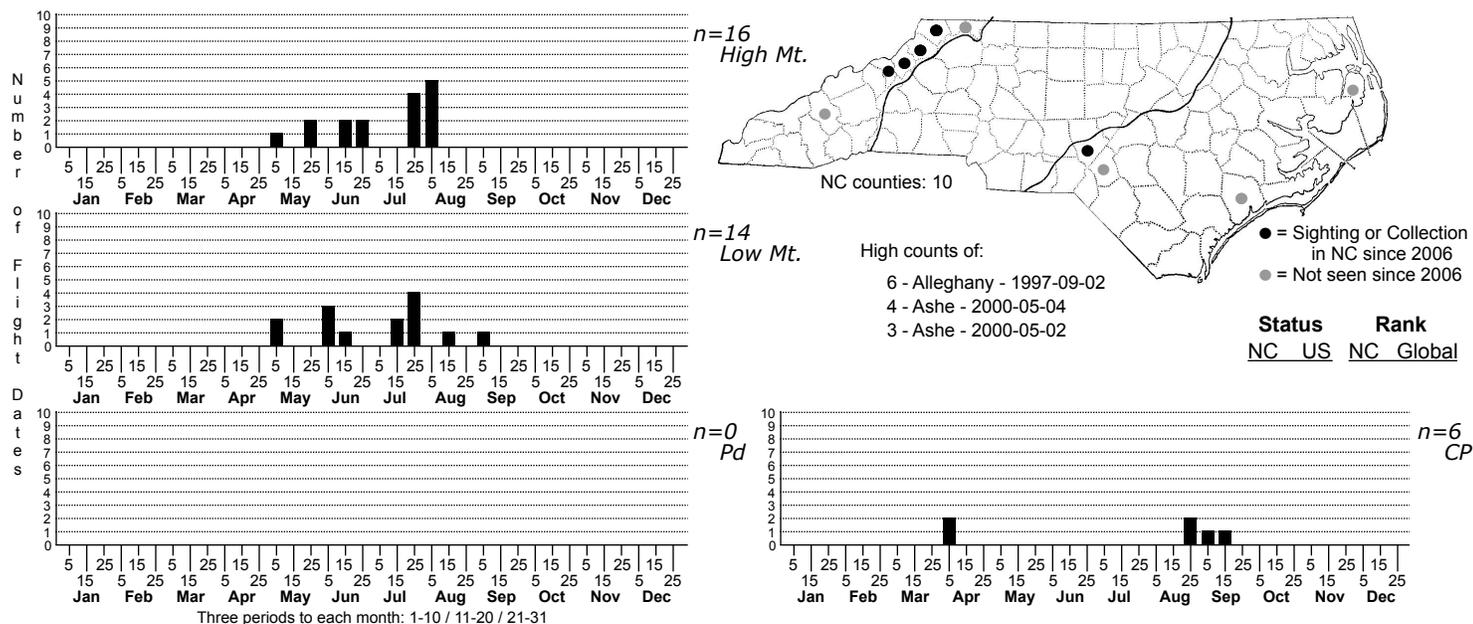


## *Dargida diffusa* Wheat Head Armyworm Moth



FAMILY: Noctuidae SUBFAMILY: Noctuinae TRIBE: Hadenini

TAXONOMIC COMMENTS: This is a large New World genus which recently has included the species formerly placed in *Faronta*. Three species occur in North Carolina. While primarily a genus of high altitude species in the West, Central and South America, our species occur at sea level with some penetrating the mountains.

FIELD GUIDE DESCRIPTIONS: Covell (1984; as *Faronta diffusa*); Beadle and Leckie (2012)

ONLINE PHOTOS:

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, ADULTS: Forbes (1954), as *Faronta diffusa*

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, IMMATURE STAGES: Forbes (1954); Wagner et al. (2011)

ID COMMENTS: Similar in size, coloration, and pattern to some of the *Leucania* species, but the more heavily streaked forewings and pearly-white hindwings are distinctive. Look for the elongated triangular mark below the apex of the forewing and a dark discal spot.

DISTRIBUTION: Recorded from most areas of the state, including the Barrier Islands and High Mountains, but records from the Piedmont are currently absent. Records from forested areas in the High Mountains probably represent migrants.

FLIGHT COMMENT: Our records do not show a distinct pattern of broods but there may be three.

HABITAT: Found most often in open habitats where either wet or dry grasses are abundant. Habitats include natural grasslands associated with maritime dunes and inland sandhills, but also include old fields, mountain bogs, and grassy balds.

FOOD: Caterpillars are known to feed on the seeds of a variety of grasses and will also attack grain crops. Wagner et al. (2011) specifically list oats (*Avena sativa*), Pinebarren Sandreed (*Calamovilfa brevipilis*), barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), rice (*Oryza sativa*), Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*), timothy (*Phleum pratense*), rye (*Secale cereale*), *Sorghum*, Tall Redtop (*Tridens flavus*), and wheat (*Triticum aestivum*). Godfrey (1972) adds Big Bluestem (*Andropogon gerardi*), Common Barnyard-grass (*Echinochloa crusgalli*), Canada Wild-rye (*Elymus canadensis*), Quackgrass (*Elymus repens*), and Annual Wild-rice (*Zizania aquatica*). We do not have any feeding records in North Carolina.

OBSERVATION\_METHODS: Adults come to light but their response to bait or flowers is unknown.

NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM RANKS: G5 SNR [S2S4]

STATE PROTECTION: Has no legal protection, although permits are required to collect it on state parks and other public lands.

COMMENTS: Compared to some of the other armyworm species, we have relatively few records for this species. Trapping fields of winter wheat may show the species to be more common but that is a habitat that is otherwise biologically unappealing.