

***Hesperia ottoe* (W. H. Edwards), 1866**
Ottoa Skipper
(Hesperiidae: Hesperinae)



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SUMMARY

The Ottoa Skipper is a prairie-dependent species that is found on a range of prairie types from southern Manitoba and eastern Montana south along the high plains to north Texas; east through Nebraska and Kansas to central Illinois and southwest Michigan. It appears that the Ottoa Skipper has always been a rare species, and the massive loss of prairie habitat during the past two centuries has made it rarer still. Conversion of prairie to agriculture and to a lesser extent, development has, and continues to be, the greatest threat to both the distribution and abundance of the Ottoa Skipper. The larval hostplants are a range of grasses, including fall witchgrass, little bluestem, and sideoats grama.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Xerces Red List Status: Vulnerable

Other Rankings:

Canada – Species at Risk Act:	Endangered
Canada – provincial status:	MB: Threatened
Mexico:	N/A
USA – Endangered Species Act:	None
USA – state status:	IL, MI, MN: Threatened

NatureServe:
IUCN Red List:

IA, MT: Species of Concern
G3G4
N/A

SPECIES PROFILE

DESCRIPTION

The Ottoe Skipper is a medium sized butterfly in the family Hesperiidae (skippers). Its wingspan is between 1¼ and 1 11/16 inches (3.2 to 4.3 cm). The uppersides of the wings are a warm orange-brown. The male has an obvious dark stigma (black or dark gray) and black borders. The female has more diffuse black borders. The undersides of the wings are yellow-orange, unmarked in males and sometimes with faint markings on females.

TAXONOMIC STATUS

Hesperia ottoe (W. H. Edwards), 1866.

LIFE HISTORY

The Ottoe Skipper is a prairie-dependent butterfly, although it is found on a range of regional prairie types, from undisturbed tall-grass and mixed grass prairies on the Great Plains to sand prairies and old fields with surviving prairie flora near the Great Lakes. The larval hostplants are a range of grasses, including fall witchgrass (*Leptoloma cognatum*), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), and sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*). In Minnesota, Ottoe Skippers have been recorded ovipositing on various forbs, such as blacksamson echinacea (*Echinacea angustifolia*). In these cases, the forbs are not larval hosts: the newly hatched larvae dropped off the flowers to feed on the grasses below.

There is a single brood between June and August, during which period males perch near host plants waiting for females. Eggs are laid singly, and the resultant caterpillars build shelters from grass blades tied with silk an inch or two above the soil surface, within which they live.

Adults are avid nectar feeders and require abundant flowers to maintain a population. Nectar sources include milkweeds (*Asclepias* sp.), vetch (*Vicia* sp.), alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*), bush houstonia (*Houstonia* sp.), purple coneflower, leadplant (*Amorpha canescens*), compassplant (*Silphium* sp.), sunflower (*Helianthus* sp.), and blazing star (*Liatris* sp.). To find sufficient nectar, adults may forage in oak savannah and scrub areas.

DISTRIBUTION

Southern Manitoba and eastern Montana south along the high plains to north Texas; east through Nebraska and Kansas to central Illinois and southwest Michigan.

THREATS

The Ottoe Skipper is a prairie-dependent species. Since European settlers arrived, 98 percent of U.S. mixed grass prairie has disappeared. Conversion of prairie to agriculture and to a lesser extent, development has, and continues to be, the greatest threat to both the distribution and abundance of the Ottoe Skipper. The remaining prairie has often been degraded through grazing, fire suppression, or neglect to the point where it can no longer support populations of this skipper. In other cases, poor timing or too great a frequency of management activities—such as mowing or prescribed fire—has led to loss of hostplants, removal of nectar sources at critical periods, and destruction of larvae.

CONSERVATION STATUS

It appears that the Ottoe Skipper has always been a rare species, and the massive loss of prairie habitat during the past two centuries has made it rarer still. The importance of protecting the remaining prairie habitat is well-recognized by conservation organizations and significant areas of prairie are now protected for wildlife. However, most of these are not managed with butterflies in mind with the result that although the habitat is protected, the Ottoe Skipper is not.

CONSERVATION NEEDS

The over-riding need is to retain prairies and keep the open landscape. To achieve this, vegetation management must be practiced. Further research is needed to clarify the specific seasonal/monthly timing of management, but it is likely that a combination of fire, grazing, and mowing will be necessary. Whichever tool is used, it must be well timed to ensure adequate nectar sources for adults and to minimize the impact on the above ground shelters of larvae. For example, burning may occur every three years, but not in extensive patches. Divide the site into many management units and treat several each year. Adults are strong fliers—they have been recorded traveling up to a mile between suitable patches of habitat—and thus can recolonize burned areas.

RESEARCH NEEDS

Monitoring of known populations should be done to plan prairie management and assess the impacts of any actions. Further studies into appropriate habitat management techniques would be important. Surveys should be done to identify additional populations and assess population status. Given the wide range of this butterfly, life history studies should be done in each region to identify regional differences in ecology and also habitat management.

RESOURCES

CONTACTS

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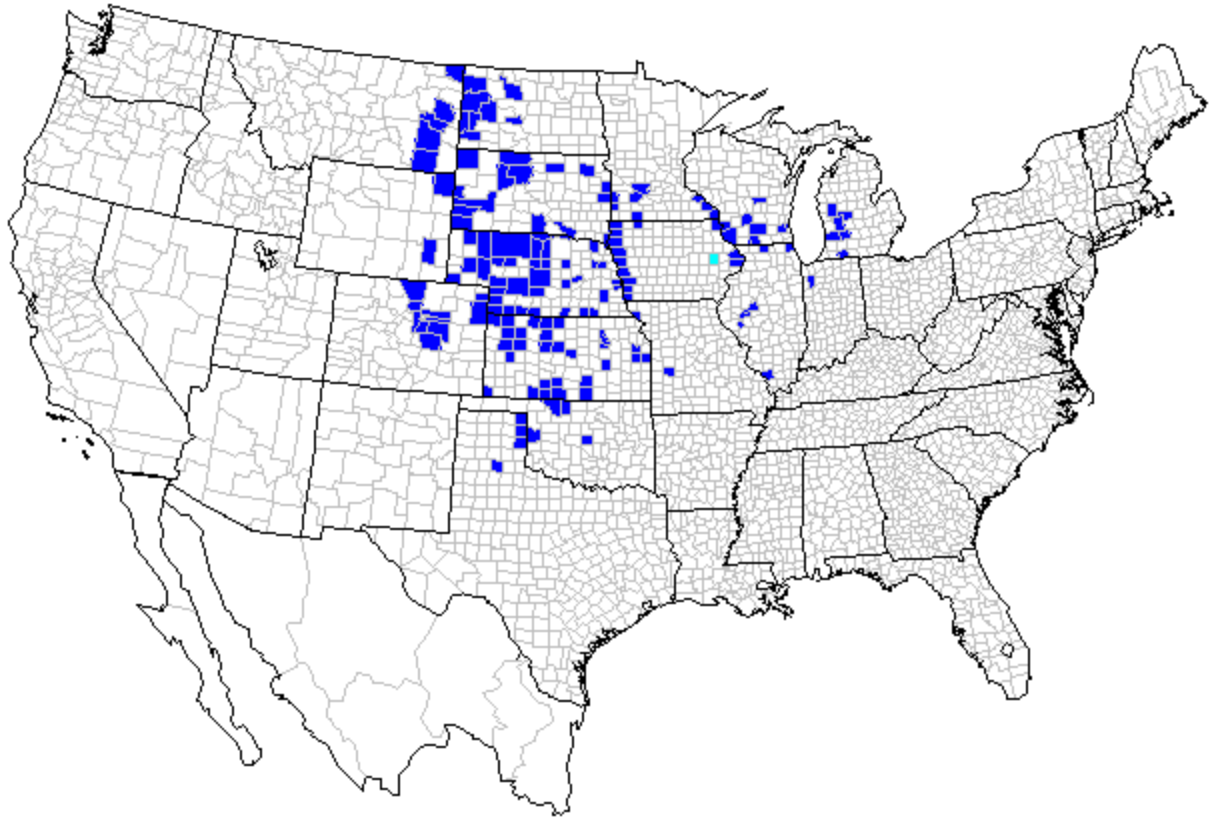
<http://wisconsinbutterflies.org/species/229>

(Accessed 5/10/05)

DISTRIBUTION MAP (U.S. range)

(From: U.S. Geological Survey, Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center.

<http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/distr/lepid/bflyusa/usa/493.htm>; accessed 5/10/05.)



■ Confirmed Records ■ Unconfirmed or Dubious Records ■ Data Not Yet Available