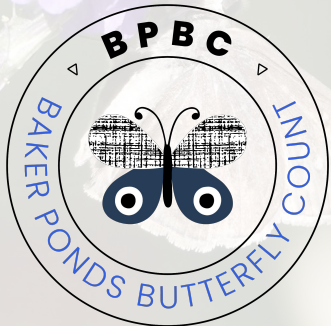


# Demystifying Those Confoundingly Confusing Duskywings



Presented by George DeWolf,  
Baker Ponds Butterfly Count Coordinator

# Duskywings - Some things to keep in mind

- 5 duskywing species are known to reside in New Hampshire
- They're all taxonomically placed in the subfamily Pyrginae, more commonly known as the Spread-winged Skippers because they're most often observed with their wings spread open.
- They're all also placed in the genus Erynnis
- All NH Pyrginae species are in the Genus Erynnis except for the Common Sootywing (*Pholisora catullus*)
- They're all small, with wingspans ranging from just over an inch to just under 2 inches.
- All adult Duskywings nectar at flowers and are observed in open woodlands near their larval food plants.
- They're all similar in appearance with drab coloration. Because of this it is particularly important to observe/photograph them in good lighting and from different angles.

# Duskywings - Some things to keep in mind (continued)

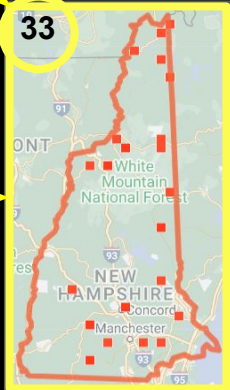
- Observing them with a focus on identification demands patience and perseverance to discern their field marks in adequate lighting.
- **Hedge 1:** “intraspecific variability” has to be taken into account with all field marks.
- **Hedge 2:** Each attribute or field mark presented here should be viewed as diagnostic but not conclusive on its own.

Family: Hesperidae

# The Dreamy Duskywing

*Erynnis icelus*

Subfamily: Pyrginae  
(Spread-winged Skippers)



WS: 1 1/8 - 1 1/2"

Steve Mirick

5/14/2023  
Barrington

Our smallest duskwing

Wings appear short relative to body

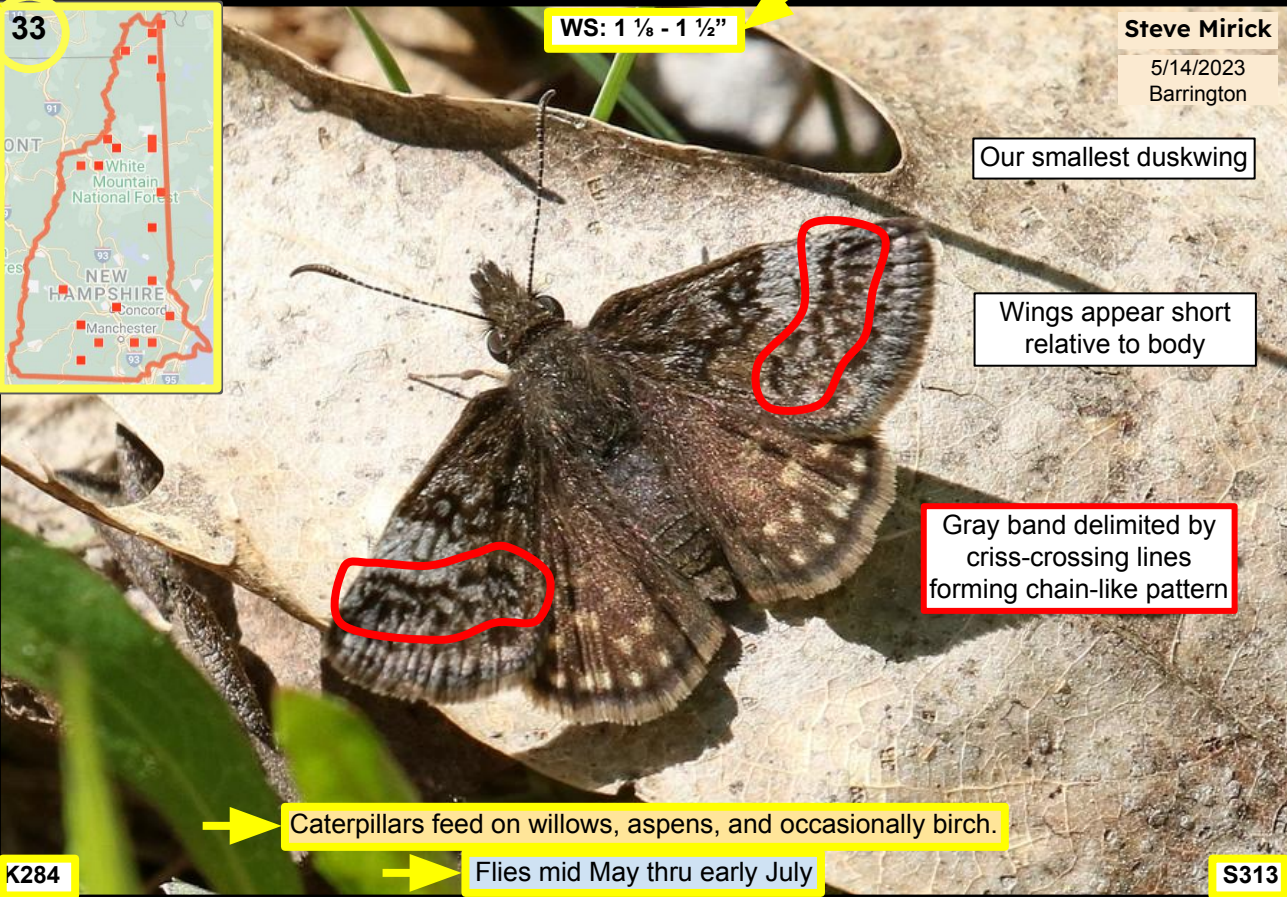
Gray band delimited by criss-crossing lines forming chain-like pattern

Caterpillars feed on willows, aspens, and occasionally birch.

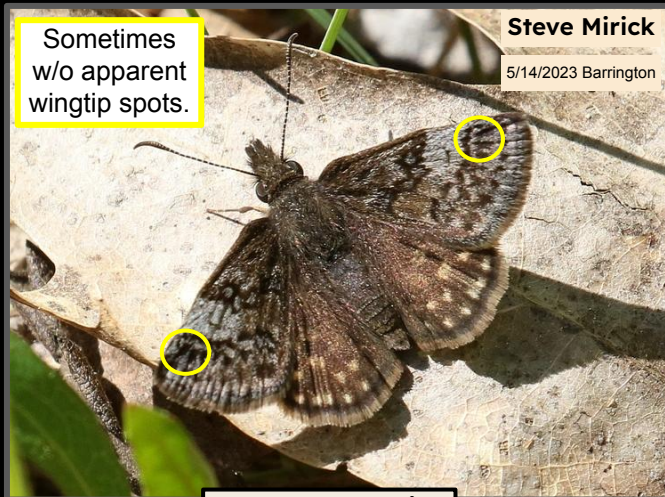
K284

Flies mid May thru early July

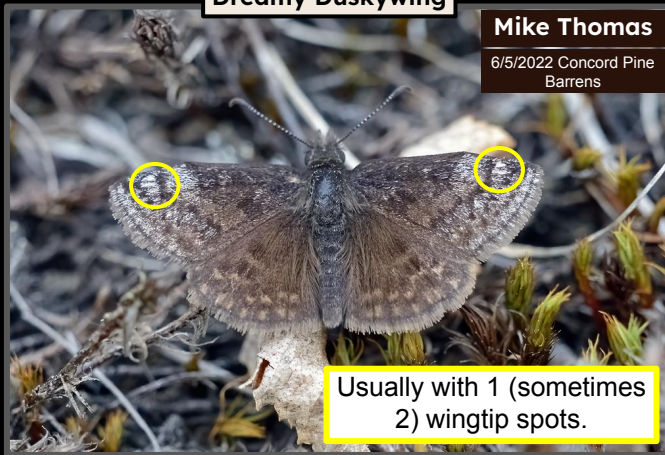
S313



# The Dreamy Duskywing (one of only two Duskywings w/o 4 misaligned sub-apical white spots)



**Dreamy Duskywing**



Also notice that the Dreamy tends to exhibit shorter more stunted black fingers than the Juvenal's, Wild Indigo, and Horace's

# The Dreamy Duskywing (a look at the underwing)

Steve Mirick

5/28/2023 Jefferson

On average the  
Dreamy & Sleepy  
have the most  
spotted  
underside of the  
hindwing

On fresh  
individuals spots  
are well-defined  
and distinct as  
opposed mottled  
or blotchy

Steve Mirick  
7/16/2022 West  
Lebanon



Wild Indigo Duskywing



Steve Mirick  
7/30/2022 Rye



Horace's Duskywing

# The Dreamy/Sleepy Duskywing Conundrum (Part 1)

## Dreamy Duskywing

*Erynnis icelus*

5/14/2023 Barrington

WS: 1 1/8 - 1 1/2"

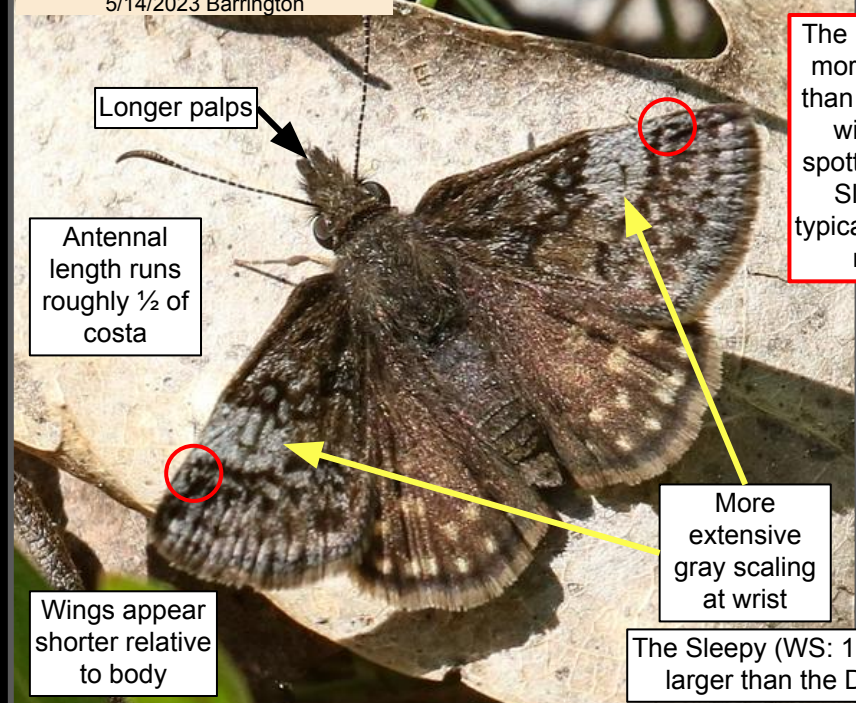
Steve Mirick

## Sleepy Duskywing

*Erynnis brizo*

WS: 1 1/4 - 1 3/4"

Steve Mirick



Longer palps

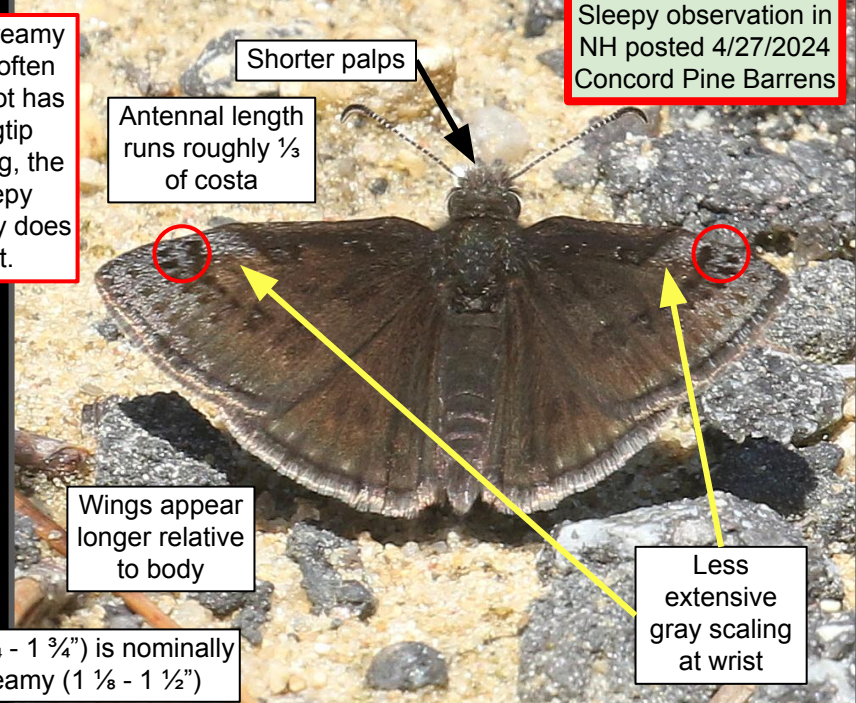
Antennal length runs roughly 1/2 of costa

Wings appear shorter relative to body

More extensive gray scaling at wrist

The Dreamy more often than not has wingtip spotting, the Sleepy typically does not.

The Sleepy (WS: 1 1/4 - 1 3/4") is nominally larger than the Dreamy (1 1/8 - 1 1/2")



Shorter palps

Antennal length runs roughly 1/3 of costa

Wings appear longer relative to body

Less extensive gray scaling at wrist

First ever iNaturalist Sleepy observation in NH posted 4/27/2024 Concord Pine Barrens

Caterpillars feed on willows, aspens, and occasionally birch.

**Dreamy** flies mid May 14-July 4 in NH **Sleepy** flies Apr 20-May 27 in New England

<sup>1</sup>Flight periods derived from iNaturalist observations

Caterpillars feed on Scrub Oak (*Quercus ilicifolia*)

# The Dreamy/Sleepy Duskywing Conundrum (Part 2)

## Dreamy Duskywing

WS: 1 1/8 - 1 1/2"

Steve Mirick

5/28/2023  
Jefferson



Plume of hair on hind tibia of males-Wisconsin Butterflies

Chain-like pattern typically less uniform, more jumbled, often narrower.



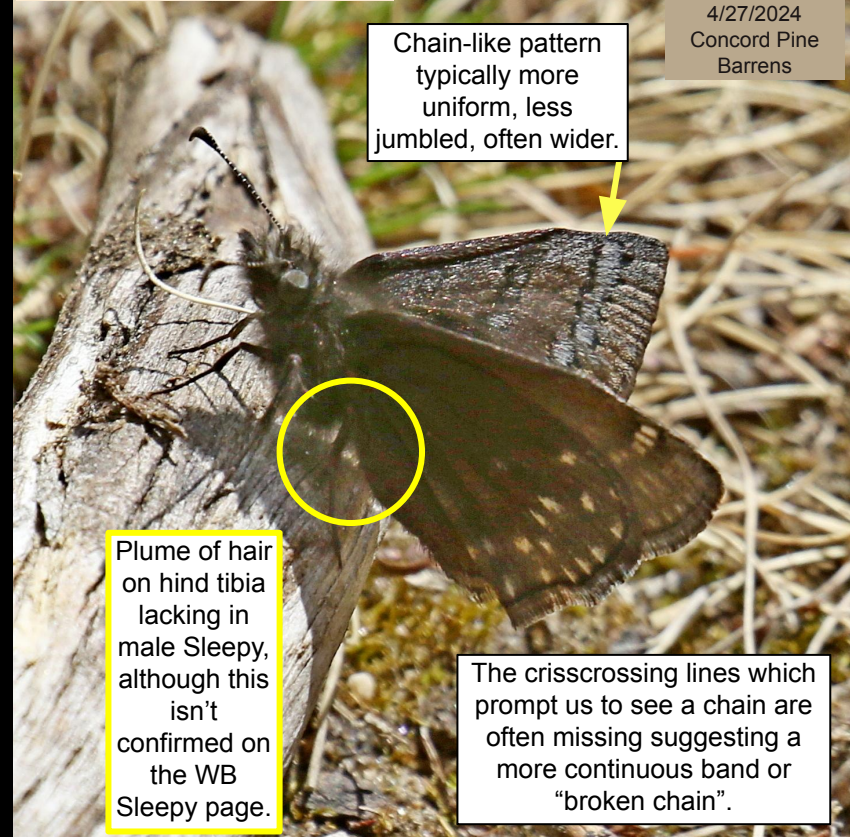
Mike Thomas

## Sleepy Duskywing

WS: 1 1/4 - 3/4"

Steve Mirick

4/27/2024  
Concord Pine Barrens



Chain-like pattern typically more uniform, less jumbled, often wider.

Plume of hair on hind tibia lacking in male Sleepy, although this isn't confirmed on the WB Sleepy page.

The crisscrossing lines which prompt us to see a chain are often missing suggesting a more continuous band or "broken chain".



Family: Hesperidae

# The Juvenal's Duskywing (Ventral)

Subfamily: Pyrginae  
(Spread-winged Skippers)

*Erynnis juvenalis*

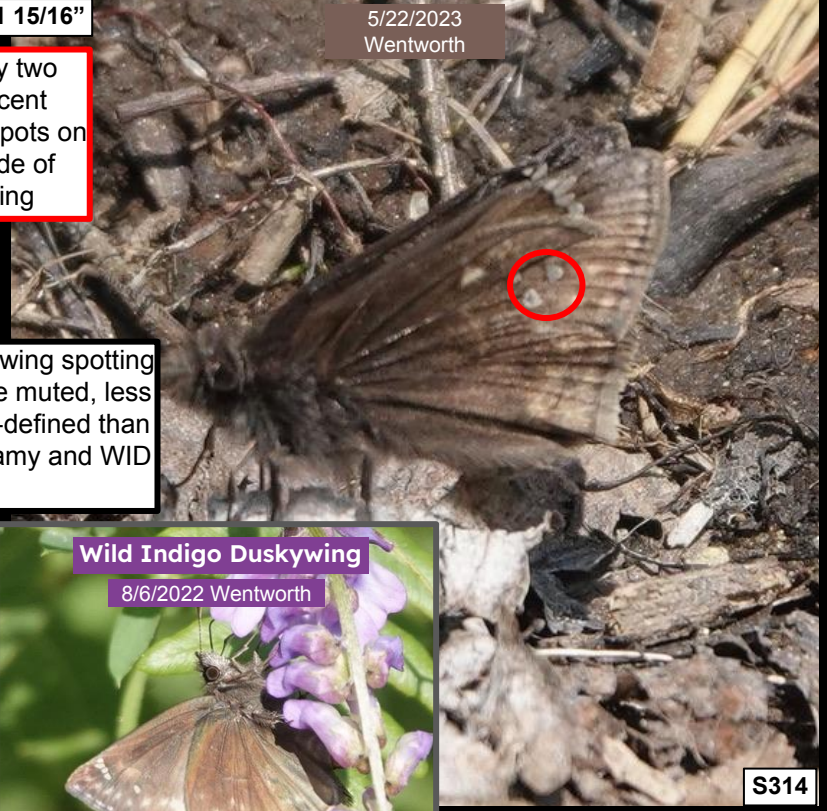
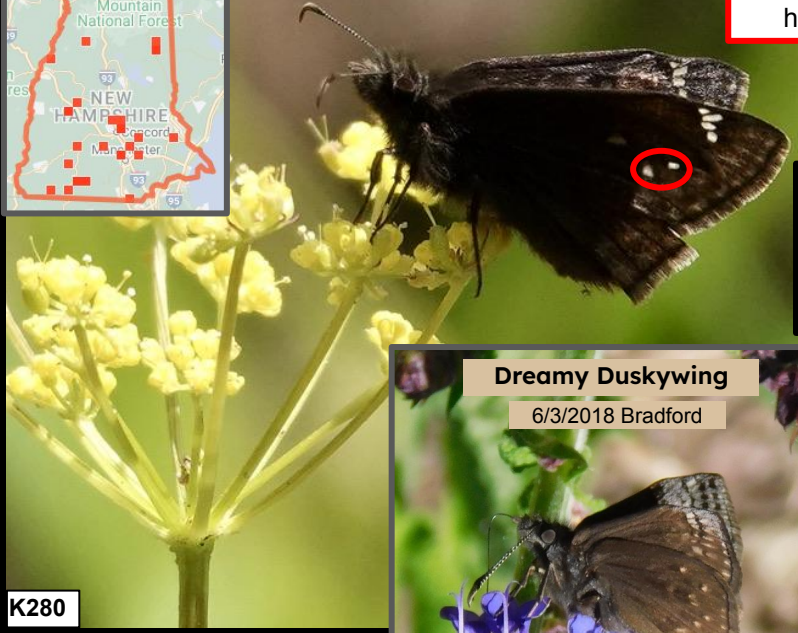


5/22/2023  
Wentworth

WS: 1 ¼ - 1 15/16"

5/22/2023  
Wentworth

Typically two  
translucent  
(hyaline) spots on  
underside of  
hindwing



Hindwing spotting  
more muted, less  
well-defined than  
Dreamy and WID

K280

Caterpillars feed on oak  
(genus Quercus)



**Dreamy Duskywing**

6/3/2018 Bradford

Amy Highstrom



**Wild Indigo Duskywing**

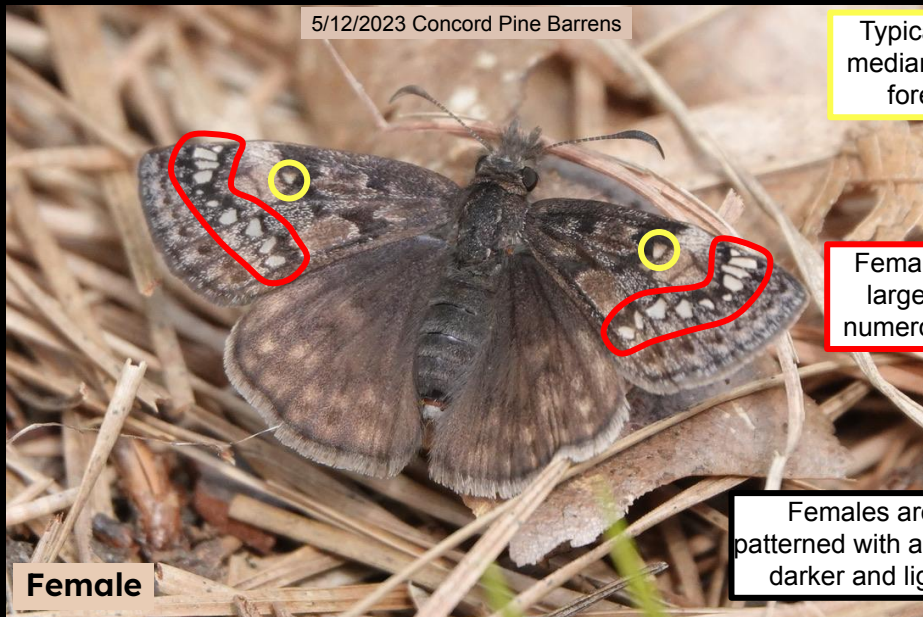
8/6/2022 Wentworth

S314

Flies mid end of April to mid  
June

# The Juvenal's Duskywing (Dorsal)

5/12/2023 Concord Pine Barrens



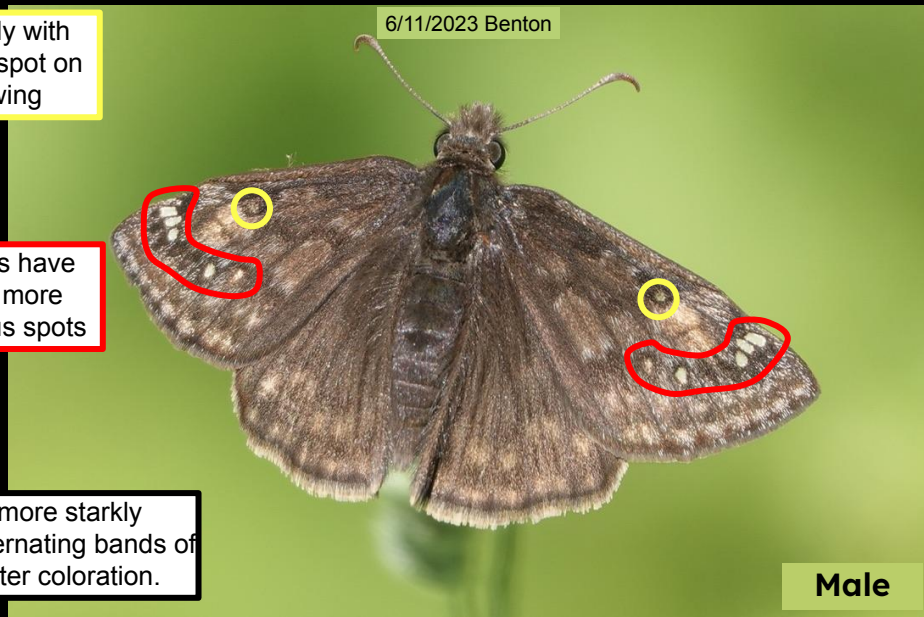
Female

Typically with  
median spot on  
forewing

Females have  
larger, more  
numerous spots

Females are more starkly  
patterned with alternating bands of  
darker and lighter coloration.

6/11/2023 Benton



Male

Apart from early flying (late April to mid May) specimens, I would be reluctant to identify these as Juvenal's without the benefit of the ventral view.

# The Wild Indigo Duskywing (Dorsal)

*Erynnis baptisiae*



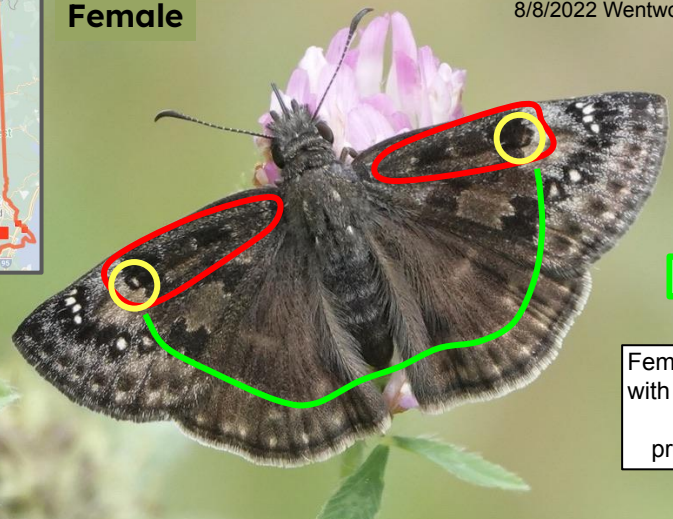
Female

8/8/2022 Wentworth

WS: 1 3/8 - 1 5/8"

8/3/2022 Wentworth

Male

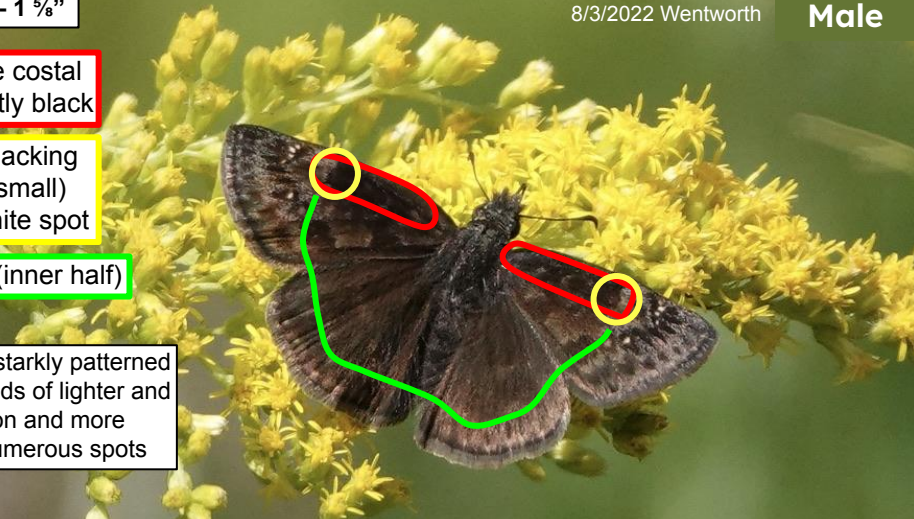


Cell inside costal fold is mostly black

Typically lacking (or very small) median white spot

Darker cape (inner half)

Females are more starkly patterned with alternating bands of lighter and darker coloration and more prominent and numerous spots

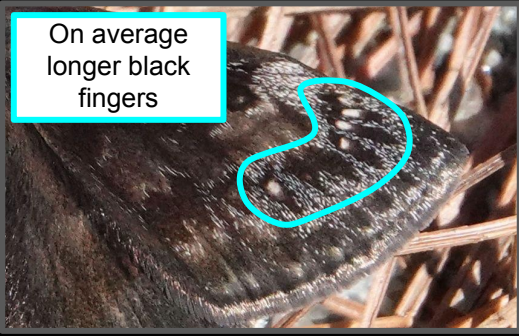


In our region Purple Crown Vetch (*Securigera varia*) is the dominant host for caterpillars. Also wild indigo (genus *Baptisia*)

K286

Flies late May to mid October. NH's only 3 brood Duskywing and the only one to fly in NH in beyond the beginning of September

S318



On average longer black fingers

# The Wild Indigo Duskywing (Ventral)

8/6/2022 Wentworth



Small spots on  
underwing are  
similar to Dreamy

Two spots at apex  
of hindwing aren't  
translucent/hyaline  
like Juvenal's

8/8/2022 Wentworth



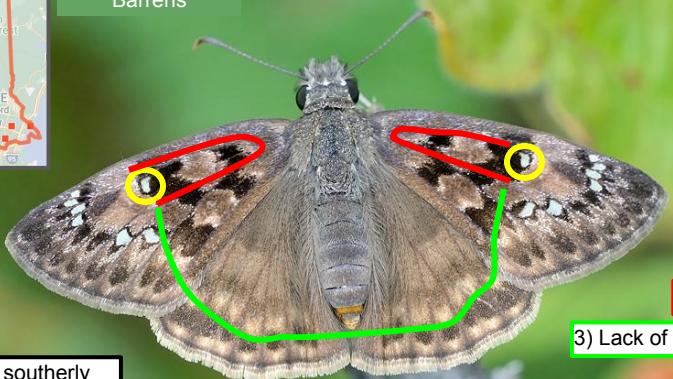
# The Horace's Duskywing (Dorsal)

*Erynnis horatius*



Mike Thomas

7/27/2022  
Concord Pine Barrens



Female

WS: 1 7/16 - 1 15/16"

Females are the most starkly patterned of our duskywings with alternating bands of lighter and darker coloration and more prominent and numerous spots

Flight period only overlaps with WID. Note:

- 1) Translucent median spot
- 2) Lack of blackened cell bar

3) Lack of pronouncedly darkened inner half/cape

A more southerly species. Very rare in VT (1 obs iNat, 3 obs e-Butterfly) and ME (1 obs on iNat)

Caterpillars feed on oak (genus Quercus)

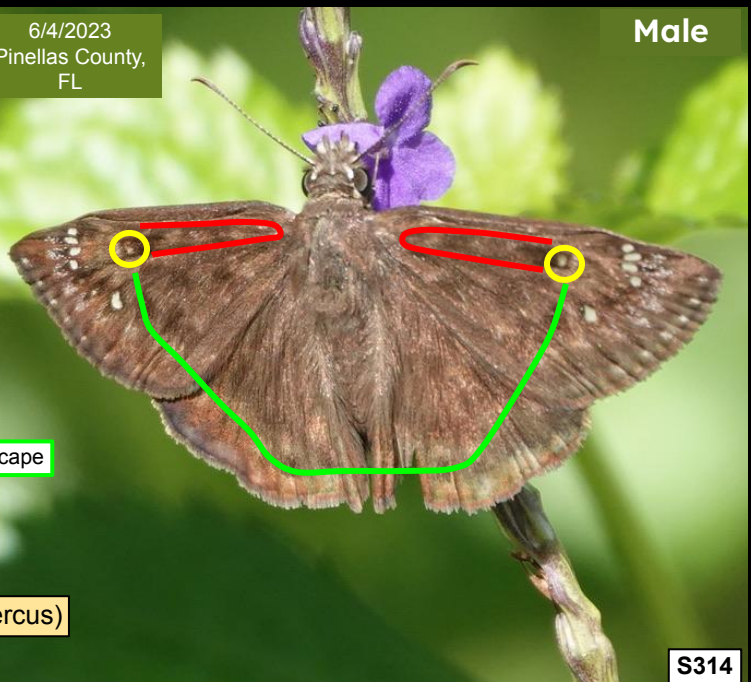
Flies in July to early August

K280

S314

6/4/2023  
Pinellas County, FL

Male



Only observed thus far in Concord and south. Nearly all sightings at or near Concord Pine Barrens, but be aware this may be the only place people are looking

# The Horace's Duskywing (Ventral)

**Steve Mirick**

7/9/2022 Concord  
Pine Barrens



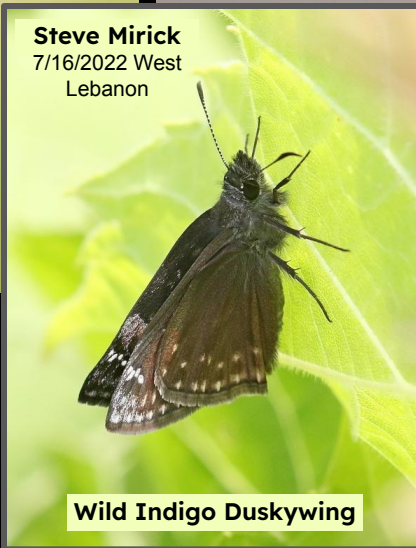
Hindwing spotting  
very faint as  
compared to the  
well-defined spots  
of the Wild Indigo  
Duskywing (the  
only species its  
flight period  
overlaps with)

**Steve Mirick**

7/30/2023 Rye



**Steve Mirick**  
7/16/2022 West  
Lebanon



**Wild Indigo Duskywing**

## Are we seeing very early Horace's Duskywings this year?

- The two earliest iNat RG observations posted for New England prior to this year were on May 18th, 2022 in Charlestown, RI (see [iNat observation 117604471](#), an observation confirmed by Bryan Pfeiffer and Harry Pavulaan) and on June 1st, 2014 in Providence, RI (see [iNat observation 794499](#), an observation confirmed by Harry Pavulaan).
- Also of note is a Duskywing observation posted on April 28th, 2024 in Brentwood, NH (see [iNat observation 211499883](#)), an observation that looks very much like a Horace's, but John Calhoun (co-author of *Butterflies of Maine...*) challenged the identification of this butterfly as a Horace's, stating that the spots on the underside of the hindwing are not always reliable...the Juvenal's can lack them and the Horace's can rarely have them.

# Summary

Lest you think Duskywings are too difficult to tell apart,  
here are some key takeaways...

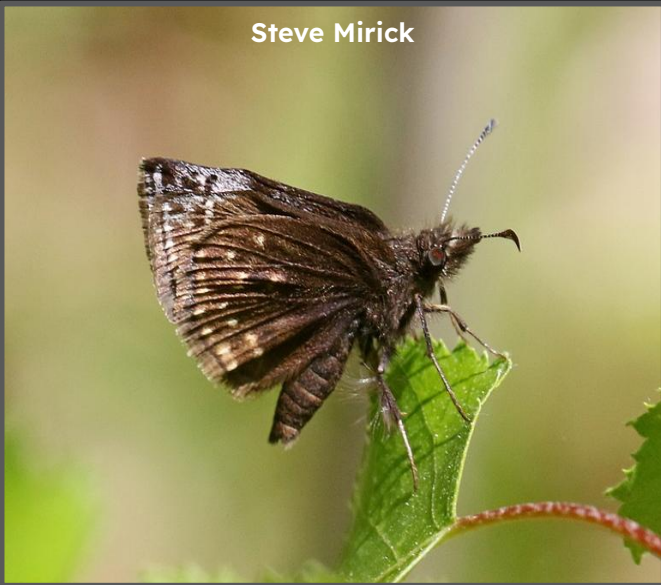


# Dreamy Duskywing

Mike Thomas



Steve Mirick



- With practice you will start to notice these are smaller.
- Remember that the wings are shorter relative to the body. Compare the antenna length to wing length. If the antennae are roughly half the length of the wings, you're most likely looking at a Dreamy.
- If you see a duskywing before mid-May and after the first week of July, suspect another species.
- Look for the dorsal post median chain-like pattern on the forewing. This pattern is typically less uniform, more jumbled, and often narrower than the pattern found on the Sleepy.

# Sleepy Duskywing

Steve Mirick



Steve Mirick



- With practice you'll start to see these as larger than the Dreamy.
- Remember that the wings are longer relative to the body. Compare the antenna length to wing length. If the antennae are roughly a third of the length of the wings, you're most likely looking at a Dreamy.
- A considerably earlier flier than the Dreamy (as much as 4 weeks earlier).
- If you see a duskywing after the end of May, suspect another species.
- Look for the dorsal post median chain-like pattern on the forewing. This pattern is typically more uniform, less jumbled, often wider than the pattern found on the Dreamy.

## Juvenal's Duskywing

- Typically exhibits two translucent subapical spots on the ventral side of hindwing
- Hindwing spotting is more muted, less well defined than the three species it overlaps flight periods with...the Sleepy, Dreamy, and Wild Indigo Duskywing.
- Unless you're observing a duskywing prior to mid-May, I'd be reluctant to identify this species based solely on the dorsal view



# Wild Indigo Duskywing

- Flight period can overlap with any of our 4 other duskywings
- For potential early season WID's (May and June) exclude Juvenal's by observing the lack of subapical translucent spots on ventral HW, exclude Sleepy and Dreamy by presence of 4 misaligned subapical FW spots dorsally.
- For potential later season WID's (July and August) exclude Horace's by observing distinctly sharp PM spots (not absent, smeared or mottled like Horace's) in the ventral HW.



Mike Thomas



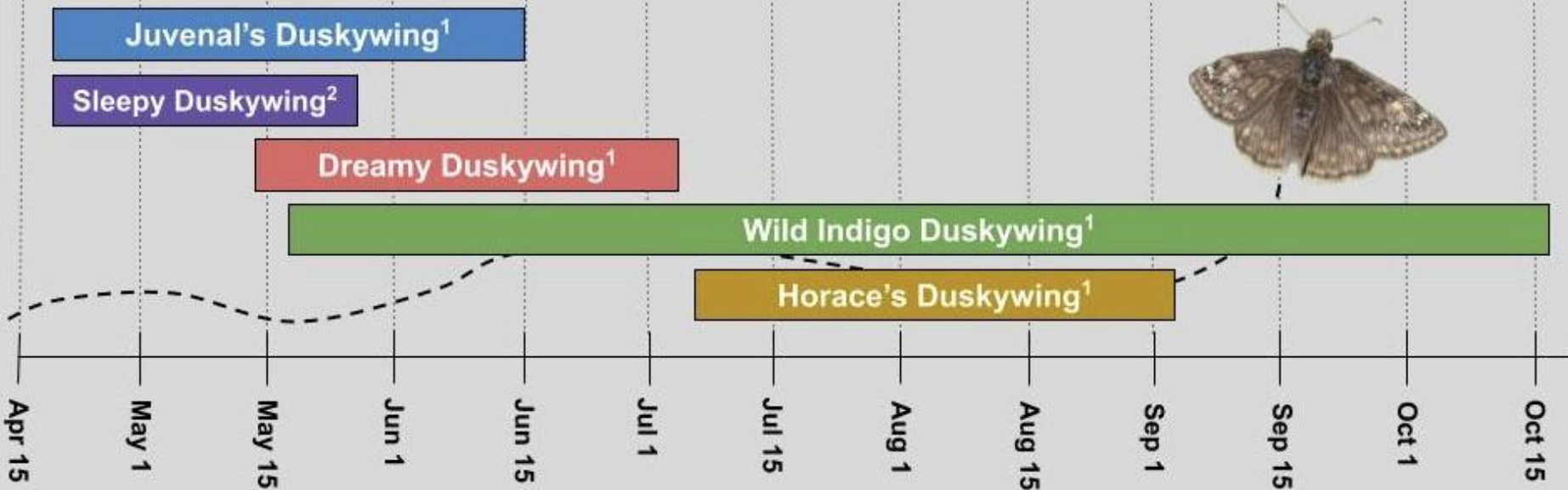
# Horace's Duskywing

- Flight period only known to overlap with Wild Indigo in NH
- The ventral view is most helpful in distinguishing this species from the Wild Indigo. The Wild Indigo has very distinct ventral PM/SM spots on the hindwing.
- The Horace's is also more likely to have a median spot on the dorsal FW.

Steve Mirick



# NH Duskywing Flight Periods



<sup>1</sup> Flight period derived from NH and VT research-grade observations on iNaturalist

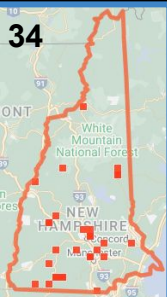
<sup>2</sup> Flight period derived from New England research-grade observations on iNaturalist

## Juvenal's

34

Habitat: Variable, can be found w/Juvenal's, Sleepy, Dreamy & Horace's

Larval Food: Variety of oaks and scrub oaks (Quercus)



## Sleepy

2

Habitat: Obligate to dry, scrub oak/pitch pine barrens. Can be found with Dreamy,

Larval Food: Scrub Oak (Quercus ilicifolia)

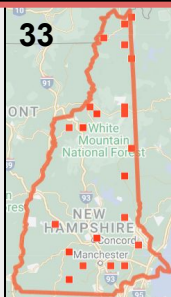


## Dreamy

33

Habitat: Variable, can be found with Juvenal's, Sleepy, & Wild Indigo

Larval Food: Willows (Salix), aspens (Populus), and occasionally birch (Betula)

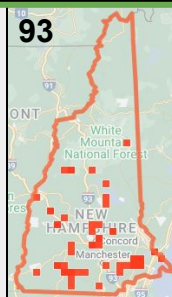


## Wild Indigo

93

Habitat: Variable, roadside, meadows.

Larval Food: In our region Crown Vetch (Securigera varia) is dominant food species. Also wild indigos (Baptisia)



## Horace's

28

Habitat: Variable

Larval Food: Oaks (Quercus)




	Dreamy	Sleepy	Juvenal's	Horace's	Wild Indigo (WID)
<b>Kaufman Page</b>	284	284	280	280	286
<b>Swift Page</b>	313	313	314	314	318
<b>Flight Period</b>	mid May - early July	Mid April - late May	end April - mid June	Early July - early Sept	late May - early Oct
<b>Wingspan</b>	1 ½ - 1 ½" (smallest of Duskie's)	1 ¼ - 1 ¾" (larger than Dreamy)	1 ¼ - 1 15/16"	1 7/16 - 1 15/16"	1 ¾ - 1 ¾" (smaller on average than Juvenal's and Horace's)
<b>FW black fingers</b>	Typically shorter, stunted	Barely present to stunted	Less prominent than WID	Less prominent than WID	Prominent. On average longer than other duskie's.
<b>Dorsal gender distinction</b>	Not pronounced. In dorsal view FW PM band more prominent in female.	Not pronounced. In dorsal view FW PM band more prominent in female.	1) Females contrasting light and dark FW bands (more starkly patterned), 2) female dorsal hyaline spots (including median spot) larger, more conspicuous and may be more numerous, 3) less sexually dimorphic than Horace's.	1) Females contrasting light and dark FW bands (more starkly patterned), 2) female dorsal hyaline spots (including median spot) larger, more conspicuous and may be more numerous, 3) more sexually dimorphic than Juvenal's and Wild Indigo.	1) Females contrasting light and dark FW bands (more starkly patterned), 2) female dorsal hyaline spots (including median spot) larger, more conspicuous and may be more numerous, 3) less sexually dimorphic than Horace's.
<b>Dorsal features<sup>1</sup></b>	1) Smallest duskywing, 2) wings appear shorter relative to body than those of Sleepy, 3) semblance of PM black chain-like pattern (often less uniform & narrower than Sleepy), 4) usually 1 FW sub-apical spot (sometimes none or two), 5) FW gray frosting at wrist more than Sleepy, 6) typically longer palps than Sleepy.	1) Larger than Sleepy, 2) wings appear longer relative to body than those of Dreamy, 3) semblance of PM black chain-like pattern (often more uniform & wider than Dreamy), 4) usually 0 FW sub-apical spots (sometimes w/1), 5) less FW gray frosting at wrist than Dreamy, 6) typically shorter palps than Dreamy.	1) Very tough to distinguish from Horace's & Wild Indigo without ventral view, 2) Look for single median white spot present on most individuals, 3) Look for lack of 2 features only on WID: contrasting darker cape and mostly black cell inside costal fold.	1) Very tough (particularly males) to distinguish from Wild Indigo. To distinguish Horace's from WID, Horace's typically has median FW spot, lacks of predominantly black cell bar inside costal fold, and lacks pronouncedly dark inner half/cape.	1) Cell inside costal fold is mostly black, 2) Perhaps the most pronouncedly black-fingered dusky, 3) More starkly contrasted darker inner half/cape than other duskie's, 4) Typically lacking (or very small) median white spot on FW.
<b>Ventral features<sup>1</sup></b>	1) Smallest duskywing, 2) wings appear shorter relative to body than those of Sleepy, 3) HW spots are well-defined (not mottled/blotchy). 4) plume of hair on hind tibia of males.	1) Larger than Dreamy, 2) wings appear longer relative to body than those of Dreamy, 3) HW spots are well-defined (not mottled/blotchy). 4) plume of hair on hind tibia missing in males.	1) Two HW sub-apical translucent spots (NOTE: rare individuals have been found to lack this feature)	1) HW spots less defined more mottled (blotchy) as compared to Wild Indigo which has well-defined spots.	1) Lack of translucent sub-apical spots on HW (as compared to Juvenal's) 2) HW spots more defined than mottled (blotchy) as compared to Horace's
<b>Antennal features</b>	Longer than Sleepy relative to wing length (Antennal length runs roughly ½ of costa)	Shorter than Dreamy relative to wing length (Antennal length runs roughly ⅓ of costa)			

1 - Always consider flight period (e.g. if it's flying much past the beginning of July, it most likely isn't a Dreamy, Juvenal's or Sleepy)

# And that's all folks!

Many thanks to [Steve Mirick](#), [Mike Thomas \(naturecloseup.com\)](#), and Amy Highstrom for graciously filling in the gaps of my butterfly photo library and providing so many magnificent photos!

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**Please, please, please:** If you find any inaccuracies in these slides or if you have any suggestions for additions or improvements, email [bakerpondsbutterflies@gmail.com](mailto:bakerpondsbutterflies@gmail.com).

*Thanks! George*

Background photo taken  
by Bob Fleck