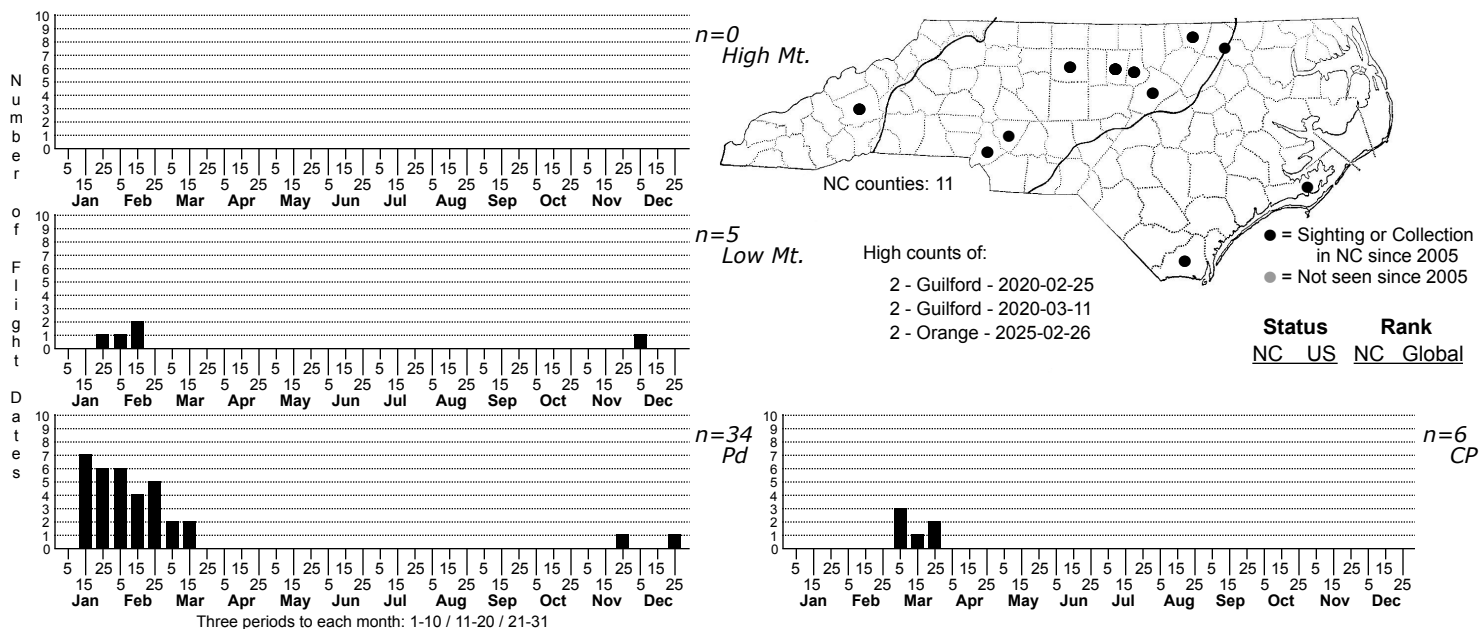


Paleacrita vernata Spring Cankerworm Moth



FAMILY: Geometridae SUBFAMILY: Ennominae TRIBE: Bistonini

TAXONOMIC_COMMENTS: The genus is limited to North America and contains three species of which two occur in North Carolina.

FIELD GUIDE DESCRIPTIONS: Covell (1984); Beadle and Leckie (2012)

ONLINE PHOTOS:

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, ADULTS: Forbes (1948); Rindge (1975)

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, IMMATURE STAGES: Forbes (1948); Wagner et al. (2001); Wagner (2005)

ID COMMENTS: Our two species look unlike most other geometrids and can be distinguished by the light reniform spot in *P. merricata* which is absent in *P. vernata*. Females of both species are flightless. In *vernata*, the females are colored similarly to the males -- mostly pale gray but with a dark dorsal stripe in some individuals (Rindge, 1975). The ends of the tarsal joints are often grayish white, contrasting with the dark brown legs; in *merricata*, the ends of the joints are only weakly contrasting, if at all (Rindge, 1975).

DISTRIBUTION: Probably occurs statewide

FLIGHT COMMENT: This is one of our "winter" moths, active when most other moth species are surviving in the egg, young larval, or pupal stages.

HABITAT: Found throughout the state in wooded areas, particularly in urban areas. Far less common in isolated woodlands.

FOOD: Larvae are polyphagous, consuming a wide variety of hardwood trees with oaks being a favorite. Wagner et al. (2001) specifically list maple (*Acer*), birch (*Betula*), apple (*Malus*), cherry (*Prunus*), oak (*Quercus*), and elm (*Ulmus*).

OBSERVATION_METHODS: Adults come to light but not to bait. Females are difficult to locate but perch on tree trunks where they will deposit the egg clutches. Adults are often seen at convenience stores where they are the only moths that come to the lights in January and February.

NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM RANKS: GNR SNR [S3S4]

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

COMMENTS: Since few people are searching for moths during cold days in January and February, our records undoubtedly under represent the species status in our state. The causes of population outbreaks and their absence in rural areas are unknown. Flightlessness may allow females to produce more eggs and to attract less attention from predators for otherwise it would seem to be a poor strategy. Much remains to be learned about this interesting species.