

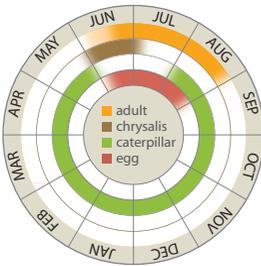
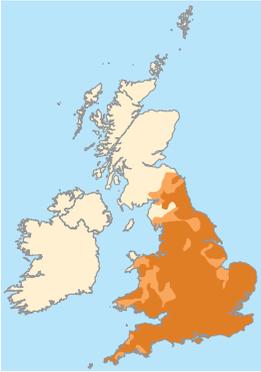
Small Skipper

Thymelicus sylvestris

UKBAP: Not listed
GB Red List: Least concern

Common resident

Wingspan: 27–34 mm



WHERE TO LOOK

Watch for it on unimproved grassland with tall vegetation. Colonies can be found on quite small patches of suitable habitat along roadside verges and field margins as well as in woodland clearings and on open ground.

LOOK-ALIKES

Essex Skipper (page 44)
Large Skipper (page 50)
Lulworth Skipper (page 46)

A common and widespread colonial butterfly of rough grassland and woodland glades.

Adult identification: Despite its name, this is not our smallest skipper. It is best identified by its unmarked golden-orange wings, though the forewing of the male carries a distinctive dark line (sex-brand). The wings lack the faint mottling of the Large Skipper, but check the colour of the tips of the antennae (dull brown or orange underneath) to separate it from the very similar Essex Skipper (page 44). This is one of the so-called ‘golden’ skippers (the group that includes Essex, Lulworth, Large and Silver-spotted Skippers)

Behaviour: A colonial species whose males are highly skilled fliers, travelling at great speed in a blur of golden wings, and frequently demonstrating great manoeuvrability. Females are both sedentary and unobtrusive. It is much more secretive than the Large Skipper (page 50).

Breeding habitat: This is an adaptable butterfly, occurring wherever tall clumps of Yorkshire-fog grow. It prefers more open sites than the Large Skipper, often being found in rough grassland on roadside verges, at the edges of fields or in woodland glades.

Population and conservation: A common and widespread species in England and Wales, with its range extending northwards in recent years.

Egg, caterpillar and chrysalis:

EGG (page 209): 0.85 mm (w) × 0.5 mm (h); initially white but yellowing with age; laid in small clusters; hatches in August, unlike that of the Essex Skipper, which does not hatch until the following spring.

CATERPILLAR (page 214): 20–25 mm; green, with a darker green line along the back and light longitudinal stripes along its sides; the head is large and yellow-green; overwinters wrapped in a blade of grass.

CHRYSALIS (page 220): 16–20 mm; green, and formed near the ground.

Foodplants: various grasses, especially Yorkshire-fog.



This is a secretive species – even at a large colony you may see only a few individuals at any one time.



Small Skipper's antennae tips are orange; Essex Skipper's are black.

