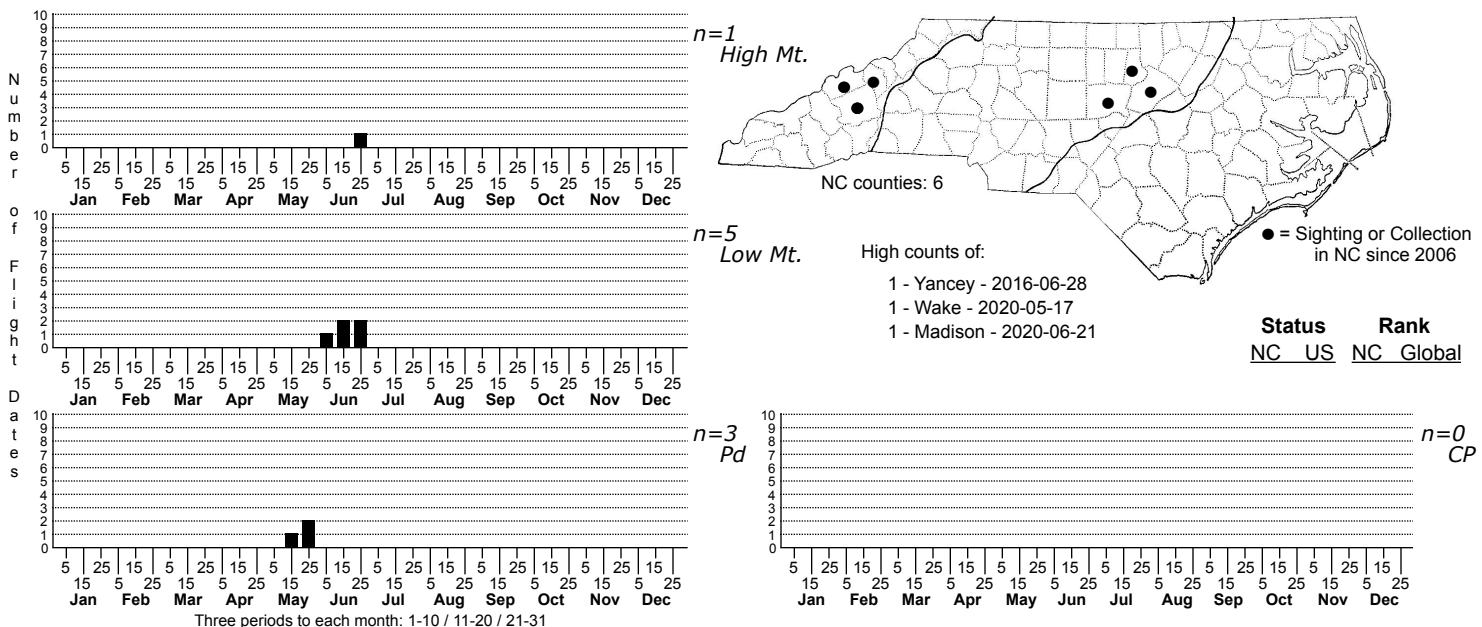


Elachista cucullata None



FAMILY: Elachistidae SUBFAMILY: Elachistinae TRIBE: Elachistini

TAXONOMIC COMMENTS: <i>Elachista</i> is a large genus of small moths that occur worldwide. Around 135 Nearctic species are currently recognized. They specialize on monocots and most feed on either grasses (Poaceae) and sedges (Cyperaceae).

FIELD GUIDE DESCRIPTIONS:

ONLINE PHOTOS:

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, ADULTS: Braun (1948, p. 70)

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, IMMATURE STAGES: Braun (1921); Eiseman (2019)

ID COMMENTS: This is a minute but distinctive black-and-white moth, with only a faint bronzy luster on the dark bands. It has a white head, a white basal band, a median fascia that does not extend all the way to the inner margin, and two subterminal spots. <i>Elachista leucofrons</i> has similar wing markings but the median fascia completely crosses the wing to reach the inner margin. The detailed description that follows is from Braun (1948). The face and head are silvery white and the collar is black. The labial palp is white, with the second segment dark brown outwardly. The third segment sometimes has dark shading outwardly, and the antenna is black. The thorax is black except for the tip of the mesothorax, which is white. The forewing is dark brown to nearly black, with a faint golden or bronzy luster. Just before the base there is a silvery fascia that is broadest on the dorsum. A second silvery white fascia occurs just before the middle that is curved and ends abruptly before reaching the dorsal margin. On some individuals this fascia is reduced to a bar from the costa to the middle of the wing, with a detached spot on the fold. A triangular silvery spot is present at the tornus, and beyond it a longer curved and oblique silvery costal spot. The cilia are grayish brown, with a row of contrasting black scales around the apex. The hindwing and cilia are dark grayish brown. The legs are dark brown, with the basal segments, the tips of segments, and a broad band on the hind tibia silvery. The abdomen is blackish and silvery beneath.

DISTRIBUTION: <i>Elachista cucullata</i> is found in eastern North America, where scattered populations have been found in Ontario, Quebec, Newfoundland, Maine, Massachusetts, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and North Carolina, to as far south as Mississippi and the Florida panhandle. As of 2020, our records include the Piedmont, along with lower and higher elevation sites in the mountains.

FLIGHT COMMENT: Populations are univoltine. The overwintering larvae complete feeding after the spring warm-up then pupate. Adults have been collected from May through July, with most records from May and June. As of 2020, our records are from mid-May to late-June.

HABITAT: The larvae feed on sedges that are found in freshwater wetlands and moist bottomlands. Representative habitats include marshes, fens, bogs, roadside ditches and floodplain forests.

FOOD: Braun (1921, 1948) reported that the hosts include several narrow-leaved sedge species, especially James's Sedge (<i>Carex jamesii</i>). Eiseman (2022) also lists Eastern Narrowleaf Sedge (<i>C. amphibola</i>) and Plantainleaf Sedge (<i>C. plantaginea</i>). The specific hosts that are used in North Carolina are not known.

OBSERVATION METHODS: The adults occasionally visit lights, and mines with the red larvae can be found during the autumn and early spring. We encourage naturalists to search for the mines in order to better document host and habitat use within the state.

NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM RANKS: GNR SU

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

COMMENTS: This wetland species is seemingly uncommon, but additional information on its distribution and abundance are needed before we can assess its conservation status.