

New Host Plant for the Statira Sulphur (*Aphrissa statira*) in Florida by Adam Skowronski

In 2008, after visiting Butterfly World in Coconut Creek, Florida, I became enthralled with butterflies, and started my first butterfly garden, ripping out all of the sculptured green landscaping plants, to make room for the new butterfly garden to be. In that early stage, besides planting for the Monarch, Zebra Heliconian, Julia and Gulf Fritillary, I was told to plant the Bahama Cassia (*Cassia bahamanesis*) for the Sulphurs.

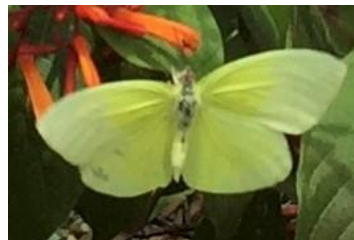
As the plants matured, and butterflies arrived, I became enthralled with searching for their eggs, larvae and chrysalis. My Bahama Cassia bush produced many Orange-barred Sulphurs (*Phoebis philea*) and Cloudless Sulphurs (*Phoebis sennae*), but the plants only lasted a couple years and had to be replaced.



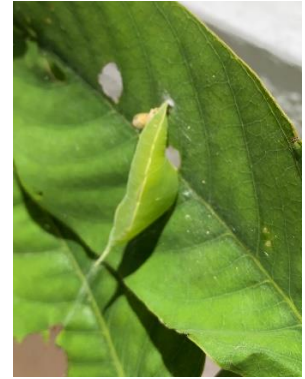
I was then introduced to the Candlestick Senna (*Senna alata*). It grew fast, big and strong, and propagation was easy, just like with Milkweed cuttings. Not only did the Candlestick grow fast, but so did the Sulphur population, much more so than on the Bahama Cassia. Watching the larvae grow in size, and change their coloration as they did, and then again change colors depending on whether they were eating the large yellow Candlestick blossoms or the green leaves, and then back to yellow when they began to pupate. However, observing them you could always see the distinguishing markings of the Orange-barred or Cloudless Sulphur larvae. Here is where the story gets interesting.



Occasionally over the last few years, I saw a lime colored Sulphur in my garden. Of course, I took photographs of it whenever possible. You know what a challenge that can be. Looking in the butterfly books, it seemed to be a Statira Sulphur (*Aphrissa statira*), but when asking fellow enthusiasts for identification, they tended to agree but said they weren't in my area, or I didn't have their host plants.



Fast forward to June 9th, 2020. In assessing the many Sulphur larvae on the Candlestick Senna, I noticed some were minus any black markings as you would see on the Orange Barred or Cloudless larvae. I proceeded to put sleeves over their branches, monitoring them, and eventually ended up with their chrysalis. This too was different from the others. Although it had roughly the same shape, it was not as wide at the middle being somewhat slenderer, and had a lime green to yellowish straight line down the side of the chrysalis. Now, to see and verify what these might be, I clipped the stems with the chrysalids, put them into an enclosure, and waited for them to eclose.



After just four days, I had three nice Sulphurs, which again looked to be Statira, two females and one male, but none of the publications I had, nor any online articles, indicated that the Statira used the Candlestick Senna as a host plant. Plants in the Pea family were noted everywhere as their host plant.



After sharing these details and photos of my findings with fellow members of the Miami Blue Chapter of NABA, it was agreed that I should check with Marc Minno, which I did, and here is his reply:

"Dear Adam,

I greatly appreciate your interesting email and beautiful photos. Those are certainly Statira. In recent years we have been discovering that Statira has a much wider host range than previously thought. In Florida I have found larvae on Cassia spp., Senna surattensis, Dalbergia ecastophyllum, and Calliandra haematocephala. In Cuba they also eat Pithecellobium and Spanish Lime (Melicoccus bijugatus). But Senna alata, Candlestick Senna, is a new host!

Thank you so much for helping to document the biology of Florida's butterflies!

Marc"

Following this discovery and confirmation that these were in fact Statira Sulphur, I have had a few more generations of them on the same Candlestick Senna. In addition to the new host plants named by Marc Minno, a friend of mine also has the Statira using the Coin Vine, (*Dalbergia ecastophyllum*) in her garden, which is also in the Pea family. Their world is expanding, and so is mine.