxford University Press, 1999).

When we ID a butterfly, we’ve really only identified one-fourth of the insect (!), the other three-fourths being egg, larva and pupa. Now, field guides to caterpillars have appeared, filling another quarter of the void. Two especially good one are: *Caterpillars in the Field and Garden (A Field Guide to Caterpillars of Eastern North America)* by Allen, Brock and Glassberg (Oxford University Press, 2005) and *Caterpillars of Eastern North America* by David Wagner (Princeton University Press, 2005). For youngsters (and oldsters, too) there’s *Caterpillars* by Amy Barlett Wright (Houghton Mifflin, 1993).

Dragonflies and damselflies are as appealing as butterflies for many of us. Field guides to these aquatic/aerial predators are now filling bookshelves in the nature section of many bookstores. Two good one are: *Dragonflies Through Binoculars* by Sidney Dunkle (Oxford University Press, 2000) and *Stokes Beginner’s Guide to Dragonflies* by Nikula and Sones (Little Brown and Co., 2002).

The field guide that really rang my chimes when I first encountered it in a book store is: *Field Guide to Grasshoppers, Katydid and Crickets of the United States* by Capinera, Scott and Walker (Cornell University Press, 2004). Now that’s field guide diversity! We do live in a great country!

# MISSISSIPPI FORESTRY COMMISSION

## Fire Prevention Message

The Mississippi Forestry Commission is concerned about the potential for catastrophic wildfire events this fall. It is a common fact that September and October are historically our driest months of the year. Even though we have had some afternoon showers and localized rain recently, many parts of the state are still very dry. Depending on where you are located in the state, some areas are anywhere from 10 to 15 inches below normal rain fall for the 2006 calendar year. With dry weather and low fall humidity's on top of a rain fall deficit like we have now, it will not take long for wildfire conditions to create problems for fire crews around the state. Our fire fighting personnel are dedicated, hard working and committed to their job of protecting life & property of Mississippi landowners. We ask that you please be careful with outdoor burning and obey local fire ordinances and county burn bans. Visit our web site for burn ban information and counties under a current burn ban at [www.mfc.state.ms.us](http://www.mfc.state.ms.us) The counties under a burn ban are located in the center of our home page.

Fiscal Year 2006 (July 1, 2005 to June 30, 2006) was a record year for wildfires. Mississippi had 5977 forest fires that burned 124,833 acres. These numbers are approximately 4 times higher than normal. There are two main reasons for the increased number of fires and acres burned. First was a bad little girl named Katrina. She increased the forest fuel load in South Mississippi by 10 times the normal amount of fuel on the forest floor. Downed timber, small and large, was everywhere. The downed timber made it almost impossible for fire crews to attack these forest fires without putting them selves and their equipment at risk. Fortunately, the training and experience paid off and no one was severely injured. Secondly, extreme drought conditions followed hurricane Katrina. We are still experiencing the effects with the persisting rain fall deficit. The effects of both of these conditions are still with us today and that is why the Mississippi Forestry Commission is concerned about the potential for catastrophic wildfires and providing for the safety of Mississippi's landowners. For more information, visit the MFC web site or contact Jimmy Mordica at 601-583-4240 or [jmordica@mfc.state.ms.us](mailto:jmordica@mfc.state.ms.us)

## **A Conversation between God and St. Francis**

[Note: I tried my best to find the author of this piece, even to the point of e-mailing with a friendly Rhode Island Master Gardener who'd passed it around herself. So far as we were able to determine, there may be no way to attribute this properly to the person who wrote it originally. So—enjoy! - *Sheila*]

**God:** Francis, you know all about gardens and nature; what in the world is going on down there in the U.S.? What happened to the dandelions, violets, thistles and the stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect no-maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought, and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long-lasting blossoms attracts butterflies, honeybees, and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of color by now. All I see are patches of green.

**St. Francis:** It's the tribes that settled there, Lord. They are called the Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers "weeds" and went to great lengths to kill them and replace them with grass.

**God:** Grass? But it is so boring; it's not colorful. It doesn't attract butterflies, bees or birds, only grubs and sod worms. It's temperamental with temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want grass growing there?

**St. Francis:** Apparently not, Lord. As soon as it has grown a little, they cut it....sometimes two times a week.

**God:** They cut it? Do they bale it like hay?

**St. Francis:** Not exactly, Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags.

**God:** They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?

**St. Francis:** No sir, just the opposite. They pay to throw it away.

**God:** Now let me get this straight...they fertilize it to make it grow and when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?

**St. Francis:** Yes, sir.



Note from Rich Richardson: Meetings are held at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Meridian every second Monday of the month at 7:00. Trinity is located at 4223 Poplar Springs Drive. Please use the SOUTH driveway on the church property (the one nearer downtown Meridian) and proceed around through the parking lot to the back, where you may enter the building through the double doors.

**Next meeting: September 11, 2006.**

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