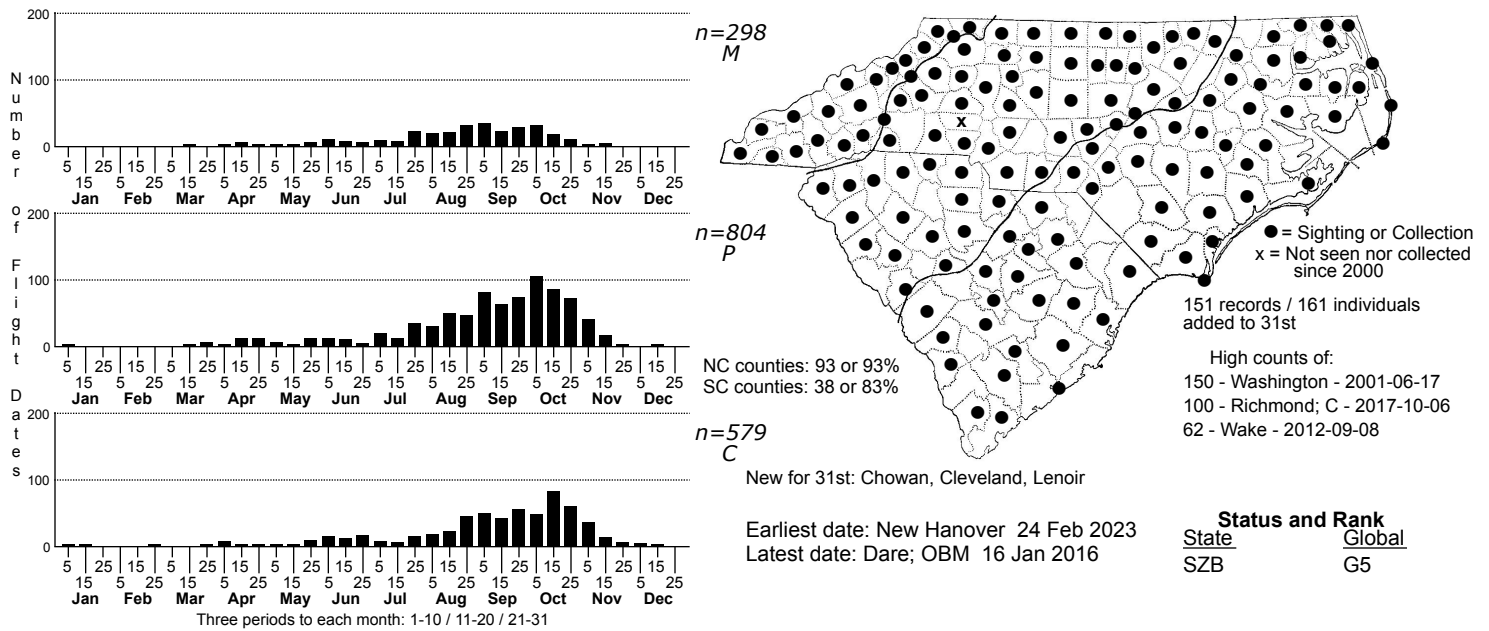


## Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*



**DISTRIBUTION:** A migratory species that is scattered across the state, and potentially occurring in every county.

**ABUNDANCE:** Very erratic from year to year. This is a migrant from Mexico and the Southwestern states. It undergoes mass emigrations every few years, so it is very rare or absent in some years in NC, but can be uncommon to rarely common in other years. In 1994 and 1996, we had only one record for the species, and in 1993 we had no records in the state. However, 1992 was a good flight year, with a handful of sightings; 1995 was another good flight year, with some observers seeing them on 10 or more occasions. The flight in 2001 was remarkable, with 17 new county reports, and many record counts, including 200 tallied on the Pettigrew State Park count. In 2002, we had roughly a dozen reports from across the state, a good total for most years, but a big letdown after the banner year in 2001. We had another very good year in 2003, with 74 reports across the state; 2004 was about normal, with 27 reports. In 2005, there was another very good flight, with new records for eight counties and a doubling of the previous number of Mountain records. In 2006, we received only 18 reports, though two new counties were added. In 2007, there were 40 records added, a decent but not exceptional year, and only one new county was added (Avery). Two additional counties, both in the foothills, had first records in 2008, which was another good flight year, though daily counts were low. Only one new county record was added in 2009, which was a moderate year for the species in NC; 2010 was a decent year also, with another new county record added. However, there were just five reports statewide in 2011. Perhaps the best flight in over 20 years occurred in 2012, when a whopping 185 records were made, with at least 35 new records in each province! Another big flight across the state came in 2017, when there were 182 records, including a one-day estimate of 100 individuals. Though there were 39 reports in 2018, nearly all were of single individuals, indicating a rather poor flight. In 2019, there were a remarkable 149 records (!), even though hardly any were of double-digit counts. In 2020, the species was also widespread, with nearly 100 records, but with no double-digit daily counts. On the other hand, 2021 was a rather poor year, with 15 reports but of just 24 total individuals; 2022 was also rather poor, and though there were 35 records, all but two were of just one individual. In 2023, there were at least 64 records, a good number, but most involved just single individuals; however, there were two new county records.

**FLIGHT PERIOD:** The flight period, or better stated "occurrence period", in NC is very wide. They have been recorded from late February into mid-January, but flight periods, of which there are two to three broods, need more elucidation. Even though the species is a migrant, the first brood migrants obviously lay eggs in the state, and several broods of butterflies certainly are raised locally (as butterflies in summer and fall often are fresh). In general, individuals seen through June are rather worn, suggesting that they are migrants from the Southwest. The bulk of the individuals in the state are seen from late July into mid-November.

**HABITAT:** Open country; ranging from fields, lawns and gardens, savannas, grassy balds, roadsides, and many other habitats. When found, the Painted Ladies are often seen with American Ladies; of course, the reverse is not usually true!

**FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS:** The foodplants are a great variety of herbaceous plants, but thistles (*Cirsium* spp.) are the best known. Nectar plants are varied, with no species particularly important, at least in NC.

**COMMENTS:** This is the "Evening Grosbeak" of the butterfly world; its mass emigrations have made national news. This species is difficult to distinguish from the American Lady in flight; thus, it is certainly possible that some Painted Ladies will be overlooked and let go as unidentified unless they are perched, when the distinctive 4-5 spots on the under hind wing can be seen.