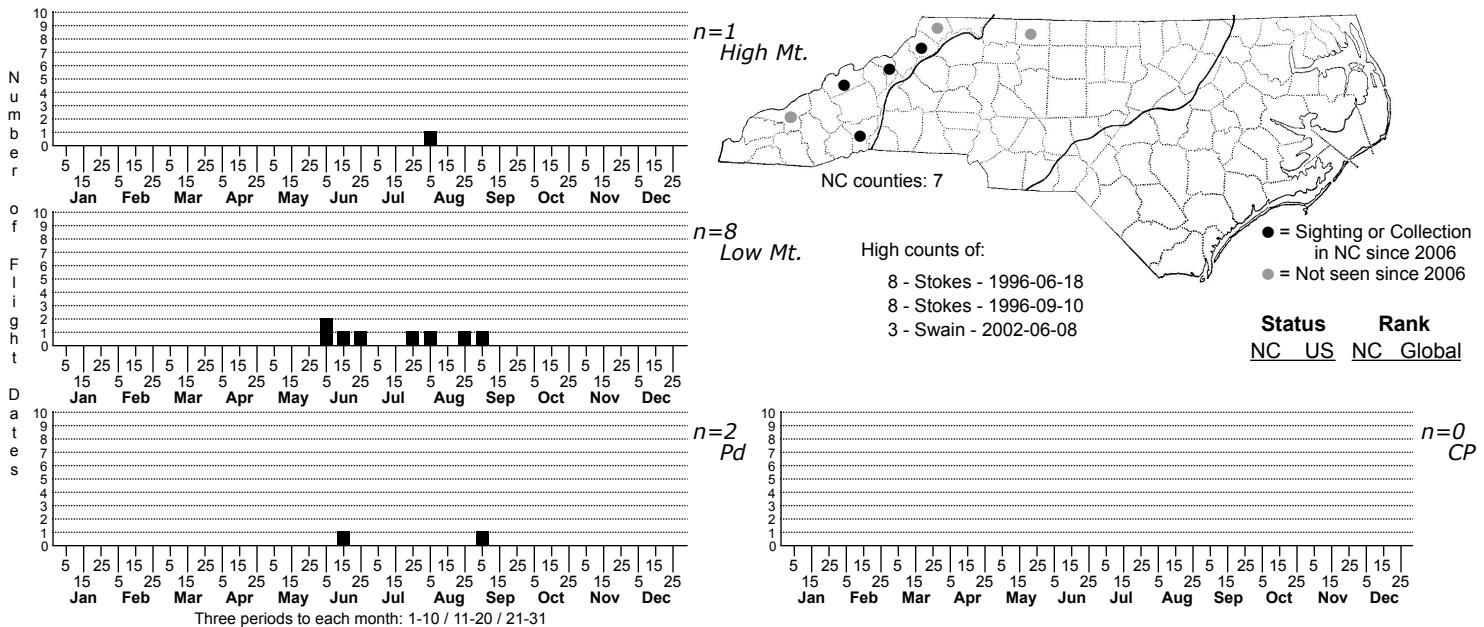


# *Dasychira vagans* Variable Tussock Moth



**FAMILY:** Erebidae **SUBFAMILY:** Lymantriinae **TRIBE:** Orgyini

**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); Beadle and Leckie (2012)

**ONLINE PHOTOS:**

**TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, ADULTS:** Forbes (1948); Ferguson (1978)

**TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, IMMATURE STAGES:** Both Forbes (1948) and Ferguson (1978) provide keys to the larvae.

**ID COMMENTS:** According to Forbes (1948), males are typically ash gray without brown or green tints; evenly colored except for the whitish shade that extends from the costa across the cell; possess a black postmedian that is somewhat sinuous -- evenly concave above a tooth at M3, but irregular or only somewhat scalloped below the tooth to the inner margin. According to Ferguson (1978), the postmedian on the underside of the forewing is characteristically more regular than in the other species, running either straight or convex rather than concave. Forms with the black longitudinal bar are rare (Ferguson, 1978). Females, which are much larger, have similar pattern and color, often possessing a blackish shade in the subterminal area but no brownish color (Forbes, 1948).

**DISTRIBUTION:** Our records come from the Mountains and from montane-like habitats at Hanging Rock State Park in the western Piedmont

**FLIGHT COMMENT:** Flies primarily from June to July

**HABITAT:** Our few records come from within or near riparian habitats in the Mountains and montane-like high monadnocks of the Sauratown Mountains in the Piedmont.

**FOOD:** Larvae are polyphagous, feeding on many species of hardwood trees and shrubs. Ferguson (1978) lists apple (<i>Malus</i>), birch (<i>Betula</i>), willow (<i>Salix</i>), aspen and poplar (<i>Populus</i>), but discounts records from conifers. We do not have any feeding records in North Carolina.

**OBSERVATION METHODS:** Our records all come from 15 watt UV light traps. Adults do not feed, so do not come to bait or to flowers. Larvae are distinctive and should be looked for on low-growing trees and shrubs. The hair of all Lymantriinae larvae are possibly urticating, however, and should be handled with care (Ferguson, 1978).

**NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM RANKS:** GNR SNR [S2S3]

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

**COMMENTS:** This is a primarily northern species that appears to be uncommon to rare in North Carolina. However, it occurs at low elevations in the Mountains and at monadnocks in the Piedmont; it is unlikely, therefore, to represent a true northern disjunct. Habitats and host plants do not appear to be limiting factors but more information needs to be obtained in order to accurately determine its distribution, habitat affinities, and conservation status in North Carolina.