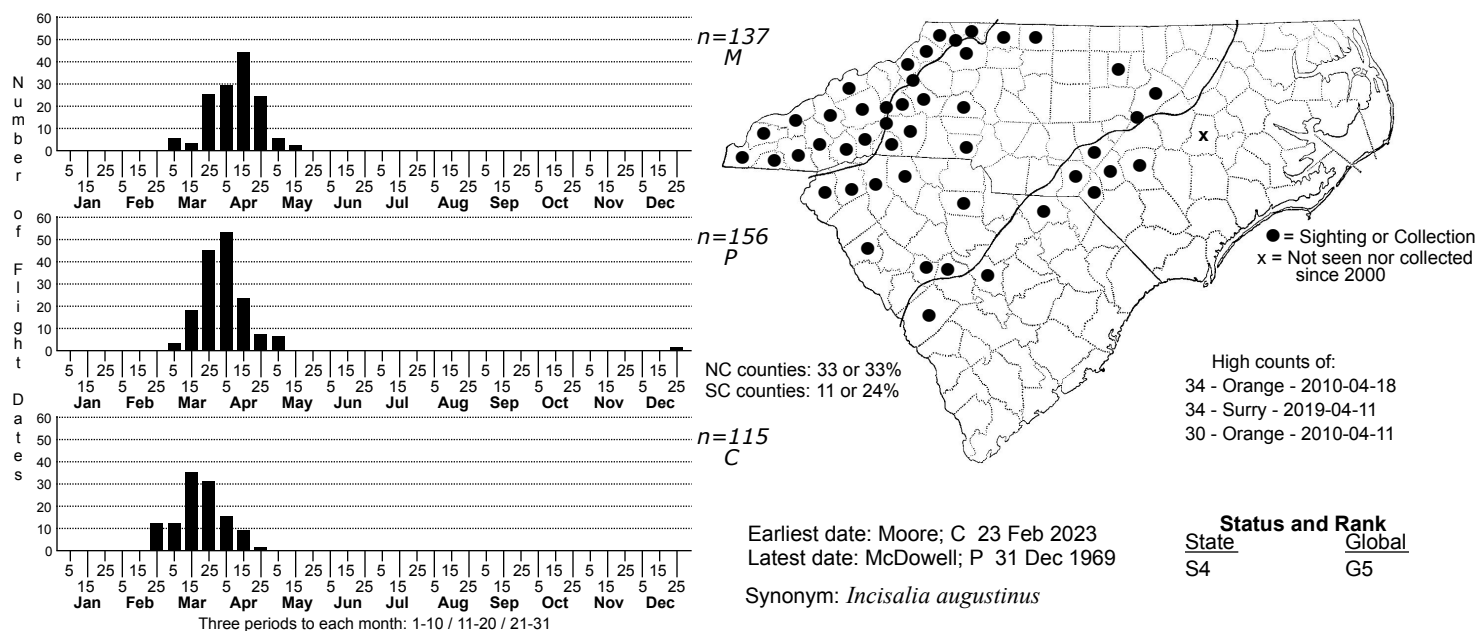


Brown Elfin *Callophrys augustinus*



DISTRIBUTION: Occurs throughout the Mountains and Piedmont foothills, as well as the Sandhills. Very scarce in most central and eastern Piedmont counties, and likely absent over most of the Coastal Plain. Presumably occurs in all Mountain and foothill counties.

ABUNDANCE: Generally uncommon but widespread in the Mountains and in foothill ranges; can be locally fairly common. Very local and rare farther east, mainly in the Sandhills. Many of the Piedmont records, for example, have come from Oconeechee Mountain in Orange County, and many of the Coastal Plain records have come from Weymouth Woods preserve in Moore County. Absence from most central and eastern Piedmont counties appears real, despite much seemingly suitable habitat and foodplants.

FLIGHT PERIOD: A single brood. Very late February to mid-April in the Coastal Plain, mid-March to very early May in the Piedmont, and primarily from late March to early May (rarely to mid-May) in the Mountains. The flight in the lower Piedmont is over by early or mid-April, whereas that in the foothills is more similar to that in the Mountains, continuing into the end of April. In very warm springs, the species can be seen even in early March in the Mountains.

HABITAT: The species is characteristic of dry forests with an abundance of ericaceous (Ericaceae) species. This can be Longleaf Pine/Turkey Oak scrub in the Sandhills, monadnock forests in the Piedmont, and a variety of dry to mesic forests in the Mountains. Areas with an abundance of evergreen heath species, especially Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), provide the best habitat.

FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS: Foodplants in NC seem to be mainly evergreen species of ericads (Ericaceae). Mountain Laurel appears to be the primary foodplant in the Mountains and Piedmont, and Creeping Blueberry (*Vaccinium crassifolium*) is suspected as a foodplant in the Sandhills. Sand-myrtle (*Kalmia buxifolia*) is suspected of being a foodplant at a new site found in Hoke County. Certain deciduous species of ericads, such as some blueberries (*Vaccinium* spp.), might also be used, but this may be in other states; the species is not seen in NC around dry forested sites dominated by deciduous ericads such as most huckleberries (*Gaylussacia* spp.) and blueberries. Nectar plants are ericads such as blueberries, but also Sweetleaf (*Symplocos tinctoria*), etc. Individuals at Weymouth Woods often nectar on the rare Sandhills Pyxie-moss (*Pyxidanthra barbulata* var. *brevifolia*).

COMMENTS: This is one of the more colonial butterflies in the state, as a handful of individuals can sometimes be seen once the first butterfly is found. The well-known population at Oconeechee Mountain in Orange County had a banner season in 2010, as observers made the highest state count there in April. Large numbers also can be seen at the higher elevations in Pilot Mountain State Park. As with most elfins, the species must normally be found with a purposeful search, as an observer usually would not look for butterflies in the interior of xeric forests from mid-March into April! Of course, few butterflies are found where and when the Brown Elfin flies. Thankfully, in the Mountains or foothills, observers may simply run into a new location by taking an early spring walk in areas with much Mountain Laurel.