

Resemblance of Essex skipper (*Thymelicus lineola*) and Small skipper (*T. sylvestris*) is causing a large overestimation of the distribution of Small skipper in Flanders.

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Essex and Small skipper are widespread and closely-resembling hesperids. Apart from genitalia examination, (fresh) females can be separated only by the colour of the antennal clubs' undersides; the shape of the androconial patch constitutes an extra trait for males. Because of the limited morphological differentiation within this species pair, it is suspected that citizen scientists frequently settle on wrong identifications. In practice, one assumes this is only a minor problem since both species naturally co-occur in similar grassland biotopes anyway. However, if one of both species –*in casu* Small skipper– is more susceptible to habitat deterioration, we hypothesized its decline may go largely unnoticed as a result.

Here, we tested for such a bias through surveying skippers –simultaneously by three experts– in 45 sites selected from the pool of all very recent observations of Small skipper in Flanders and Brussels (euro.observado.org). We selected 15 sites for each of three types: (i) with and (ii) without photographic evidence (and at least 15km away from type (i)), and (iii) no records, but semi-natural grassland within a 1-5km distance from type (i).

We show that while numbers of Essex and Large skipper do not differ significantly among the types, Small skipper occurs almost exclusively and at much higher densities in sites where it was recorded with photographic evidence, compared to the other types. We discuss the implications for the species' current distribution and Red List status in Flanders (N-Belgium) and other nitrogen-stressed regions of Western Europe.