A Pocket Guide to *Common Kansas Butterflies*

By Jim Mason

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Eggs, larva and chrysalis of Black Swallowtail

Cover Photo: Regal Fritillary
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Introduction

Insects are the most numerous and successful group of organisms on Earth, but most of them lack a "fan base." In fact, many are downright despised by people! However, butterflies are a type of insect that most people find appealing. Their beautiful colors, close association with flowers, intriguing behaviors - and their inability to bite us - combine to make them ambassadors, of sorts, for their six-legged kin.

This pocket guide covers 61 of the more common and interesting species of the 190 species of butterflies recorded within Kansas' borders. If you come across a butterfly that does not quite look like what is shown here, it may well be a different species. A list of comprehensive butterfly references is in the back of this guide. Each species account includes the following:

***Range:** Delineates the part of Kansas where you are likely to see the species. Many elected for this pocket guide have been found statewide, but the strong prairie winds can blow these small creatures into atypical locations. The complete state list includes over 70 erratics, which may show up after weather events like hurricanes that come inland and sweep up normally tropical species and drop them here. Under ordinary conditions though, most butterflies will reside in the habitat where their caterpillar host plant is found, which is always good to keep in mind when trying to make an identification.*

***Wingspan:** Gives the width from tip to tip when the wings are held out flat. It is given as a range rather than a fixed dimension. Adult size is*

determined by how well the caterpillar eats, along with other factors. Butterflies do most of their eating as caterpillars, which may be 3,000 times their birth weight before pupation! But some individual caterpillars don't get to eat as much as others, thus the variance in wingspan. Size range is still an important clue when identifying butterflies. For instance, if you spot a mostly orange and black butterfly whose wingspan is less than 2.3", it is probably not a Monarch.

***Flight Time:** Tells when you are likely to see adults of that species. Many butterflies are seen as adults only during a limited time span. Others fly for a longer span during the year or may have multiple generations in a year. Widely-distributed species will often fly earlier or later in the season in the southern or eastern part of Kansas.*

***Host Plant:** Lists some or all of the plants used for food by the caterpillars. An adult butterfly's mouth is a long, thin tubular structure called a proboscis which is used to sip liquid foods, such as flower nectar. A caterpillar, however, has chewing mouthparts and eats vegetation, usually from only a few plant species known as its host plant.*

Regal Fritillaries on Butterfly Milkweed

Butterflies vs. Moths

The easiest way to tell a butterfly from a moth is to look at the antennae. Each butterfly antenna ends in an enlarged structure called a club. Moth antennae may be pointed or feathery-looking but never have a club on the end. There are some day-flying moths and some that are quite colorful, so neither activity period nor colorful appearance is adequate to distinguish moths from butterflies.

Observing Butterflies

Butterfly watching is best done with a pair of close-focusing binoculars. Most binocular makers offer models with close-focusing capability, but when choosing a pair make sure you test them out before buying. If you can look through them and focus on your shoelaces, that is a good standard to go by. With this special tool, you can stay outside a butterfly's discomfort zone and observe it without scaring it away. This will open up a whole world of behavior you would otherwise never witness. The binoculars will also allow you to appreciate many details of the insects and flowers they visit you may have overlooked before.

A butterfly is most vividly colored right after it has come out of its chrysalis. Such individuals are referred to as "fresh." Over the few short days or weeks of its adult life those colors will fade and the wings may become damaged by storms, accidents or narrow escapes from predators. This can make a familiar species appear to be something else.

When butterflies gather to sip from damp spots on the ground for the moisture and/or minerals present, this is called "puddling." Some species will navigate to the highest point in their landscape as a way to meet each other. This is called "hill-topping." Females of some species will lead the males in a barnstorming race across the landscape, perhaps as a way to test their fitness as mates.

A butterfly develops through four stages of growth during its life - a process called complete metamorphosis. It starts from an egg, which hatches into a caterpillar. Caterpillars have five growth stages, called instars. Each instar may look different from the others, depending on the species. The third growth stage is the chrysalis, from which emerges the winged adult, a butterfly.

Skippers are the most numerous butterfly family in Kansas, with 63 different species. Many are difficult to distinguish in the field. They are the "little brown birds" of the butterfly watching world! Not only are they small, most of them have very subtle variances in their marks and similar orange/tan/yellow coloration. In addition, some are sexually dimorphic (different male and female forms). Common to all is a small hair-like extension of the antennal club known as the apiculus, which easily identifies the insect as a skipper of some sort, even if you cannot pin down the exact species. This pocket guide only covers 16 of the Kansas skippers. Serious butterfly watchers who want to master identification of the skippers are strongly encouraged to obtain one of the comprehensive butterfly guides listed on page 67.

While watching butterflies, don't pass up opportunities to observe other flower visitors you may encounter. Some may be seeking food from the plants (bees, flies and other pollinating insects) and some may be predators (crab spiders and assassin bugs). The micro-world of insects is a fascinating place to explore!

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Gray Copper on Daisy Fleabane

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■ *Pipevine Swallowtail*

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Pipevine Swallowtail

Battus philenor

Range: Southeast 1/4
Wingspan: 2.7 – 4"
Flight Times: Multiple flights, April – October
Host Plants: Pipevines (*Aristolochia sp.*) Larvae feed gregariously.
Comments: The Pipevine Swallowtail sets the standard for bad taste in large, dark butterflies in Kansas. Their caterpillars sequester chemicals from the pipevine host plant that make them noxious to birds. Other dark swallowtails and the Red-spotted Purple mimic this coloration to give them some protection from predation by birds. The Pipevine Swallowtail, however, has a single peripheral row of large orange spots on the under hindwing, whereas the mimics have either two rows and/or additional spots near the body. The bright orange eggs are laid in groups.

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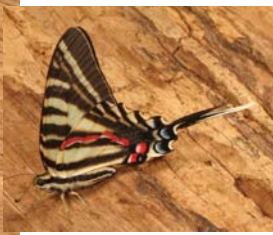

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■ *Zebra Swallowtail*

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Zebra Swallowtail

Eurytides marcellus

Range: Southeast 1/4
Wingspan: 1.9 – 3"
Flight Times: 2-3 flights, March – October
Host Plants: Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*).
Comments: The Zebra Swallowtail cannot be confused with any other local species, but there is variance in size and subtle differences between the spring and summer forms. Spring forms have shorter tails and two red spots on each hindwing rather than one. The range of this gorgeous swallowtail is limited by its extreme host plant specificity. Their caterpillars feed solely on the foliage of pawpaw trees, an understory tree found in eastern woodlands. In Kansas, that tree is found only in the southeast. In good light, notice the "white" stripes actually have a bluish tint. Flight is usually only a few feet above the ground. Groups of Zebras can sometimes be found puddling at muddy spots near streams.

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■ *Black Swallowtail*

Black Swallowtail

Papilio polyxenes

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 2.7 – 4"
Flight Times: Multiple flights, May – November
Host Plants: Various species in the Carrot Family
Comments: This species is sexually dimorphic (different male and female forms). The spots in the inner row on the upper forewing of males are much larger than those of females, and females have a large area of blue blush on their upper hindwings. This is the most commonly encountered swallowtail in Kansas, due in no small part to our widespread planting of host plants in gardens and home landscapes. One can still have dill for the herb shelf and carrots for the table, and yet also raise Black Swallowtail caterpillars, by planting a row of fennel and moving any caterpillars that show up on the dill or carrots to the fennel. Photos of the eggs, larva and chrysalis are on the index pages of this Pocket Guide.

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■ *Giant Swallowtail*

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Giant Swallowtail

Papilio cresphontes

Range: East 1/2
Wingspan: 3.7 – 5.5"
Flight Times: 2 flights, April – October
Host Plants: Various species in the Citrus Family
Comments: The Giant Swallowtail is seen in Kansas either as a southern stray or in association with its local host plant, prickly ash (*Zanthoxylum americanum*), a thicket-forming shrub found in eastern woodlands. This butterfly is considered an agricultural pest in Florida because it uses citrus trees for host plants. It is easily recognized by its very large size and the wide, yellow stripe that is continuous across both upper forewings. All swallowtail caterpillars have bright red or orange "horns" they can pop out of their foreheads when alarmed. This structure, called an osmeterium, is an intriguing defensive mechanism which, in addition to its startling, sudden appearance, releases a distinctive odor.

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Eastern Tiger Swallowtail

Papilio glaucus

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Range: East 2/3
Wingspan: 2.5 – 4.5"
Flight Times: 2 flights, March – October
Host Plants: Various trees, including ash, cherry and apple
Comments: The Eastern Tiger Swallowtail is fond of flying high in trees, where the female lays her eggs on leaves in the upper branches. It is a spectacular visual treat when one comes down to eye level to sip nectar at flowers. Groups may be seen puddling on damp ground. Some females are not yellow but nearly black; however, in good light the tiger stripes can still be faintly seen. Dark form females are easily distinguished from other species by their large size and absence of white spots on the abdomen. Like all of Kansas' swallowtails, it overwinters in a distinctive chrysalis which is reminiscent of a lineman working on a telephone pole. The chrysalis is attached by the tip of the tail to any solid object with the head end up, and leans at an angle away from that object, suspended by a silk "lineman's belt."

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■ *Checkered White*

Checkered White

Pontia protodice

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.2 – 1.8"
Flight Times: Multiple flights, March – November
Host Plants: Various species in the Mustard Family
Comments: The Checkered White is a native species and more commonly uses weedy plants for host plants than the introduced Cabbage White. It has more dark markings on it, top and bottom, than the uniformly plain Cabbage White and has prominent streaking on the under hindwings.

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Cabbage White

Pieris rapae

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.2 – 1.8"
Flight Times: Multiple flights, February – November
Host Plants: Various species in the Mustard Family
Comments: The Cabbage White has a plain yellow under hindwing and only a few dark marks on the wings, in contrast to the "checkered" Checkered White. Also notice the dark upper forewing tip. Males have only one upper forewing spot, while females have two. The Cabbage White was introduced from Europe during the 19th century and rapidly spread across the continent. It may become a garden pest locally and is occasionally seen in open plant nurseries during winter.

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Clouded Sulphur

Colias philodice

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.1 – 2.1"
Flight Times: Multiple flights, March – December
Host Plants: Various species in the Legume Family
Comments: This is Kansas' most common yellow butterfly. Fresh individuals have a thin pinkish fringe on the wings. Clouded Sulphurs do not have any orange on the upperwings, while Orange Sulphurs typically do. Identification can be a challenge, though, because Clouded Sulphurs interbreed with Orange Sulphurs, with confusing results for the butterfly watcher. White form females are not uncommon, and may be separated from other white butterflies by the dark outer wing edges. Summer individuals are larger than those seen in spring or fall.

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Orange Sulphur

Colias eurytheme

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.3 – 2.3"
Flight Times: Multiple flights, March – December
Host Plants: Various species in the Legume Family
Comments: This species is also known as the alfalfa butterfly, because alfalfa is both a nectar plant and a preferred host plant. It is slightly larger than the Sleepy Orange with more diffuse markings on the underwings and its flight is more leisurely. The small dark mark on the upper forewing is rounded into an oblong dot in both the Orange and Clouded sulphurs. The Orange Sulphur interbreeds with the Clouded Sulphur, and hybrids are often seen in summer. White form Orange Sulphur females look much like white form Clouded Sulphurs.

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■ *Cloudless Sulphur*

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Cloudless Sulphur

Phoebis sennae

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.8 – 2.7"
Flight Times: Multiple flights, July – December
Host Plants: Wild Senna, Partridge Pea and related legumes
Comments: Cloudless Sulphurs re-colonize Kansas each year from resident populations in the southern U. S.. Individuals begin showing up in Kansas in mid-summer. It is noticeably larger than other yellow butterflies seen in Kansas, and the color of the wings appears much lighter and brighter. The male upperwings are usually unmarked and light yellow, while the females have a row of small dark spots on the edge. Females will have several dark marks on their underwings and some are white, nearly greenish below. The flight is rapid and direct, usually at eye level or higher.

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Sleepy Orange

Abaeis nicippe

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Range: Statewide except northwest corner
Wingspan: 1.1 – 1.9"
Flight Times: 3 flights, May – October
Host Plants: Wild Senna and Partridge Pea
Comments: The Sleepy Orange is slightly smaller than an Orange Sulphur. Note the absence of eye spots on the underwings. The small dark spot in the center of the upper forewing is linear rather than rounded, suggesting a closed or "sleepy" eye instead of an open one. This "sleepy" eye is visible from below only when the wings are held slightly spread; appearing as a short, black dash in the center of the forewing. The fall form of the Sleepy Orange has darker mottling on the under hindwing. An alarmed individual will fly rapidly and erratically toward cover.

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■ *Little Yellow*

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Little Yellow

Pyrisitia lisa

Range: East 2/3
Wingspan: 1.1 – 1.7"
Flight Times: Multiple flights, May – November
Host Plants: Wild Senna and Partridge Pea
Comments: The Little Yellow is most easily recognized by its small size. The bright, unmarked yellow of the upperside with black outer margins is distinctive when seen in flight. It generally perches with its wings closed, as do all sulphurs. The underside is greenish-yellow with various spots, like larger sulphurs. It is usually seen flying close to the ground in open areas.

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Dainty Sulphur

Nathalis iole

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 0.7 – 1.3"
Flight Times: Multiple flights, April – November
Host Plants: Various species in the Aster Family
Comments: Kansas' smallest sulphur, the Dainty is often found flying low to the ground in barren vacant lots where its weedy host plants (especially native marigolds) are common. The wide, mid-wing black line on the upperside is a good field mark noticeable only in flight since they perch with their wings held closed. They may be observed very late in the season when winter is slow in coming.

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■ *Southern Dogface*

Southern Dogface

Zerene cesonia

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.7 – 2.5"
Flight Times: 2 flights, March – November
Host Plants: Various species in the Legume Family
Comments: The Southern Dogface is an uncommon migrant in Kansas. It is larger than Orange or Clouded sulphurs and is a brighter yellow above with a slightly hooked forewing tip. Males have solid black forewing tips while females have light splotches in theirs. The "dog face" is on the upper forewing and may be seen on perched individuals when the wings are held slightly open.

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■ *Gray Copper*

Gray Copper

Lycaena dione

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.2 – 1.7"
Flight Times: 1 flight, May – July
Host Plants: Docks (*Rumex sp.*)
Comments: Look for Gray Coppers in low, wet grassy habitats. Unlike the Bronze Copper, it may also be found in drier habitats such as railroad right of ways. Milkweed is a favorite nectar plant. Females have several dark spots on their upper forewings while males have only a couple. The underside of both wings is light whitish-gray with several small black spots. There is a vivid orange marginal band on the hind wings above and below.

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■ *Bronze Copper*

Bronze Copper

Lycaena hyllus

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.2 – 1.6"
Flight Times: 2 or more flights, May – October
Host Plants: Docks and knotweeds
Comments: Bronze Coppers stay close to damp habitats such as swales, roadside ditches and margins of ponds and streams. Smartweed is a favored nectar plant. These butterflies are most easily distinguished from Gray Coppers by the orange on the under forewings. Their flight time extends much later in the season than Gray Coppers. Male upperwings are mostly brown washed with purple and have a few small dark spots, while females have a large area of orange in the upper forewings and more numerous spots.

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■ *Coral Hairstreak*

Coral Hairstreak

Satyrium titus

Range: East 3/4
Wingspan: 0.9 – 1.4"
Flight Times: 1 flight, June – July
Host Plants: Various trees, including plum and cherry
Comments: Look for Coral Hairstreaks in brushy fields and thickets in early summer. Butterfly milkweed is one of their preferred nectar sources, and finding the two together is a beautiful sight. Dogbane (*Apocynum sp.*) is another favored nectar plant. Upperwings are mostly light brown, and underwings are light gray with several small white-edged black spots. They have a row of small red/orange spots along the hindwing margin, above and below. This row of spots below may extend across the forewings also in females. Coral Hairstreaks do not have tails (hairstreaks).

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Gray Hairstreak

Strymon melinus

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 0.8 – 1.2"
Flight Times: Multiple flights, March – November
Host Plants: Many different plants in different families
Comments: The Gray Hairstreak is Kansas' most common hairstreak. It may be found nectaring in a wide variety of habitats. Look for the tails, the plain gray underwings with the narrow, tri-colored band of orange, black and white crossing both wings and the orange eyespot with a black center on the rear edge of the hindwing. Compared to the Gray Copper, the upperwings are plain gray without any spots, and the rear edge of the hindwing has a single orange eyespot rather than a band of orange. The upper surface of the abdomen of males is pale orange while female abdomens are all gray. Also note the orange on the forehead and the leading edge of the forewings. It is often seen basking with wings open.

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■ *Juniper Hairstreak*

Juniper Hairstreak

Callophrys gryneus

Range: East 2/3
Wingspan: 0.7 – 1.2"
Flight Times: 2 flights, March – August
Host Plants: Eastern Red Cedar
Comments: Although small, the Juniper Hairstreak is one of Kansas' most attractive butterflies, and very easily recognized. They are usually found on and around cedar trees, which are the host plant. Shake a tree's branches and you may flush out a few. Watch for them nectaring near cedars, particularly on milkweeds. They typically perch with their wings closed, displaying the olive green camouflage of the underwings, set off by bands of cinnamon brown edged in white. The legs and antennae are zebra striped and the black antennal club has a dot of orange on the end.

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■ *Reakirt's Blue*

Reakirt's Blue

Echinargus isola

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 0.6 – 1.0"
Flight Times: Multiple flights, April – November
Host Plants: Various members of the Legume Family
Comments: The underwing pattern of the Reakirt's Blue is "busier" and the background color is darker compared to Eastern Tailed-Blues and the Azures. Look for the median row of white-ringed black spots on the underside of the forewings, two dark spots on the rear edge of the upper hindwings and the absence of tails or any orange marks on the back edge of the hindwings. Males show an overall blue color above, while females only have a small amount of blue near the base of their otherwise dark upperwings. The smaller Western Pygmy Blue (not illustrated) does not have the median row of black spots on the under forewing.

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■ *Eastern Tailed-Blue*

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Eastern Tailed-Blue

Cupido comintas

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 0.6 – 1.0"
Flight Times: 3 flights, April – November
Host Plants: Various members of the Legume Family
Comments: A common behavior of this species and other hairstreak butterflies is to slowly move the hind wings up and down when perched. This is a distraction display which animates the eyespots on the rear wings and the antenna-like tails so a bird predator will hopefully strike there instead of the head. This is the only Blue in our area with tails. In worn or older individuals with the tails missing, look for the 2-3 orange spots near the rear edge of the hindwings to distinguish it from the Azures. It may often be seen puddling in groups on damp ground. Their caterpillars, like the caterpillars of other blues, are attended to and protected by ants. The caterpillars reward the ants by secreting droplets of honeydew.

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Spring Azure & Summer Azure

Celastrina ladon & Celastrina neglecta

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 0.7 – 1.4"
Flight Times, Spring Azure: 1 flight, March – May
Flight Times, Summer Azure: 3 flights, May – October
Host Plants: Dogwood, New Jersey Tea and other woody plants
Comments: Spring Azures appear earlier than other local butterflies, aside from species that overwinter as adults. Azures have unmarked, light-blue upperwings but female upper forewings have wide dark edges. The upperwings are seldom seen when perched. The underwings are white with a variable number of small black spots, but have neither eyespots nor any orange marks on the trailing edges. These two species can only be distinguished in the field by the calendar date, but they may still overlap in May. A fresh individual in May would most likely be a Summer Azure. Azures often puddle in large groups. Their slug-like caterpillars feed on the flowers, buds and fruits of their host plants.

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■ *American Snout*

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American Snout

Libytheana carinenta

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.2 – 1.9"
Flight Times: 2 flights, May – October
Host Plants: Hackberry
Comments: The bold black, orange and white colors on the upper wings may bring to mind a Painted Lady, but the long labial palps extending in front of the head readily separate the American Snout from all other local species. Also note the smaller size and distinctive squared-off forewing tips. This species' abundance varies greatly each year, depending on weather conditions in the southern U.S., where the first generation originates.

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■ *Variegated Fritillary*

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Variegated Fritillary

Euptoieta claudia

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.5 – 2.6"
Flight Times: Multiple flights, April – November
Host Plants: Several, including violets, passion vines and pansies
Comments: The Variegated Fritillary is Kansas' most common fritillary. The upperwings resemble those of a Great Spangled Fritillary, but note the wide, pale yellow median band crossing both wings, visible from above and below. The Variegated is also much smaller than a Great Spangled and has no large silver spots on the under hindwings. It is very conspicuous in prairies early in the season, but may be found nectaring almost anywhere by late summer.

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■ *Great Spangled Fritillary*

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Great Spangled Fritillary

Speyeria cybele

Range: Northeast 2/3
Wingspan: 2.6 – 3.5"
Flight Times: 1 flight, May – September
Host Plants: Violets
Comments: The Great Spangled Fritillary is a Monarch-sized light orange butterfly with large silver spots on the underside of the hind wings. In contrast to the Regal Fritillary, both upperwings are orange and the dark lines on the upper forewings have more of a chain mail look. Males emerge in June, about a week before the females. Males die shortly after mating. Females may fly through the rest of the summer into early fall.

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■ *Regal Fritillary*

Regal Fritillary

Speyeria idalia

Range: Statewide, rare west 1/2
Wingspan: 2.9 – 3.8"
Flight Times: 1 flight, June – September
Host Plants: Prairie violets, such as *Viola pedata*
Comments: Regal Fritillaries reside only in pristine tallgrass prairie containing the host plant. However, much of that habitat nationally has been lost to development and agriculture, and their numbers have declined. Fortunately, much of Kansas' tallgrass prairie remains, and good numbers of this species are still present. Males emerge first in June, with females emerging later. Both may often be found around the Fourth of July. Males die soon after mating, but females may live until early fall. The dark upper forewing tip of the female is the easiest way to separate the sexes in the field.

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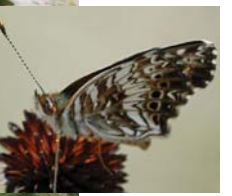

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■ *Gorgone Checkerspot*

©Larry Armstrong

Gorgone Checkerspot

Chlosyne gorgone

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.0 – 1.7"
Flight Times: Multiple flights, April – October
Host Plants: Various species in the Aster Family. Larvae feed gregariously.
Comments: The Gorgone Checkerspot is common across Kansas. The best way to recognize it is by the median transverse band of black-bordered white cells on the under hindwing. These cells have very jagged outlines, giving this band a "shattered glass" look. On the upper side, small pale chevrons in the dark band on the rear edge of the hindwings will distinguish it from the Silvery Checkerspot.

©Betsy Betros

©Greg Sievert

■ *Silvery Checkerspot*

©Greg Sievert

Silvery Checkerspot

Chlosyne nycteis

Range: East 1/2
Wingspan: 1.3 – 1.6"
Flight Times: Multiple flights, May – August
Host Plants: Various species in the Aster Family. Larvae feed gregariously.
Comments: In the eastern half of the state, the Silvery Checkerspot can be confused with the Gorgone, but the cells in the transverse, white median band on the under hindwing have even, rounded borders, unlike the jagged borders of the Gorgone. To distinguish this from the Pearl Crescent, look at the submarginal row of dark dots on the upper hindwings, of which at least a few will have white centers on a Silvery Checkerspot. The base of the upper hindwing is nearly all dark on both this and the Gorgone Checkerspot, unlike the reticulated pattern on a Pearl Crescent.

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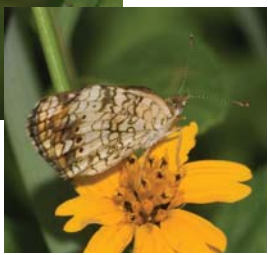

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■ *Phaon Crescent*

Phaon Crescent

Phyciodes phaon

Range: Southeast 1/2
Wingspan: 0.8 – 1.3"
Flight Times: 2 flights: June – July, September – October
Host Plants: Fog fruit (*Phyla sp.*)
Comments: The Phaon Crescent's upper forewings have a transverse, crooked, cream-colored median band. The under forewings, when visible, have a bold calico pattern which distinguishes it from the Pearl Crescent. The Phaon Crescent is local in distribution and found in close association with the host plant, which grows along wetland edges.

©Betsy Betros

female top,
male bottom

©Betsy Betros

■ *Pearl Crescent*

Pearl Crescent

Phyciodes tharos

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.0 – 1.6"
Flight Times: Multiple flights, April – November
Host Plants: Various species in the Aster Family.
Comments: The Pearl Crescent is one of the most common butterflies in the state, due primarily to its generalist strategy on choosing host plants. The under hindwings of males are plainly marked compared to females. Look midway along the outer margin of the under hindwing for the black-bordered white crescent that gives the species its name. On the upper hindwing, note the area at the base of the wing is not predominantly dark like on the checkerspots and none of the small dark spots in the submarginal row have white centers.

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©Greg Sievert

■ *Question Mark*

Question Mark

Polygonia interrogationis

©Greg Sievert

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.9 – 2.5"
Flight Times: Potentially year-round
Host Plants: Elm and hackberry
Comments: Question Marks overwinter as adults. Like the Eastern Comma, overwintering Question Marks have upper hindwings that are mostly orange. The summer generation has mostly dark upper hindwings. Look for the silvery "squiggle + a dot" in the center of the under hindwing. It is larger than the Comma, with longer tails and a smoother outline to the forewings. It is one of the few species in Kansas that may be seen flying on warm winter days. It rarely visits flowers but is attracted to carrion, scat, over-ripe fruit and puddles on damp earth.

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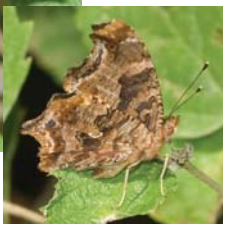

■ *Eastern Comma*

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Eastern Comma

Polygonia comma

©Betsy Betros

Range: Northeast 1/2
Wingspan: 1.6 – 2.3"
Flight Times: Potentially year-round
Host Plants: Nettles and hops
Comments: The scalloped wing edge of the Eastern Comma easily separates it from the Emperors, and the smaller tails separate it from the Question Mark. Commas overwinter as adults. That generation has mostly orange upper hindwings, while those of the summer generation are mostly dark. The underside of the hind wing has only a silvery squiggle, without the additional dot of the Question Mark. Its range in Kansas is much less than that of the Question Mark.

©Thane Rogers

■ *Mourning Cloak*

©Thane Rogers

Mourning Cloak

Nymphalis antiopa

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.6 – 2.3"
Flight Times: 2 flights: spring and fall
Host Plants: Various trees, including willow, cottonwood, elm and hackberry. Larvae feed gregariously.
Comments: Although overwintering adults may be seen flying on warm winter days, those individuals usually have faded and tattered wings. The subtle beauty of a Mourning Cloak's markings is best appreciated in a freshly-emerged individual of the summer generation. Watch for the new hatch in early June. These will fly briefly and then aestivate (enter summer hibernation). They will then feed again in fall before hibernating. These individuals may live 10 months as an adult, making it Kansas' longest-lived butterfly species.

©Greg Sievert

■ *American Lady*

American Lady

Vanessa virginensis

©David Welfelt

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.6 – 2.3"
Flight Times: Adults immigrate from the southwest, then 2 local flights, March – November
Host Plants: Pussytoes and Pearly Everlasting
Comments: The upper hindwing eyespots of the American Lady are not clearly separated from each other like those of the Painted Lady, and the under hindwing has only two large eyespots instead of 4-5 small ones.

©Bob Gress

©Thane Rogers

Painted Lady

Vanessa cardui

©Larry Armstrong

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.7 – 2.6"
Flight Times: Adults immigrate from the southwest, then 2 local flights, March – November
Host Plants: Many different plants in different families
Comments: The Painted Lady is found nearly worldwide, making it the most widely distributed of all butterfly species. For that reason, it is also known as the Cosmopolitan. Its wide usage of different host plants helps make that possible. Note the row of small eyespots on the under hindwing, in contrast to only two on the American Lady. The Painted Lady, like the Hackberry Emperor, has a large black area on the upper forewing tip with white spots, but the remainder of the wings, both above and below, has an orange background color rather than light grayish brown. Spring migrants, usually seen as single individuals, are often observed flying purposefully in a northeasterly direction. A notable flight in 1983 was so heavy that individuals hitting windshields posed a hazard to motorists.

©Carolyn Schwab

■ *Red Admiral*

©Larry Londagin

Red Admiral

Vanessa atalanta

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.6 – 2.3"
Flight Times: 2 local flights plus immigrants from the south, March – November
Host Plants: Nettles
Comments: The Red Admiral is one of the few species that overwinters as an adult in Kansas. For that reason, it may often be observed in early spring. Watch for it on blooming lilacs. Note the bold red stripe across both upperwings, unlike any other local species. The underwings have a very cryptic coloration that blends remarkably well with tree bark. However, the wings are occasionally held less tightly together and then the red, white and blue markings on the under forewings become visible. Red Admirals are fond of tree sap and also salt, which they obtain from the sweat on our bodies or while puddling.

©Betsy Betros

■ *Common Buckeye*

©Betsy Betros

Common Buckeye

Junonia coenia

©Greg Sievert

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.5 – 2.4"
Flight Times: Adults immigrate from the south, then 2 local flights, April – November
Host Plants: Figworts and plantains
Comments: With its wings spread basking in the sun, the Common Buckeye is easily recognized by the large, colorful eye spots on both upperwings. The underside of the wings is cryptically colored, with the fall version being more reddish-brown. Males will sometimes dart out to investigate people who wander into their territory.

©Betsy Betros

■ *Red-spotted Purple*

©Linda Williams

Red-spotted Purple

Limenitis arthemis astyanax

©Greg Sievert

Range: East 1/2
Wingspan: 2.3 – 3.5"
Flight Times: 2 flights, May – September
Host Plants: Various woody plants, including cherry, apple, cottonwood and serviceberry
Comments: The upper wings of the Red-spotted Purple mimic those of the Pipevine Swallowtail, but there are no tails. Note the large red spots near the base of the underwings. This species overwinters in the larval stage. Fifth instar caterpillars have long, spiky "horns" on their heads.

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■ *Viceroy*

©Betsy Betros

©Greg Sievert

Viceroy

Limenitis archippus

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 2.3 – 3.1"
Flight Times: 2 flights, May – September
Host Plants: Willows and poplars
Comments: The dark line crossing the hind wing veins is the easiest way to separate the Viceroy from the Monarch. In a few individuals, however, this line is missing. Note there is only a single row of white spots in the black band on the trailing edges of the wings, while Monarchs have two rows. Viceroys overwinter in the larval stage, inside a small leaf that has been rolled up, sewn shut with silk and attached to the twig so it won't fall off. Watch for these butterflies perched on the foliage of the host plants.

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■ *Goatweed Leafwing*

Goatweed Leafwing

Anaea andria

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.8 – 2.5"
Flight Times: 2 flights: one emerges in late spring and the other emerges in fall and overwinters
Host Plants: Croton
Comments: Goatweed Leafwings overwinter as adults and may sometimes be seen flying on warm winter days. The lack of black upperwing markings helps separate them from the anglewings, as does the relatively smooth wing margin and lack of any "punctuation marks" on the under hindwings. Males will often fly up and investigate any moving object (including people) in their territory. Males have solid dark orange upperwings, while those of females are lighter and have a wide, pale submarginal band. They typically perch with wings closed and are well-camouflaged when they do, since they strongly resemble a dead leaf. Adults rarely visit flowers, instead feeding from sap flows, rotting fruit and scat.

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■ *Hackberry Emperor*

Hackberry Emperor

Asterocampa celtis

©Greg Sievert

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.5 – 2.2"
Flight Times: 2 flights, May – October
Host Plants: Hackberry
Comments: Hackberry Emperors appear some years in very large numbers, and in those years the larvae may defoliate host trees. They are fond of salt and often land on shoulders and arms to sip sweat with their proboscis. The upper wings have a large dark area near the forewing tip but are somewhat variably colored otherwise, from light orange to grey. Of the two short, dark bars on the upper forewing, the one closest to the body is often broken or nearly broken. There is a row of small eyespots on the under hindwings near the outer edge.

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■ *Tawny Emperor*

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Tawny Emperor

Asterocampa clyton

©Greg Sievert

Range: East 2/3
Wingspan: 1.4 – 2.4"
Flight Times: 2 flights, June – October
Host Plants: Hackberry
Comments: Tawny Emperors may be found in woodland edge habitat. Compared to their close cousin, the Hackberry Emperor, the upper wings have an overall wash of light orange to brown color without any white marks or a large black area at the tip. Note the two unbroken dark bars on the upper forewing. Below, the eyespots and other markings are less distinct than those of a Hackberry Emperor. Like the Hackberry Emperor, it rarely visits flowers, instead feeding on sap flows, rotting fruit and scat.

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■ *Little Wood Satyr*

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Little Wood Satyr

Megisto cymela

Range: East 2/3
Wingspan: 1.3 – 1.7"
Flight Times: 1 flight, May – August
Host Plants: Various grasses
Comments: The Little Wood Satyr is found in woodland edges and glades. It is the Kansas butterfly most likely to be mistaken for a moth due to its size and appearance. It is much smaller than Common Wood Nymphs and flies earlier in the year, but there is a period of overlap in mid-summer. It has two conspicuous eyespots on the outer forewings, visible from above and below. On the underwings, notice the two narrow, transverse dark brown lines that cross both wings.

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■ *Common Wood Nymph*

Common Wood Nymph

Cercyonis pegala

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.7 – 2.7"
Flight Times: 1 flight, June – October
Host Plants: Various grasses
Comments: Common Wood Nymphs are found in woodland edge habitat and nearby grassy areas. When stirred into flight they usually fly a short distance to a new perch with a leisurely, bouncing flight pattern. The species is much larger than other satyr butterflies in this area, which have somewhat similar wing markings. The two large eyespots on the under forewings, which often touch one another, are usually surrounded by a large yellow area. The upperwings are mostly a plain brown, and the underwings have a complex pattern of small, dark brown lines on a light brown background.

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■ *Monarch*

Monarch

Danaus plexippus

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 2.3 – 3.1"
Flight Times: 3 flights, April – October
Host Plants: Milkweeds
Comments: Look for Monarchs in prairie habitats, mainly in the eastern half of the state. They also visit home flower gardens. Caterpillars feed solely on milkweeds from which they obtain a potent toxin which protects them from predation by birds. The bold yellow, black and white stripes of the caterpillar advertise this quality to birds, as does the bold orange and black coloration of the adult. The jade green chrysalis with a scattering of gold dots is gorgeous to behold. Their bird-like annual migration to one small area of central Mexico is unique in the world, and all the more remarkable because the insects have no elders to show them the way. First spring arrivals are usually in the second week of April. The main wave of fall migrants typically passes through Kansas in mid-September.

©Greg Sievert

■ *Silver-spotted Skipper*

©Linda Williams

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Silver-spotted Skipper

Epargyreus clarus

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.6 – 2.5"
Flight Times: 3 flights, April – October
Host Plants: Various legumes, such as Black Locust, False Indigo and Wild Senna
Comments: This is the most common large skipper in the state. The large blaze of silver near the middle of the underwings is distinctive, also note the blaze of yellow/orange in the forewings. The flight is rapid, jerky and erratic, but individuals are easily observed while nectaring at flowers. Favored nectar plants include milkweeds, alfalfa and buttonbush. It often perches upside down. Males await females on exposed perches from which they fly out to investigate any large insect flying by.

©Greg Stewert

■ *Southern Cloudywing*

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Southern Cloudywing

Thorybes bathyllus

Range: East 1/2
Wingspan: 1.3 – 1.6"
Flight Times: 3 flights, April – October
Host Plants: Various legumes
Comments: Cloudywings and duskywings can be difficult to separate in the field, but note the differences in wing shape and the even coloration of cloudywings compared to the more mottled coloration of duskywings. The upperwings of the Southern Cloudywing are darker toward the base and lighter on the margin. The white spots in the forewing median area are in a row and usually hourglass-shaped. The face is typically white and there is a small white spot at the bend of the antennal club.

©Paul Griffin

■ *Hayhurst's Scallopwing*

Hayhurst's Scallopwing

Staphylus hayhurstii

Range: East 2/3
Wingspan: 0.9 – 1.2"
Flight Times: 2 flights, May – October
Host Plants: Various weeds, such as Lambsquarter and Amaranth
Comments: In contrast to other small, dark skippers, look for the wavy, scalloped margin of the hindwings, hence its name. It perches with the wings held open; flat against the surface it rests on. In good light, notice the abundance of lighter-colored scales on the upper wings, which make it look as if they were dusted with flour, and give it an almost grizzled appearance. The caterpillars feed at night.

©Rosa McHenry

■ *Funereal Duskywing*

Funereal Duskywing

Erynnis funeralis

Range: Southwest 1/2
Wingspan: 1.4 – 1.8"
Flight Times: 3 flights, May – August
Host Plants: Various legumes
Comments: This is the only duskywing in Kansas with a conspicuous white fringe on the hindwings. The fringe is visible from above and below. Also note the pale brown patch along the leading edge of the upper forewing, and the relatively narrow forewing compared to other duskywings.

©Carolyn Schwab

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■ *Wild Indigo Duskywing*

Wild Indigo Duskywing

Erynnis baptisiae

Range: East 1/2
Wingspan: 1.1 – 1.5"
Flight Times: 2 flights, April – October
Host Plants: Wild Indigos (*Baptisia*) and Crown Vetch
Comments: The Wild Indigo Duskywing has always been associated with native prairie containing its primary host plant. However, it has also shown a willingness to utilize Crown Vetch as a host plant, so its numbers are increasing since that plant has been extensively used by highway departments for erosion cover on road cuts. The best field marks for this species are on the upper forewings. They are darker at the base than the tip, there is a scattering of light grey scales in the wing tip area and a small brown patch between the wing tip and base. All duskywings are very challenging to identify in the field, and this species is no exception. Seeing one of them on its host plant may be its best field mark.

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■ *Common Checkered-Skipper*

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Common Checkered-Skipper

Pyrgus communis

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.0 – 1.3"
Flight Times: 3 flights, March – November
Host Plants: Various mallows
Comments: This species is easy to recognize, with its vivid black and white wing pattern. It may be found most of the year in low, weedy habitats and is often seen basking in mowed areas along hiking trails or nectaring at dandelions, asters and other common weeds. Fresh individuals have a vivid blue-green sheen on their long, upper body hairs which is visible in good light. The under hindwings have a distinctive pattern of irregular tan and white stripes.

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■ *Common Sootywing*

©Carolyn Schwab

Common Sootywing

Pholisora catullus

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.0 – 1.2"
Flight Times: 3 flights, April – September
Host Plants: Various weedy plants, including Lambsquarter, Amaranth and ragweeds
Comments: At first glance, the Common Sootywing might be mistaken for one of the other small, dark skippers, but look for the white face, white spots on top of the head and the small white spots near the forewing tip of otherwise very dark wings. It is also smaller than our duskywings and cloudywings. Close up, notice the vividly zebra-striped antennae. It is often seen in vacant lots and other disturbed habitats, or puddling in groups at muddy sites. Caterpillars sew leaves of the host plant together for resting spots.

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■ *Least Skipper*

©Greg Sievert

Least Skipper

Ancyloxypha numitor

Range: East 3/4
Wingspan: 0.8 – 1.1"
Flight Times: 3 flights, May – October
Host Plants: Various grasses
Comments: This very small butterfly is more often seen around damp grassy swales. It has rounded outer margins on the forewings compared to the more pointed wingtips of other orange skippers. Its under hindwings are plain orange, but the under forewings have a dark central area and distinct black veins toward the edge. Above, the wings have wide, dark terminal bands with long orange fringes. It flies slowly, just over, or even under, the semiaquatic grasses of its restricted habitat near lakes, streams, marshes or roadside ditches. It is easily overlooked, but easy to observe once found.

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©Mark Neubrand

■ *Fiery Skipper*

Fiery Skipper

Hylephyla phyleus

Range: East 1/2
Wingspan: 1.0 – 1.4"
Flight Times: 2 flights, May – October
Host Plants: Weedy grasses, such as Bermuda and crabgrass
Comments: The Fiery Skipper's host plants are more common in urban areas or disturbed ground than in native prairie so they are not uncommon in towns. It nectars at most flowers, but especially milkweeds, thistles, alfalfa and ornamentals in gardens. Note the unusually short antennae. The undersides of the wings are plain orange, but have several dark spots on them. Females have more spots on their wings than males. Above, males have a narrow dark stigma in the forewing (unlike that of the Sachem) and the narrow black terminal band is jagged on the inner side, as if the orange in the middle of the wing were flames, hence the species name. Female upperwings have several large orange and black marks and a wider terminal band.

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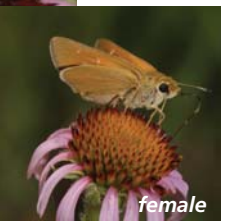

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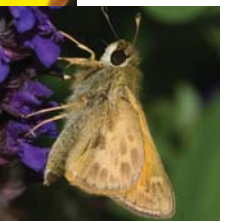
■ *Ottoe Skipper*

Ottoe Skipper

Hesperia ottoe

Range: Statewide, except southeast corner
Wingspan: 1.3 – 1.6"
Flight Times: 1 flight, June – July
Host Plants: Bluestem grasses
Comments: The Ottoe Skipper is found only in native prairie in early to mid-summer. The underside of the wings is an unmarked light orange. Males have a black stigma on the upper forewing similar to a male Sachem, but much narrower. From above, females resemble female Sachems, and also have a small transparent window in the middle of the forewing, but note the plain orange underwings.

©Bob Gress



■ *Sachem*

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Sachem

Atalopedes campestris

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.1 – 1.6"
Flight Times: Multiple flights, April – November
Host Plants: Various grasses
Comments: The Sachem is a larger skipper that flies in a variety of habitats all season, often becoming rather common by fall. It is sexually dimorphic (different male and female forms). The large black blotch on the basal area of the male's upper forewing (known as a **stigma**) is distinctive. Females have a couple square-ish transparent windows in the middle of the forewing. Below, the wings are somewhat variably marked, but look for a square dark patch in the middle of the edge of the hindwing next to the abdomen.

©Greg Sievert

■ *Arogos Skipper*

Arogos Skipper

Atrytone arogos

Range: Statewide, except southwest 1/4
Wingspan: 0.9 – 1.2"
Flight Times: 2 flights, May – June & July – September
Host Plants: Bluestem grasses
Comments: The Arogos Skipper is found in native prairie. It has unmarked orange underwings like the Delaware Skipper, but is smaller and the wings are edged with a lighter-colored fringe. The upper forewings lack the distinct black veins and the narrow V marks of the Delaware. Females typically have a narrow dark streak through the middle of the forewing.

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■ *Delaware Skipper*

Delaware Skipper

Anatrytone logan

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 1.1 – 1.4"
Flight Times: 2 flights, May – September
Host Plants: Various native grasses, including Big Bluestem and Switchgrass
Comments: The underwings of the Delaware Skipper are unmarked orange all the way out to the fringe on the edges. Above, the orange forewings have distinct black veins and wide, dark terminal bands. Both sexes have a dark, narrow V mark in the middle of the upper forewing, but females also have a dark blotch near the base of the wing. Look for it around swales and other damp grassy habitats, as well as drier locations such as roadsides and overgrown fields. It frequents flowers, especially thistles and milkweeds, and is easy to observe while nectaring.

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■ *Zabulon Skipper*

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Zabulon Skipper

Poanes zabulon

Range: East 1/2
Wingspan: 1.1 – 1.4"
Flight Times: 2 flights, April – September
Host Plants: Various grasses
Comments: The Zabulon Skipper is a strongly dimorphic species (different male and female forms). Males have large, central yellow patches on the upper hindwings not divided by black veins as in the male Hobomok (not illustrated). Below, the hindwing has a large, irregularly-shaped, central yellow patch and a smaller yellow patch near the base. Females are mostly brown to nearly black with some dim orange blotches and a few large white spots on the outer half of the wings. It occurs most often in shaded woodlands or along streams where it rests on vegetation in sunlit openings. Males appear to establish territories. It commonly visits flowers for nectar in both native prairie and suburban plantings.

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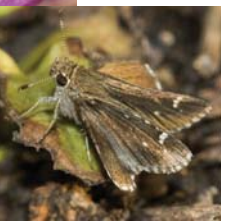

■ *Nysa Roadside-Skipper*

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Nysa Roadside-Skipper

Amblyscirtes nysa

Range: East 2/3
Wingspan: 0.7 – 1.0"
Flight Times: 2 flights, May – June & August – September
Host Plants: Various grasses
Comments: The Nysa Roadside-Skipper is best recognized by the vivid brown and black mottling on the underwings. It is dark above like the Common Roadside-Skipper but with a small white spot on the forewing which is separate from the larger spot on the leading edge. Look for patrolling males perched on trails and bare patches of ground in the early morning. In early spring it often occurs on lawns with low flowers such as white clover. Roadside skippers typically bask with the rear wings held horizontal and the upper wings partially spread.

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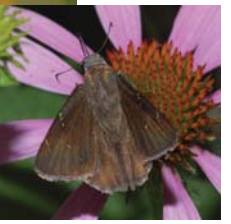

■ *Common Roadside-Skipper*

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Common Roadside-Skipper

Amblyscirtes vialis

Range: Statewide
Wingspan: 0.9 – 1.2"
Flight Times: 1 flight, April – September
Host Plants: Various grasses
Comments: This small skipper is found in edge habitat, forest trails and along streams and roadsides. It also visits flowers for nectar, both in native prairie and suburban gardens. It has plain dark wings above and below, with a small, distinct white patch on the leading edge of the forewing near the tip. This white patch is visible from above and below and is typically wider at the wing edge. Fresh specimens will have a tan and black checkered fringe on the trailing edge of the wings.

List of Suggested Books:

Betros, B., *A Photographic Field Guide to the Butterflies in the Kansas City Region*, Kansas City Star Books, Kansas City MO, 2008

Brock, J. & Kaufman, K., *Kaufman Field Guide to Butterflies of North America*, Houghton Mifflin, New York NY, 2003

Dole, J., Gerard, W. & Nelson, J., *Butterflies of Oklahoma, Kansas and North Texas*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman OK, 2004

Heitzman, J.R. & Heitzman, J.E., *Butterflies and Moths of Missouri*, Missouri Department of Conservation, Jefferson City MO, 1996

Schwilling, M. & Ely, C., *Checklist of Kansas Butterflies*, Emporia State University, Emporia KS, 1991

Scott, J., *The Butterflies of North America*, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 1986

Spencer, L., *Arkansas Butterflies and Moths*, Ozark Society Foundation, Little Rock AR, 2006

List of Internet Resources:

Butterflies and Moths of North America (BAMONA)
http://www.butterfliesandmoths.org/

Butterflies of America (includes North & Central America)
http://butterfliesofamerica.com/

North American Butterfly Association (NABA)
http://www.naba.org/

Kansas Lepidoptera list-serve
http://listserv.ksu.edu/archives/ksleps-l.html

Butterflies of Oklahoma
http://www.birdsofoklahoma.net/Butterflies.htm

BugGuide (for photos of all species of North American insects and arachnids)
http://bugguide.net/

This and all other GPNC pocket guides may be viewed online at the nature center's website
http://www.gpnc.org

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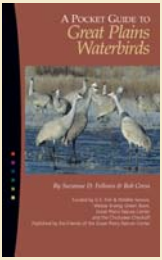

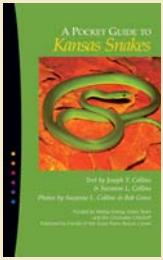

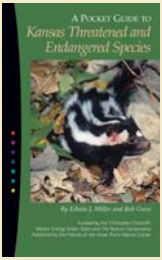

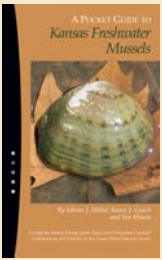

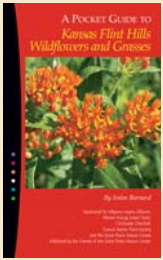

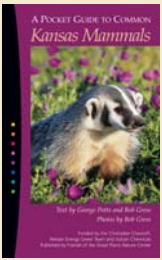

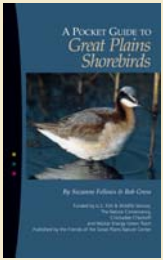

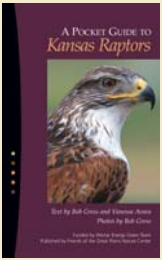

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