

Butterflies and Skippers – Order Lepidoptera

Annotated Checklist by Family and Subfamily
for Nevada and Placer Counties, California



Sierra Nevada Parnassian

This checklist of living creatures is, by nature, a work in progress. As regions change—by human activity and by nature—and the ecology alters, the flora (plants) and fauna (animals) change, too. This list is from the sources cited on the last page; those sources are based on county records, which are based on museum specimens, authoritative monographs or other publications, or records from recognized experts.

Species in this list are presented in phylogenetic (evolutionary) order. In addition to listing the common and scientific name (*Genus [Subgenus] species*) for the butterflies and skippers that have been recorded in Nevada and Placer Counties, this list contains select life history details for each species as well. The life cycle of butterflies and skippers, like most insects, has four distinct stages: **egg**, **larva** (caterpillar), **chrysalis** (pupa), and a winged **adult** butterfly or skipper. Each species has a diapause strategy—the “dormancy” that a specific life stage enters in order to survive through a time that is unsuitable. The most common “dormancy” for butterflies and skippers is through winter when temperatures are low and there is much less plant material available. (All caterpillars eat plants, and almost all adults consume flower nectar.) Diapause strategy can involve any one of the life stages (including any one of the caterpillar stages, or instars, which are the periods between each skin molt), but will always be the same stage for all individuals of a specific species.

Overwinters: The life stage that hibernates through the winter. For caterpillars, the stage is in perens. For adults, some species migrate to a warmer location for the winter, either south or to a lower elevation.

Number of Broods: The number of flight periods each species can be expected to have in a normal year (— = unknown).

Flight Period: The time period that the specific species can typically be seen flying as an adult in the proper habitat. As with wildflowers, the flight period varies with altitude, latitude, and yearly weather variations. Most of the species in this list have geographic ranges well beyond our two counties, and the flight period listed is generalized for much of that range (e-month = early, m-month = mid, l-month = late).

	Overwinters	No. of Broods	Flight Period
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Butterflies – Superfamily Papilionoidea

Swallowtails – Family Papilionidae

Parnassians – Subfamily Parnassiinae

Clodius Parnassian	<i>Parnassius clodius</i>	egg	1	Jun–Jul
Sierra Nevada Parnassian	<i>Parnassius behrii</i>	egg	1	m-Jul–e-Sep

Range: Endemic to (restricted to, found nowhere else) Sierra Nevada, high elevation.

Swallowtails – Subfamily Papilioninae

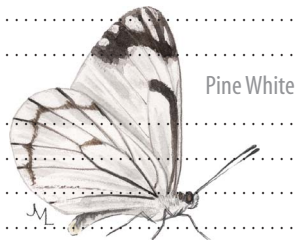
Pipevine Swallowtail	<i>Battus philenor</i>	chrysalis	1+ ¹	Apr–Sep ²
This species has the strangest life cycle of any California butterfly. . . . When the larvae pupate, some will lay over until next spring; some will hatch without diapause in a couple of weeks; and a few will hatch some time late in summer or in fall. ¹				
Anise Swallowtail	<i>Papilio zelicaon (incl. nitra)</i>	chrysalis	1	Apr–Jul
Indra Swallowtail	<i>Papilio indra</i>	chrysalis	1	Mar–Aug

		Overwinterers	No. of Broods	Flight Period
Western Tiger Swallowtail	<i>Papilio rutulus</i>	chrysalis	1	Jun–Jul
Two-tailed Swallowtail	<i>Papilio multicaudata</i>	chrysalis	1	May–m-Aug
Pale Swallowtail	<i>Papilio eurymedon</i>	chrysalis	1	Apr–Jul

Whites and Sulphurs – Family Pieridae

Whites – Subfamily Pierinae

Pine White	<i>Neophasia menapia</i>	egg	1	Jun–Sep
Becker's White	<i>Pontia beckerii</i>	—	several	Mar–Oct
East side of the Sierra.	Pine White			
Spring White	<i>Pontia sisymbrii</i>	chrysalis	1	Feb–Jul
Checkered White	<i>Pontia protodice</i>	chrysalis	3	Mar–Nov
Western White	<i>Pontia occidentalis</i>	chrysalis	2	May–Aug
Margined White	<i>Pieris marginalis</i>	chrysalis	2	Feb–Sep
Cabbage White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	chrysalis	multiple ¹	almost all year
Only confirmed non-native butterfly in US. ¹				
Large Marble	<i>Euchloe ausonides</i>	chrysalis	2	Feb–Apr, May–Aug
Desert Marble	<i>Euchloe lotta</i>	chrysalis	1	Mar–Jun
California Marble	<i>Euchloe hyantis</i>	chrysalis	1	Apr–e-Jul
Pacific or Sara Orangetip	<i>Anthocharis sara</i>	chrysalis	1+	Feb–Apr, May–Jun
Stella Orangetip	<i>Anthocharis stella</i>	chrysalis	1	l-Mar–m-Aug primarily m-Jun–m-Jul
Gray Marble	<i>Anthocharis lanceolata</i>	chrysalis	1	Mar–Jun



Sulphurs – Subfamily Coliadinae

Clouded Sulphur	<i>Colias philodice</i>	caterpillar (3rd)	3	May–Oct
Orange Sulphur or Alfalfa Butterfly	<i>Colias eurytheme</i>	chrysalis	2–3	Jun–Oct
Queen Alexandra's Sulphur	<i>Colias alexandra</i> ^(N)	caterpillar (late)	1	May–Aug
California Dogface	<i>Zerene eurydice</i>	chrysalis ²	2	Apr–May, Jul–Aug
California State Butterfly		adult(?) ¹		
Range: North-central California south to Baja California, west of the central mountains and deserts.				
Cloudless Sulphur	<i>Phoebis sennae</i>	chrysalis ²	—	Apr–Oct ¹ primarily l-Aug–Sep ¹
Adults migrate to northern areas from southern (warmer) breeding areas.				
Dainty Sulphur	<i>Nathalis iole</i>	adult	—	l-Apr–e-Oct ¹
Adults migrate to northern areas from southern (warmer) breeding areas.				

Gossamer-wing Butterflies – Family Lycaenidae

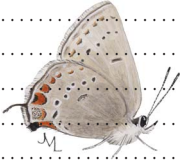
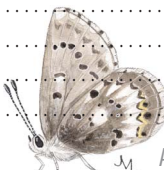
Coppers – Subfamily Lycaeninae

Tailed Copper	<i>Lycaena [Tharsalea] arota</i>	egg	1	May–Aug
Lustrous Copper	<i>Lycaena cupreus</i> ^(P)	caterpillar (half-grown)	1	May–Aug
Great Copper	<i>Lycaena xanthoides</i>	egg ²	1	May–m-Aug primarily l-May–m-Jul
Edith's Copper	<i>Lycaena editha</i>	egg	1	l-Jun–Aug
Gorgon Copper	<i>Lycaena gorgon</i>	egg	1	May–Jun
Ruddy Copper	<i>Lycaena rubidus</i>	egg	1	low elev: Jun–Jul high elev: Jul–Aug
Blue Copper	<i>Lycaena heteronea</i>	egg	1	May–Aug
Purplish Copper	<i>Lycaena belloides</i>	egg	2	May–Jul, Aug–Oct
Lilac-bordered Copper	<i>Lycaena nivalis</i>	egg	1	Jun–Aug
Mariposa Copper	<i>Lycaena mariposa</i>	—	1	Jul–Aug

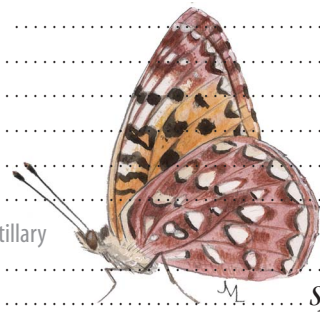
Caterpillar host is Dwarf Bilberry, *Vaccinium caespitosum*, which grows at margins of wet meadows at higher elevations in the Sierra.

Hairstreaks – Subfamily Theclinae

Golden Hairstreak	<i>Habrodais grunus</i>	egg	1	Jun–Sep
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		Overwinters	No. of Broods	Flight Period	
Great Purple Hairstreak		<i>Atlides balesus</i>	chrysalis	3	Mar–Dec
Behr's Hairstreak		<i>Satyrium bebrii</i>	egg	1	Jun–Jul
Sooty Hairstreak		<i>Satyrium fuliginosum</i>	—	1	Jul–Aug
California Hairstreak		<i>Satyrium californica</i>	egg	1	May–Aug
Sylvan Hairstreak		<i>Satyrium sylvinus</i>	egg	1	May–Aug
Gold-hunter's Hairstreak		<i>Satyrium auretteorum</i>	egg	1	May–Jul
Mountain-mahogany Hairstreak		<i>Satyrium tetra</i>	egg	1	Jun–Jul
Hedgerow Hairstreak		<i>Satyrium saepium</i>	egg	1	Apr–Sep
Western Green Hairstreak		<i>Callophrys affinis</i>	chrysalis	1	May–Jul
(previously <i>C. apama</i> , <i>C. affinis</i> , and <i>C. dumetorum</i>)					
Sheridan's Green Hairstreak		<i>Callophrys sheridani</i>	chrysalis	1	Mar–Jun
Brown Elfin		<i>Callophrys [Incisalia] augustinus</i>	chrysalis	1	May–Jul
One of the few butterflies that nectar at Redbud flowers in the early season. ¹					
Moss' Elfin		<i>Callophrys [Incisalia] mossii</i>	chrysalis	1	Mar–Jun
Western Pine Elfin		<i>Callophrys [Incisalia] eryphon</i>	chrysalis	1	May–Jun
Thicket Hairstreak		<i>Callophrys [Loranthomitoura] spinetorum</i>	chrysalis	1	Mar–Aug
Johnson's Hairstreak		<i>Callophrys [Loranthomitoura] johnsoni</i>	chrysalis	1	Mar–Jul
Juniper Hairstreak		<i>Callophrys [Mitoura] gryneus^(N)</i>	chrysalis	1	Mar–Jul
Nelson's Hairstreak		<i>Callophrys [Mitoura] nelsoni</i>	chrysalis	1	May–Jul
Gray Hairstreak		<i>Strymon melinus</i>	chrysalis	multiple ¹	Mar–Oct
Blues – Subfamily Polyommatainae					
Western Pygmy-Blue		<i>Brephidium exile</i>	chrysalis	multiple ¹	Jul–Oct
Our smallest butterfly ¹ —wingspan 1/2–3/4".					
Marine Blue		<i>Leptotes marina</i>	—	—	Apr–Nov ¹ primarily after Jul ¹
Adults migrate to northern areas from southern (warmer) breeding areas.					
Reakirt's Blue		<i>Hemiargus isola^(N)</i>	chrysalis	3	Mar–Nov
Adults migrate to northern areas from southern (warmer) breeding areas.					
Eastern Tailed-Blue		<i>Everes comyntas</i>	caterpillar	multiple ¹	Apr–Nov
Western Tailed-Blue		<i>Everes amyntula</i>	caterpillar (mature)	1	Mar–Jul
Spring Azure or Echo Blue ¹		<i>Celastrina "ladon" (C. l. echo¹)</i>	chrysalis	2 ¹	Feb–Apr, May–e-Jul ¹
This "species" is in reality still a complex of additional species (Appalachian Azure, Atlantic Holly Azure, Dusky Azure, and Hops Azure) whose identity is under current research. Only one entity, known as <i>echo</i> , occurs in our area. ¹ Adults nectar on Redbud in the early season. ¹					
Sonoran Blue		<i>Philotes sonorensis</i>	chrysalis	1	Feb–Mar
Pacific Dotted-Blue		<i>Euphilotes enoptes</i>	chrysalis	1	m-May–Oct
Arrowhead Blue		<i>Glaucopsyche piasus</i>	chrysalis	1	Mar–Jul
Silvery Blue		<i>Glaucopsyche lygdamus</i>	chrysalis	1	low elev: Mar–Jun high elev: Jun–Aug
Northern Blue		<i>Lycaeides idas</i>	caterpillar (2nd)	1	Jul–Aug
(our populations formerly referred to as <i>L. argyrognomen</i>)					
Melissa Blue		<i>Lycaeides melissa</i>	egg ²	—	Apr–Oct
Greenish Blue		<i>Plebejus saepiolus</i>	caterpillar (half-grown)	1	May–Aug
Boisduval's Blue		<i>Plebejus [Icaricia] icarioides</i>	caterpillar (2nd)	—	Apr–Aug
Shasta Blue		<i>Plebejus [Icaricia] sbasta</i>	—	1	Jun–Aug
Where found above timberline, these butterflies require 2 years to mature, spending their first winter as eggs and the second winter as mature caterpillars.					
Acmon Blue		<i>Plebejus [Icaricia] acmon</i>	caterpillar (2nd)	many	Mar–Oct
Lupine Blue		<i>Plebejus [Icaricia] lupini</i>	caterpillar (2nd)	1	Jun–Aug
Sierra Nevada Blue		<i>Agriades podarce</i>	caterpillar/chrysalis	1	Jun–Sep
Habitat: Subalpine meadows. Range: Southern Oregon to central California in Klamath Range and Sierra Nevada.					
Metalmarks – Family Riodinidae					
Mormon Metalmark		<i>Apodemia mormo</i>	egg–hatchling ¹	1 ¹	Jul–Sep

		Overwinterers	No. of Broods	Flight Period
Brush-footed Butterflies – Family Nymphalidae				
Heliconians and Fritillaries – Subfamily Heliconiinae				
Great Spangled Fritillary	<i>Speyeria cybele</i>	caterpillar (1st, unfed)	1	m-Jun–m-Sep
Coronis Fritillary	<i>Speyeria coronis</i>	caterpillar (1st, unfed)	1	m-Jun–Sep
Zerene Fritillary	<i>Speyeria zerene</i>	caterpillar (1st, unfed)	1	m-Jun–e-Sep
Callippe Fritillary	<i>Speyeria callippe</i>	caterpillar (1st, unfed)	1	May–Aug
Great Basin Fritillary	<i>Speyeria egleis</i>	caterpillar (1st, unfed)	1	l-Jun–Aug
Northwestern Fritillary	<i>Speyeria hesperis</i>	caterpillar (1st, unfed)	1	Jun–Oct
Zerene Fritillary				primarily Jul–Aug
Hydaspe Fritillary	<i>Speyeria hydaspe</i>	caterpillar (1st, unfed)	1	Jun–Sep
Mormon Fritillary	<i>Speyeria mormonia</i>	caterpillar (1st, unfed)	1	Jun–Sep
Pacific Fritillary	<i>Boloria epithore</i>	caterpillar (4th)	1	May–Aug
True Brush-foots – Subfamily Nymphalinae				
Leanira Checkerspot	<i>Thessalia leanira</i>	caterpillar (3rd)	1	Apr–Jul
Northern Checkerspot	<i>Chlosyne palla</i>	caterpillar (half-grown)	1	Apr–Jul
Sagebrush Checkerspot	<i>Chlosyne acastus</i> ^(N)	caterpillar (3rd & 4th)	2	Jun–Aug
Hoffmann's Checkerspot	<i>Chlosyne hoffmanni</i>	caterpillar (half-grown)	1	Jun–Jul
Field Crescent	<i>Phyciodes pratensis</i>	caterpillar (half-grown)	1	Jun–Aug
California Crescent	<i>Phyciodes orseis</i>	caterpillar (3rd)	1	May–Jun
Mylitta Crescent	<i>Phyciodes mylitta</i>	caterpillar (half-grown)	2	Apr–Sep
Variable Checkerspot	<i>Euphydryas chalcedona</i>	caterpillar (3rd & 4th)	1	Apr–Jun
				higher elev: Jun–Jul
Edith's Checkerspot	<i>Euphydryas editha</i>	caterpillar (3rd & 4th)	1	low elev: Mar–May high elev: Jun–Aug
Satyr Comma	<i>Polygonia satyrus</i>	adult	2–3	Feb–Nov
Green Comma	<i>Polygonia faunus</i>	adult	1	May–Aug
Gray Comma	<i>Polygonia progne</i> ^(N)	adult	2	Apr–May, Jun–Aug
Hoary Comma	<i>Polygonia gracilis</i> ^(P)	adult	1	Apr–Jun, Jul–Sep
California Tortoiseshell	<i>Nymphalis californica</i>	adult	3	Apr–May, Jun–Sep
				Overwintering adults lay eggs in early spring and die. The second-generation adults, emerging in late spring, migrate to the Sierra where two more broods are produced. Adults from the last summer brood migrate back to lowland California to hibernate for the winter. ²
Mourning Cloak	<i>Nymphalis antiopa</i>	adult	1	Jun–Jul
				After feeding briefly, the adults estivate (dormancy in summer) until fall, when they re-emerge to feed and store energy for hibernation.
				Some adults migrate south in the fall. Adults live 10–11 months and may be our longest lived butterfly.
Milbert's Tortoiseshell	<i>Nymphalis [Aglais] milberti</i>	adult	2	May–Oct
				Eggs are laid in large batches of up to 900. Most species of butterflies and skippers (in our area) lay their eggs singly or in small clusters, though it is typical of the Checkerspots and Crescents to lay eggs together in groups or large batches.
American Lady	<i>Vanessa virginiensis</i>	adult	multiple	all year ^{1,2}
				Least common of our three ladies. ¹
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	adult	multiple	l-Feb–e-Dec ¹
				This butterfly has the widest range of any in the world, occurring on all continents except Australia and Antarctica. From the deserts along the US-Mexican, it migrates and temporarily colonizes the United States and Canada south of the Arctic. The northward migration occurs every year, but varies in density by several orders of magnitude; when sparse it is nearly invisible, but in big years hundreds of millions of adults invade our air space on a broad front, astonishing spectators and tying up traffic. ¹
West Coast Lady	<i>Vanessa annabella</i>	adult	multiple	all year
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	adult	multiple	all year
Common Buckeye	<i>Junonia coenia</i>	caterpillar	multiple	all year
				Adults live for only 10 days. ²
Admirals and Relatives – Subfamily Limenitidinae				
Lorquin's Admiral	<i>Limenitis lorquini</i>	caterpillar (half-grown)	several	Apr–Oct
California Sister	<i>Adelpha bredowii</i>	caterpillar (half-grown)	2	May–Sep



		Overwinters	No. of Broods	Flight Period
Satyrs – Subfamily Satyrinae				
Common Ringlet	<i>Coenonympha tullia</i>	caterpillar (1st & 4th)	1–2	Mar–Oct
Common Wood Nymph	<i>Cercyonis pegala</i> ^(N)	caterpillar (1st, unfed)	1	1-May–Oct
Great Basin Wood Nymph	<i>Cercyonis sthenele</i>	caterpillar (1st, unfed)	1	Jun–Aug
Small Wood Nymph	<i>Cercyonis oetus</i>	caterpillar (1st, unfed)	1	Jun–Aug
Chryxus Arctic	<i>Oeneis chryxus</i>	caterpillar	1	m-Jul–m-Aug

Caterpillars require 2 years to complete development; hibernating as young caterpillars the first winter, and as mature ones the second winter. Adults tend to occur in alternate (odd) years. Range in our area is the high Sierra.²

Monarchs – Subfamily Danainae

Monarch	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>	adult (migrates)	varies latitude	Spr–Sum
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The Monarch is famous for its long-distance seasonal migrations. Most North American Monarchs overwinter in the Transvolcanic Range near Mexico City. Ours do not. Monarchs from the western Great Basin and West Coast spend the winter along the California coast.¹ They roost in trees, forming huge aggregations that used to have hundreds of thousands of individuals. (In the past decade plus, Monarch populations have plummeted, with winter aggregations now numbering a only few hundred at most locations.) During the winter the butterflies may take moisture and flower nectar on warm days. Most have mated before migrating in the spring from their wintering spots in search of milkweed species. After laying eggs, these adults die. At least four more generations can occur until fall, when that generation migrates to the traditional wintering spots (where these individuals have never been before). Overwintering adults live for up to eight months; summer-generation adults live for only a couple of weeks.² Males are not territorial and do not puddle. Females may drive off other females from clumps of the host plant—a most unusual behavior in butterflies.¹

Skippers – Superfamily Hesperioidea

Skippers – Family Hesperiidae

Spread-wing Skippers – Subfamily Pyrginae

Silver-spotted Skipper	<i>Epargyreus clarus</i> (incl. <i>buachuca</i>)	chrysalis	1	May–Jul
Largest skipper in our fauna. ¹				
Northern Cloudywing	<i>Thorybes pylades</i>	caterpillar (fully grown)	1	May–Jul
Western Cloudywing	<i>Thorybes diversus</i> ^(N)	—	1	Jun–Jul
Range: Local and scarce. South Cascade mountains of Oregon and the Sierra Nevada of California.				
Mexican Cloudywing	<i>Thorybes mexicana</i>	—	1	Jun–Aug
Habitat: Alpine and subalpine meadows, slopes, and clearings. Range: In California, the Sierra crest and eastward. ²				
Dreamy Duskywing	<i>Erynnis icelus</i>	caterpillar (fully grown)	1	Apr–e-Jul
Sleepy Duskywing	<i>Erynnis brizo</i>	caterpillar (fully grown)	1	Mar–Jun
Properius Duskywing	<i>Erynnis properius</i>	caterpillar (fully grown)	1	Mar–Jul
Mournful Duskywing	<i>Erynnis tristis</i>	caterpillar (last brood)	multiple	Mar–Oct
Pacuvius Duskywing	<i>Erynnis pacuvius</i>	caterpillar (large) ¹	1	Apr–Jul ¹
Funereal Duskywing	<i>Erynnis funeralis</i> ^(N)	caterpillar (last brood)	3	Mar–Dec
Persius Duskywing	<i>Erynnis persius</i>	caterpillar (fully grown)	1	Apr–Jun
Two-banded Checkered-Skipper	<i>Pyrgus ruralis</i>	—	1	Apr–Jul
Common Checkered-Skipper	<i>Pyrgus communis</i>	caterpillar (fully grown)	multiple ¹	Mar–Oct
Northern White-Skipper	<i>Heliopetes ericetorum</i>	—	several	Apr–Oct
Common Sootywing	<i>Pholisora catullus</i>	caterpillar (2nd brood)	2	May–Aug

Grass Skippers – Subfamily Hesperinae

Arctic Skipper	<i>Carterocephalus palaemon</i>	caterpillar (fully grown)	1 ¹	May–Jul
Skipperling – Subfamily Heteropterinae, not Hesperinae ¹				
Fiery Skipper	<i>Hylephila phyleus</i>	—	several	Apr–Dec
Juba Skipper	<i>Hesperia juba</i>	caterpillar (probably)	2	May–Jun, Aug–Sep
Western Branded Skipper	<i>Hesperia colorado</i>	egg	1	Jun–1-Sep
Lindsey's Skipper	<i>Hesperia lindseyi</i>	egg	1	May–Jul
Nevada Skipper	<i>Hesperia nevada</i>	caterpillar	1	1-May–e-Aug
Sandhill Skipper	<i>Polites sabuleti</i>	chrysalis	1	Apr–Sep

		Overwinters	No. of Broods	Flight Period
Sonora Skipper	<i>Polites sonora</i>	—	1	Jun–Aug
Sachem	<i>Atalopedes campestris</i>	caterpillar (fully grown)	3	Apr–Jun, Aug–Oct
Rural Skipper	<i>Ochlodes agricola</i>	—	1	May–Jun
Woodland Skipper	<i>Ochlodes sylvanoides</i>	egg or caterpillar (1st)	1	Jul–Oct
Yuma Skipper	<i>Ochlodes yuma</i> ^(P)	—	2	Jun–Jul, Aug–Sep
Umber Skipper	<i>Poanes melane</i>	—	2	Mar–Jun, Jul–Oct
Common Roadside Skipper	<i>Amblyscirtes vialis</i>	caterpillar	1	Mar–Jul
Eufala Skipper	<i>Lerodea eufala</i>	—	several	all year

Adults migrate to northern areas from southern (warmer) breeding areas.

End Notes

(N) Within our two counties, recorded only in Nevada County.

(P) Within our two counties, recorded only in Placer County.

Checklist Sources (for this handout)

Woodside Gardens, The Registry of Nature Habitats. 1999–2011. *Butterflies of North America: Butterflies of Nevada County, California*. http://www.abirdshome.com/resource/chklist/states/counties/ca_57.htm (11 October 2011)

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