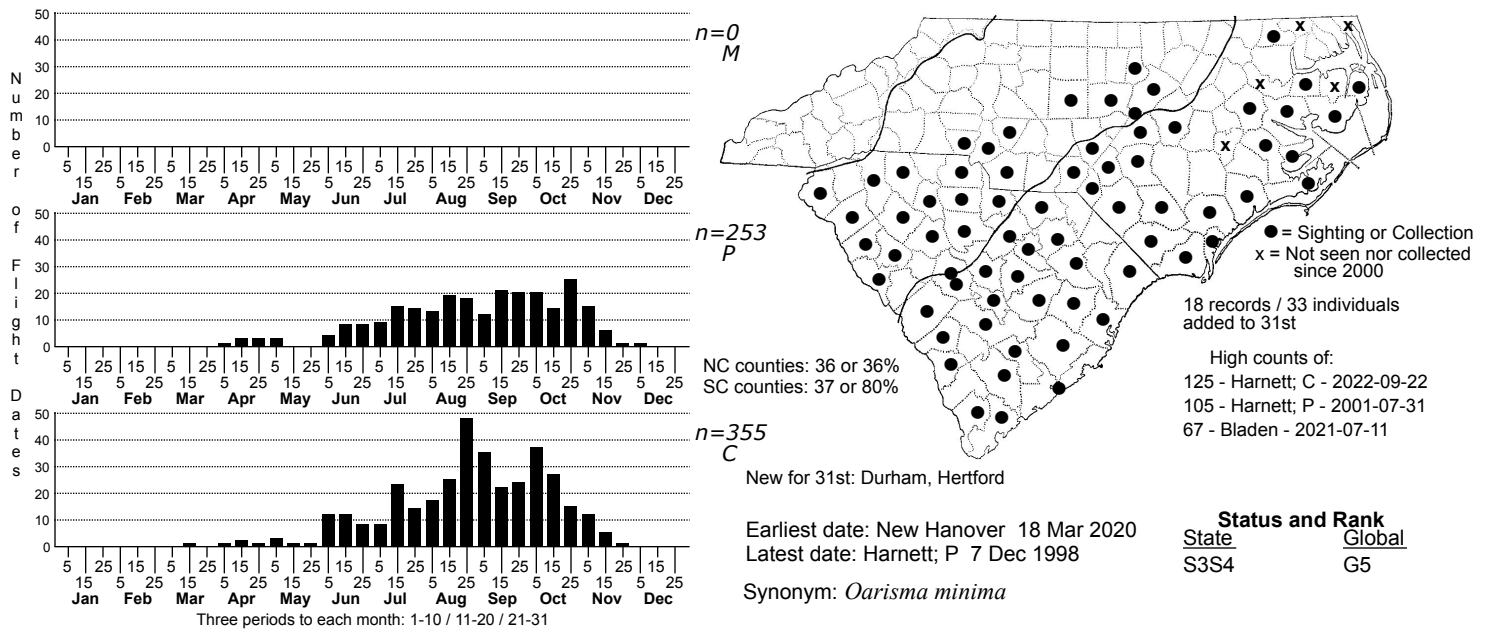


Southern Skipperling *Copaeodes minima*



DISTRIBUTION: The southeastern half of the state, occurring over most of the Coastal Plain and in the southeastern portion of the Piedmont (where a resident in some areas but a stray in others). Absent from most of the Piedmont and all of the Mountains, and apparently much of the northwestern Coastal Plain. NC lies at the northern end of the species' range, though it strays to VA. Randolph County was added to the county list in 2020, and Cabarrus County in 2021, though the species is presumably just a migrant/stray that far to the northwest in the state (though there are breeding populations in nearby Mecklenburg County).

ABUNDANCE: Somewhat variable from year to year. Uncommon to locally fairly common, but easily overlooked, in the extreme southeastern Coastal Plain; uncommon north to the Sandhills, Harnett, and Craven counties; rare in the southern Piedmont and in the Coastal Plain north of Craven County. This apparent scarcity is perhaps in part due to its tiny size, making it easy to overlook; however, up to several dozen individuals can be seen in a few favored fields, including at a few spots in central Harnett County, close to the edge of the Piedmont. The species was shockingly scarce in 2015, with nary a single report from the entire Coastal Plain. There were also just four state reports in 2016, and this suggests that the species is on the decline in NC due to habitat loss and other factors. However, numbers of small species such as this can rebound quickly under excellent conditions, as witnessed by a state record high count by a single observer in Harnett County in 2022, of 125 individuals.

FLIGHT PERIOD: Apparently four broods. A very small brood in April and early May, a small brood from early June into July, and seemingly two much larger broods from early August through November, with a slight "valley" in early to mid-September. Most books indicate two broods at the northern edge of the range, but the flight chart seems to indicate as many as four broods in the state. The species is clearly a "winter-stressed" one; few progeny survive the winter, and it takes several broods the following year to build back the population.

HABITAT: This species favors sunny areas of short grasses, generally less than a foot tall. Its tolerance of habitats is fairly broad, but it generally avoids the wet areas, such as marshes, that are the habitats of the Least Skipper. Habitats in NC include savannas, roadsides, open fields, weedy lawns, and openings in Longleaf Pine (*Pinus palustris*)/scrub oak scrub.

FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS: Bermuda Grass (*Cynodon dactylon*) is the main foodplant, though other grasses are certainly used. The species nectars on many species, but generally within about a foot of the ground.

COMMENTS: This species, as do all tiny species, keeps close to the ground. It has a relatively quick and darting flight like most other skippers, rather than the weak, bobbing flight of the slightly larger but similar Least Skipper. Its apparent absence north of the southern Piedmont counties is probably real, as NC lies at the northern edge of the range. Paul Hart recorded the species often in his yard at Raven Rock State Park in Harnett County, greatly contributing to the surprising (and misleading) number of records from the Piedmont. Recent observations by many people in Wake County and in Mecklenburg County suggest that there are likely resident populations in these areas, as well, especially considering that the Southern Lake Norman butterfly count in the latter county tallied an excellent 16 individuals on August 11, 2013.

There is some recent concern for this species, as it is most frequently found in dry to mesic grassy fields and grassy vacant lots that can be easily cleared or mowed. In addition, its habitats can quickly become overgrown by saplings if not constantly mowed or otherwise kept in a grassy condition. The situation brightened in 2021, with a gratifying 18 reports, including our second highest one-day count of 67 in Bladen County. And there were an excellent 25 state reports in 2022, including the all-time state record tally.