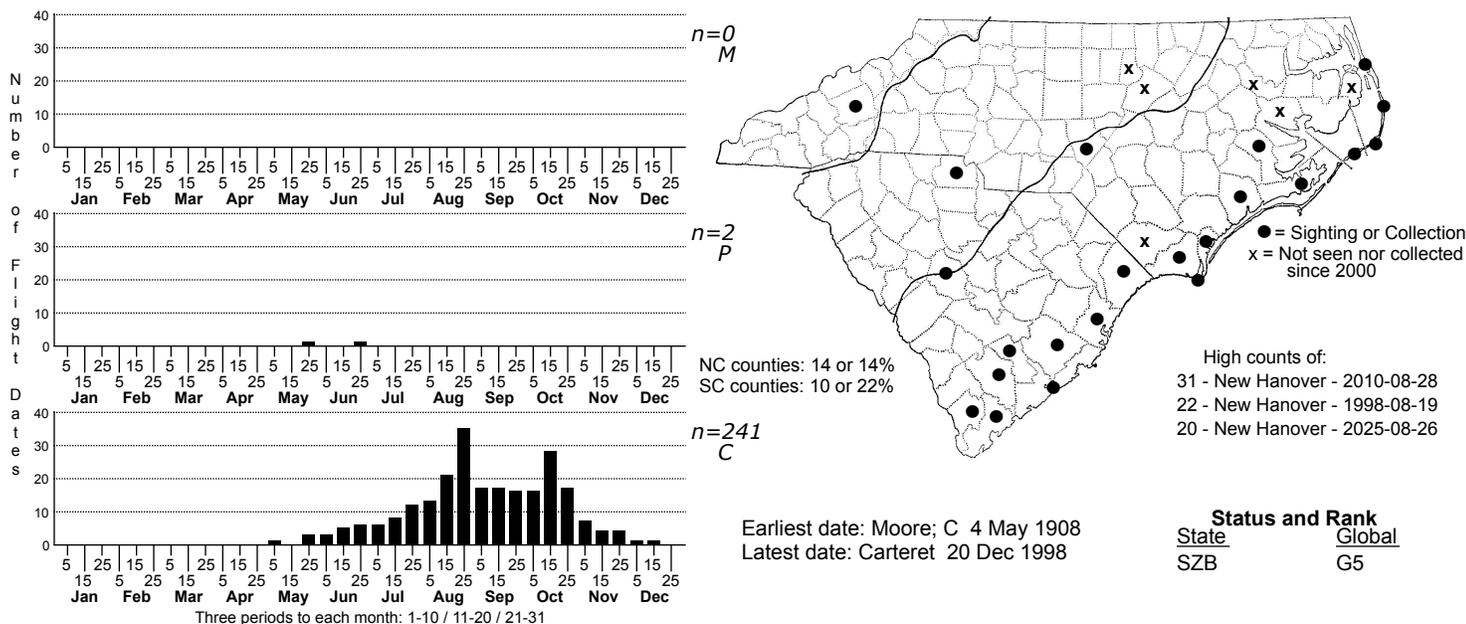


Queen *Danaus gilippus*



DISTRIBUTION: Though there are scattered records over the Coastal Plain and eastern Piedmont, it is primarily seen along and near the southern coast. The record from Durham County likely relates to an escaped individual, as the species is kept at butterfly houses and as several observers have actually seen free-flying Queens outside the houses on the grounds of the N.C. Museum of Life and Science. However, the Wake County record came in 1935, long before butterfly houses. Remarkably, in summer 2019, a larva was photographed in the wilds of Buncombe County (in the Mountains), and the pupa it formed was also photographed; experts confirmed the identification.

ABUNDANCE: This is primarily a post-breeding southern migrant into NC during the summer and fall, but it apparently overwinters successfully in some years and is thus a sparse resident in southern coastal counties, especially as it seems too regular in late summer and fall at Fort Fisher in New Hanover County for all individuals in the first part of the season to be strays from farther south. It is normally rare to locally uncommon along the immediate coast, north to Carteret County, very rare farther north along the coast, and a casual stray inland to the Fall Line. It is also quite variable in numbers from year to year, though it is reported almost annually. It can occasionally be numerous every few summers and falls at Fort Fisher and at nearby Bald Head Island (Brunswick County), barely five miles from each other.

FLIGHT PERIOD: Essentially only in summer and fall, generally from mid-July to early or mid-November. Migrants (or possibly residents) in summer lay eggs and produce a fall brood of adults. Whether adults seen in July and August are mostly migrants from farther south, or eclosed along the NC coast, is not known, but some individuals in summer are fresh -- suggesting the latter.

HABITAT: Mainly in coastal environments, such as tidal marshes and shrub thickets, and the margins of maritime forests. Probably also other open areas near the coast, though not usually seen in gardens or yards.

FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS: Individuals in NC have been seen ovipositing on Gulf Coast Swallow-wort (*Patalias palustre*), formerly named as Sand-vine (in the genus *Cynanchum*), a vine that grows in maritime thickets and marshes. This species, not milkweeds (*Asclepias* spp.), is the main foodplant in NC. Adults nectar on many flowers.

COMMENTS: This is the southern counterpart of the Monarch, at least in the Gulf states and the Southwest. Even though the species is thought to be mostly a migrant to NC, adults do lay eggs in the state, and some of the individuals seen in 1995 were extremely fresh and may have been raised in-state. In 1998, certainly some of the adults seen came from eggs laid in the state, perhaps by the first brood in July. Hurricane Floyd in September 1999 heavily damaged the Fort Fisher area, and no Queens could be found there in a check in October. However, one was reported at nearby Bald Head Island after the hurricane. We had only one report in 2000, not surprisingly from Fort Fisher, but none in the state in 2001. A few were reported, from Fort Fisher and Shackleford Banks, in 2002; a count of eight individuals at Fort Fisher attests to the continued reproductive success at that site. However, the species has been nearly absent, or at least not reported, from the Fort Fisher area in 2003-04; the colony there might have died out again. Randy Newman had three records in late summer and fall 2005 from Fort Macon State Park in Carteret County, and there were a handful of reports from 2006-2008, all from the coast. There were a remarkable 15 reports in 2009, though most being at Fort Macon State Park. In 2010, there were eight reports, nearly all from Fort Fisher, where the state record count of 31 adults was made on August 28. There were only a few state reports in 2011 and in 2012, but 2013 was a fairly good year in the state, with a total of 11 reports. There was not a single report for the state in 2016. There were a remarkable 30 (!) records in 2019, mainly from Fort Macon, Fort Fisher, and Baldhead Island. There were over 20 reports in 2020, including a stray far north at Pea Island NWR in Dare County. It has generally been reported annually since 2020, but mainly just in New Hanover, Brunswick, and Carteret counties.