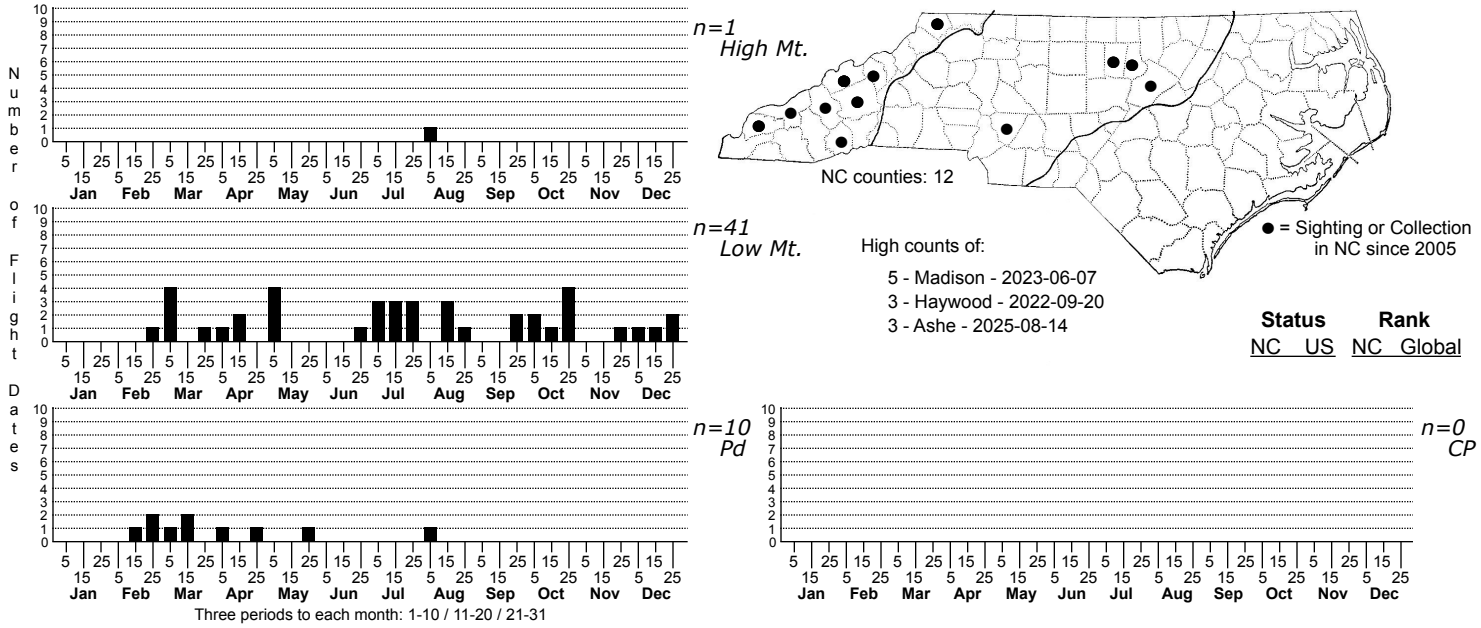
Acleris placidana Black-headed Birch Leaffolder Moth



FAMILY: Tortricidae SUBFAMILY: Tortricinae TRIBE: Tortricini
TAXONOMIC_COMMENTS:

FIELD GUIDE DESCRIPTIONS: Covell (1984); Beadle and Leckie (2012)
ONLINE PHOTOS:
TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, ADULTS:
TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, IMMATURE STAGES: MacKay (1962).

ID COMMENTS: This species tends to be rather uniformly colored, with the most distinctive mark being a black longitudinal dash near the middle of the wing at about one-half the wing length. The palps, head, thorax, and ground color of the forewing can vary from dull white or grayish-white to whitish-tan, and are overlain with a mixture of blackish or dark brown flecks and more diffuse, faint blotches. The costal triangle near the middle of the wing -- that is often well-developed is some Acleris species -- is typically either absence or reduced to two dark blotches along the costa, with the terminal apex near the middle of the wing replaced by a longitudinal black dash. An oblique ridge of raised scales is present at around one-half the wing length that extends from the inner margin to the costa. It separates the basal half of the wing that is often slightly lighter-colored that the apical half. Clusters of small, raised scale patches are also present at around one-fourth and three-fourths the wing length. The hindwing varies from light brown to light gray.

DISTRIBUTION: Acleris placidana is found throughout most of the eastern U.S. and in adjoining regions of southern Canada (Ontario; Quebec; Newfoundland; New Brunswick; Nova Scotia). There are also a few records from western North America, including Alaska, British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan. In the eastern U.S. the range extends from Maine southward through the Atlantic Coast states to northern Florida, and westward to northern Mississippi, southeastern Louisiana, western Tennessee, eastern Oklahoma, Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota. This species is absent or rare in most areas of the southeastern Coastal Plain. As of 2024, our records are restricted to the Piedmont and Blue Ridge.

FLIGHT COMMENT: The adults have been observed during every month of the year in different areas of the range, with the adults typically first appearing seasonally in March through May, depending on the latitude and local climatic conditions. As of 2024, we have records from mid-February through late-December. Local populations in North Carolina appear to have two or three generations per year, with the adults from the final brood overwintering and becoming active again beginning in late-February and early March.

HABITAT: Most of our records are from mesic hardwood forests or forest edges, particularly where species of birch are present.

FOOD: The larvae feed on deciduous trees and shrubs, with birches serving as the primary hosts (Forbes, 1923; Meyrick, 1938; Prentice, 1966, Baker, 1972; Ferguson, 1975; MacKay, 1962; Brown et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2010; Beadle and Leckie, 2012). The reported hosts include Gray Alder (Alnus incana), Yellow Birch (Betula alleghaniensis), Dwarf Birch (B. nana), River Birch (B. nigra), Paper Birch (B. papyrifera), Grey Birch (B. populifolia), Common Apple (Malus domestica), cherry (Prunus) and viburnum (Viburnum). As of 2024, we have rearing records for North Carolina for Yellow Birch and Sweet Birch (B. lenta), which is a new host record. Records of adults from the Piedmont suggest that other hosts are being used outside the mountains, but our only rearing record from the region is for a pupa collected from a fern. Though the host plant is unknown in this case, River Birch seems like a possibility based on the floodplain habitat.

OBSERVATION_METHODS: The adults are attracted to lights and to wine and sugar bait, and the leaf folds are often conspicuous on the host plants.

NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM RANKS: GNR[S3S4]

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

COMMENTS: This species is widespread and can be locally abundant in the Blue Ridge, but much less so in the Piedmont.