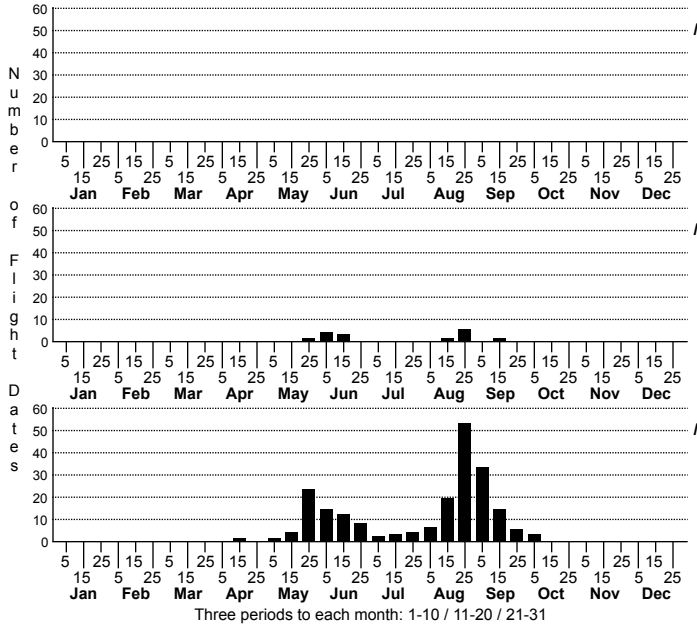
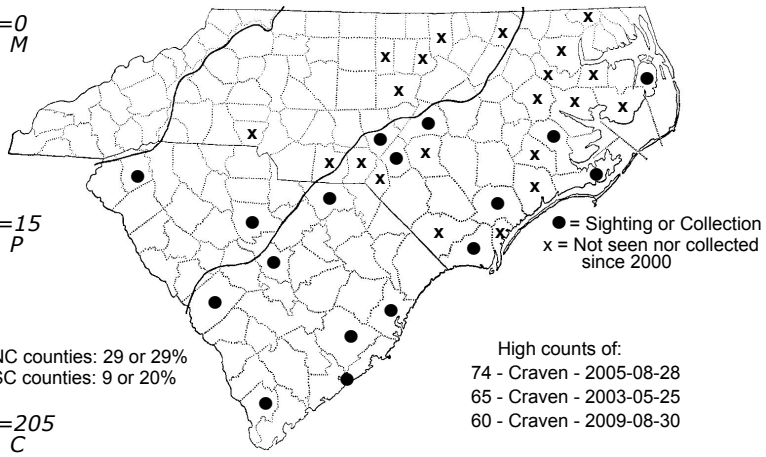
Georgia Satyr *Neonympha areolatus*





NC counties: 29 or 29%
SC counties: 9 or 20%

High counts of:
74 - Craven - 2005-08-28
65 - Craven - 2003-05-25
60 - Craven - 2009-08-30

Earliest date: Pender 20 Apr 2017
Latest date: Carteret 5 Oct 1993

Status and Rank

State	Global
SR - S2	G3G4

Synonym: *Neonympha areolata, Neonympha helicta (in part)*
Other Name: Helicta Satyr (in part)

DISTRIBUTION: A paper by Ron Gatrelle (1999) split off a new species -- Helicta Satyr (Neonympha helicta) -- from the Georgia Satyr (N. areolatus). However, in early 2023, Pelham's Catalogue of the Butterflies of the U.S. and Canada lumped "Helicta" back into Georgia Satyr, as the more Northerly subspecies -- N. areolatus septentrionalis. The combined subspecies -- now named again as the Georgia Satyr -- range over the Coastal Plain and barely into the eastern Piedmont; however, the "true" Georgia Satyr (subspecies areolatus) occurs only in the Coastal Plain, essentially now just in the lower portions north to Croatan National Forest (Craven, Jones, and Carteret counties), with some records from the Sandhills region. "Helicta" occurs (occurred) in the Piedmont, northern Coastal Plain, and the Sandhills. Several photos of Georgia/Helicta were taken in Fort Liberty (Hoke County) in early June 2020; one or two might have been Georgias, but Helicta is the more likely subspecies there and thus the status of the Georgia subspecies in the Sandhills is muddled. Roughly 8-9 specimens (in the Carnegie Museum) taken in mainland Dare County appear to be the Georgia taxon, based mainly on the shape of the hind wing eyespots.

ABUNDANCE: Quite local; rare in most counties (at best), but locally very common in a few Coastal Plain savannas. Poorly known along the inner side of Pamlico and Croatan sounds, where it seems to be very rare and probably declining. The Helicta subspecies has declined greatly and now is very rare and is possibly gone from the Piedmont. The Georgia subspecies has lost much or most of its former habitat in the Coastal Plain, and it is clearly declining, being found now mainly in protected savanna/ flatwood sites.

FLIGHT PERIOD: Two broods; mid-May to late June, and sparingly to mid-July, and a larger brood from late July to early October. Peak abundance in late May, and in late August and early September.

HABITAT: This is the "savanna" butterfly in NC. It is usually associated with open pinewoods canopy with a dense herbaceous layer. It strongly favors dense and diverse herbaceous vegetation of savannas, but also can be common in powerline clearings that "mimic" a savanna. Also apparently occurs (at least formerly) in coastal or near-coastal wet grasslands and oligohaline marshes (near the shorelines of Pamlico Sound and Croatan Sound). The Helicta subspecies occurs in wet powerline clearings, wet glades, and ditches.

FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS: Sedges are the foodplants. The adults seldom nectar, but feed on the usual satyr "foods" -- carrion, sap, fruits, moisture.

COMMENTS: This is one of the most colonial butterflies in NC, and because it favors high-quality savannas, it is also more seriously threatened by habitat destruction than most butterflies. An observer can often see several dozens of Georgia Satyrs bouncing slowly over savanna herbs, but yet once the savanna has been left, it is difficult to find them anywhere else on a day's outing. This is probably the slowest, and easiest to catch, butterfly in NC.

The reasons for the near collapse of "Helicta" Satyrs in NC can be traced mainly to habitat loss of grassy wetlands, including mismanagement of powerline clearings. Large numbers of observers cover the lower Piedmont, and this taxon simply is no longer being observed/photographed there now.

The two subspecies are very similar in appearance. The Helicta form has eyespots that are more elliptical than the very narrow eyespots in the Georgia form. Other differences are very subtle. There is still considerable disagreement about whether Helicta and true Georgia should have been lumped (or re-lumped), as some biologists insist these are good species (based mainly on genitalia).