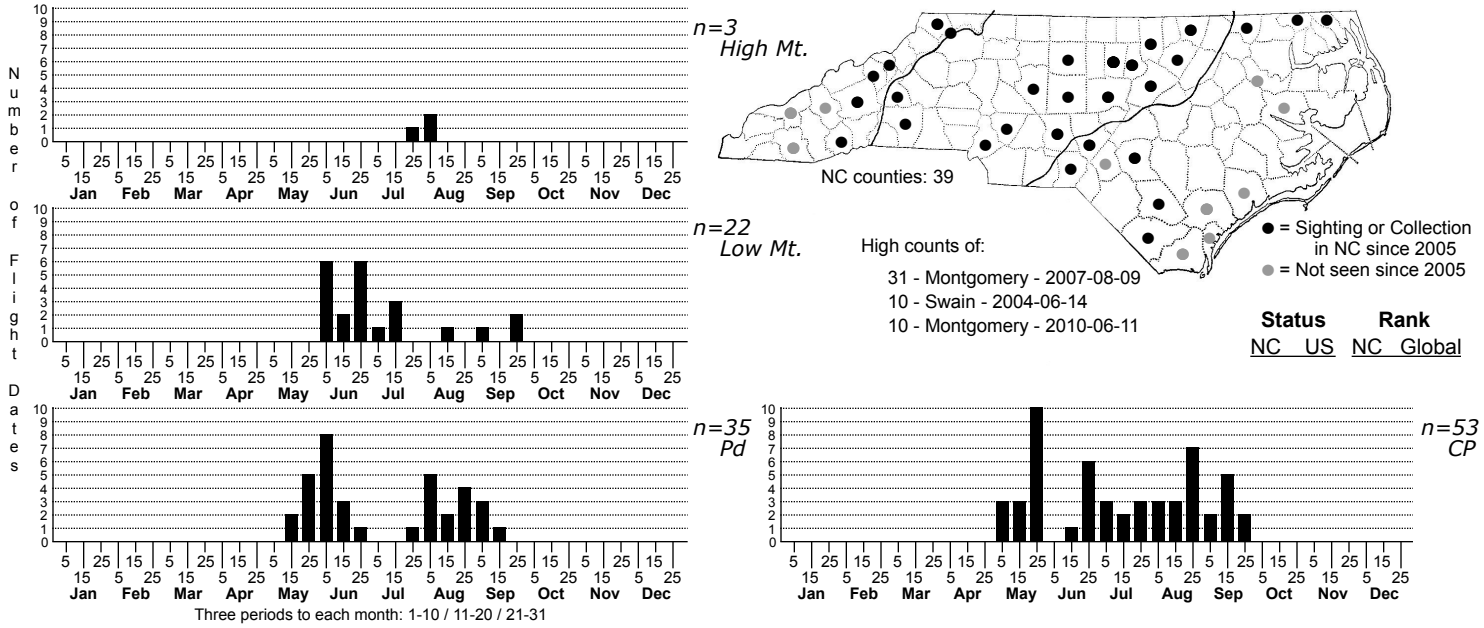
Dasychira tephra Tephra Tussock Moth



FAMILY: Erebidae SUBFAMILY: Lymantriinae TRIBE: Orgyiini
TAXONOMIC_COMMENTS: One of 16 species in this genus that occur in North America, 10 of which have been recorded in North Carolina.

FIELD GUIDE DESCRIPTIONS: Covell (1984)
ONLINE PHOTOS:
TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, ADULTS: Ferguson (1978)
TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, IMMATURE STAGES: Ferguson (1978) includes tephra in a key to the larvae. Illustrated by Wagner (2005).

ID COMMENTS: Males are typically uniformly gray brown with olive shadings and little contrast between green and brown areas (Ferguson, 1978); the pale patch found along the costa and cell is usually missing in the males (although present to some extent in the females). The antemedian line is black and roundly crenulated. The postmedian is usually straight or concave on the forewing but evenly convex on the hindwing. Forms with a black bar from the base to the tornus are fairly common in this species. In tephra, this bar is characteristically wide, black, and rounded or truncated at the end, whereas is is sharply pointed in obliquata and missing in dorsipennata (Ferguson, 1978). Females are larger and similar in color to the males but often have a paler patch from the costa to the cell. As in the males, there are barred forms of the females, again with wide black bar with a rounded or truncated termination at the tornus. Ferguson (1978) notes that barred females in particular can be confused with similarly marked individuals of basiflava and obliquata, although the bar in obliquata tends to be thinner and more sharply pointed.

DISTRIBUTION: Recorded across the entire state except for the Barrier Islands.

FLIGHT COMMENT: Probably two adult flights over most of North Carolina except possibly in the High Mountains.

HABITAT: The majority of our records come from wet to mesic hardwood forests, although there are also a few from dry sandhill or ridgetop habitats. In the Coastal Plain and Piedmont, it occurs primarily in riparian habitats where Laurel and Willow Oaks are common. Sand Laurel Oak -- closely related to Laurel Oak -- could be a host plant in some of the dry coastal fringe sandhills habitats where tephra has been found but it has not been recorded on the Barrier Islands where Sand Laurel Oak is common. In the Mountains, tephra occurs primarily at lower elevations but in both riparian and ridgetop habitats. Both Willow Oak and Water Oak are absent or rare over most of that region and other species of oaks are likely to be the host plants.

FOOD: Larvae are stenophagous, feeding primarily or exclusively on oaks (Ferguson, 1978; Wagner, 2005). Ferguson found at least one larva on Laurel Oak (Quercus laurifolia) but reared it on White Oak (Q. alba). He also cites R. Dominick as having reared D. tephra on Water Oak (Q. nigra). In North Carolina, we have found the species feeding on Honey Locust (Gleditsia triacanthos).

OBSERVATION_METHODS: Appears to come well to 15 watt UV lights. Adults do not feed, so do not come to bait or to flowers. Larvae are distinctive and should be looked for in order to better document their host plants. The hair of all Lymantriinae larvae are possibly urticating, however, and should be handled with care (Ferguson, 1978).

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: Widespread in fairly common habitat types in North Carolina and apparently secure.