

Butterfly Boot Camp: Confusing Fall Skippers

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Dull Firetip



Why are fall
skippers so
confusing?



Why are skippers so confusing?

Generally, they are dull colored

Many are the roughly the same size

When they have patterns, they are often indistinct and wear away easily with age

Many species exhibit sexual dimorphism

Their behavior makes it difficult to observe and photograph them easily (hence the name “skipper”)

Sexual
dimorphism





Multiple ID
Characteristics

ID is typically by a COMBINATION of characters, not a single “nailed it” characteristic.

Often impossible to get beyond *spuh*

The TOTALITY of features gives you a more-or-less confident ID



For good photo ID you need:

A dorsal forewing shot

A dorsal hindwing shot

A ventral forewing shot

A ventral hindwing shot

A face/eye shot

Skipper migration

For a long time it was believed that Monarchs were the only North American butterfly to engage in true (2-way) migration

Some skippers (and some other butterflies) were believed to “irrupt” northward – and die

More recently, evidence is accumulating that skippers like Long-tailed Skipper and others may actually migrate both north and south along the East Coast

The mid-Atlantic can see tremendous buildups of these “migrant” skippers in early-mid fall

The skipper “posture”

Two general postures for the skippers:

1. Spread-wing
2. Vertical Take-off Plane



Spread-wing



VTO Plane

Types of skippers

All skippers are in the family *Hesperiidae*

Spread-winged skippers as a class are our largest skippers, subfamily *Pyrginae*

Grass skippers, subfamily *Hesperiinae*, include some of our smallest North American butterflies (including Maryland's smallest)

A large orange shape on the left side of the slide, consisting of a vertical rectangle on the left and a quarter-circle on the right.


Spread-winged Skippers

Tribe *Erynnini* – the duskywings

Tribe *Carcharodini* – the sootywings

Tribe *Eudamini* – the tailed skippers
(though not all are tailed) and
cloudywings

Tribe *Pyrginae* – the “checkered
skippers” (though not all are
checkered”)

A yellow decorative shape in the bottom right corner, consisting of four curved, parallel lines of varying lengths arranged in a roughly circular pattern.

Duskywings --
Erynnini

Duskywings

Medium-sized (most are about the size of a quarter)

Base color is very dark (almost black) to light brown

Utilize various caterpillar host plants, from legumes to oaks

Includes both univoltine (spring only) and multivoltine (several broods a year) species

What to look for in duskywings



"Bracelet"

"Costal Cell" Spot

Wild Indigo Duskywing

The principal fall species we have in the mid-Atlantic is *Wild Indigo Duskywing*.

Originally a rather uncommon butterfly, it has expanded greatly in both numbers and range with the introduction of the popular “Penngift” crown vetch as a highway planting. Original host was wild indigo, *Baptisia*.

Dx: *Lacks a costal cell spot.*

Moderate sexual dimorphism

Wild Indigo Duskywing

Male



Female

Horace's Duskywing

In normal years, the flight for this species should be over by early fall.

Larval food plant is oaks (red & white)

Dx: *Possesses costal cell spot*

Moderate sexual dimorphism

Horace's Duskywing

Male



Female

Sootywings --
Carcharodini

Common Sootywing (male)



Common Sootywing (female)



Common Sootywing



Long-tails and
Cloudywings –
Eudamini

Long-tails

Some of our largest, most robust skippers

Only one is commonly found in mid-Atlantic in the fall (*Silver-spotted Skipper*) and one is an irregular migrant and not seen every year (*Long-tailed Skipper*)

Generally feed on legumes as caterpillars

No sexual dimorphism

Silver-spotted Skipper

named for the silvery “bird dropping” spot on its ventral hindwing



© Nathan Madison

Silver-spotted Skipper



Long-tailed Skipper

Rare migrant but seen most years



Long-tailed Skipper

Yes, a good percentage of the population is tail-less!



Dorantes Long-tailed Skipper



Cloudywing

One expected fall species here, *Southern Cloudywing*.

Large, robust skippers fond of nectar but often perching on or near the ground.

A very rare cloudywing that occasionally shows up here in the fall is *Confused Cloudywing*. Very little is known about the biology or phenology of this species.

Dx: *Elongated, hour-glass like transparent markings on the dorsal forewings, white or light face and eyering*

Southern Cloudywing



Southern Cloudywing



Confused Cloudywing



Confused Cloudywing



Northern Cloudywing



Checkered-
skippers --
Pyrginae

Common Checkered-skipper



Grass Skippers --
Hesperiinae

Grass Skippers

These are the “typical” skippers, usually small, often drab, almost always frenetic.

Includes some of the most difficult challenges in the skipper group (i.e., the “Three Witches”)

You’re just going to have to content yourself very often with simply “grass skipper”

Least Skipper



Little sexual dimorphism among
Leasts:



Look for the white chassis on
Least Skippers:



© Donna Brunet

Swarthy Skipper



Minimal sexual dimorphism in Swarthies



Once Swarthies get a little wear,
though ...



How about this one?



Eufala Skipper



Fiery Skipper



Fiery Skipper



Whirlabout



Whirlabout – strong sexual dimorphism dorsally



Peck's Skipper



Peck's has little sexual dimorphism;
males are a little brighter dorsally



Tawny-edged Skipper



Tawny-edged Skipper



Crossline Skipper



Crossline Skipper



Faded Crosslines



Sachem -- males



Sachem -- females



Zabulon Skipper



Zabulon Skipper



Clouded Skipper



Clouded Skipper





The Three "Witches"

Females of:

- Little Glassywing
- Dun Skipper
- Northern Broken-dash

Little Glassywing



Little Glassywing



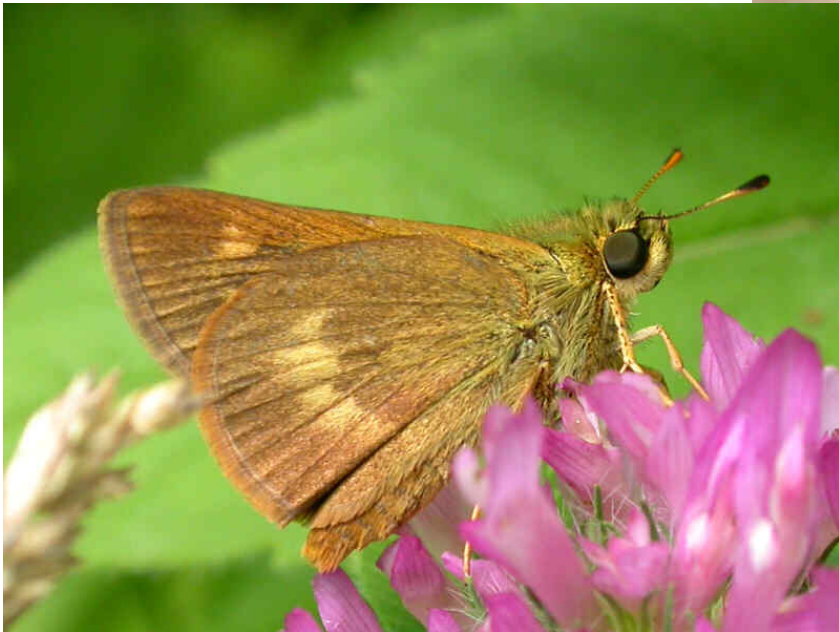
Dun Skipper



Dun Skipper



Southern/Northern Broken-dash



Southern/Northern Broken-dash



Southern Broken-dash



Leonard's Skipper



Leonard's Skipper



Ocola Skipper



Ocola Skipper



Brazilian Skipper



Brazilian Skipper



Brazilian Skipper – this is why they're also known as canna rollers



Finis

