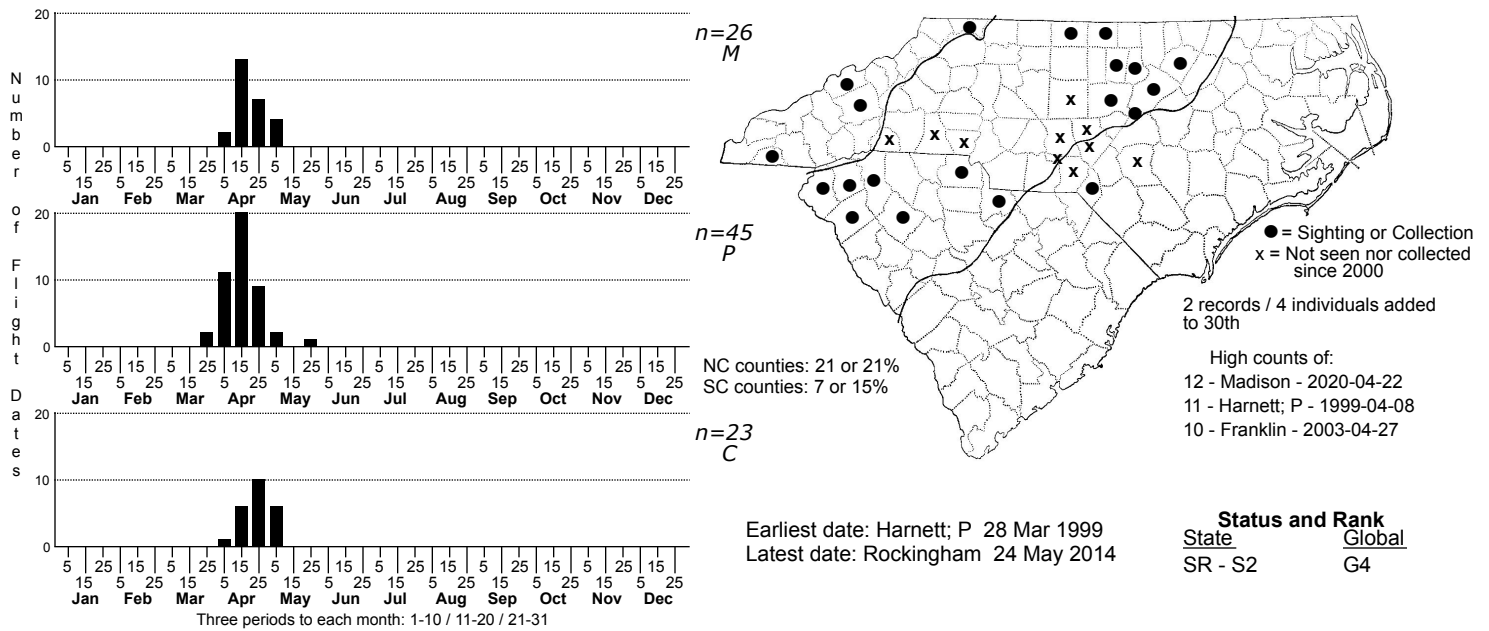


# Cobweb Skipper *Hesperia metea*



**DISTRIBUTION:** Scattered across the Piedmont and Sandhills, and found in the southern mountains in 2002. Still no records for the northwestern 40% of the Piedmont; but the species was finally found in the northern mountains in 2006, and in the central mountains in 2012. Rockingham County was a rare newly-added Piedmont county to the known range in 2014, thanks to a photo on the surprisingly late date of May 24. A photograph documented the species from Buncombe County in 2016; there are now four counties in the mountains where it has been recorded. Nonetheless, the species ought to be present in nearly all of the Piedmont and mountain counties.

**ABUNDANCE:** Clearly declining in the Piedmont and Sandhills, and now difficult to find in these regions. Although we have relatively few records, this species is easily overlooked and under-surveyed. Now rare in the lower Piedmont and the Sandhills but absent farther to the east. Seemingly very rare in the upper Piedmont and in the mountains; status in these regions needs much elucidation, but there is no logical reason why it should be "absent" in much of the western Piedmont. A notable colony has been discovered in recent years in Madison County, and a one-party group tallied an excellent 12 individuals in April 2020. However, the species is practically not being found anywhere else in the state in recent years.

**FLIGHT PERIOD:** A single spring flight; extremely late March to very early May. Formerly in the Sandhills into early May, but now terminates its flight there by late April. The mountain flight is between early April and early May. This narrow flight period is part of the reason that there are relatively few records for NC. This is one of the earliest grass skippers in the state.

**HABITAT:** This species has habitats similar to that of the Leonard's Skipper. They include dry powerline clearings, upland wooded edges, brushy fields, and so forth; wet places are avoided. Habitats typically look "dead", as areas with broomsedges and bluestems in April tend to look brown or golden, as opposed to green; usually nectar sources are few, as well.

**FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS:** The foodplants are various broomsedges and bluestems (*Andropogon* spp., *Schizachyrium* spp.). The adults nectar on low-growing flowers of a number of species.

**COMMENTS:** This is a rather small and easily overlooked skipper, and it tends to stay low in grasses in powerline clearings and other grassy areas. As with most other *Hesperia* skippers, this species has a narrow flight period, partly explaining its "rarity". Observers may have only two or three weekends in which to look for this species! Several active field observers have been looking for this species in recent years, at known sites, and have come up empty, especially in the Piedmont. It is now clear that there has been a population decline in the state (at least in the Piedmont and Sandhills), but most *Hesperia* skippers have been reported in fewer numbers in recent years, for unknown reasons. Herbiciding of powerline clearings and roadsides, and possible collecting, are potential factors in this decline. This species was formerly tracked as Significantly Rare by the N.C. Natural Heritage Program, as was the Leonard's Skipper. Though both were moved to the Watch List at least ten years ago, the Cobweb Skipper was returned to the state's Significantly Rare list in 2018. The State Rank has now been sadly moved from S3 to S2.