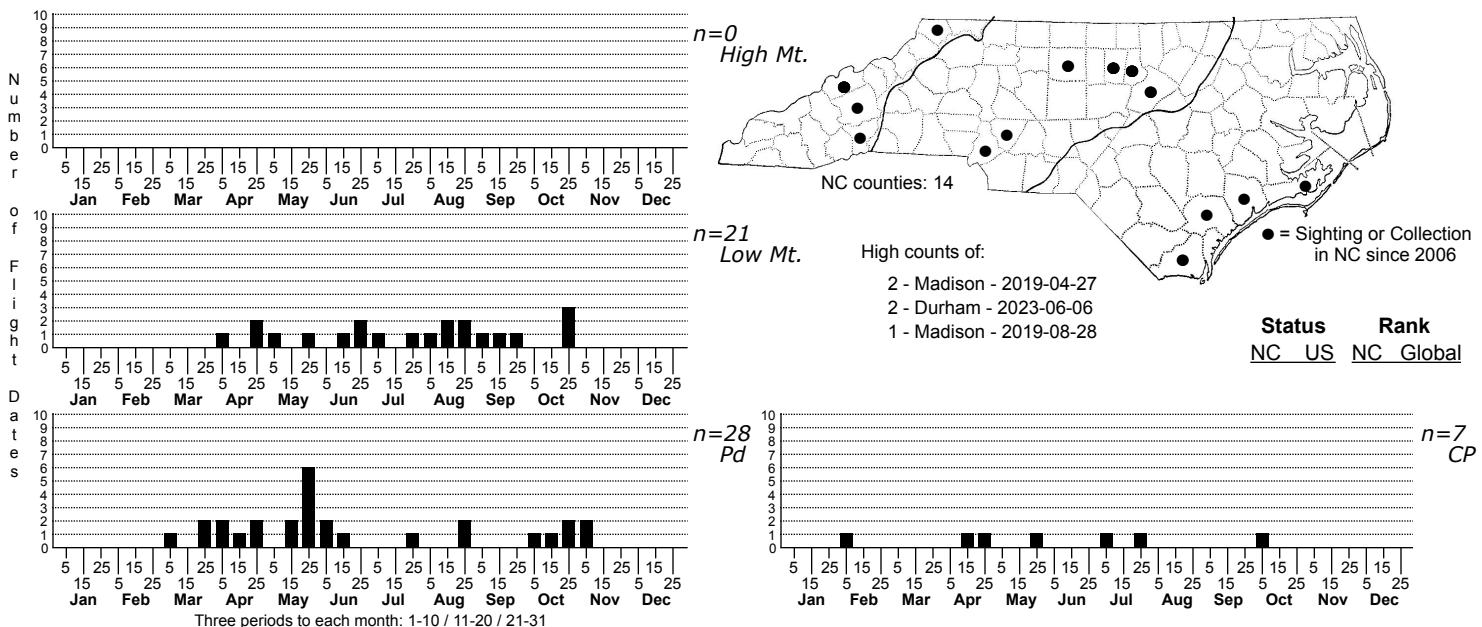


Caloptilia azaleella Azalea Leafminer Moth



FAMILY: Gracillariidae **SUBFAMILY:** Gracillariinae **TRIBE:** [Gracillariini]

TAXONOMIC COMMENTS: <i>Caloptilia</i> is a large genus with nearly 300 described species; 64 species have been described from North America north of Mexico. The larvae mostly feed on woody plants and begin as leaf-mining sap-feeders. The latter instars usually exit the mines and feed within a conical roll that begins at the leaf apex or at the tip of a leaf lobe.

FIELD GUIDE DESCRIPTIONS: Beadle and Leckie (2012)

ONLINE PHOTOS:

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, ADULTS: Beadle and Leckie (2012)

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, IMMATURE STAGES: Eiseman (2019)

ID COMMENTS: The adults have a dark brown ground color on the upper head, thorax, and forewings with a conspicuous pale yellow patch that extends from about one-quarter of the basal region to near the apex. The patch is widest near the median area and narrows posteriorly. A row of minute dark dots typically occurs along the costal margin within the yellow patch, and two or more dark bands are often evident in the cilia. The tibia and femur of the front and middle leg are dark brown, and contrast with the white tarsi below that have dark marks near the tarsal joints. The rear leg is uniformly light straw-colored to whitish, with dark marks at the joints (often faint). The face is white and the labial palps are pale yellow with dark tips. <i>Caloptilia superbifrontella</i> is somewhat similar but lacks the conspicuous black spots near the tarsal joints (typical of azaleella) and has a yellowish streak at the base of the forewing that extends to the dorsum of the thorax. <i>C. superbifrontella</i> also typically lacks the fine black spots along the costa that are characteristic of <i>C. azaleella</i>.

DISTRIBUTION: Although we have only a few records for North Carolina as of 2019, this species presumably occurs statewide.

FLIGHT COMMENT: <i>C. azaleella</i> is multivoltine, with the first seasonal generation beginning in April.

HABITAT: Because this species uses ornamental azaleas as hosts, it is primarily found in city, suburban, and rural landscapes where azaleas are planted.

FOOD: This species is only known to use azaleas (<i>Rhododendron</i> spp.) as hosts (Eiseman, 2022). Non-native, ornamental azaleas appear to be the primary hosts. In North Carolina, Tracy Feldman has reared a larva from <i>Rhododendron</i>.

OBSERVATION METHODS: Adults occasionally come to lights. Ornamental azaleas should be checked for evidence of leaf mines and leaf shelters.

NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM RANKS: GNR [SNA]

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

COMMENTS: <i>C. azaleella</i> does not merit any conservation concerns given that it is an introduced species that appears to rely almost entirely on ornamental azaleas as hosts.