

## Lon hobomok wetona (Western Hobomok Skipper)

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Steve Cary,

### Taxonomy

- **Class:** INSECTA
- **Order:** LEPIDOPTERA
- **Family:** HESPERIIDAE
- **Genus:** Lon
- **Scientific Name:** *Lon hobomok wetona* (Scott, 1981)
- **Common Name:** Western Hobomok Skipper
- **Synonyms:** *Poanes hobomok* ssp. *wetona* Scott, 1981
- **Taxonomic Name Source:** Pelham, J. P. 2008. A catalogue of the butterflies of the United States and Canada with a complete bibliography of the descriptive and systematic literature. *The Journal of Research on the Lepidoptera*. Volume 40. 658 pp. Revised 14 February, 2012.

### Agency Status

- **NMDGF:**
- **Federal Status:**
- **BLM Sensitive:**
- **USFS:**
- **IUCN Red List:** [Not Evaluated](#)
- **Nature Serve Global:** [T2](#)
- **NHNM State:** S1
- **NM Endemic:** NO

### Description

Hobomok Skipper is similar to Taxiles Skipper in appearance and habits. When fresh from the chrysalis, Hobomok males are lovely blue and gold underneath. The median spots on the underside of the HW are larger and more blocky in Hobomok than Taxiles. Dark-scaled veins on the dorsum are lacking on Taxiles males. Lon hobomok females are more distinctly gold above than Lon taxiles females. **Comments.** James A. Scott first saw this skipper in New Mexico at Raton Mesa (Co) on 4 June 1973. Our populations are best referred to subspecies *Lon hobomok wetona* J. Scott 1981, which is smaller and lighter than the eastern form.

Description courtesy of Steven J. Cary, [Butterflies of New Mexico](#), 2024

### Habitat and Ecology

In New Mexico this butterfly resides mostly in montane drainages and grassy forest openings surrounded by Oak-Pine woodlands (Gatrelle 2002, Scott 2020, Cary and Toliver 2024). The specific host plants for this taxa have not been recorded however other subspecies of this taxa use Panicgrass (*Panicum spp.*) and Bluegrass (*Poa spp.*) in the Poaceae family (Scott 2020, Cary and Toliver 2024). The Western Hobomok Skipper is univoltine with extreme flight dates ranging from mid May to early July although the highest densities are observed in June (Scott 2020, Cary and Toliver 2024). Adults of both sexes feed on flower nectar and sip moisture from mud (Scott 2020, Cary and Toliver 2024). This butterfly visits all colors of flowers and known nectar plants include Geraniums (*Geranium spp.*), Sweetvetch (*Hedysarum spp.*), Bush Vetchling (*Lathyrus eucosmus*), and Common Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*), this butterfly has also been observed feeding on berries, and bird dung. (Scott 2020). Males can be observed perching on sunlit vegetation near streambanks, or in small clearings awaiting females periodically patrolling up and down drainages or surrounding areas before often returning to their same perches (Scott 2020, Cary and Toliver 2024).

## Geographic Range:

This butterfly has been observed in the Raton Mesa Complex, in northeastern New Mexico, as well as in the Wet Mountains, in Colorado (Brock and Kaufman 2003, Scott 2020, Warren *et al.* 2024). It is possible the butterfly occurs in additional sites between these two areas, such as west of La Veta, but currently these two localities are the only ones in which it has been observed (Gatrelle 2002, Scott 2020). In New Mexico this butterfly is usually found between 2,285 and 2,590 m (Cary and Toliver 2024). This butterfly is likely somewhat of a glacial relict, which shifted in distribution with that of grasses, north, east, and to higher elevations, as the Wisconsin ice sheet retreated 20,000 years (Gatrelle 2002). There are populations of *Lon hobomok* further south in the Sacramento Mountains of New Mexico, and it is unknown what subspecies they may be. They have likely been isolated from populations of *L. h. wetona* for quite a long time and as a result, are not currently considered this subspecies.

## Conservation Considerations:

This subspecies underwent a NatureServe conservation assessment in 2007 and was found to be globally imperiled with extinction which is the IUCN equivalent of an endangered rank (NatureServe 2024). It also went through a state assessment in one of the two states it exists in that being Colorado and was found to be imperiled there as well (NatureServe 2024). Due to the threats of fire suppression and ecological succession choking out the forest openings and edges this butterfly requires it seems like there is cause for conservation concern and action otherwise this butterfly is unlikely to persist. These efforts should first focus on research as we are missing quite a bit of information which we will need to properly conserve this butterfly. This includes determination of the butterflies range including searching around and in between the two known occurrences as well as figuring out what is happening with the populations to the south in the Sacramento and likely also Sangre de Cristo mountains. Determination of the host plants being utilized by this butterfly will also be crucial for its effective protection. As land use change and degradation of habitat seem to be the main threats to this taxa, habitat restoration and protection is probably where conservation should be focused in order to properly protect this butterfly.

## Threats:

This subspecies is somewhat range limited and seems restricted to higher elevation forest edges, clearings, and drainages as a result of this habitat association ecological succession and climate change are likely the two main threats to this butterfly (Scott 2020, Cary and Toliver 2024). The effects of climate change are especially prevalent for this population as it is one of the most southern populations of the Hobomok Skipper with only one further south population being found in New Mexico (Lotts and Naberhaus 2023, GBIF.org 2024). It has been documented that many butterfly species respond to climate change by moving to higher elevations or higher latitudes however, as this butterfly

is already at higher elevations there is a concern that this butterfly may run out of space if it cannot make its way further north (Rodder *et al.* 2021). As the western United States is expected to continue to get hotter and drier over the next century this is a major threat to the taxa (Cook *et al.* 2009, Cook *et al.* 2015, Williams *et al.* 2022). Climate change also threatens this subspecies with phenological mismatch with both host and nectar sources which could result in steady declines in population numbers or in the event of an extreme phenological mismatch the extirpation of entire populations (Singer and Parmesan 2010, Patterson *et al.* 2019).

The second major threat to this butterfly is ecological succession and this butterfly is likely highly affected by fire or the lack of it. Scott (2020) has cited that this subspecies seems to be declining by overgrowth of conifers choking out forest openings which this butterfly relies on; this is especially prevalent in the Wet Mountains (Scott 2020). This overgrowth of conifers however can also cause fires to burn hotter with all the extra fuels potentially resulting in additional mortality if a fire does occur. Because we don't know the host plant for this taxa we also do not know how fire might affect this butterfly's host plant but more research is needed on the subject. Widespread habitat alteration besides just loss of habitat to conifers has also occurred across this butterfly's range through grazing, invasive species and recreational development (CNHP 2024).

Determination of the specific host plants for this butterfly is needed in order to more properly analyze the threats to them; however, invasive species have invaded the habitat of this butterfly across its range and is likely a major threat to this butterfly's host plants (CNHP 2024).

## Population:

The population size and trend are not known for this subspecies. Determination of population size and monitoring of population trends is necessary to ensure the population is stable. Especially as several widespread, relatively common species of butterfly are in decline across the American west (Forister *et al.* 2021).

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## More Information

