

Hesperiidae family

Mottled Grass-skipper

*Anisynta cynone***Aso known as:** Cynone Skipper**Abundance in Adelaide area:** Rare**Flight:** Mar-Apr**Wingspan:** m 23 mm; f 24 mm**Mature larva length:** 20 mm

This fascinating Skipper has become rare due to habitat alteration, but persists in some coastal areas near the suburbs. It is assumed to breed on native grasses in the Adelaide area and has adapted to introduced grasses. If the Coast Tussock-grass is grown in gardens close to nature reserves near the sea, from Goolwa to Port Gawler, this Skipper may become established.

The Mottled Grass-skipper has only one flight period, in autumn, and has the ability to delay egg hatching. It can also remain in the chrysalis stage for a long period over summer.

Caterpillar food plants: Native and introduced grasses.

Adelaide native species: Coast Tussock-grass (*Poa poiformis* var. *poiformis*), and probably other coastal grasses, such as *Austrostipa* species.

Foreign species: Weed grasses—Couch*, False Brome*, Rice Millet*, Veldt Grass* and others.

A rare Skipper in the Adelaide region, the Mottled Grass-skipper survives in sub-coastal grassland environments. These areas do not look appealing or capable of harbouring interesting wildlife and this, combined with the desirability of open land near the coast for residential development, have impacted on this butterfly.

The butterfly emerges late in autumn, whereas most Skipper species are active in spring or summer. This allows the butterfly to lay its eggs



near clumps of perennial grasses that produce new growth as the first autumn rains fall, which is when the eggs emerge.

The upper surface of both sexes of this small Skipper is mid-brown to grey-brown. Both wings are fringed with a chequered grey and brown scale fringe. Underneath, the forewing is also mid brown, becoming more orange-brown towards the outer margin.

The caterpillar is pink-brown in colour with a prominent brown head. It feeds over winter and spring then moves off its food plant to make a shelter in which it seals itself to wait out the summer as its food plants die back. In March, the caterpillar transforms into a cylindrical, pale brown pupa with black patches near the head and with a white powdery bloom surrounding it. The best way to assist this Skipper is by preserving open, un-mown, grassed areas near the coast such as reserves along bike tracks and in uncultivated coastal margins where the butterfly still survives.

