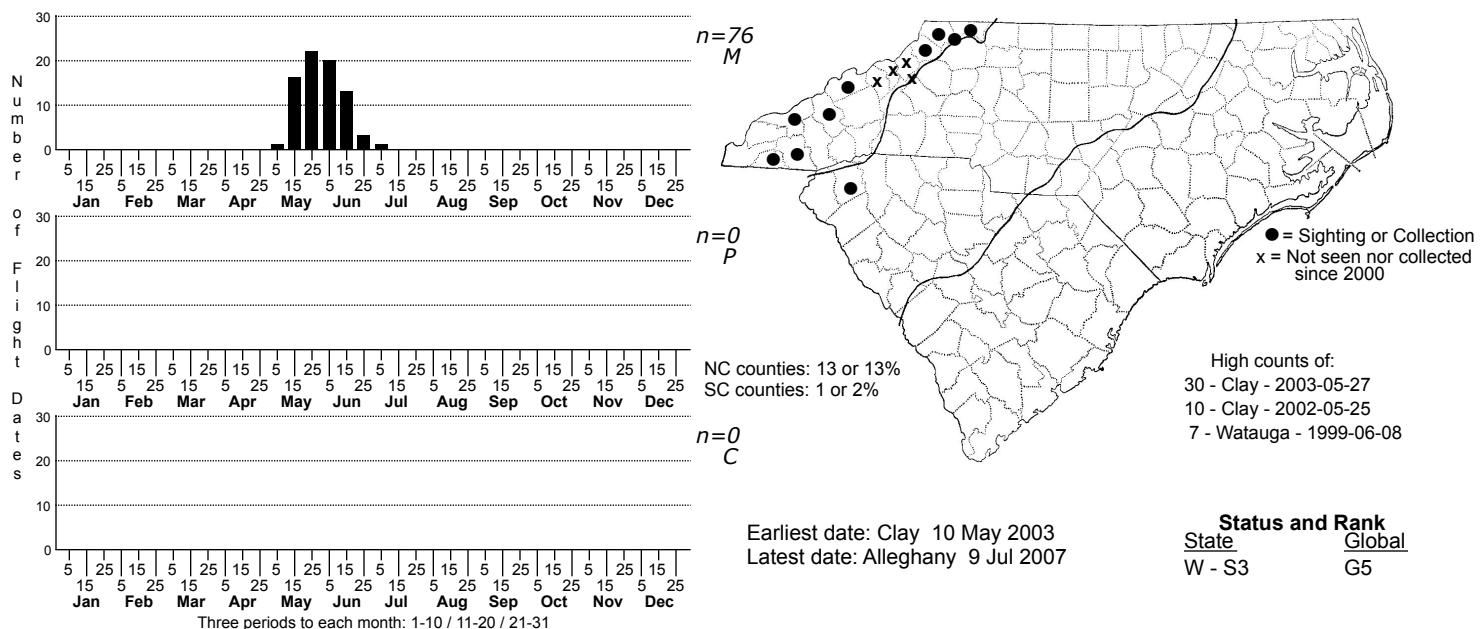


## Indian Skipper *Hesperia sassacus*



**DISTRIBUTION:** Middle and higher Mountains (generally above 3000 feet elevation), where NC is at or near the southern edge of the range. Occurs perhaps in most Mountain counties, especially in the northern half of the region. It is quite surprising that the species has still never been recorded from heavily worked Buncombe County, though most locations where field work has taken place are likely lower in elevation than the species prefers.

**ABUNDANCE:** Uncommon in the northern Mountains, but rare to locally uncommon in the southern half of the Mountains. More field work needed, but recent field work in the southern Mountains has turned up the species in a number of sites, and (oddly for a Northern species) our two highest counts are from Clay County, at the southern edge of the range. In the past few years, it seems to have declined in numbers in NC.

**FLIGHT PERIOD:** A single brood; mid-May to late June, rarely into early July.

**HABITAT:** The habitats in NC are meadows, grass boulders, powerline clearings, and other grassy or rocky openings, mainly over 3000 feet elevation. This is the northernmost of the five Hesperia skippers found in NC.

**FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS:** The foodplants are a number of species of grasses. The species commonly nectars on a variety of flowers, with a fondness in NC for Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*).

**COMMENTS:** I found the species at the top of Mount Jefferson, at bare spots/openings, in 1995 and 1996; and Derb Carter found them there in 1997. Jeff Glassberg reported it on Jones Knob in 1996, and Steve Hall and I saw one there in 1998. In 1997, I saw one in meadows at Roan Mountain, where suitable habitat is abundant. I found a total of 11 individuals at several sites in Watauga County in June 1999, and Derb Carter located a colony in the Cataloochee area of Haywood County in May 2001. In 2002, Ron Gatrell and others found Indian Skippers at a handful of new sites from Madison to Clay counties, including our first double-digit one-day count; and Gatrell saw a remarkable 30 individuals in Clay County in late May 2003. Ted Wilcox has found the species at a number of sites in Ashe and nearby counties in the past few years. It has not been hard to find recently in some meadows along the northern portion of the Blue Ridge Parkway, though numbers there have been low in recent years.

Though the species has probably not increased in recent years, records have been accumulating at a steady rate. Thus, in 2014 the N.C. Natural Heritage Program removed the species from its Watch List, especially as the habitats are mostly man-made (meadows, etc.). It was put back on the Watch List in 2018. However, there were no reports at all from the state in 2022 or 2023, and just one in 2024, though this is likely owing to scarcity of field work in the northern counties prior to late June.