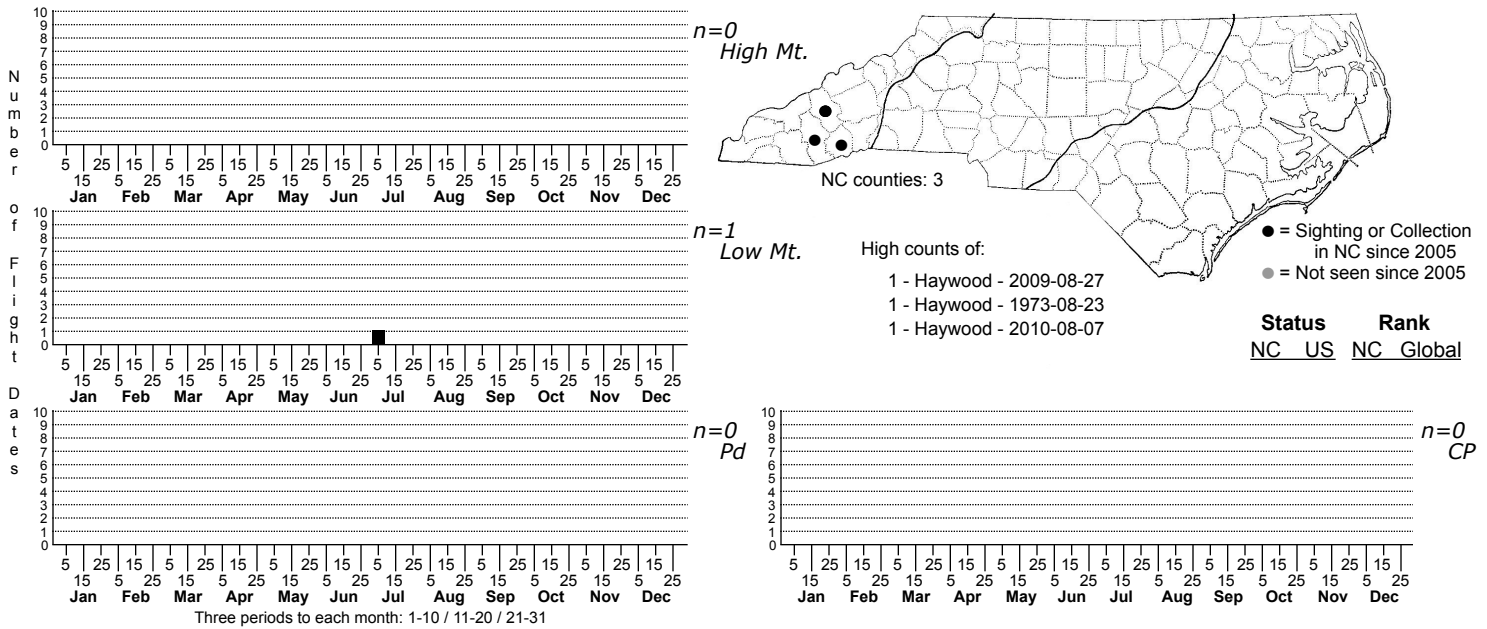


Orgyia antiqua Rusty Tussock Moth



FAMILY: Erebidae SUBFAMILY: Lymantriinae TRIBE: Orgyiini

TAXONOMIC COMMENTS: One of ten species in this genus that occur in North America, four of which have been recorded in North Carolina. The subspecies in our area is most likely *O. a. nova*, which is found over most of North America other than the Pacific Northwest and Alaska (Ferguson, 1978).

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

ONLINE PHOTOS:

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

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, IMMATURE STAGES: Ferguson (1978); Wagner (2005)

ID COMMENTS: Males are a rusty chocolate brown on the forewings, with a well-developed, contrasting white tornal spot. The hindwings are a brighter rusty brown. Females have only rudimentary wings, similar to the females of *Phigalia* species.

DISTRIBUTION: Restricted to the High Mountains where it may be a Pleistocene relict.

FLIGHT COMMENT: Unknown in North Carolina where we only have a few larval records.

HABITAT: The North Carolina specimens come from high elevations along the Blue Ridge.

FOOD: Larvae are polyphagous, feeding on a wide variety of both conifers and deciduous trees and shrubs. Ferguson (1978) notes the following among the most commonly reported: fir (*Abies*), spruce (*Picea*), pine (*Pinus*), hemlock (*Tsuga*), birch (*Betula*), alder (*Alnus*), willow (*Salix*), poplar (*Populus*), maple (*Acer*), elm (*Ulmus*), apple (*Malus*), and cherry (*Prunus*). In North Carolina, larvae have been recorded feeding on Yellow Birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*), Sourwood (*Oxydendrum arboreum*), and blueberry (*Vaccinium*).

OBSERVATION METHODS: Females lack wings and males fly primarily in the daytime; although they have been occasionally found at night (Ferguson, 1978), sampling using lights or bait is probably ineffective. Males should be looked for flying in appropriate habitats.

NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM RANKS: G5 S1S2

STATE PROTECTION: Listed as Significantly Rare by the Natural Heritage Program. That designation, however, does not confer any legal protection, although permits are required to collect it on state parks and other public lands.

COMMENTS: With only our three larval records for this species south of New York (one confirmed by Wagner, 2005), this species would appear to be an extremely rare disjunct from the far North. Apart from elevation, however, habitats do not appear to be a major limiting factor. The fact that males are primarily day-flying may have allowed them to be overlooked, particularly in surveys aimed specifically at moths, most of which rely on light trapping at night. Although there is much to be learned about the distribution, abundance, and habitat association for this species in North Carolina, it currently appears to be one of our rarest and most unexpected species. Like other disjuncts from the North, it may also be highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change.