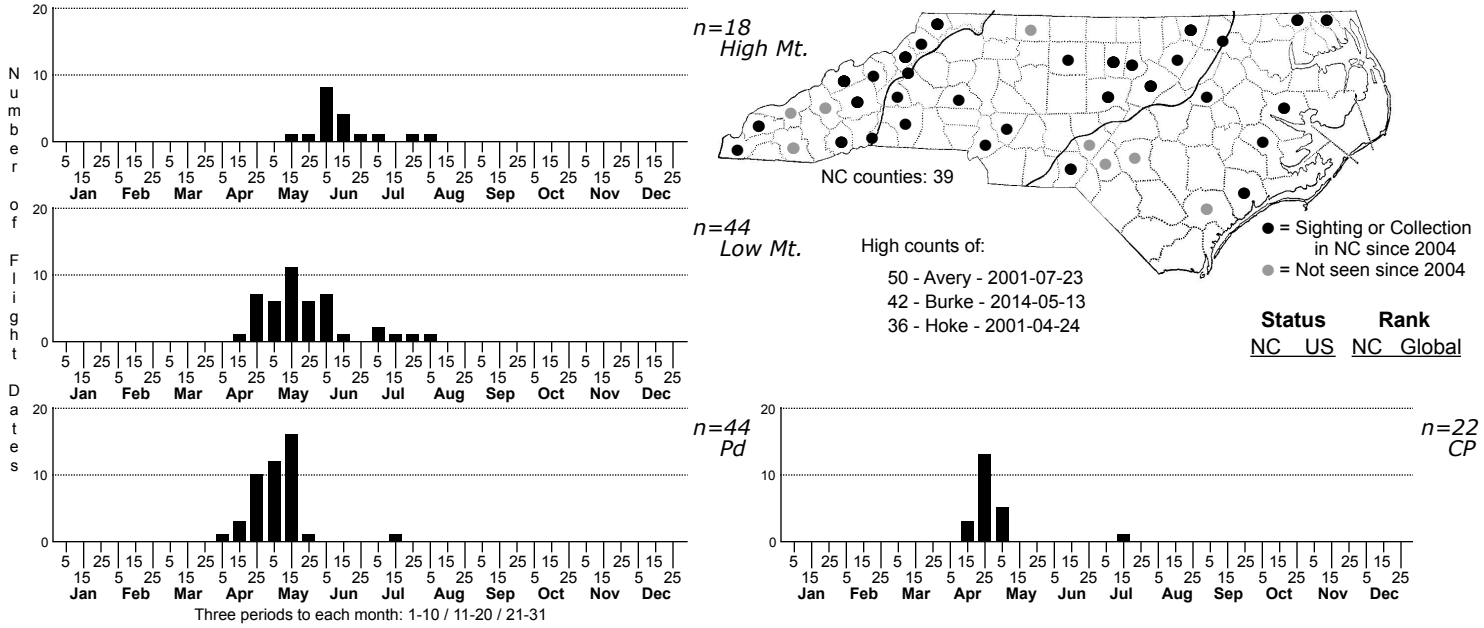
Tortricidia testacea Early Button Slug Moth



FAMILY: Limacodidae SUBFAMILY: TRIBE:
TAXONOMIC_COMMENTS: Members of the family Limacodidae have larvae that are known as 'slug caterpillars' due to their unusual movement that entails a high degree of contact with the substrate and the use of abdominal sucker-like appendages for movement. The tend to glide in slow motion across the substrate like a slug. Overwintering occurs in a cocoon that has a hatch-like lid that opens to allow the adult to eclose. This is one of three species in the genus Tortricidia that occur in North America, all of which are found in North Carolina.

FIELD GUIDE DESCRIPTIONS: Covell (1984); Beadle and Leckie (2012)
ONLINE PHOTOS:
TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, ADULTS: Forbes (1923)
TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, IMMATURE STAGES: Dyar (1898); Wagner (2005)

ID COMMENTS: Tortricidia testacea is the easiest of our three Tortricidia to identify, although like the others there can be considerable variation among individuals. The adults have broad forewings that are typically creamy-pink to pale orange, although some may appear reddish-orange or brown. They are distinguished by the broad, diffuse rusty-orange shading that runs diagonally from the mid-point of the inner margin to the apex. This feature can be absent on especially light-colored individuals and hard to distinguish on dark individuals. The head, palps, antennae, thorax and basal portion of the costa are also rusty-orange, and the forewing veins on the distal half are darker than the surrounding ground color. The hindwing varies from rusty-white to light rusty tan. Individuals typically rests with the abdomen curled up above the wings.

DISTRIBUTION: Tortricidia testacea is broadly distributed in North America, including much of southern Canada from British Columbia to Prince Edward Island. It also occurs throughout most of the eastern US and in northern California and the Pacific Northwest. Scattered, isolated records are also known for Colorado, Utah, and South Dakota. The range in the eastern US extends from Maine southward to northern Florida, and westward to Arkansas, eastern Oklahoma, Missouri, eastern Kansas, Illinois and Minnesota. This species occurs statewide in North Carolina, with the possible exception of the barrier islands.

FLIGHT COMMENT: the adults have been observed from February through September in different areas of the range, with a seasonal peak typically from May through July in most areas. As of 2023, we have records from early April through early August. Local populations appear to be univoltine in North Carolina, with a seasonal peak in April and May in the Coastal Plain and Piedmont, and a few weeks later in the Blue Ridge.

HABITAT: Local populations are typically found in or near hardwood forests or forest edges as well as wooded residential neighborhoods. Our records come primarily from wet to mesic hardwood forests, including bottomland forests, pond and lakeshores, cove forests, and northern hardwoods.

FOOD: The larvae are polyphagous and feed on the foliage of a variety of hardwoods, particularly those with smooth leaves that allow the larvae to closely contact the leaf surface (Dyar, 1898; Wagner, 2005; Heppner, 2007; Lill, 2008; Beadle and Leckie, 2012). The reported hosts include birches (Betula), hickories (Carya), chestnuts (Castanea), American Beech (Fagus grandifolia), American Witch-hazel (Hamamelis virginiana), Blackgum (Nyssa sylvatica), Black Cherry (Prunus serotina), Northern Red Oak (Quercus rubra) and other oaks, and American Basswood (Tilia americana).

OBSERVATION_METHODS: The adult are attracted to blacklights. They have reduced mouthparts and may not feed; we do not have any records from bait or flowers.

NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM RANKS: G4 [S4]

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

COMMENTS: This species occurs widely across the state, occupying a broad set of hardwood forests, and making use of a large range of host plants, including many that are common. It therefore appears to be secure in North Carolina.