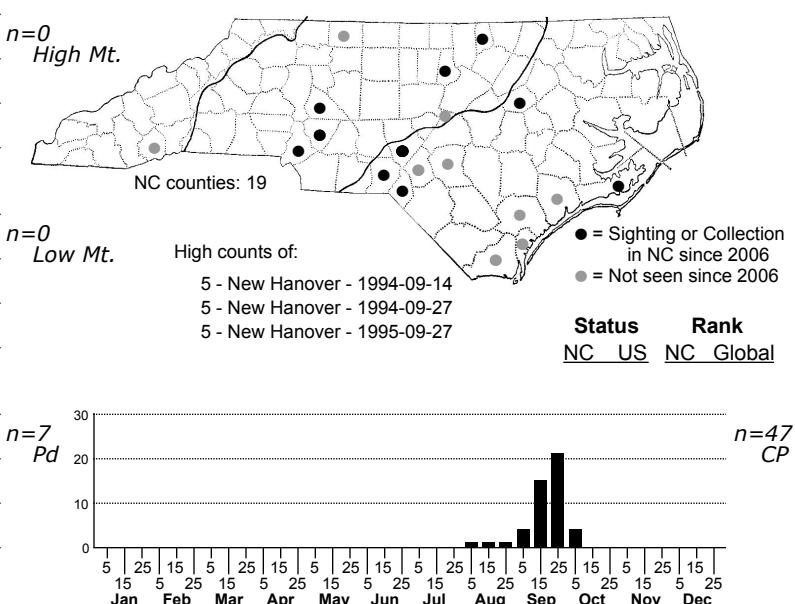
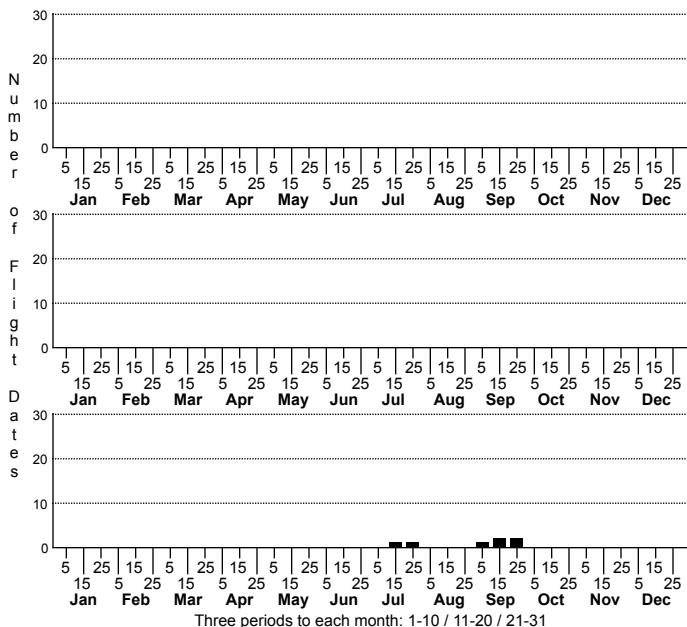


# *Chytonix sensilis* Barrens Marvel



FAMILY: Noctuidae SUBFAMILY: Noctuinae TRIBE: Elaphriini

TAXONOMIC COMMENTS: The genus *Chytonix* nominally contains some 30+ species from India, China, Japan and the Americas. Most belong in other genera, however, particularly the neotropical species. Our fauna is limited to three species of which two occur in North Carolina and all may form a single genus. An apparently undescribed species akin to *C. sensilis* -- identified with barcoding -- occurs in October and November in central Florida.

## FIELD GUIDE DESCRIPTIONS:

### ONLINE PHOTOS:

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, ADULTS: Grote (1881); Forbes (1954)

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, IMMATURE STAGES: Wagner et al. (2011)

ID COMMENTS: A medium-sized, gray and reddish-brown Noctuid, usually with a median dash in the fold connecting the antemedian and postmedian lines and ending with a white point or streak. The antemedian and postmedian are both single, black, and strongly marked; the orbicular and reniform spots are both large and grayish. *Sensilis* is very similar in size, color, and pattern to *Chytonix palliatricula*, especially the form (iaspis) that lacks the large median patch of white. Grote (1881) noted a difference between the two species in the postmedian line: in *sensilis*, there is a slight indentation opposite the cell and the lower portion of this line is fairly straight and meets the inner margin at a right angle; in *palliatricula*, the postmedian is more excurred opposite the cell and the lower portion is somewhat waved and runs obliquely inward, meeting the inner margin at an acute angle. Forbes (1954) further added that the antemedian is more excurred in *sensilis* and usually touches the orbicular, whereas it is usually straighter and more oblique in *palliatricula*, often with a gap separating it from the orbicular. The ground color of the forewings are generally more reddish in *sensilis*, especially in the subterminal area (Grote, 1881).

DISTRIBUTION: The vast majority of our records come from the southern half of the Coastal Plain, including the Fall-line Sandhills. We also have three records from the Piedmont and one from the Blue Ridge.

FLIGHT COMMENT: Appears to be univoltine; all of our records come from mid August to early October. Presumably there is a reason this species has a single flight period late in the season but it has not been elucidated. The undescribed species from central Florida, which is very similar in pattern, has a similar flight period and is probably a Pleistocene relict.

HABITAT: The majority of our records -- including all of those from the Coastal Plain -- come from Longleaf-Pine dominated habitats, including wet savannas, flatwoods, and sandhill seeps as well as dry to xeric sandhills. One of the records from the western Piedmont comes from dry oak-pine forests on a monadnock. The habitats at the other sites in the Piedmont and the one in the Blue Ridge were not recorded.

FOOD: According to Wagner et al. (2011), the larvae of *Chytonix* feed on fungi. McCabe (1995) reported that *C. sensilis* feeds on a fungus that grows luxuriously on fire-blackened tree trunks. Interestingly, no caterpillars of this common species have been located in the wild though they should be easy to find perhaps by gathering mushrooms after the flight period, bagging them and looking for frass. However, keep in mind that we do not know whether or not they develop after the adult flight period or overwinter and emerge in the spring.

OBSERVATION METHODS: Appears to come well to blacklights. We also have one record from bait.

NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM RANKS: G4 S3S4

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

COMMENTS: This species is considered to be a barrens specialist in the Northeast (McCabe, 1995; Wagner et al., 2003), which is consistent with the vast majority of our records. If as speculated by McCabe that it feeds on a fire-dependent fungus, then it could be declining as a result of the widespread suppression of wild fires. However, we have at least one record from an area in the Piedmont where neither wild fires or prescribed burns are frequent, suggesting that there may be other habitat factors of importance. Until more surveys have been conducted for this species -- which has a very narrow flight period -- in the Piedmont and Blue Ridge, an accurate assessment of its conservation status in North Carolina cannot be made.