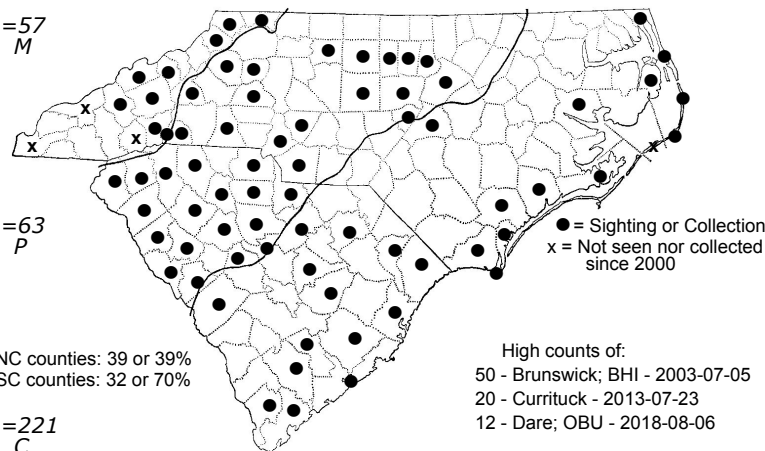
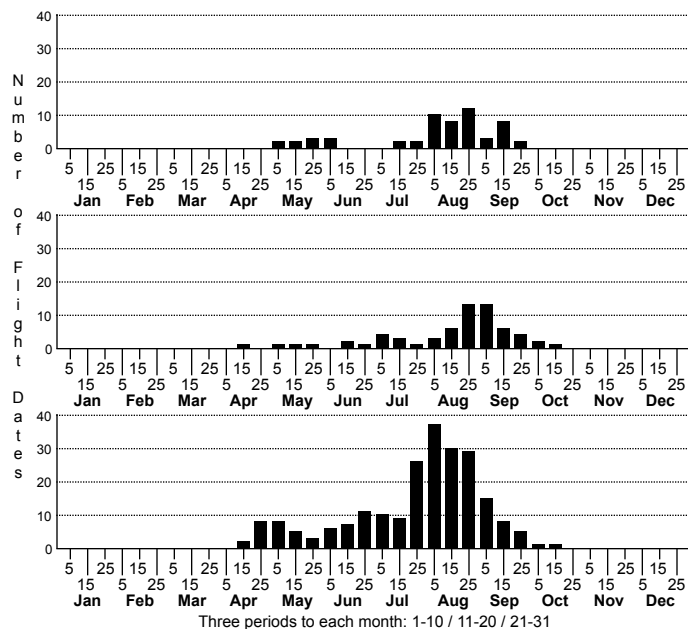


# Eastern Giant Swallowtail *Heraclides cresphontes*



Earliest date: Carteret 15 Apr 2008  
Latest date: Dare; Mainland 18 Oct 2023  
Synonym: *Papilio cresphontes*  
Other Name: Giant Swallowtail

**Status and Rank**  
State Global  
SR - S2 G5

**DISTRIBUTION:** Mainly coastal, near maritime forests and thickets. However, also likely to be resident in the Brushy Mountains, the New River area in Ashe/Alleghany counties, and in a few other foothill and Mountain counties. Certainly a migrant/stray in the heavily surveyed central and eastern Piedmont counties, except for a seemingly accidental breeding record in Asheboro in 2017 and a small and very local breeding population in central Chatham County (from 2021-2024). It might well be a migrant/stray in some Mountain areas.

**ABUNDANCE:** Uncommon and local along the coast, in and adjacent to extensive maritime forests and thickets; a handful of double-digit daily counts from the immediate coast. Locally uncommon breeder along the New River in Alleghany and Ashe counties, but very rare and local away from the coast as a resident in the foothills and low Mountains (except near the New River). Very rare to rare as a migrant (nearly all of the Piedmont and the Coastal Plain away from tidal water). Most readily found in the northern portions of coastal Dare County and adjacent Currituck County, on the Outer Banks.

**FLIGHT PERIOD:** Two broods, with the assumption that the second is much longer than the first (and not composed of two run-together broods). The first brood is relatively small (as compared with the second); it occurs from mid-April to late May near the coast, and throughout May to early June well inland. The primary flight occurs near the coast from early or mid-June to early or mid-October, with numbers peaking in July and August; in the foothills and Mountains this second brood occurs from mid-July to late September, and sparingly into October. However, more data are needed to define the flight periods away from the coast.

**HABITAT:** Along the coast, seen mainly in or near maritime forests or thickets, especially extensive, high-quality forests with Hercules-club (*Xanthoxylum clava-herculis*). In the Brushy Mountains and in Caldwell County, seen in upland forests with Hoptree (*Ptelea trifoliata*). Seen along the New River in Ashe and Alleghany counties, where Hoptree grows in places along this river. Migrants could be seen in most any habitat, though most are reported from gardens and arboretums.

**FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS:** The foodplants are always in the rue family (Rutaceae); in NC, Hercules-club along the coast and Hoptree at scattered inland sites (over mafic soil). However, in some areas, at least inland such as in Buncombe County and in Chatham County, non-native species in this family are used as foodplants, as the native Hoptree is quite rare in most of the region. The species nectars frequently, almost always with wings rapidly flapping.

**COMMENTS:** It is no surprise that this is a scarce butterfly in NC. Hercules-club is only found in scattered maritime forests along the coast, and Hoptree is a rare to occasional shrub inland, both in rocky uplands and in rich woods and streambanks. It is expected that other colonies will be found in the Brushy Mountains, where Hoptree is present in moderate numbers. A small colony was discovered on a mountain, apparently part of the Brushy Mountain range, in Caldwell County in May 2007. There were a number of records in several areas of Buncombe County in 2010, suggesting that small breeding populations are present in lower elevations in that Mountain county. Hoptree may be numerous enough in a few other places, such as Chimney Rock, that other colonies can be intentionally searched for. In 2013, several observers found Giant Swallowtails in double digits in a single day, along the northern portion of the Outer Banks, including 20 at the Pine Island Audubon Sanctuary in late July. In 2021 and 2022, several people discovered a breeding population in Chatham County, using Meyer Lemon trees as the foodplant there.