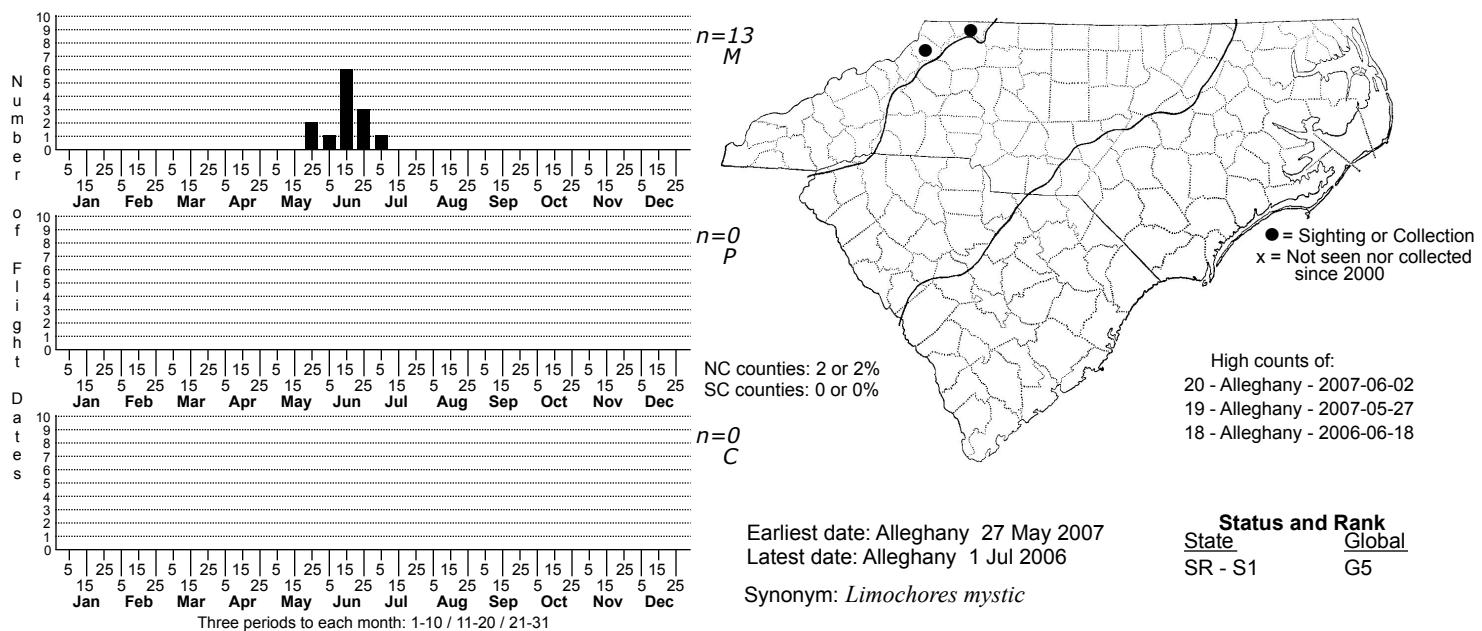


# Long Dash *Polites mystic*



**DISTRIBUTION:** Only in the extreme northern Mountains, where first found in the state in 2006 in Alleghany County, and found in Watauga County in 2007; presumed to occur in adjacent Ashe County. This is a Northern species, ranging southward only in the central Appalachians to WV, western VA, and now northern NC.

**ABUNDANCE:** Only known from three or four sites in the state, but formerly common at the Alleghany County one (current status unknown). A remarkable 18 individuals were counted on the date of discovery, and as many as 20 were seen there in 2007. Presumed to be very rare in the northern Mountains, if found anywhere else in NC.

**FLIGHT PERIOD:** A single brood, in early summer; in NC from late May to very early July. The flight in 2007 was about two weeks earlier than that in 2006, thanks to a warm spring season.

**HABITAT:** This is a species of open wetlands, but it can and does range into adjacent uplands (fields) to obtain nectar. The sites in NC are a wet meadow/bog complex, which is the preferred habitat type in states to our north, and a marshy pond margin.

**FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS:** The primary foodplants are grasses; bluegrasses (*Poa* spp.) have been mentioned in the literature. One individual in NC was seen nectaring on a wild azalea (*Rhododendron* spp.), though it is expected to nectar on milkweeds (*Asclepias* spp.) and a great variety of other species, such as Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*).

**COMMENTS:** Though the Long Dash was one of the more likely new species to be discovered in NC, word of discovery of a large population was quite a surprise. Ted Wilcox and Will Cook got landowner permission to survey a bog area where several rare butterflies (of other species) had been seen in the past. Though they missed their targets, especially Baltimore Checkerspot, they encountered a "gold mine" of skippers -- at least 18 individuals of Long Dash (first record south of VA) and 16 individuals of Two-spotted Skipper, a first state record west of the Coastal Plain and eastern edge of the Piedmont. Both of these species have been recorded in a handful of Mountain counties in western VA, and the range of both has been extended roughly 60 miles to the south. Wilcox and Cook each obtained numerous photographs of both skipper species, and the photos can be viewed on their websites and this one. The site remained strong on several dates in 2007, and Wilcox found a new site well to the south, in northern Watauga County, which extends the range southwestward. I found several at bogs and adjacent meadows at a new site in Watauga County in 2012. Unfortunately, this main bog site has become very overgrown, as cattle have been removed and no other grazing, mowing, or burning seems to be taking place to keep the woody vegetation reduced. Sadly, there has been no state report since 2018, but surely a few small populations must still exist, perhaps even in Ashe County.