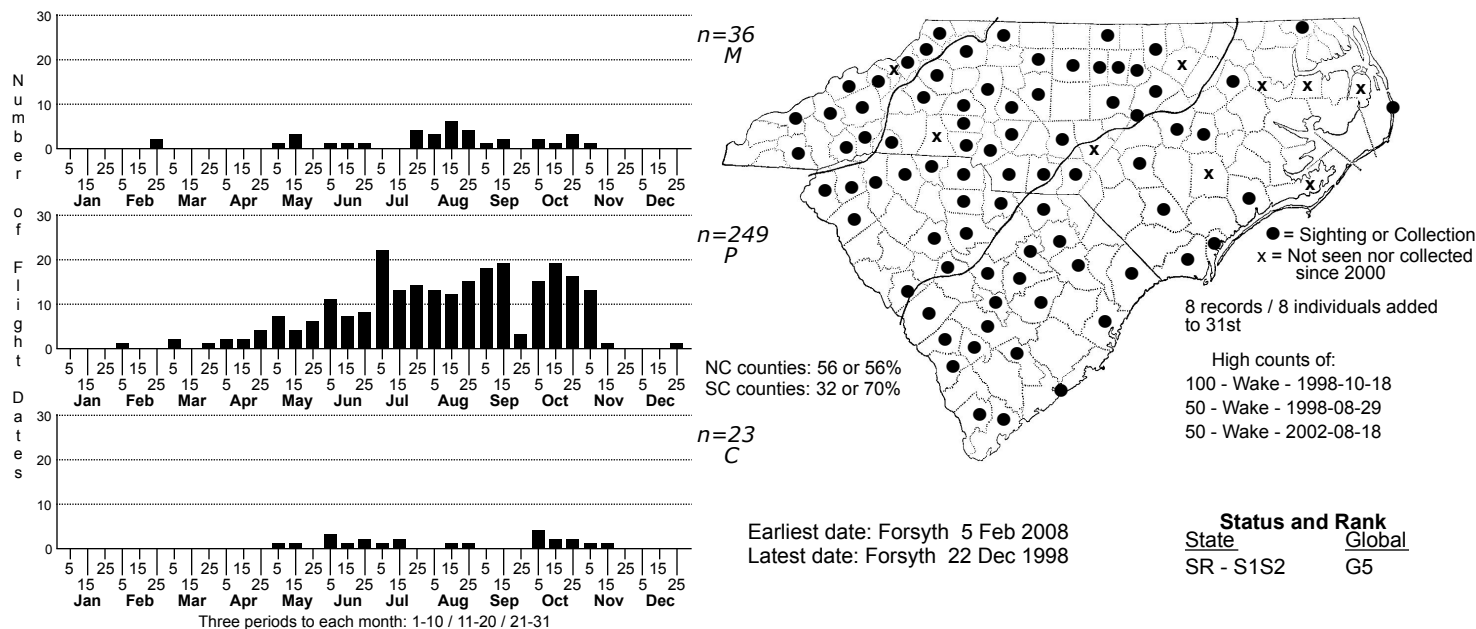


## Checkered White *Pontia protodice*



**DISTRIBUTION:** Nearly statewide, but records scattered, with no records for nearly half of the counties. Primarily found in the Piedmont, at least at the present time. There is a surprising scarcity of records for the Coastal Plain, especially as the species is more numerous in the states south of NC than to the north. There was a first record for Bladen County in the southern Coastal Plain in 2021, but it is puzzling why the species seems so rare in this large region, despite an abundance of fields and pastures.

**ABUNDANCE:** Rare resident -- mainly in the Piedmont --and declining at an alarming rate. Some records (especially in the Mountains and near the coast) may be of migrants. Certainly, it was more numerous 20 or more years ago. Very rare to rare in the Mountains and (surprisingly) very rare in nearly all of the Coastal Plain; most numerous now in the Piedmont, where locally common until a decade ago in Wake County, but a very good find in most areas. Now declining due to loss of agricultural areas to development or abandonment. Thankfully, an excellent 21 records came from the state in 2017, though many were from Wake and Alamance counties. Sadly, there were very few records in 2018-19, and just one record in the entire state in 2019, though there were 6 reports in 2021. With the gleaning of iNaturalist records in 2022, website editors added 11 records in the last year, most from 2022; and eight more were added in 2023. The State Rank of S1S2 might need to be moved to a precarious S1 in upcoming years.

**FLIGHT PERIOD:** March into November (exceptionally in February and December), with three or more broods. The first brood is rather scarce in NC, occurring from March to mid-May. The primary flights (second, third, and possibly fourth broods) occur between late May and early November; more data are needed in the Coastal Plain and Mountains, but there is a surprising near-absence of Coastal Plain records between mid-July and the end of September.

**HABITAT:** Open country, particularly waste lots, alfalfa fields, weedy croplands, and other brushy habitats with many flowers (often introduced species); some bare ground is often present. The Cabbage White is typically present where the Checkered White is found, but the reverse is seldom true.

**FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS:** The primary foodplants are mustards (Brassicaceae); peppergrass/pepperweed (*Lepidium* spp.) are important species in NC. I have seen a female ovipositing on *Lepidium campestre* in Wake County. The species nectars frequently, on both native and introduced species.

**COMMENTS:** This is a species shrouded in mystery. It is difficult to understand the scarcity of a butterfly that feeds on plants in the mustard family. Part of the scarcity of records can be attributed to the difficulty of identifying male Checkered Whites in flight; Cabbage Whites occur in the same habitats, and the two can be easily confused in flight. These two whites are quite "flighty" and often do not readily perch, and they must often be followed for many hundred yards until they land.

Butterflies had been finding large numbers in the past 25 years in extensive croplands and pastures on NC State University property in Wake County, but some of these fields have recently been lost to development, road construction, and over-mowing of roadsides; sadly, the species has been difficult to find in this county in the past few years. As a result, the NC Natural Heritage Program started tracking the species (in 2008) at sites where it is believed to be resident. People should search the largest fields and pastures in their local area for this species, though nearly all observations now are "serendipitous". Keep checking out white butterflies!