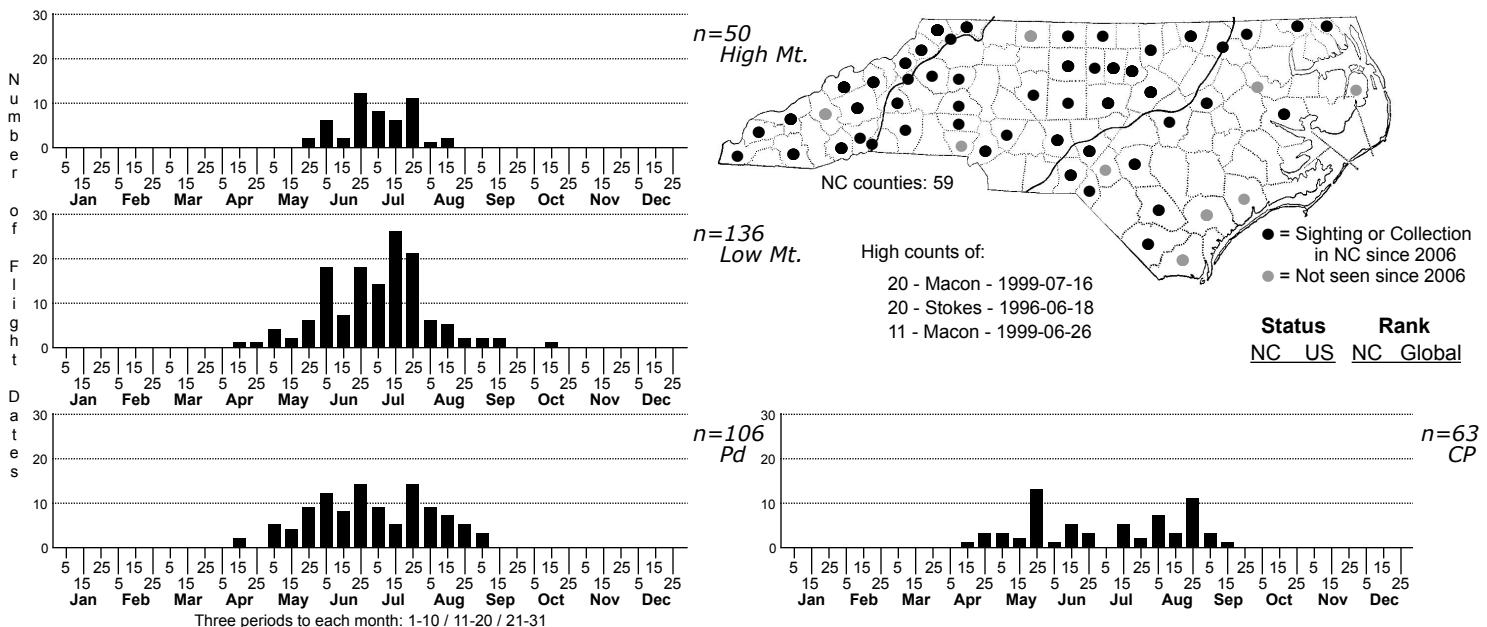


Acronicta americana American Dagger



FAMILY: Noctuidae SUBFAMILY: Acronictinae TRIBE:

TAXONOMIC COMMENTS: One of 74 species in this genus found in North America north of Mexico (Schmidt and Anweiler, 2020), 42 of which have been recorded in North Carolina. *Acronicta americana* was included in Species Group I by Forbes (1954), which in North Carolina also includes *A. rubricoma*, *A. hastulifera*, *A. dactyliina*, and *A. lepusculina*.

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

ONLINE PHOTOS:

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, ADULTS: Forbes (1954); Schmidt and Anweiler (2020)

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, IMMATURE STAGES:

ID COMMENTS: Our largest Dagger. Forewings are pale gray with the postmedian usually the most prominent marking: a scalloped, double, white-filled line with both the inner and outer edges well defined and darker than the ground color, at least when fresh. The orbicular is oval shaped and also pale-filled but the large horseshoe-shaped reniform has a fuscous filling. No basal dash is present but there is typically a slender, black anal dash. The hindwings are sexually dimorphic, being dark fuscous in the females and a paler luteous in the males; the veins are lined with dark in both sexes but are more contrasting in the males (Forbes, 1954). A distinct median line is also present on the hindwing (Covell, 1984), at least on the underside, but shows through to the upperside to a varying extent. *Acronicta dactyliina* and *A. hastulifera* are smaller but have forewings with a similar pattern. The inner edge of the postmedian in those species is more diffuse or absent (Forbes, 1954), but can be very similar to that of worn *A. americana*. In both *A. dactyliina* and *A. hastulifera*, the outer side of the postmedian tends to be more darkly shaded, at least where the anal dash crosses it, and the reniform is usually covered with a dark smudge. In *A. americana*, the postmedian area is usually the same or only slightly darker than the ground color and the dark shade in the reniform is more confined to the center. The hindwing of female *A. americana* is much darker than those of the other species and is diagnostic. In male *A. americana*, the hindwing is about the same shade as the females of the other two species, but the dark veins are much more contrasting. Males of both *A. dactyliina* and *A. hastulifera* have nearly white hindwings, lined with gray, which easily distinguishes them from *A. americana* (Forbes, 1954). Although Covell (1984) states that a median line on the hindwing is characteristic of *A. americana*, both *A. dactyliina* and *A. hastulifera* also possess them, again usually most strongly marked on the underside of the wing but showing through to the upperside in some cases.

DISTRIBUTION: Probably occurs state-wide, but seems to be uncommon on the coast.

FLIGHT COMMENT: Please refer to the flight charts.

HABITAT: Wagner et al. (2011) list woodlands and forests as habitats used by this species. Our records come from the most of the hardwood habitats found in the state except for maritime forest in the southern Coastal Plain. We do not have records from pocosins or maritime shrublands, or other sites dominated by shrubs rather than trees.

FOOD: Larvae are widely polyphagous on hardwood trees and shrubs. Wagner (2005) lists maple, alder, birch, hornbeam, hickory, chestnut, redbud, hazelnut, ash, walnut, sycamore, poplar, oak, willow, basswood, and elm. In North Carolina, the species has been observed on a variety of hardwood trees, but maples seem to be the primary host. Specifically, larvae have been recorded feeding on Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*) and Box-elder (*A. negundo*).

OBSERVATION METHODS:

NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM RANKS: G5 SNR [S5]

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

COMMENTS: