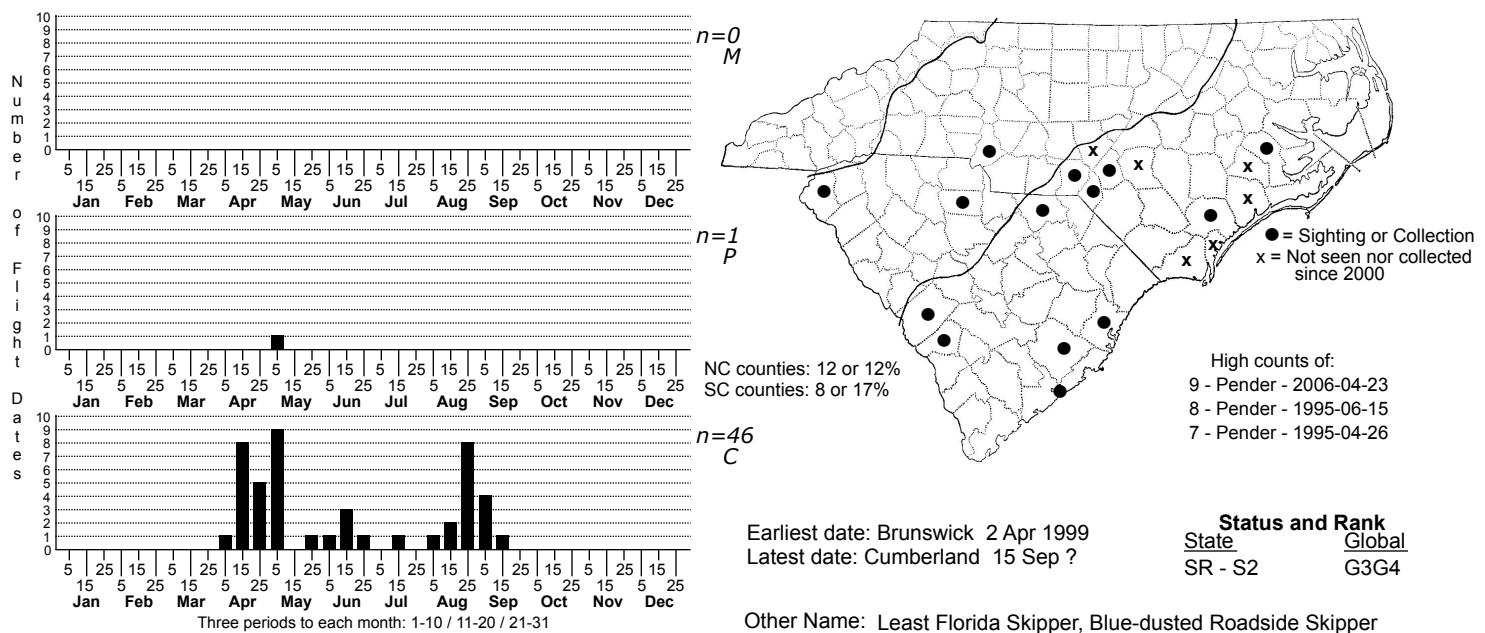


Dusky Roadside-Skipper *Amblyscirtes alternata*



DISTRIBUTION: Recorded in NC only from the southern half of the Coastal Plain, north to Moore, Jones, and Craven counties -- with the surprising exception of a 2014 photo record from the southern Piedmont in Mecklenburg County. A sighting in the Craven County portion of Croatan National Forest in 2007 extends the range in NC slightly northward. Its range extends north to extreme southeastern VA (though probably now historical); thus, it might occur in the northern Coastal Plain of NC. However, with continued loss of suitable pine stands and with fire suppression, the hope of any future records north of Croatan National Forest is increasingly very slim.

ABUNDANCE: Rare (or easily overlooked); formerly locally uncommon in a few lower Coastal Plain sites. Clearly has declined in the last 10 years, with few recent records. Recorded only from 12 counties, six in the lower Coastal Plain, five in the Sandhills, and one in the Piedmont. As far as known, rare in the Longleaf Pine (*Pinus palustris*) regions of the Coastal Plain, and very rare to absent elsewhere. Extremely rare in the southern Piedmont, and perhaps just a stray.

FLIGHT PERIOD: Dates in NC span from early April to mid-September. The flight chart seems to show three broods in the Coastal Plain: early April to early May; late May to late June; and early August to mid-September. The 2018 record for mid-July falls within a formerly large gap in flights, but the individual in the photo appears to be quite fresh, and thus this last (and largest) brood likely extends from mid-July to mid-September. Most other roadside-skippers have their second broods well into July, though the Lace-winged may have a second brood that also seems to finish by the end of June. Thus, is there truly a "second" brood from late May to late June, or is this an extension of the first brood? As the Carolina, Reversed, and Common roadside-skippers have three certain broods in NC, we will assume for now that the Dusky also has three broods here.

HABITAT: This skipper shows a strong affinity in NC to Longleaf Pine forests, both xeric places and wetlands. Habitats include dry Longleaf Pine/scrub oak sandhills, flatwoods, and drier savannas. The Piedmont record came from "the intersection of a dirt/gravel horse trail and a large high tension power line cut", according to the photographer, Chris Talkington.

FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS: The foodplants have apparently not been well reported, but they are certainly native grasses; Bearded Skeleton-grass (*Gymnopogon ambiguus*) is a suspected foodplant. The species nectars infrequently; it is more often seen on the ground or on vegetation than on flowers.

COMMENTS: As with most other *Amblyscirtes* skippers in NC, finding one is always a thrill, as most species are scarce, small, and easily overlooked as they perch on or close to the ground instead of at flowers. It often takes two or more people walking through a savanna or flatwoods, scattered a few yards apart, and carefully watching for any movement, to spot one. This tiny species is so obscurely marked that the faint dusting of pale blue or gray spots (or scales) on the ventral hind wing can be seen well only at close range. Worn individuals are nearly impossible to identify when the faint pale scales are worn away. It can be mistaken for a Common Roadside-Skipper, and Carolina Butterfly Society field trip participants puzzled over a Dusky/Common in April 1999; fortunately, photographs were used to identify it as a Dusky a few days later! Some individuals look similar to Bell's Roadside-Skipper, and confusion of these two has occurred in SC, where Bell's is known to be present.

The surprising record from the southern Piedmont would seem outlandish at first look, but it has been recorded decades ago from the SC foothills in Oconee County, as well as in many north-central counties in the GA Piedmont, though most such records were from decades ago. It seems to be extremely rare now in the Piedmont of these states.