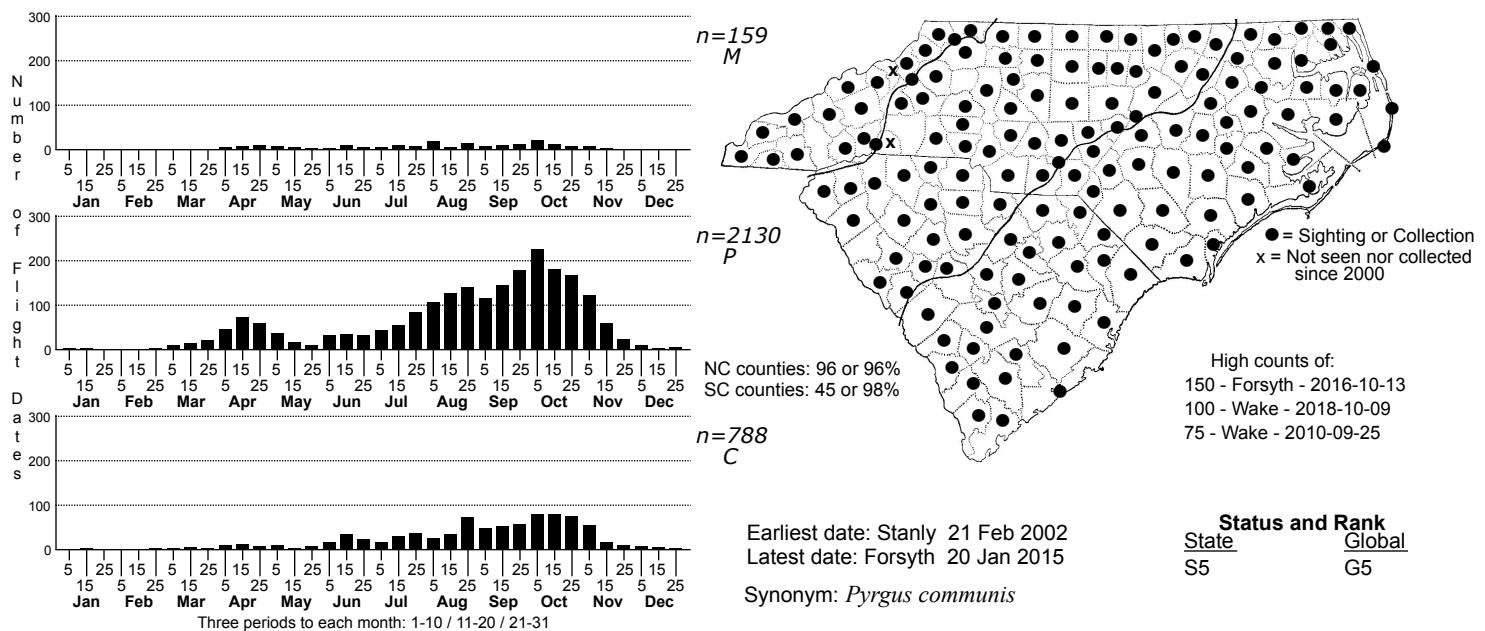


# Common Checkered-Skipper *Burnsius communis*



**DISTRIBUTION:** Essentially statewide; certainly occurs in all counties, but might be migratory (non-resident) in a few of the higher Mountain counties.

**ABUNDANCE:** Fairly common to often common in the fall, except rare to uncommon in the Mountains. Rather rare in spring, and not numerous until after mid-July, with numbers peaking quite late (in September and October) for a skipper.

**FLIGHT PERIOD:** Apparently three broods in the state, but only the last is numerous. Broods are a small one from March to mid-May downstate and in April and May in the Mountains, a larger one from early June to early September, and the main one from early September to mid-November, rarely into December. Whether this third brood is simply a brood hatched in NC or represents mostly migrants from farther south is not well understood. The scarcity of spring records in the Coastal Plain, compared with the many in the Piedmont, is a bit baffling.

**HABITAT:** This is an open country butterfly. It occurs in fields, gardens, vacant lots, powerline clearings, and other mostly disturbed places, usually well away from forested cover.

**FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS:** The foodplants are mainly in the mallow family (Malvaceae), most of which are introduced. The species nectars on many plants, mostly close to the ground, such as on clovers (*Trifolium* spp.) and composites (Asteraceae).

**COMMENTS:** Though references often mention this species and others as migrants, we suggest the term "winter-stressed" for a species showing the flight patterns above (as do Phaon Crescent, Southern Skipperling, Eufala Skipper, and a few others). These species have very small first broods, and successively larger following broods. To some biologists, this implies that the species migrates into the state in large numbers in summer and especially in early fall. However, we suggest that these species, being near the northern end of their breeding range, have adults that leave large numbers of eggs in the fall, but only a few adults are produced from this brood to fly in the spring, perhaps as most larvae succumb to cold weather. Those few adults flying in the spring mate, lay eggs, and a larger brood is then produced, and a third brood (if there is one) is larger still.

The extremely similar White Checkered-Skipper (*Burnsius albezens*) has recently been collected in NC, as well as often in SC. In fact, most recent specimens from all but the northwestern part of SC have been determined to be White, based on examination of genitalia. Thus, this Western species is clearly moving northeastward and might be widespread in southern NC now. The late Ron Gatrell has dissected a number of both species from South Carolina, and had this to say about potential field marks: "Communis [Common] being noticeably larger and much darker on the underside of the hindwings. The markings on the underside of albezens [White] looks washed out in comparison. Also the ground color above in communis is darker - kind of blackish gray, while in albezens it is more a brown gray. This is all for males." John Burns provides these data for fore wing length: "albescens [=albezens]: 12.0 to 14.9 mm (mean: 13.72 mm); communis: 13.2 to 15.6 mm (mean: 14.58 mm)". Charles Bordelon says: "... males of *P. albescens* also have the same basic pattern as *P. philetas* [Desert Checkered-Skipper] dorsally." Several biologists, including me (LeGrand), suggest that males with strongly blue hairs on the body and wing bases are Commons, or are mostly likely to be Commons; White males tend to have only silver or gray hairs (though some or many male Commons may show silver or gray hairs).

We will continue to treat essentially all reports of "checkered-skipper sp." in NC as Commons, as we do not want to discard such data, as there are just several definitive records for White in the state, and as recently collected individuals in Durham County were determined to be Commons.