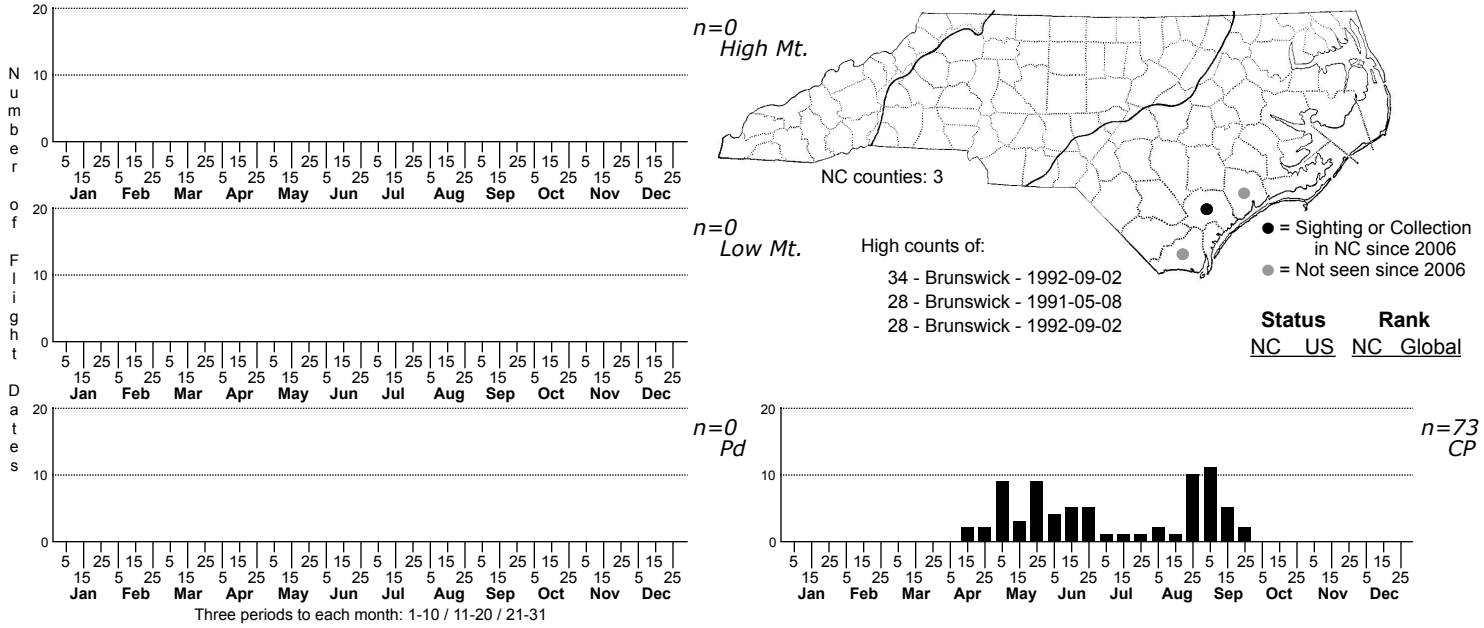
Amolita roseola Pink Sedge Moth



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. The genitalia of our population of roseola are also quite different from our other two species of Amolita, enough so to make one wonder whether this roseola has been correctly placed. However, it occurs in the same habitats and the pattern of maculation, other than being pink, is very like the other species.

FIELD GUIDE DESCRIPTIONS:
ONLINE PHOTOS:
TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, ADULTS: Smith (1903); Forbes (1954)
TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, IMMATURE STAGES: Wagner et al. (2011)

ID COMMENTS: A medium-small, pale pinkish Sedge Moth. The ground color is yellowish-white, with a strong dusting of pink except along the veins. A somewhat darker band runs from the base to the cell and then upwards towards the apex, with another runs down from the apex through the subterminal area (Smith, 1903). Amolita fessa has a similar pattern but lacks the pink dusting. Sexes are similar in pattern but the female is larger and has fasciculate rather than bipectinate antennae.

DISTRIBUTION: All of our records come from the southern part of the Outer Coastal Plain.

FLIGHT COMMENT: There appear to be two broods in the outer Coastal Plain centered in May and late August. A few specimens have been taken throughout the summer so a small third brood may also occur.

HABITAT: Virtually all of our records come from wet pine savannas, including several very wet clay savannas where marl occurs close to the surface. None come from sandhill habitats, including sandhill seeps where several species of Carex occur. We have one record from a wet ecotone between a pocosin and somewhat mesic flatwoods.

FOOD: In the Northeast, Wagner et al. (2011) identify the host plant as Pennsylvania Sedge (Carex pensylvanica). However, that species occurs in dry woodland habitats primarily in the mountains and straggling into the Piedmont of North Carolina, not the Outer Coastal Plain where all of our records for Amolita roseola come from. In the wet savanna habitats that A. roseola occupies, only a few species of Carex occur, of which C. striata is the most common and C. glaucescens is also present. In the very wet clay savannas where at least a couple of our A. roseola populations occur, the rare C. lutea is another possibility. We have no observations of larvae in North Carolina, however, and other species of wetland graminoids cannot be ruled out.

OBSERVATION_METHODS: All of our records come from blacklight traps, which appear to be quite effective in sampling this species. Adults can also be flushed from wet savannas and other sedge-filled sites during the day.

NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM RANKS: G5 SNR [S2S3]

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

COMMENTS: Based on the strong restriction of records to wet pine savannas, this species is a good candidate for listing as Significantly Rare in North Carolina. However, the fact that it uses other types of habitats, as well as different host plants, in other parts of its range suggest that more surveys need to be conducted in a wider array of sedge-rich habitats before any final conclusions about its status can be reached. DNA analysis also needs to be conducted on more populations to determine if the separate species that appear to exist within this complex differ in range, habitats, host plants, and -- consequently, conservation status.