

How to Identify the Poweshiek Skipper

Traditionally, skippers are considered to be relatively hard to identify (compared to other butterflies) because they are small, often similarly marked, and their colors not as flashy as other butterflies. However, by looking at the other butterflies likely to be encountered in this area, it should be relatively easy to identify.

First determine: Is it a moth, a “true butterfly” or a skipper?

- Butterflies and skippers have clubbed antennae—moths do not.
- Skippers have widely separated antennae and the club ends in a point. True butterflies have closely separated antennae and the club is blunt.

In practice, you will soon learn to see the difference easily so you will not need a look at the antennae in order to tell the difference.

The Poweshiek skipper is a “grass skipper.” Grass skippers have a characteristic pose that they use, at least part of the time, which is often described as the “jet fighter pose.”



Poweshiek skipper



Poweshiek skipper
(jet fighter pose)

The Poweshiek skipper is the only grass skipper in this area which has distinct white veins on the underside of its wings, with a background light brown or gray color, and an upper surface that is dark brown with a touch of orange on top.

The following pages show some of the grass skippers that are found in the area, and that are most likely to be confused with the Poweshiek skipper. And while the “jet fighter” pose is characteristic of the grass skippers, do not be fooled if you don’t see it right away. Normally you will only see the underside of the butterflies—like the preceding and following photos on the left side of the page. If you watch a grass skipper for a while, sooner or later it will strike that pose, however.

The **European skipper** does not have the distinct white veins, but can appear grayish, at least from the side. I think worn specimens might be confused for the Poweshiek. Note, however, that from the top you can see light brown with dark brown veins.



European skipper

The **European skipper** may be the butterfly most likely to be confused with the Poweshiek. It is probably less common than the next three, however.



European skipper

The **least skipper** is small and generally light brown. It is easily differentiated from the top—having a light brown triangle surrounded by a black border. From the side it might be harder, but it will not have the distinct gray veins.



Least skipper

The least skipper is very common, especially in wet areas.

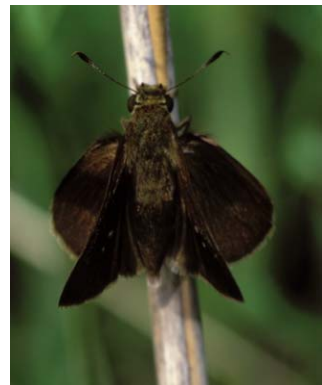


Least skipper

The **dun skipper** might show the dark brown from above (but note the white spots), but should not be easily confused from the side.



Dun skippers



The **Delaware skipper** is a common light brown or yellowish butterfly.



Delaware skippers



Other skippers: There are a number of other common grass skippers in this area, but none of them should be easily confused with the Poweshiek skipper.



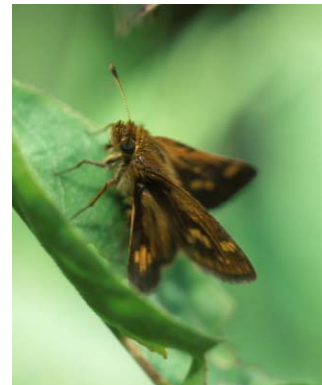
Hobomok skippers



The **hobomok skipper** is found in late May to early June, and is very perky and easy to identify. The **Peck's skipper** is slightly smaller and can be found from late May throughout the rest of the summer.

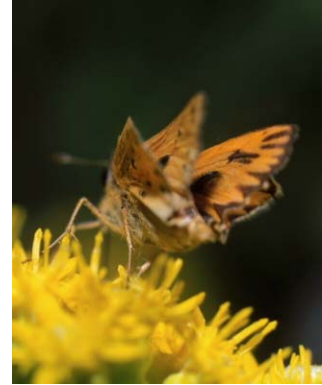


Peck's skippers





fiery skippers



The **fiery skipper** is the only local skipper that is light brown with many darker brown dots (on the underside of the wings). It is most common towards the end of the summer.

Tawny-edged skippers are encountered fairly often, from early spring until late summer.



tawny-edged skippers



Here are some more skippers that you might see. These are not grass skippers—you won't see the jet fighter pose with them. You will not mistake any of them for the Poweshiek skipper.



Common checkered skipper



Wild indigo duskywing



Common sootywing

So there you have the common skippers. Once you learn to key in on them, skippers as a group are fairly easy to identify. There are some moths that could be mistaken for them. “True butterflies” (the butterflies that are not skippers) are also fairly distinctive and should not be easily mistaken for them.



This is the eight-spotted forester—a moth that looks quite a bit like a butterfly.



This moth really does not have a common name. Its scientific name is *Eustixia pupula*.



This orange sulfur is a typical “true butterfly.”

This is sort of a backwards way to learn butterflies. The “true butterflies” are usually larger and more conspicuous, and are learned first. However, this project is about the Poweshiek skipper. It was originally discovered here—in Grinnell, Iowa. As near as we can tell, it was last seen in Poweshiek County in 1917. It is probably not found here anymore, but if it is we want to locate it. If it is not, we want to bring it back.

If you think you see one, let us know right away. We will need to confirm the record—we will send more observers to the site to look for and possibly photograph them. Time is of the essence, since the adult life span is so short. **Do not** capture or kill any of the butterflies. Since the Poweshiek skipper is on Iowa’s threatened species list, it is illegal to do so without a special permit. Capturing this butterfly will be required as a part of the project, but we will leave that up to the experts.

Do not be discouraged if you do not find any Poweshiek skippers. They are very rare—that’s why they need protection. Any information you give us about the other butterflies you find will be useful. And hopefully you will have fun doing the surveys as well.