

The Creature Initiative

By Kim Smith

“The election for the president of the United States this November 4th is the most crucial election in the past 50 years. The U.S. stands at a precipice. Its emotional, financial, and moral resources have nearly collapsed, having been squandered by the divisive and misguided policies of the recent past.”—Jeffrey Glassberg.

Perhaps you have heard of Jeffrey Glassberg. He holds a Ph.D. in molecular genetics, in 1981 invented DNA fingerprinting, co-founded a biotechnology company (Lifecodes) that commercialized this technique, is past president of Xerces Society, has written myriad books and field guides on butterflies, wildflowers, dragonflies, and caterpillars, graduated in 1993 from Columbia University School of Law, and is an Adjunct Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at Rice University. He is also the director and president of NABA, the North American Butterfly Association.

In his recent essay “The Butterfly Ballot” for the Fall 2008 issue of *American Butterflies Magazine*, Mr. Glassberg describes, on a small scale, one example of the spiraling downhill course of the U.S. When NABA petitioned the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to list Miami Blues (a beautiful tiny blue butterfly, formerly common throughout Florida, now considered one of the rarest insects in the country) as endangered, USFWS rejected the petition. He asks the question, how can a formerly widespread species be more endangered than to be known from only a single colony threatened by habitat disturbances and hurricanes?

A population that values freedom, encourages education and opportunity, and understands science and mathematics is critical to the well being of not only our children and grandchildren, but also all peoples of our nation and of the world.

The majority of Americans believe that the U.S. affords the greatest freedom, provides the greatest opportunity to succeed through creativity and hard work, and its citizens are the best educated. Glassberg sites several studies that beg the question, is this really true? I read in full two of the sources sited and the facts are worth retelling. The article *Public Acceptance of Evolution* (Miller, J.D. *Science*, 313: 765-766) draws a comparison of public acceptance of evolution in 32 European countries and Japan. Forty percent of Americans accept evolution compared to seventy percent of Spaniards and Germans and eighty percent of Danes and Icelanders. Only Turkey ranked lower than the U.S. The authors identify three relevant factors: the acceptance of fundamentalist religious beliefs, the politicization of science, and the widespread ignorance of biology.

Adam Liptak writes in the *Inmate Count in U.S. Dwarfs Other Nations* (*New York Times*, April 23, 2008) that the U.S. has less than 5% of the world’s population, but holds almost a quarter of the world’s prisoners. “The United States comes in first, too, on a more meaningful list from the prison studies center, the one ranked in order of the incarceration rates. It has 751 people in prison or jail for every 100,000 in population. The only other major industrialized nation that even comes close is Russia, with 627 prisoners for every 100,000 people. The others have much lower rates. England’s rate is 151; Germany’s is 88; and Japan’s is 63. The median among all nations is about 125, roughly a sixth of the American rate.” (A. Liptak).

We are like the butterfly emerging from the pupa case. Former caterpillars, voraciously having sustained only ourselves, now vulnerably hanging upside down and out on a limb, poised for transformation to unfold. We can't afford to be vulnerable any longer. Now is the time to push forward and emerge from the chrysalis into the 21st century. Individually and collectively, Americans have the ability to undertake metamorphosis and create a new and beautiful direction for our nation. Protecting butterflies is at the heart of Mr. Glassberg's essay. We can focus our lens to include all creatures and ask the question, which candidate for president and vice-president will best nurture, care for, and protect the interwoven web of life, all life that is our planet Earth?

A subscription to *American Butterflies* and *Butterfly Gardener*, both published quarterly by the North American Butterfly Association, is included with membership to NABA. Visit their website to learn more about how your membership will contribute toward building the premier butterfly garden in the world—www.naba.org.

Kim Smith is an interior and garden designer. Preorders for her forthcoming book *Oh Garden of Fresh Possibilities! ~ Notes from a Gloucester Garden*, Holiday 2008, are available through her website at www.kimsmithdesigns.com and Toad Hall Bookstore at www.toadhallbooks.org. Kim will be happy to respond to readers' questions and comments at kimsmithdesigns@hotmail.com.



Monarch Emerging from Chrysalis