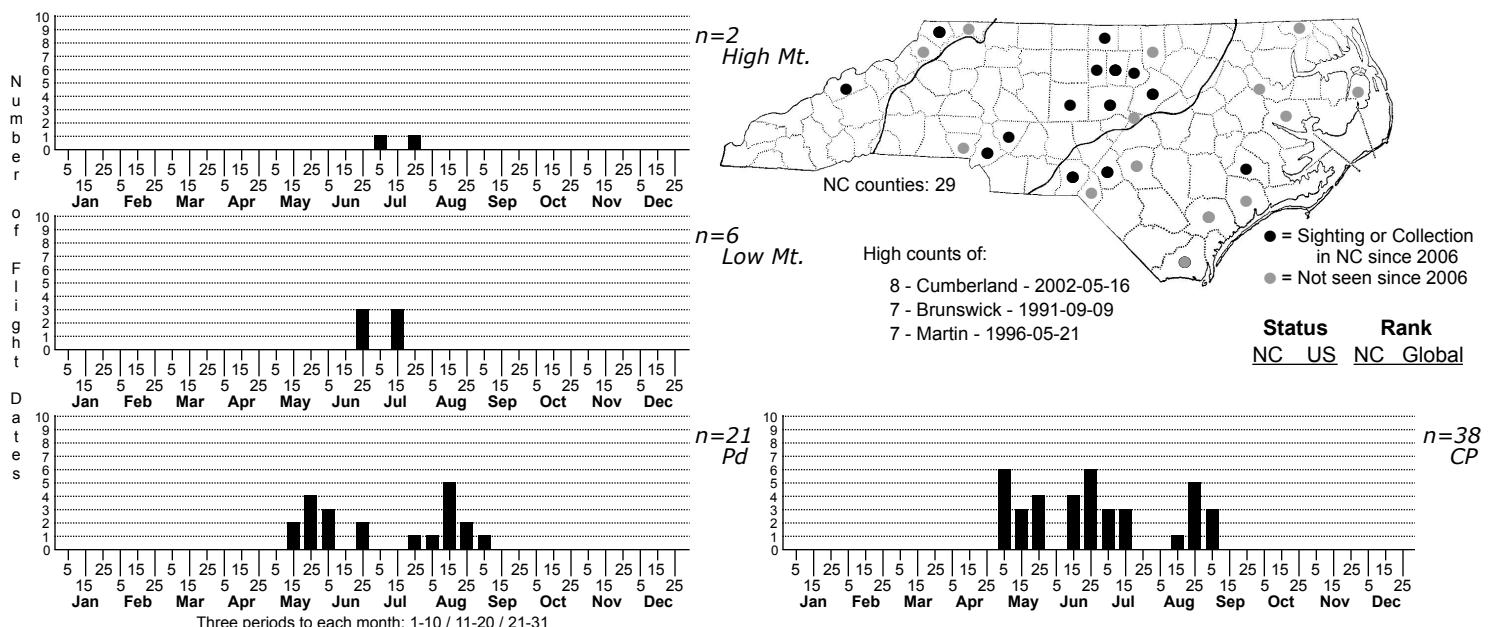


Amolita fessa Feeble Grass Moth



FAMILY: Erebidae SUBFAMILY: Erebinae TRIBE: Ophiusini

TAXONOMIC COMMENTS: The genus *Amolita* is currently placed in the Erebidae in the tribe Ophiusini together with such dissimilar genera as *Zale*, *Ophisma* and *Metria*. Previously it was thought to be near *Metalectra* and it likely will be moved again. The genus consists of 12 described species from the New World, five are known from the U.S. and three are found in North Carolina. However, the uncertainty surrounding the generic placement descends to the species level as well, since many of our species appear to be complexes of multiple species.

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

ONLINE PHOTOS:

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, ADULTS: Forbes (1954)

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

ID COMMENTS: *Amolita fessa* is a medium-small, pale Erebidae marked with two longitudinal dark lines. The ground color is pale whitish (clay color) or tan, dusted with fuscous. A prominent, dark fuscous line runs from the base out to the cell, where it bends upwards to the apex. A second, outer dark shade also curves up to the apex, beginning near the inner margin. Transverse lines are absent and the orbicular and reniform spots are represented by dark dots. The hindwings are paler than the forewings but dusted with pale brown along the veins (Forbes, 1954). *A. obliqua* is similar in size, color, and ground color but there are two parallel lines in the outer portion of the wing that run diagonally from the apex and outer margin down past the center of the wing, past or through a more weakly defined line running out from the base. These lines are often shaded with reddish or yellowish in *A. obliqua* but are usually fuscous in *A. fessa* (Smith, 1904). These features can vary however, and may be misleading; dissections are often needed to confirm the identity of a specimen.

DISTRIBUTION: Probably occurs state wide, at least as a complex, from the Barrier Island to the High Mountains

FLIGHT COMMENT: The species appears to be double brooded in the Coastal Plain and lower Piedmont but single brooded in the mountains.

HABITAT: All of the sites where habitats have been recorded in North Carolina are wetlands. These include maritime, tidal, and riverine swamps; wet pine savannas; mountain bog and fens; and the shorelines of shallow impoundments, including beaver ponds, old millponds, borrow pits, and reservoirs. We do not, however, have any records from peatland habitats.

FOOD: Appears to be specialized on wetland graminoids. Grasses are cited as foodplants (e.g., Forbes, 1954), but we suspect this reflects what captive larvae will eat when given incorrect choices. Although the literature states that the caterpillars feed on grasses and thus should be distributed throughout open area habitats, in reality we find the species tightly associated with wetland areas as are all of our *Amolita* species. These areas are usually somewhat open to very open and with sedges. To our knowledge the only larvae of any of our *Amolita* species that have been found in the wild were on sedges (*Carex*).

OBSERVATION METHODS: Adults readily come to light and can be flushed from wet savannas and other sedge-filled sites during the day.

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: *Amolita fessa*, as a complex at least, is somewhat specialized in terms of habitats but the habitats themselves are fairly widespread. If it turns out that there are actually several different species in this complex, each with a narrower range and specialized on different host plants and habitats, the conservation status of each one will need to be re-assessed.