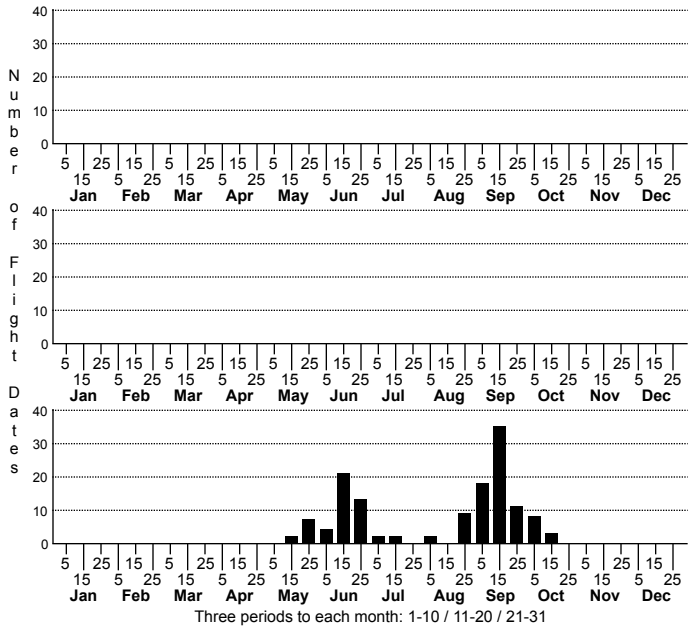
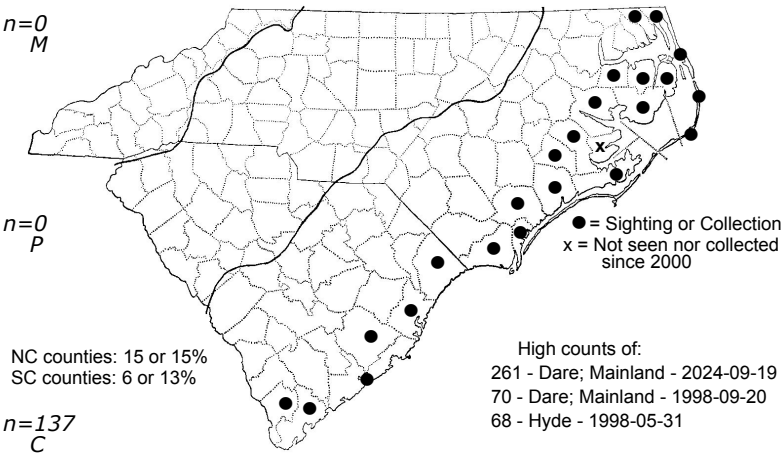
Palatka Skipper *Euphyes pilatka*





High counts of:
261 - Dare; Mainland - 2024-09-19
70 - Dare; Mainland - 1998-09-20
68 - Hyde - 1998-05-31

Earliest date: New Hanover 15 May 2004
Latest date: Dare; Mainland 18 Oct 2025

Status and Rank

State	Global
S3S4	G3 [G3G4]

DISTRIBUTION: The tidewater region of the lower Coastal Plain only; recorded from 15 counties, ranging from Currituck on the north to Brunswick on the south. It ranges "inland" to Beaufort County.

ABUNDANCE: Local; may be locally common to abundant in the northern part of the coastal range, at least from Pamlico Sound (Hyde County area) northward, but uncommon and local southward. For example, a staggering tally of 261 was made by Jeff Pippen, Audrey Whitlock, and others in September 2024 near the Pamlico Sound on mainland Dare County.

FLIGHT PERIOD: Two broods; mid- or late May to mid-July, and late August to mid-October. Unlike with most other skippers, whose second brood is usually much longer or has many more individuals flying than in the first brood, two of the four highest counts are from the first brood. However, peak counts may well be in mid-September.

HABITAT: The species is closely tied to Sawgrass (Cladium jamaicense). Thus, it is found almost exclusively at tall, slightly brackish marshes in the tidewater area. This butterfly's abundance is tied to the abundance of Sawgrass; very common where the grass is abundant, such as parts of mainland Hyde and Dare counties along Pamlico Sound. Because nectar plants are often scarce in or near Sawgrass marshes, the species can range a mile or more away from such marshes; for example, they have been seen in powerline savannas, along canal banks (such as north of Lake Phelps), and even at a school yard with plantings of Lantana (Lantana strigocamara) and at a rest area with Lantana.

FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS: The only known foodplant is Sawgrass. The adults nectar on many flowers, such as milkweeds (Asclepias spp.); I have seen much nectaring on thistles (Cirsium spp.) and Pickerelweed (Pontederia cordata). Many in fall 2024 in Dare County were nectaring on Bitterweed (Helenium amarum), a short, weedy species!

COMMENTS: This is a large skipper of the Sawgrass marshes. It is somewhat similar in pattern below to an Aaron's Skipper, but that species has a more obvious ray on the hind wing and is smaller in size. Actually, the Palatka looks very much below like a giant Tawny-edged Skipper! Though Sawgrass marshes have relatively few plant species with suitable nectar flowers for butterflies, I have had little problem finding Palatkas on suitable nectar sources. Note that Aaron's Skipper, Dion Skipper, Broad-winged Skipper, and a few other marsh skipper species can occur with the Palatka, and thus the identification can be tricky, especially if the pale blob on the under hind wing is covered by darker scales on fresh individuals.