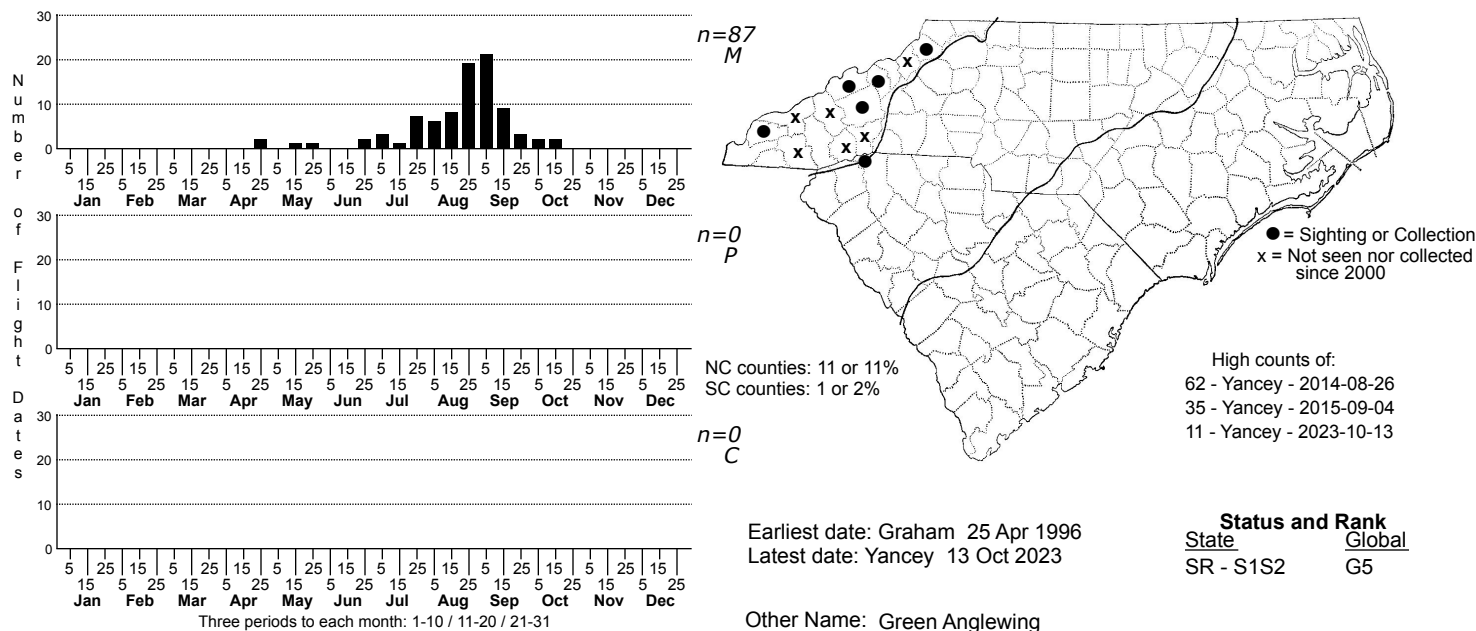


## Green Comma *Polygonia faunus*



**DISTRIBUTION:** Scattered in most of the Mountains; absent from the Piedmont and Coastal Plain. Only one recent record from the northern Mountains (Watauga County).

**ABUNDANCE:** Declining in recent years. Even though there are records for 11 of the 17 entirely Mountain counties, this is a very rare species in the state and is much less often seen in the Mountains than is the Question Mark or Eastern Comma. Even in its preferred habitats, it is greatly outnumbered by those two species. And, as it has been seen in only five counties in the past 30 years, it is clearly in decline.

**FLIGHT PERIOD:** Apparently one brood, with fresh adults on the wing beginning in July, flying at least sporadically into the first half of October. They overwinter in hibernation and fly again in spring. Much more flight data are needed, at least in spring. Interestingly, Scott (1986) states "apparently L June - M Aug., and Sep. overwintering to May in Va." If there are two broods in VA, there are certainly two broods in NC, with flight dates similar to VA. However, Allen (1997) says the species "is univoltine in the Appalachians. Overwintering adults appear in early spring, often while snow is still present, and fly through May. The single brood emerges from late June to August and may aestivate during hot summer days. They become active again during fall, feeding and storing fat. These individuals hibernate during the winter months."

**HABITAT:** This is a species of cool forests. In NC, its favored habitat, at least formerly, seems to be a mixture of hemlocks and hardwoods at low and middle elevations, often near a stream. It also is found in hardwood or coniferous forests at high elevations, including spruce-fir forests (such as at Mount Mitchell State Park). The species is best looked for in openings, along trails, and especially along dirt roads in such cool forests. With the death of most Eastern Hemlocks (*Tsuga canadensis*) owing to the hemlock woolly adelgid, the Green Comma is becoming even more scarce at lower and middle elevations.

**FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS:** Foodplants are primarily birches (*Betula* spp.) and willows (*Salix* spp.). In NC, it is suspected that birches are the primary foodplants of the caterpillars; willows are presumably not foodplants in NC. In fact, owing to the great majority of records in recent years from Mount Mitchell State Park, where the state's only population of the very rare Mountain Paper Birch (*Betula cordifolia*) is found, it is suspected that this rare birch is the main foodplant in the park. In fact, some of the trees can be seen from where the Green Commas are typically spotted! Adult foods are presumably the same as for the Eastern Comma and Question Mark -- sap, carrion, dung, etc.

**COMMENTS:** Why this butterfly seems so scarce today is a mystery, as its habitats are abundant in the Mountains. It has certainly declined in numbers, for no obvious reason. This decline has preceded the decline in the population of the Eastern Hemlock, which is a component of the Green Comma's habitat at some locales. Though Green Comma looks somewhat like Eastern Comma, with a decent view it is reasonably obvious because of the very ragged wing margin, yellow spots on the hind wing margin above, the deep scarlet near the body shading to light orange near the wing tips, and the blackish under wing. To see this species, you should be prepared to drive numerous poorly-traveled dirt roads, as slowly as you can. Four of my six sightings have been on U.S. Forest Service roads and a fifth was on a dirt road at a Forest Service campground. A small population was found at Mount Mitchell State Park in 2000 by Simon Thompson, and he and others found relatively large numbers there in 2008. Several observers tallied a remarkable 62 adults there on August 26, 2014. Though regular at this state park, the Green Comma is seldom reported anywhere else now. Are people looking in other areas of spruce-fir stands (such as Roan Mountain, Grandfather Mountain, and the southern Blue Ridge Parkway) in August and September, for this species?

As explained on the Eastern Comma page, we are retaining the common name as Green Comma, as opposed to Green Anglewing, as is used on the Butterflies of America website. Most references still use Green Comma as the common name.