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**Title:** Checkerspot Butterflies as Charismatic Media Stars: Getting the Word Out from the Grassroots on Global Nitrogen Overdose

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**Abstract:**

Getting the word out to the general public about the global "nitrogen overdose" has proved challenging because of the complexities of the global nitrogen cycle and the insidious nature of cumulative effects on ecosystems. This presentation recounts successful media outreach efforts to bring attention to the nitrogen issue, using the threatened Bay checkerspot butterfly as a "charismatic" focal species and victim. The butterfly is threatened by atmospheric nitrogen deposition that enriches nutrient poor soils derived from serpentinite rock and allows nitrophilous grasses to invade and displace the dazzling wildflower displays that the butterfly depends on. Over the past decade, public and media outreach have resulted in numerous articles in local, regional, and national print media, and extensive TV and radio coverage of the reintroduction of the butterfly into restored habitat in 2007. The grassroots media strategy has several elements of success, including: 1) the public's (and journalists') love of butterflies and wildflowers; 2) field tours to dramatically illustrate the effects of N-deposition; 3) time-tested soundbites, humor, and amiable relationships with journalists; 4) careful fact checking; and 5) political outreach. Through these efforts, journalists effectively told relatively complex stories in creative approachable ways that have educated the public about the nitrogen pollution issue.