

# Skipper of the summer

BY LINDA KAPPEN

The Sonora Skipper (*Polites Sonora*) is a grass skipper of the family Hesperiidae. Its wingspan can be up to 1.25 inches. The dorsal hind wing (DHW) is a rusty brown with light spots and a darkened border. On the ventral hind wing (VHW) a closely curved semicircle is made up of creamy yellow bars with a single marking in the center toward the base of the wing. The VHW is tan with some slightly different shades.

Being grass skippers, Sonora Skippers will use various grasses, including Idaho fescue as a host plant.

They produce a single generation with the larvae overwintering in the fourth instar (the phase between moltings). The adult can be seen in flight from late May to late August.

Some nectar plants for the Sonora are goldenrod, asters, legumes, thistles, cinquefoils, and other summer wildflowers. Sonoras live in habitats of forest openings, fields, moist mountain meadows, and stream sides, to name a few.

This butterfly has a spotty distribution in most mountain ranges of the Pacific Northwest. In Oregon, it ranges from the Willamette Valley coastal areas to the inland mountains, with the Siskiyou and Cascades supporting the Sonora Skipper locally.

On June 27, 2021, one of the hottest days of that summer, our Siskiyou Field Institute course found us traveling mountain roads near Little Hyatt Dam, where elevations are around 5,000 feet. We headed toward Vesper Meadow and met Jeanine Moy, Vesper Meadow Education Program director, to check in for a quick visit to one of the upland meadows. Jeanine and I started the baseline butterfly list for Vesper Meadow in 2018, so adding to the list is an ongoing project.

We arrived at an upland meadow and walked through an open field of cinquefoil with a forest on one side, a stream on the other, and moist areas through the middle. The riparian area was alive with plants and flowers. Here I observed a joined pair of Sonora Skippers, who patiently allowed me to photograph the fine details of their closed wings. Even though they were cooperative, it was still a challenge to get to eye level with my lightweight point-and-shoot, pocket-size camera. For such a hot day we still observed a few other insects on this upland meadow spot. I was happy the Sonora Skippers were next to the moist riparian area where the stream was still moving with cool water.

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A joined pair of Sonora Skippers. Photo: Linda Kappen.





Areas like Vesper Meadow provide excellent habitat for Sonora Skippers. Photo: Linda Kappen.

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