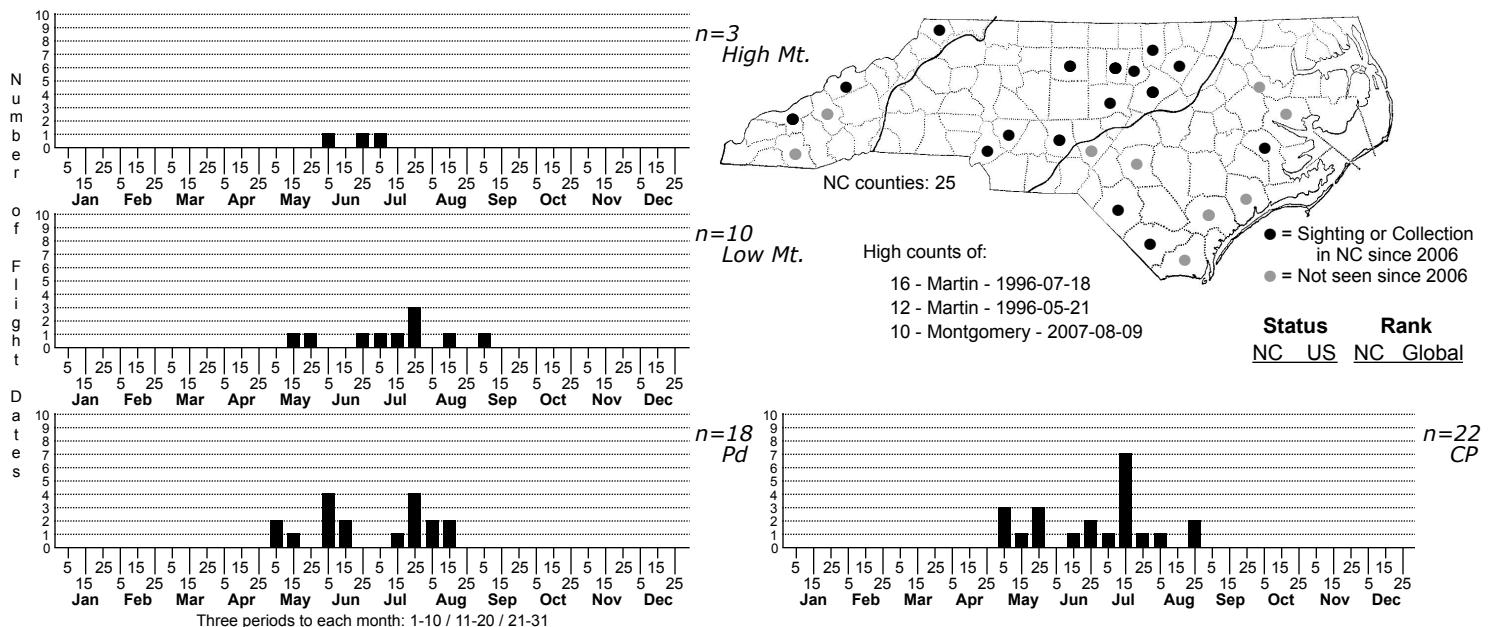


# *Acronicta exilis* Exiled Dagger



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. This species is placed in subgenus *Lepitoreuma* by Schmidt and Anweiler, and within the *Increta* Species Group. Other members of this group in North Carolina include *A. albarufa*, *A. ovata*, *A. modica* (*A. haesitata*), *A. immodica* (*A. modica*), *A. increta*, and *A. tristis*.

FIELD GUIDE DESCRIPTIONS: Covell (1984); Leckie and Beadle (2018)

ONLINE PHOTOS:

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

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, IMMATURE STAGES: Forbes (1954); Wagner et al. (2011); Schmidt and Anweiler (2020)

ID COMMENTS: A relatively small, pale gray Dagger, the smallest member of the *Increta* Species Group. The ground color of the forewings is often yellowish and there are no extensive dark patches, including in the basal area. Lines and spots are normally developed; as in *A. ovata*, the basal dash curves smoothly up to join the antemedian, enclosing a pale oval patch (Forbes, 1954; Schmidt and Anweiler, 2020). Also as in *A. ovata*, the reniform is shaded with red and there is usually a contrasting anal dash. *A. exilis* differs from *A. ovata* in its much smaller size and smaller amount of dark shading in the basal area.

DISTRIBUTION: Occurs nearly statewide, with some records from the high mountains but none from the barrier islands.

FLIGHT COMMENT: Adults are found from spring to late summer, possibly with two peaks in activity.

HABITAT: Schmidt and Anweiler (2020) state that this species is among the most habitat-limited members of the *Increta* Species Group, occurring primarily in warmer and dryer examples of oak forests. Most of our records do, in fact, come from the Eastern Piedmont and Coastal Plain, but we also have several records from the Mountains, including at least one site in the Great Smoky Mountains that is above 4,500 ft in elevation.

FOOD: Larvae are stenophagous, feeding on White Oak (*Quercus alba*), and possibly also on Post Oak (*Q. stellata*), Chestnut Oak (*Q. montana*), or other members of the *Leucobalanus* group (Wagner et al., 2011; Schmidt and Anweiler, 2020). In Texas, George Smiley reared a larva from Overcup Oak (*Q. lyrata*).

OBSERVATION METHODS: Comes at least moderately well to blacklights but we have no records from bait

NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM RANKS: G4 SNR [S3S4]

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

COMMENTS: Although at best only locally common, this species occupies a wide range of habitats in the state, most of which are still extensive. It therefore does not appear to be of any conservation concern here in North Carolina.