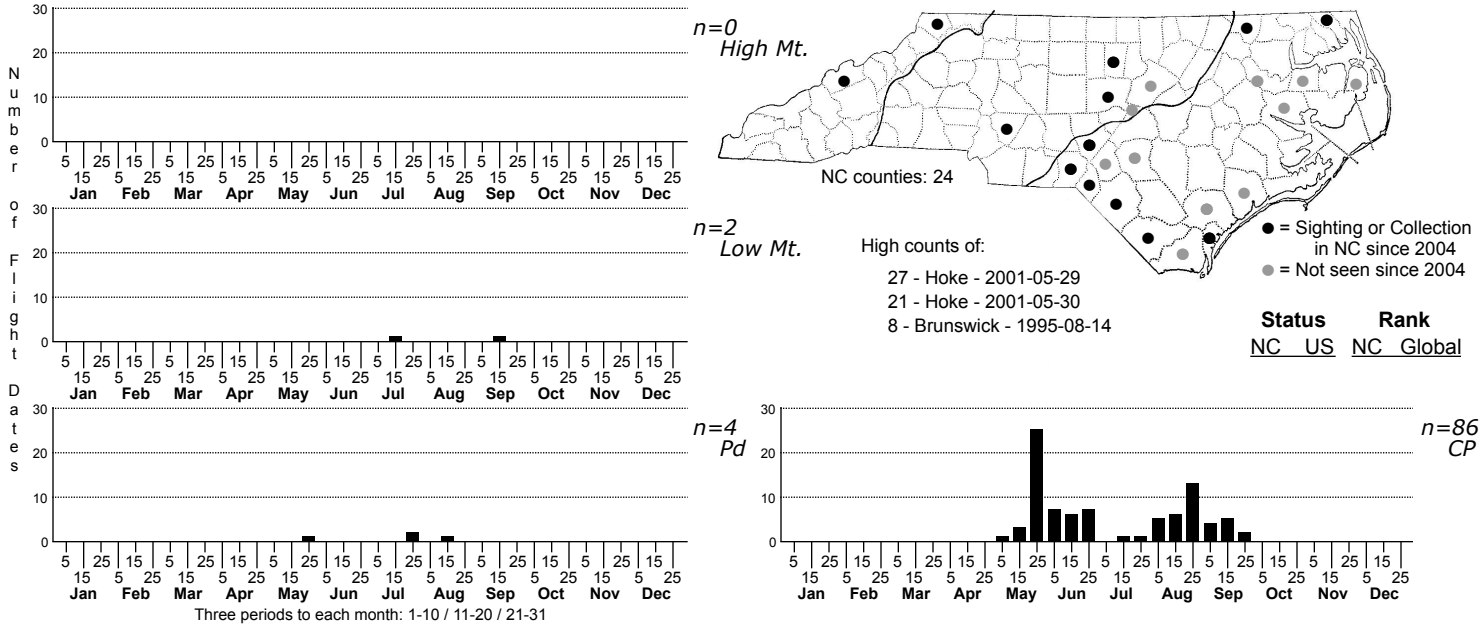
Dasychira meridionalis Southern Tussock Moth



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. Ferguson (1978) treated meridionalis as a full species; formerly, it was considered a subspecies of basiflava (e.g., in Forbes, 1948). Ferguson also described three subspecies of meridionalis, of which D. meridionalis memorata occurs in North Carolina.

FIELD GUIDE DESCRIPTIONS: Covell (1984)
ONLINE PHOTOS:
TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, ADULTS: Forbes (1954); Ferguson (1978)
TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, IMMATURE STAGES: Both Forbes (1948) and Ferguson (1978) provide keys to the larvae.

ID COMMENTS: Dasychira meridionalis is similar in color and pattern to D. basiflava but slightly smaller: the length of the forewing for the paratypes ranges between 13 and 17 mm for males (up to 18mm in males of basiflava) and 18 to 25 mm for females (Ferguson, 1978). There is a more extensive area of white in the median area than in basiflava; in females, it typically crosses the entire width of the wing. Males are blacker in the basal and postmedian areas than basiflava and the basal orange spot is often obscured. Females also show more contrast between the median area and the rest of the wing. Barred forms appear to be unknown in meridionalis and the postmedian runs straighter than in basiflava, where it is typically finely dentate (Ferguson, 1978).

DISTRIBUTION: Ferguson (1978) thought the dividing line between northern basiflava and southern meridionalis was located somewhere in the middle of North Carolina, giving the range of meridionalis memorata from Southern Pines, NC to northern Florida. Our records seem to agree, indicating that meridionalis occurs primarily in the southern half of the Coastal Plain in North Carolina, including the Fall-line Sandhills, and that basiflava occurs north of the Pamlico Sound in the Coastal Plain as well as the north-central Piedmont and most, if not all, of the Mountains.

FLIGHT COMMENT: Appears to be bivoltine in North Carolina with both an late spring-early summer flight and a late summer-early fall flight.

HABITAT: Nearly all of our records come from swamp forests or bottomland hardwoods in the Coastal Plain. None come from peatlands and the few records we have from drier Longleaf Pine habitats are located near to stream forests.

FOOD: Ferguson (1978) and Wagner (2005) both state that oaks are host plants (Ferguson also mentions that Louisiana specimens were reared on Chinese Elm). Based on our habitat records, members of the Laurel Oak group seem likely, particularly Laurel Oak itself (Quercus laurifolia) in Coastal Plain floodplains and mesic slopes, and perhaps Sand Laurel Oak in the Coastal Fringe Sandhills habitats where D. meridionalis also occurs.

OBSERVATION_METHODS: Our records for adults all come from 15 watt UV light traps; they 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 and should be handled with care (Ferguson, 1978).

NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM RANKS: G4G5 [S4]

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

COMMENTS: This species appears to be a specialist on floodplain forests in the Coastal Plain, but these habitats are still widespread and the species currently appears to be secure in the state.