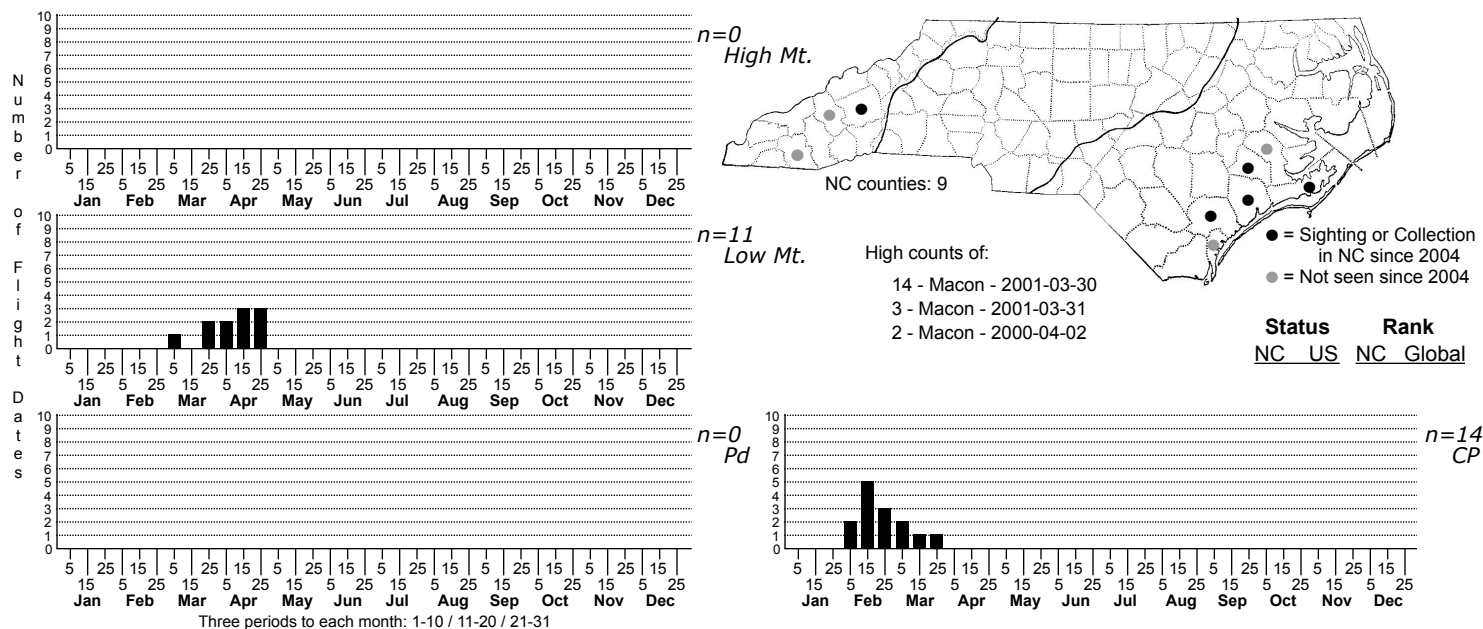


## *Cerastis fishii* Fish's Dart



FAMILY: Noctuidae SUBFAMILY: Noctuinae TRIBE: Noctuini

TAXONOMIC\_COMMENTS: The genus *Cerastis* has undergone significant change in the past 20 years, primarily due to its fusion with *Metalepsis*. It now contains about 13 species almost equally split between the Nearctic (mostly *Metalepsis*) and the Palearctic (mostly *Cerastis*). The combined genus is closely related to *Choephora*. We have two species in North Carolina, both of which fly early in the spring.

FIELD GUIDE DESCRIPTIONS: Beadle and Leckie (2012)

ONLINE PHOTOS:

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, ADULTS: Forbes (1954); Lafontaine (1998)

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, IMMATURE STAGES:

ID COMMENTS: Two color forms occur, one reddish, the other gray. There is a distinct black rectangular spot on the forewing costa which is absent in *C. tenebrifera*. Sexes are similar.

DISTRIBUTION: Our records come from the Mountains and Outer Coastal Plain.

FLIGHT COMMENT: At lower elevations the adults are found on warmer days in March, at higher elevations (low mountains) in April and May. Overlaps with the more common *C. tenebrifera* but usually is on the wing somewhat later in that species's flight season.

HABITAT: Our records come from two areas where blueberries and other heaths are common: Longleaf Pine habitats in the Coastal Plain and upland habitats in the Mountains.

FOOD: Blueberries have been used to rear larvae from captive females but wild larvae have not yet been seen.

OBSERVATION\_METHODS: Adults come to lights but we could not find records at bait or at flowers. However, a British member of the same genus does occur at willow blossoms (Porter, 1997).

NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM RANKS: G4 [S3S4]

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

COMMENTS: We have very few records from this species, but that is due partly to its very early flight period. It appears to be somewhat specialized in terms of its habitats, however, and at least some of its rarity could be due to changes in the frequency of the natural fires needed to support extensive areas of blueberries and other heaths, particularly in upland habitats. More adult surveys need to be conducted in the right habitats during the late winter, or larval surveys conducted later in the growing season, to determine the abundance, distribution, and habitats of this species.