



**Natural Heritage  
& Endangered Species  
Program**

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*Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife*

**Persius Duskywing  
*Erynnis persius***

State Status: **Endangered**  
Federal Status: **None**

**DESCRIPTION:** The Persius Duskywing (*Erynnis persius*) is a skipper butterfly with a wingspan of 28 to 35 mm (Schweitzer et al. 2011). The forewing is dark brown, almost black, the hind wing also dark brown but not as dark as the forewing. There are small white apical spots on the forewing and pale submarginal spots on the hind wing. The male has raised, white, hair-like scales on the forewing that render a “soft” appearance. The common Wild Indigo Duskywing (*Erynnis baptisiae*) is so similar in appearance that the Persius Duskywing cannot be reliably identified in the field or from a photograph. However, comparing the males of each species, the Persius Duskywing typically has more raised, white, hair-like scales on the forewing than the Wild Indigo Duskywing (but the latter also has a smaller number of similar scales); many (but not all) Wild Indigo Duskywings have a brown patch in the distal area of the forewing that is absent on the Persius Duskywing; and many (but not all) Persius Duskywings have white forewing apical spots that are aligned, not offset like the Wild Indigo Duskywing. Female Persius and Wild Indigo Duskywings are even more similar in appearance. The only definitive way to identify the Persius Duskywing is to examine the male genitalia under magnification.



*Erynnis persius* • MA: Plymouth Co. • 19 May 2004 • Photo by M.W. Nelson

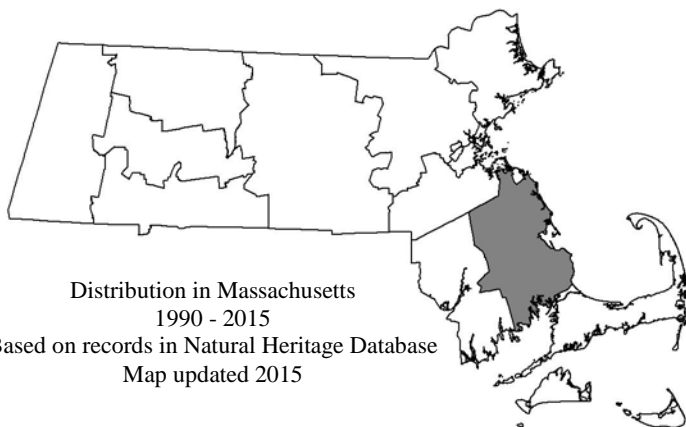
**Adult Flight Period in Massachusetts**

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

**HABITAT:** The Persius Duskywing inhabits xeric, open oak woodland, sandplain pitch pine-scrub oak barrens, and other disturbance-dependent habitats with wild indigo or lupine.

**LIFE HISTORY:** Adult Persius Duskywing butterflies fly from early May through mid-June. Larvae feed on wild indigo (*Baptisia tinctoria*) or lupine (*Lupinus perennis*) in June and July, with all individuals fully grown and entering diapause by early August. Larvae overwinter and pupate in early spring.

**GEOGRAPHIC RANGE:** The nominate subspecies of the Persius Duskywing (*Erynnis persius persius*) occupies a spotty and disjunct range in eastern North America, from southern New England west through southern Ontario and Michigan to Wisconsin, and south to New Jersey and Pennsylvania, possibly extending further south in the



Distribution in Massachusetts  
1990 - 2015  
Based on records in Natural Heritage Database  
Map updated 2015

**A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan**

**Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife**

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Appalachian Mountains (Opler 1998). During the past 60 years the *Persius Duskywing* has declined dramatically throughout this range, including in Massachusetts, where there is currently only one known population.

**STATUS AND THREATS:** The *Persius Duskywing* is threatened by habitat loss and fire suppression. Fire promotes growth of wild indigo and lupine, and maintains the open habitat structure needed by both the *Persius Duskywing* and its host plants. Other potential threats include introduced generalist parasitoids, aerial insecticide spraying, non-target herbiciding, excessive deer browse of larval host plants, and off-road vehicles.

### **Literature Cited**

- Opler, P.A. 1998. *A Field Guide to Eastern Butterflies*. Peterson Field Guide Series. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, Massachusetts. 486 pp.
- Schweitzer, D.F., M.C. Minno, and D.L. Wagner. 2011. *Rare, Declining, and Poorly Known Butterflies and Moths (Lepidoptera) of Forests and Woodlands in the Eastern United States*. Forest Service, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Washington, DC. 517 pp.

*Updated 2019*  
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