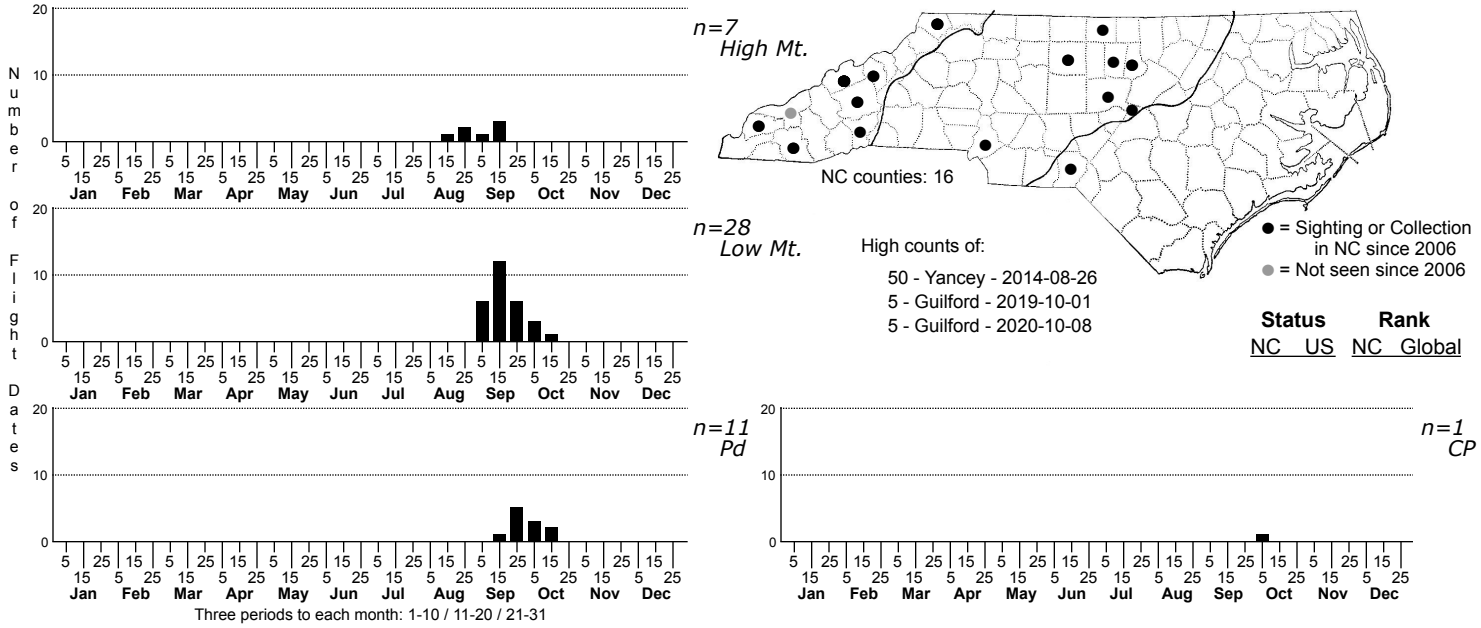
Agriphila ruricolellus Lesser Vagabond Sod Webworm Moth



FAMILY: Crambidae SUBFAMILY: Crambinae TRIBE: Crambini
TAXONOMIC_COMMENTS:

FIELD GUIDE DESCRIPTIONS: Beadle and Leckie (2012)
ONLINE PHOTOS:
TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, ADULTS:
TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, IMMATURE STAGES:

ID COMMENTS: The following description is based in part on those of Fernald (1896) and Forbes (1923). The head and thorax are light yellowish-tan to cream-colored, while the palps are light yellowish-tan with darker speckling near the base of the scales. The ground color of the forewing is mostly yellowish-tan to cream-colored, but shades into a darker brownish-orange along the costa and submarginal area. The forewing is dusted with dark orangish-brown scales that are arranged in six or seven horizontal lines on the basal half of the wing. Similar lines are present on the apical half beyond the median line, but tend to be more diffuse and less well-defined. The median line is brown and diffuse. It originates about midway along the costa and projects obliquely outward for about one-fourth of its length. It then bows outward and run obliquely inward to the inner margin at about one-third the wing length. A similar subterminal line originates at around the outer fourth of the costa and runs nearly parallel to the median line before ending in the sub-tornal region of the inner margin. The terminal line is composed of a marginal row of seven black dots. The fringe is golden-bronze, while the hindwing pale-gray to light-brown with a dull whitish fringe.

Agriphila ruricolellus resembles A. vulgivagellus, but the latter is larger (20-39 mm versus 18-20 mm), darker overall, and lacks the median and subterminal lines.

DISTRIBUTION: Agriphila ruricolellus is broadly distributed in North America, including the eastern U.S., Alaska, the Yukon, most of southern Canada (British Columbia eastward to Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island) and at a few scattered localities in the western U.S., including Colorado, Utah, California and Washington. In the eastern U.S. the range extends from Maine and other New England states southward to Georgia and Alabama, and westward to northwestern Arkansas, eastern Oklahoma, eastern Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota. This species is absent or uncommon in much of the southeastern Coastal Plain. As of 2023, we have a single record from the western Coastal Plain, with all others from the Piedmont and Blue Ridge.

FLIGHT COMMENT: The adults have been observed from June through November in different areas of the range, with the peak months being July through September. As of 2023, our records range from late-August through mid-October. Local populations in North Carolina are univoltine.

HABITAT: Most of our records come from either residential neighborhoods or from fragmented landscapes that have mixtures of forests and fields. Felt (1894) noted that the adults are most commonly see around damp areas and near forests.

FOOD: The host plants are poorly documented. Felt (1894) was able to raise captive larvae on Timothy (Phleum pratense) and Sheep Sorrel (Rumex acetosella), although they largely rejected the grass for the first 10 days. Robinson et al. (2010) also listed corn as a host. Rogers (2014) repeatedly sampled plots for larvae in Creeping Bentgrass (Agrostis stolonifera), Kentucky Bluegrass (Poa pratensis), and turf type Tall Fescue (Festuca arundinacea) and was only able to recover a single larva from the fescue plot, even though numerous adults were observed at light traps. It was uncertain if the larva was actually feeding on the fescue. Clearly, much more work is needed to document the hosts of this species in the wild.

OBSERVATION_METHODS: The adults are attracted to lights.

NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM RANKS: GNR S3S5

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

COMMENTS: This species is not very common in North Carolina. Information is needed on its preferred habitats, host plants, and abundance before we can accurately assess its conservation status within the state.