

THROUGH THE LEPIDOPTERAN LENS

The Sandhill Skipper

BY LINDA KAPPEN



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The Sandhill Skipper (*Polites sabuleti*), aka Saltgrass Skipper, is a butterfly of the Hesperidae family of Skippers. The Sandhill Skipper is small with a wingspan of up to 1.2 inches. The upper side has dark brown borders and brown to black markings. The underside has a tan background with shades of off-white markings. The veins give the underside a cobwebby appearance.

Various grasses in our area of southern Oregon serve as host plants for this species, including native species of fescue and bromes. Eggs are laid singly on host or nearby plants. Larvae feed on host plants; then the pupae hibernate. Sandhill Skippers can be seen in flight from May to October.

The range for the Sandhill Skipper reaches from Baja north throughout the Pacific Northwest. Sightings are usually uncommon. Habitats include mountain meadows, roadsides, alkali and sage flats, lawns, or parks. Adults nectar on native composites and clover and may visit a variety of garden annuals in some locations.

Some late-season, native, flowering plants at higher elevations in the Siskiyou Mountains could yield a sighting of this small but sharp-looking skipper. Some plants



A male Sandhill Skipper, dorsal view.



A female Sandhill Skipper, dorsal view.



A male Sandhill Skipper, ventral view.



A female Sandhill Skipper, ventral view.

grow by mountain roadsides, an easy place to stop and look. I found this to be true in late August of 2022 as I was driving in a western portion of the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest. Next to the road was a blooming patch of goldenrod where I spent time observing the Sandhill Skipper and some other butterflies, bees, and insects flying excitedly across the bright yellow blooms of the goldenrod, landing for nectar a few moments at a time.

Native plants that flower in late summer, such as goldenrod, rabbitbrush, aster, coneflower, and buckwheat, are important nectar sources for insects. Plants blooming past September are especially important. Looking carefully in these islands of blooms for late-flying insect species is a nice calm activity at the close of summer, marking the beginning of fall, before winter begins in the mountains.

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All photos by Linda Kappen.

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