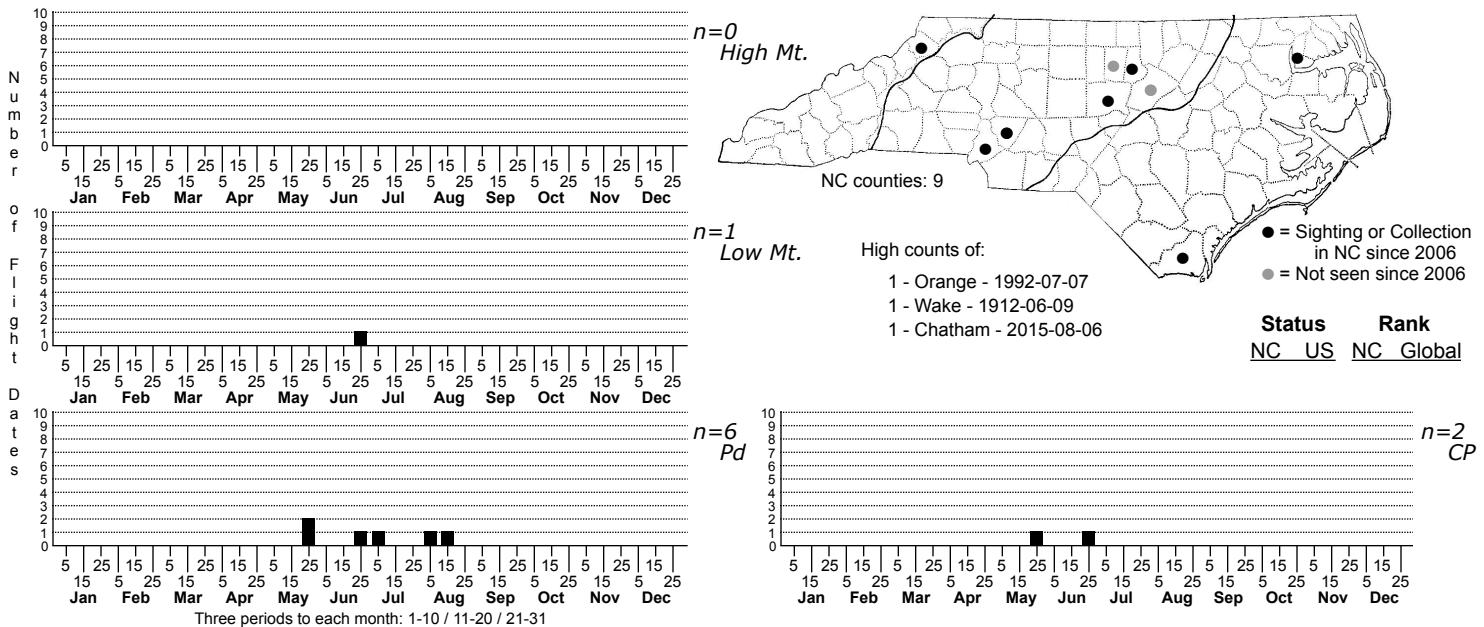


Sphinx franckii Franck's Sphinx



FAMILY: Sphingidae SUBFAMILY: Sphinginae TRIBE: Sphingini

TAXONOMIC COMMENTS: This large genus of some 27 species ranges from England to Japan and down through the Americas. There are approximately 14 resident species in North America and at least 5 in North Carolina. Two very different larval types occur in the genus and it is likely that *Sphinx* is composed of more than one genus.

FIELD GUIDE DESCRIPTIONS: Covell (1984)

ONLINE PHOTOS:

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, ADULTS: Forbes (1948); Hedges (1971); Tuttle (2007)

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, IMMATURE STAGES: Forbes (1948); Tuttle (2007)

ID COMMENTS: A large gray sphinx moth with yellowish-tan shading, particularly along the inner margin; its size and its coloration distinguish this species from other sphingids in our area. Sexes are similar.

DISTRIBUTION: Potentially statewide but our records are too poor to demonstrate its true distribution.

FLIGHT COMMENT: In the Coastal Plain look for adults on the wing from the last week in May through the first or second week of June, perhaps a week later in the Piedmont.

HABITAT: A woodland species found where ash is common, usually in basic-mesic hardwood forests in the uplands and rich, alluvial bottomlands. The recent observation of this species along the coast indicates that it might also use species of Ash that occur in blackwater swamps, i.e., Carolina Ash and Pumpkin Ash.

FOOD: Larvae are stenophagous, probably feeding primarily or even exclusively on ash (<i>Fraxinus</i>). Forbes (1948) states that elm (<i>Ulmus</i>) is used, but Tuttle (2007) notes that no source for the information was given and that captive larvae refuse to feed on elm. The few larvae that have been found in the field were feeding on ash, including a mature larva discovered by J.B. Sullivan in McDowell Park (Mecklenburg County) feeding on a small waist-high ash in August.

OBSERVATION METHODS: Adults come to lights but apparently do not visit flowers or baits. High intensity UV lights, such as mercury-vapor, may be needed to more effectively sample for this species. Caterpillars should be searched for in July and early August. Sleeve them on the foodplant which wilts badly when cut.

NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM RANKS: G4G5 SU [S1S2]

STATE PROTECTION: Currently placed on the Watch List by the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program. However, it has no legal protection, although permits are required to collect it on state parks and other public lands.

COMMENTS: Long thought to be one of the rarest sphinx moths in eastern North America, it is now known to have a short flight period during which in the right habitat it is not uncommon. However, as an ash-feeding species, it appears to be under severe threat due to the spread of the Emerald Ash Borer, an exotic beetle that threatens to destroy most species of Ash in eastern North America (see Wagner, 2007, for a discussion of the threat posed to ash-feeding Lepidoptera due to the invasion by this exotic pest).