

METALMARKS



Metalmarks are small- to medium-sized butterflies of the family [Riodinidae](#). Of the [1,532](#) species found world wide, [24](#) inhabit NA, and only [6](#) occur in the Mojave Desert. The name refers to the often metallic-looking spots that adorn the wings. Typical of all butterflies, they are diurnal and lack a frenulum that their cousins, the moths, employ to connect fore- and hindwings, which allows both sets to act in unison during flight. Likewise, they undergo a four-stage complete metamorphosis life cycle from egg to larva (caterpillar) to pupa to adult. However, while most butterflies hold their wings closed vertically above their bodies at rest, metalmarks generally hold theirs more horizontal, though not flat (usually at about a 45-degree angle).

Most species are colorful and boldly patterned, with broad, triangular forewings that are generally larger than the hindwings. Their features often mimic the highly toxic members of the family [Nymphalidae](#), the brushfoot butterflies. This [Batesian](#) mimicry among metalmarks is more common than in any other similarly sized insect family. Also similar to the brushfoots, males have reduced (almost vestigial) forelegs.

Family RIODINIDAE (Metalmarks)

Mormon Metalmark (*Apodemia mormo*)

Measurements:

Average: Length: 1" Wing Span: 1.5"

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; brown body with white pubescence; short, broad wings; dorsal wings brown with orange patches **checkered** with white spots bordered in black (highly variable among subspecies); ventral side grayish with white spots; green eyes; long dark antennae with white bands, brown apical knobs; genders similar (males slightly smaller and have reduced forelegs)

Notes:

common; solitary or in large emergent swarms; occurs in somewhat isolated colonies in grasslands to relatively dry habitats throughout w NA from the Great Plains west to Pacific coast, and from extreme sw CAN south to Sinola, MEX; males emerge first and linger near food plants to await potential mates; female lays singular to small groups of eggs on leaves of host plants, primarily the family **Caryophyllales** (buckwheats); adults consume nectar of various yellow flowers (buckwheats, rabbitbrush, sunflowers, etc.); caterpillars (brown, spikey and pubescent) feed on leaves and stems; over 20 subspecies; flies in short, fast, linear pattern from July to October; adult lifespan about 12 days for males, slightly longer for females

Mojave presence: native

Comments:

The Mormon Metalmark is listed as **THREATENED** in Canada due to habitat loss, and while relatively uncommon in the Mojave, it is the most common metalmark in the region. Unlike most metalmark species, these hold their wings at about a 45-degree angle. The specimens shown above were photographed in Dolan Springs, Arizona, in October of 2022. They were sparingly mixed in with an emergent swarm of superficially similar-looking **California Patch** butterflies (*Chlosyne californica*), making them difficult to distinguish in the field.



Dolan Springs, Arizona



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