

THE SACHEM: A NEW SKIPPER FOR MANITOBA AND THE PRAIRIE PROVINCES

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The afternoon of 9 July 1991 was ideal for butterfly watching in south-eastern Manitoba — sunny, but not too warm, with light winds and plenty of moisture after a wet weekend. I spent much of the afternoon counting and photographing butterflies along Provincial Road 308, south of East Braintree. This lightly used stretch of gravel road passes through a variety of forest habitats, and is about 60 km from the nearest extensive agricultural region.

Of particular interest was a small, newly discovered population of the Baltimore, *Euphydryas phaeton* (Drury), a rare species in Manitoba.^{4,6,10} Among the skippers, the Dun Skipper, *Euphyes ruricola* (Boisduval), was exceptionally common, and there were also numbers of the European Skipper, *Thymelicus lineola* (Ochsenheimer) and a few individuals of the Long Dash, *Polites mystic* (W.H. Edwards).

One roadside patch of Canada Thistle, *Cirsium arvense* (L.) Scop., about 18 km s.s.e. of East Braintree (49° 30'N, 95° 32'W) had attracted a fine variety of butterflies. While engaged in photography I noticed an unfamiliar skipper nectaring on a thistle flower. Large and robust, relative to the three species listed above, it resembled a female *Hesperia*. It was quite worn and faded, and the most prominent features were two large, almost transparent spots near the centre of each forewing. I obtained a series of six photographs before the skipper flew away, after which it could not be relocated.

Comparison of the slides with plates in Opler and Krizek's *Butterflies East of the Great Plains* led to the tentative identification of this skipper as a female Sachem (sometimes spelled Satchem and also known as Field Skipper), *Atalopedes campestris* (Boisduval).⁷ The photographs did not match well with any known Manitoban species.⁴ I therefore sought advice in confirming the skipper's identity.

Two Manitoban lepidopterists, Paul Klassen and Richard Westwood, agreed that the identification could be correct, but suggested that I seek an opinion from an authority more familiar with the species. Four slides were sent to Paul Opler (U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Fort Collins, Colorado), who confirmed the skipper's identification as a female Sachem. Two of these slides, showing dorsal views of the skipper, are reproduced here.

The Sachem is resident across much of the southern United States from Virginia to California and south to Brazil.^{7,9} It is a temporary summer visitor and sporadic breeder as far north as southern Ontario and much of the northern United States, and it has been recorded in British Columbia.^{1,2,5,7,8,9} In North Dakota, McCabe and Post distinguish two flight periods, 10 June-25 July and 25 August-5 October; the Manitoba record lies well within the former period.⁵ While there is general agreement that the Sachem cannot withstand severe winters, McCabe



Female Sachem near East Braintree, MB, 9 July 1991; dorsal view.

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and Post suggest that winter survival may be possible in the southern badlands of North Dakota.⁵ They note that the spring brood is absent after harsh winters, but can be abundant in June after mild winters.

Although their distribution map shows specimen locations only in the southern third of North Dakota, McCabe and Post indicate that the Sachem may occur as far north as the Pembina Hills and Turtle Mountains in good years; these regions adjoin Manitoba.⁵ Royer shows one additional specimen location in Grand Forks County, about 100 km from the Manitoba border, and 200 km s.w. of the East Braintree site.⁸ Seasonal reports published by the Lepidopterists' Society indicate that the Sachem staged a significant flight into the north-central United States in late June and early July 1991.⁶ The species was reported from seven Wisconsin counties, in-

cluding four new county records, and two new county records were reported for North Dakota. Of particular interest was a report from Kittson Co., at the northwestern extremity of Minnesota, only about 120 km. s.w. of East Braintree, on 26 June 1991.⁶

It is possible that some Manitoba records of the Assiniboia Skipper, *Hesperia comma assiniboia* (Lyman), for 22 June to 11 July, which are questioned by Klassen et al., are referable to female Sachems.⁴ The female Sachem is well illustrated in several sources,^{5,7,8} but many of the commonly used field guides lack illustrations or detailed descriptions, making identification difficult. Furthermore, the insect is quite variable, and the individual illustrated in Howe's *Butterflies of North America* is extremely dark.³

Given the wide-ranging, sporadic northward movements of the Sachem,



Female Sachem near East Braintree, MB, 9 July 1991; dorsal view.

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its occurrence in Manitoba from time to time would not be surprising. The worn condition of the individual described here is consistent with long-distance immigration. Sachem larvae feed on various grasses, including Crabgrass (*Digitaria* sp.), so breeding in Manitoba may be possible if the Sachem ever reaches the province in sufficient numbers.⁷

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