

SPECIES FACT SHEET

Common Name: Yuma Skipper or Giant-Reed Skipper

Scientific Name: *Ochlodes yuma* (Edwards, 1873)

Phylum: Arthropoda

Class: Insecta

Order: Lepidoptera

Family: HesperIIDae

Technical Description:

Ochlodes yuma is a large, < 1.75", tawny skipper with few obvious markings. Males have a narrow, indistinct black margin on the outer edge of both wings dorsally and a long, narrow black stigma on the dorsal fore wing. Females are similar but lack the stigma and may have pale spotbands and black basal smudges on their ventral hind wing (Pyle, 2002, Pyle personal communication, and Pelham personal communication).

Several subspecies of *O. yuma* occur including *O. yuma anasazi* (New Mexico), *O. yuma lutea* (Nevada and Oregon), *O. yuma yuma* (California), and *O. yuma sacramentorum* (California).

The Yuma skipper may be confused with the Woodland Skipper (*O. sylvanoides bonnevilla*) which is relatively plain on the ventral surface and can occupy some of the same habitat; however *O. yuma* is 1.5 to 2 times larger than *O. sylvanoides bonnevilla*, is less heavily marked, has narrower stigmata, and typically has an earlier flying period (Pyle, 2002).

Life History:

In Oregon and Washington *O. yuma* has one flight period from early July to early September, peaking in August (Pyle, 2002).

O. yuma is closely associated with its primary, known host plant *Phragmites australis* (giant or common reed). *P. australis* is sometimes treated as a synonym of *P. communis*. There are two strains of *P. australis* in the Pacific Northwest, one native and one non-native. It is assumed that *O. yuma* populations are associated with native genotypes of *P. australis* but the extent that *O. yuma* may also use the non-native *P. australis* strain as a larval host plant is not currently known (Warren 2005). Pyle (2002) noted adults in a small population of *O. yuma* in Klickitat County, Washington were associated with an ornamental grass (*Miscanthus* spp.).

Males often perch on *P. australis* awaiting females. Females deposit their eggs on or near the host plant. The eggs of *O. yuma* are light green and caterpillar colors are variable and range from light green to tan. The caterpillar head

varies from cream to tan and is bisected by a darker brown vertical stripe. Caterpillars feed on *P. australis*. They also roll up leaves of their host plants to use as shelters (Allen, et al. 2005; Pyle, 2002; Opler, et al. 2006).

Adults nectar on a variety of flowers including thistles and yellow composites (Pyle, 2002).

Range, Distribution, and Abundance:

Historic –

At the species level *Ochlodes yuma* is common in its limited habitat (areas with its host plant) in California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, northern New Mexico, Arizona, and in isolated areas in Oregon and Washington. Oregon and Washington represent the northern end of the Yuma skipper's range. Until 1984 it was known no farther north than Nevada. In 1984 Jonathan Pelham discovered a colony at the Sun Lakes State Park in Grant County Washington. Ray Albright found one colony north of Imnaha in Wallowa County, Oregon in 1985 and another near Summer Lake Oregon in 1986 (Pyle 2002). The butterfly has also been found near the Deschutes River at I-84 in Wasco and Sherman County Oregon. In 2002 the first record of *O. yuma* in Idaho was confirmed (Warren 2005).

Current –

In Oregon *O. yuma* is known from three widely separated areas. First, it is locally common near Summer Lake in Lake County. Second, it is commonly found along the Imnaha River in Wallowa County. Third, it is found along the lower Columbia River in Wasco, Sherman, and Hood River counties. (Warren, 2005 and Pyle, 2002).

According to a Forest Service website *O. yuma* is also known from Klamath county near the Fremont-Winema National Forests; however there are no records to support this assertion (Ross personal communication).

In Washington, *O. yuma* is known from the Sun Lakes below Dry Falls in Lower Grand Coulee in Grant County, and an isolated colony in eastern Klickitat County in gardens behind Maryhill mansion (Warren, 2005 and Pyle, 2002).

According to Pyle (2002) northwest colonies of Yuma Skipper are best referred to as *O.y. lutea* although Warren (2005) has found significant variation between individuals from different sites.

Habitat Associations:

O. yuma is found around reed beds in and around freshwater marshes, streams, oases, ponds, seeps, sloughs, springs, and canals (Pyle, 2002 and Opler, et al. 2006). Adults are almost always found in close association with the primary larval hostplant *Phragmites australis*.

Threats:

As a species *O. yuma* is widely distributed and relatively secure (Opler, et al. 2006). However in Oregon and Washington it is known from only a few populations in three widely separated areas. Site specific threats are unknown but general threats include loss of wetland habitats to urban or agricultural uses, pesticide spraying (especially the use of organophosphates and pyrethroids for mosquito control), and grazing damage to wetland habitat. There is a question about the ability of *O. yuma* to use the non-native strain of *P. australis*; if *O. yuma* are unable to utilize the non-native strain of *P. australis*, then the colonization of *O. yuma* habitat by non-native strains of *P. australis* would likely be a threat to this skipper. However, *O. y. sacramentorum* is known to use the non-native strain of *P. australis* (Pelham personal communication).

Conservation Considerations:

Avoid disturbing established beds of the native *P. australis* at known sites of *O. yuma*.

Discourage pesticide application on or near occupied habitat; if spraying is unavoidable, take precautions to limit inadvertent spray onto individual adults or larvae.

Surveys for *O. yuma* are encouraged (Warren 2005) along the Snake River in Baker and Malheur counties, in the Owyhee River canyon of Malheur County, along the John Day River, and along the Columbia River east of Sherman County in order to more accurately identify its range.

Other pertinent information (includes references to Survey Protocols, etc):**Conservation status**

Heritage Global Rank: G5

Heritage State Rank: Arizona (SNR), California (S3), Colorado (S2S3), Nevada (SNR), New Mexico (SNR), Oregon (S1?), Utah (SNR), Washington (S1), Wyoming (SNR)

State Candidate Species in WA.

Key to Identification of the Species

O. yuma is larger, brighter, and plainer than any other Northwest hesperiine skippers and is normally found only in association in or near beds of giant reed.

Butterfly field guides (such as Pyle 2002) are probably the best source of pictorial “keys” and it is best to refer to a butterfly guide when trying to identify this species.

ATTACHMENTS:

- (1) Survey Protocol**
- (2) List of Pertinent References/Literature/Pertinent or knowledgeable contacts**
- (3) Map of Range and Distribution**
- (4) Photos**

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Survey Protocol

Below is a general survey for butterfly searches that can be adapted to *Ochlodes yuma*. Searches should be conducted by an expert in butterfly identification and all personnel should be trained by an expert before conducting the search.

All sites should be surveyed during the following environmental conditions.

Minimum temperature: Above 60 degrees F.

Cloud cover: Partly sunny or better. On cooler days the sun can play a very important role in getting butterflies to take to the air. On warmer days (above 60 degrees F), direct sunlight is less important, but a significant amount of the sun's energy should be coming through the clouds to help elevate the temperature of basking butterflies.

Wind: Less than 10 MPH. On windy days, butterflies will drop out of the air if they cannot maintain their direction and/or speed of flight.

Time of day: Between 10AM and 6PM. Success is most likely during the warmest parts of the day.

Time of year: Typically late July – late August. Currently occupied sites should be checked before the start of the search as flight times may vary due to weather conditions in the spring and early summer.

Follow this protocol after arriving at each potential site.

1. Approach the site and scan for any butterfly activity, as well as suitable habitat.
2. Fill out all of the site information on your datasheet.
3. Walk through the site slowly (about 5 minutes to walk 100 meters), look back and forth on either side, approximately 20 to 30 feet out. Do best to walk in a path such that you cover the entire site with this visual field, or at least all of the areas of suitable habitat.
4. If you leave the path you are walking to look at a particular butterfly, do your best to return to where you left your path when you resume walking/searching through the site.
5. When a suspected *O. yuma* is encountered, net the butterfly to confirm its identification.
6. Record all data for sites whether butterflies are seen or not. In this way, new sites, as well as overall search effort, are documented.

References

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Personal communication

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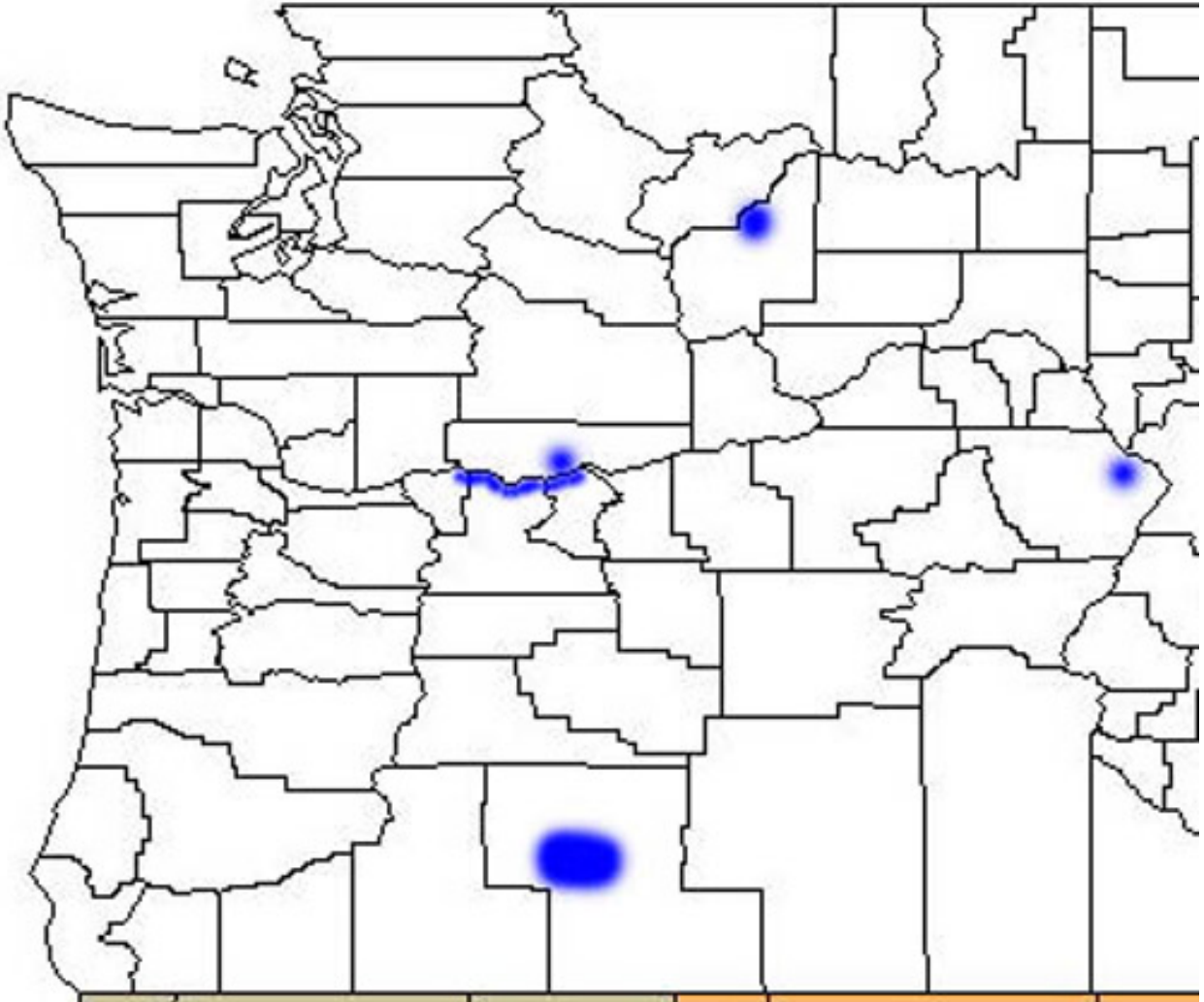
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**Yuma Skipper (*Ochlodes yuma*)
Distribution Map for Oregon and Washington**



Attachment to Species Fact sheet prepared by The Xerces Society.

Yuma Skipper (*Ochlodes yuma*) photos



Photos by Adam Winer
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