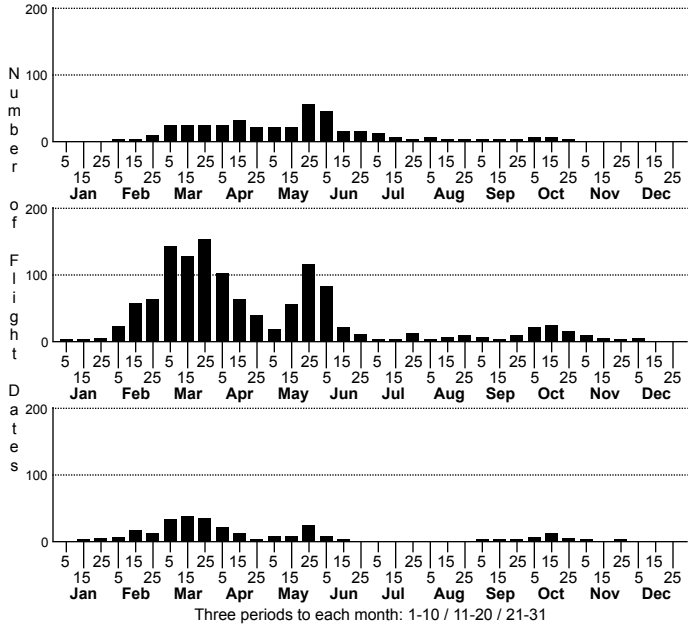
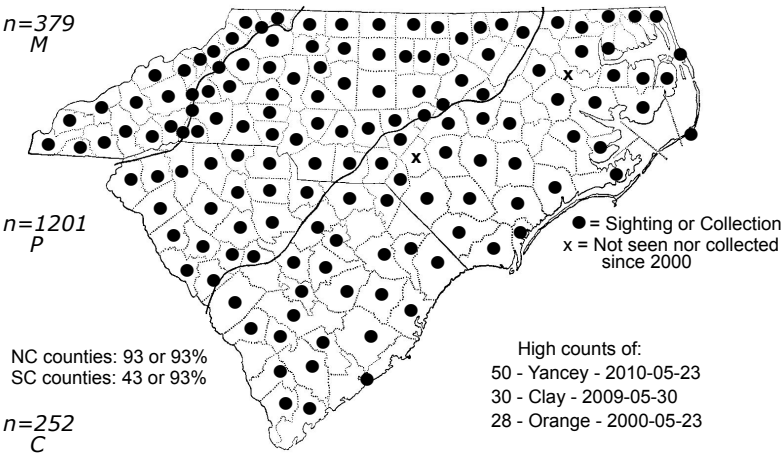
Mourning Cloak *Nymphalis antiopa*





NC counties: 93 or 93%
SC counties: 43 or 93%

High counts of:
50 - Yancey - 2010-05-23
30 - Clay - 2009-05-30
28 - Orange - 2000-05-23

New for 33rd: Cherokee, Currituck

Earliest date: Gaston 4 Jan 2016
Latest date: Mecklenburg 8 Dec 2004

Status and Rank

State	Global
S5	G5

DISTRIBUTION: Statewide, from the Mountains to the Outer Banks. Though no records yet for scattered Coastal Plain counties, likely is present in all counties. It was finally recorded from well-worked Brunswick and Onslow counties, along the coast, in 2011.

ABUNDANCE: Despite its wide range in NC, it is generally uncommon. It is somewhat more numerous in the Mountains (where it may be locally fairly common) than in the Piedmont, and it is rare to very uncommon in the central and eastern Coastal Plain.

FLIGHT PERIOD: This butterfly has the longest life-span (brood) of any species in the Eastern United States, up to about 11 months (late May to late April, on average, in NC). The species overwinters as an adult, with these butterflies on the wing on warm winter days; adults are seen mostly from mid-February to mid-June; worn individuals are seen into late April. The new brood is on the wing from mid-May into mid-June downstate, and until mid- or late July in the Mountains. Adults then aestivate/ hibernate until late winter of the next year, though they may fly sporadically in fall (generally in October). Some dates refer to migratory individuals. The highest counts in the state are all from late May, when new individuals are emerging.

HABITAT: Most individuals are seen inside or along the margins of hardwood forests. Migrants, however, may be seen flying across roads and other open country. Mourning Cloaks are often seen flying through forests that do not have full leaf cover -- early or mid-spring before leaves have completely emerged, or October when leaves are beginning to drop. They may be seen along forest trails and dirt roads through forests, but they are not typically found in open country. They can be seen on a few mountaintops with small openings in spring or early summer, and you might see some "hilltopping" behavior as males seek out females in these sunny, exposed sites, such as at the summit of Mount Jefferson.

FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS: The foodplants are various trees and shrubs -- willows (Salix spp.), birches (Betula spp.), elms (Ulmus spp.), cottonwoods (Populus spp.), etc. The species does not normally nectar at flowers; instead, it feeds on sap, decaying fruit, moist spots on trails and roads, and so forth.

COMMENTS: This is a fairly common, widespread, and familiar butterfly in the Northeastern states, but in NC it is not common, though it may be locally numerous in the Mountains and less so in the Piedmont. It is not one of the butterflies that the average person will encounter. It tends to be a solitary butterfly in NC, and even seeing more than several a day is a rare occurrence. It can be easily missed in a given year, even by active observers, unless you do much hiking in hardwood forests in late winter and spring.