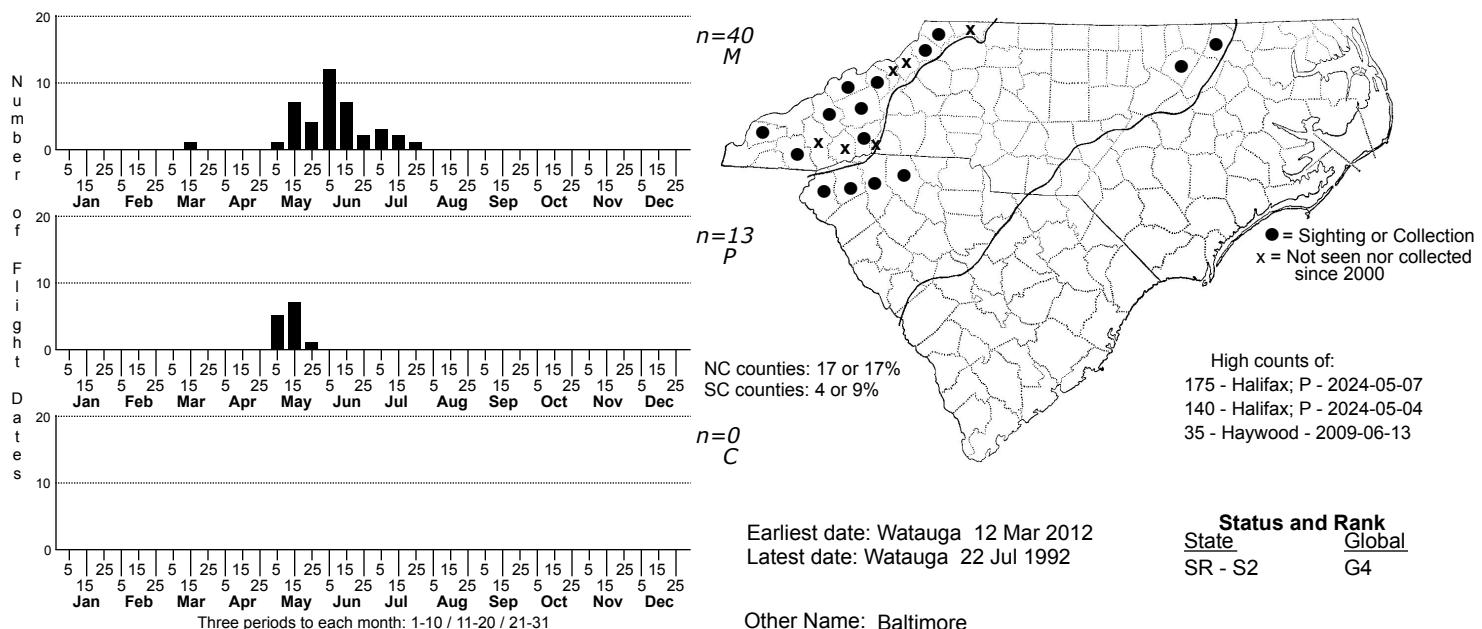


Baltimore Checkerspot *Euphydryas phaeton*



DISTRIBUTION: Formerly restricted to the Mountains in NC, with 15 county records, ranging from the VA border to the GA border. However, in 2024 a large colony was discovered near the Fall Line in Halifax County -- the first record east of the Mountains, and disjunct by over 100 miles. Another individual was seen in nearby Franklin County a few weeks later, perhaps a wandering individual from that large colony.

ABUNDANCE: Rare and probably declining, though it can be (or was) locally numerous (there are several one-day counts of 24 or more). If it is mainly restricted to bogs and wet meadows, it is also very habitat-restricted. If it also occurs in upland forests, as it does in GA, it is not as restricted as formerly believed. A disjunct colony in Halifax County, where common in 2024.

FLIGHT PERIOD: A single brood. The Halifax County brood was noted from early to late May. At lower elevations in the Mountains (at least in the southern counties) the flight begins around mid-May, but in the higher elevations the flight doesn't begin until late June. The flight lasts about a month at any place, with the high elevation sites finishing around mid- to late July. There was a shocking report of two adults seen in Watauga County on March 12, 2012, likely owing to the very warm spring weather.

HABITAT: In the southern Appalachians, the species inhabits two very different habitats. From NC northward, it typically occurs in bogs and wet meadows where considerable turtleheads (*Chelone* spp.) are present. However, in GA it has been reported only in upland forests, presumably near yellow false-foxgloves (*Aureolaria* spp.). It has been recorded from all three Mountain counties in SC, plus in the foothills in neighboring Spartanburg County; bogs are very rare in these counties, and I suspect the butterflies might have been from upland places. Most NC records come from bogs/wet meadows, at least in the northern Mountains. However, I saw one in a clearcut on a ridge in June 1994, and in a high elevation meadow in July 1995. The Halifax County colony is in a powerline clearing with wet spots.

FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS: The primary foodplants in NC are turtleheads (*Chelone* spp.), of which there are four species. Three are restricted to bogs, wet meadows, etc., but Pink Turtlehead (*Chelone lyoni*) is also found in seeps and other damp spots on forested slopes. Yellow false-foxgloves (*Aureolaria* spp.) are usually found on dry to mesic wooded areas and are suspected foodplants in GA and in the Ozarks. Interestingly, the weedy plantains (*Plantago* spp.) are foodplants in some Northern states. Nectar plants are varied, and the adults also feed at carrion, mud, and other places.

COMMENTS: Much is still to be learned about this beautiful species in NC. Some people suspect that the upland populations might be a different subspecies or even species. Finding the Baltimore Checkerspot in NC generally requires searching in bogs, most of which are on private property. The species thus is somewhat colonial, and certainly restricted in habitat. Of major interest was the counting of 24 Baltimore Checkerspots in two high-elevation meadows near Roan Mountain in early July 1996 by Derb Carter, Jeff Pippen, and me. This population seems to have crashed in recent years. Are butterflies being collected out, or are some other factors involved, such as deer-browse on the foodplants (as the habitat and other butterfly species are present in usual condition/numbers)? Other observers found two large colonies, at new sites, in the southern mountains in 2004. Both were in bogs or marshy, open wetlands, as opposed to uplands. Pippen found the largest colony ever reported in the Mountains of the state at a site in Haywood County in 2009; most individuals were seen on a dirt road, where they could be easily observed and photographed, but (sadly) could also be easily run over by vehicles or be collected. Ricky Davis discovered the 2024 colony in Halifax County, where over 150 individuals were reported on a day in May by other people. This population presumably is a new one, as surely one or more would have been seen or photographed by other people in previous years. It is suspected that one gravid female, possibly from the VA Mountains or Piedmont, laid hundreds or thousands of eggs in 2023, and most (or all?) of the individuals there in 2024 are "siblings". If so, will there be an inbreeding problem, where no adults are found at all in 2025?