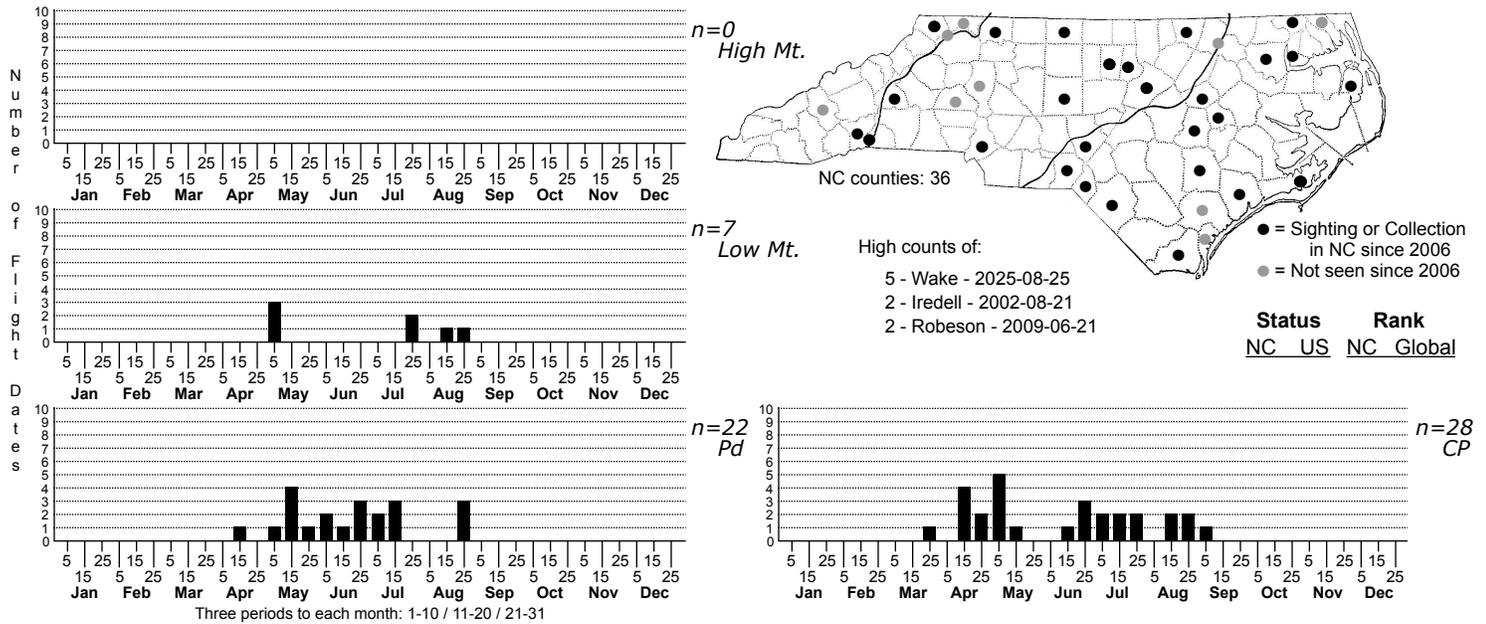


## *Estigmene acrea* Salt Marsh Moth



FAMILY: Erebidae SUBFAMILY: Arctiinae TRIBE: Arctiini

TAXONOMIC\_COMMENTS: One of two species in this genus north of Mexico and the only one in our area

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

ONLINE PHOTOS:

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, ADULTS: Forbes (1960)

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, IMMATURE STAGES: Forbes (1960); Wagner (2005)

ID COMMENTS: Males are unmistakable, with a combination of white forewings, dotted with black, and bright orange hindwings; easily identifiable from photographs that show at least a portion of the hindwings. Females are white with black spots on both pairs of wings and are similar in color to several other species of Arctiinae. They are larger and have longer hindwings than spotted members of Spilosoma and are much larger than Hyphantria; they are, conversely, smaller than Hypercompe scribonia, which has ring-shaped spots (some cobalt blue) that are missing in Estigmene. Can be distinguished in photographs from Spilosoma congrua if the dorsal surface of the abdomen is showing -- it is pure white in congrua but strongly orange and spotted with black in Estigmene. Spilosoma dubia also has a yellow abdomen with dark spots but is more overlain with long white hair, which is missing in the much more brightly-colored abdomens of Estigmene. The thorax is also covered with long, fluffy white scales in Spilosoma species but is closely-scaled in Estigmene.

DISTRIBUTION: Described by Brimley (1938) as occurring from Wilkes and Catawba Counties eastward, but we now have several records from at least the Low Mountains. Probably occurs statewide except possibly the High Mountains.

FLIGHT COMMENT: Reported to have two broods over most of the East (Forbes, 1960; Wagner, 2005). Our records may be consistent with that pattern but adults appear to be present throughout most of the growing season, at least in the Coastal Plain.

HABITAT: Wagner (2005) lists general open areas as the habitats used by this species. Most of our records come from salt-marsh habitats and adjoining dune grasslands at Fort Macon State Park. Other records come from areas with fresh-water marshes or wet old-field habitats (e.g., New River State Park, Mason Farm Biological Preserve, Smith Creek Restoration site). We have only a couple of records from Longleaf Pine savannas, however, and none from peatlands, which may indicate that it is not adapted to frequent fire.

FOOD: Larvae are polyphagous, feeding on many low-growing forbs and graminoids, including crop species, as well as woody plants, including some tree species (Wagner, 2005). In North Carolina, larvae have been recorded on American Burnweed (<i>Erechtites hieraciifolia</i>), Common Boneset (<i>Eupatorium perfoliatum</i>), Tuliptree (<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>), White Sweetclover (<i>Melilotus albus</i>), and a smartweed (<i>Persicaria</i> sp.).

OBSERVATION\_METHODS: Appears to come somewhat poorly to blacklights, with only single specimens being collected in light traps, and not at all to bait.

NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM RANKS: G5 SNR [S4S5]

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

COMMENTS: While we suspect that this species is more common than our records indicate, and that it probably occurs in a wide range of human-altered, open habitats, we have too few records to be completely sure about its status in the state.