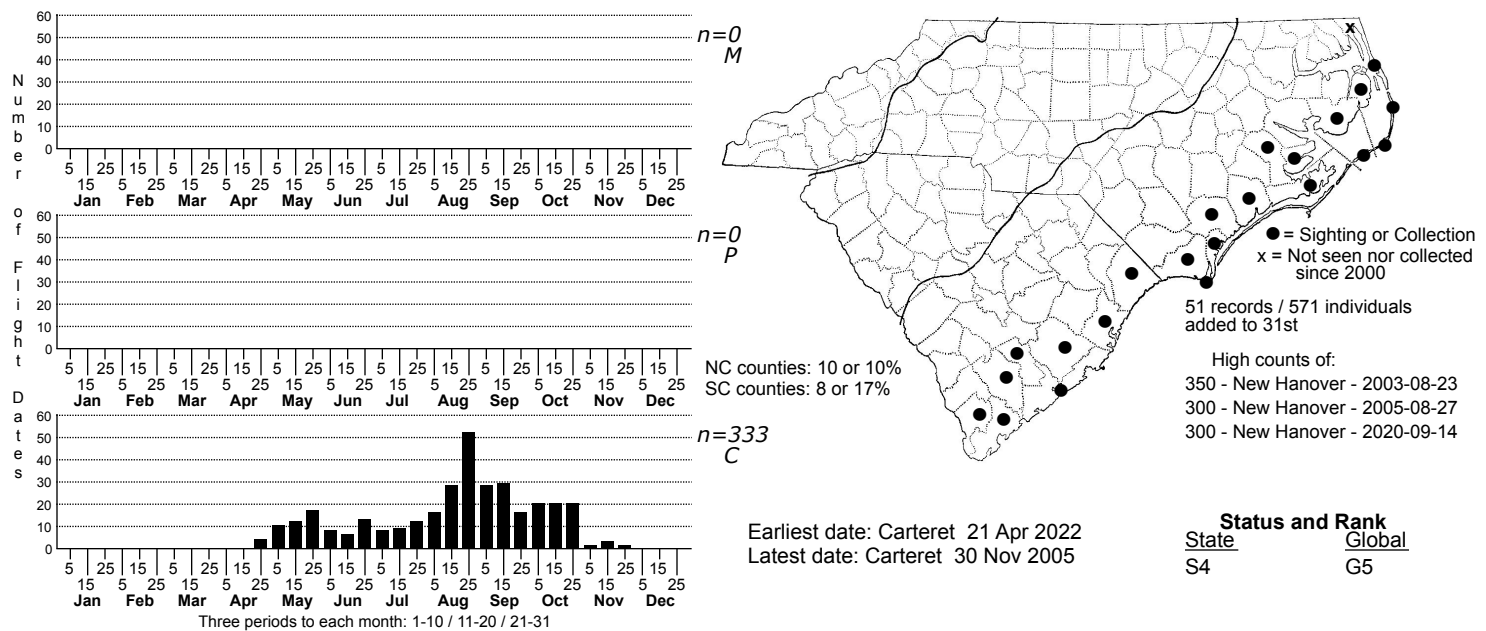


## Salt Marsh Skipper *Panoquina panoquin*



**DISTRIBUTION:** Along the entire coast, from the VA line to the SC line. It is found not only in salt marshes near the coast, but it is also found at brackish marshes along the mainland side of Pamlico Sound, such as at mainland Dare and Hyde counties.

**ABUNDANCE:** Common to locally abundant, but after hurricanes and perhaps after severe winters the populations can be clearly diminished in the following year or two. Still, it is usually easily found in the vicinity of tidal salt marshes. Also fairly common to common in some brackish marshes on the mainland.

**FLIGHT PERIOD:** The species has two or three broods in NC. Flights extend from very late April to late October, and sparingly to late November -- a long spread of dates for just two broods -- with several records for each month in-between. There is a slight dip in records in mid-June, and another in early July; the first brood certainly finishes in the latter half of June or early July. The second brood follows soon thereafter, certainly by mid-July. There is likely a third brood that starts around late August, though this is just speculation from the flight chart. It is most common in late August and September.

**HABITAT:** The species is closely tied to salt and strongly-brackish marshes. It may be found in the salt marshes dominated by Saltmarsh Cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) and also in brackish marshes dominated by Black Needlerush (*Juncus roemerianus*). However, it does move away from such marshes for several hundred yards to nectar on flowers in fields, gardens, and the like. Interestingly, the first record for Pender County (in 2011) came from the northeastern corner of the county, at least 10 air-miles from salt water; a photo was provided by Mike Turner for confirmation.

**FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS:** The primary foodplant (at least in NC) is suspected to be Seashore Saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*). This small grass is difficult to see amid the Saltmarsh Cordgrass and Black Needlerush, but it is present in most tidal marshes. The adults nectar at many flowers, though relatively few species bloom in tidal marshes. Saltmarsh Fleabane (*Pluchea odorata*), asters (*Symphyotrichum tenuifolium* and others), Sea-lavender (*Limonium carolinianum*), and thistles (*Cirsium* spp.) are among those used. They often nectar at Lantana (*Lantana strigocamara*) and other garden plants near marshes.

**COMMENTS:** This is one of the easiest butterflies in NC to search for, as it is quite common and is closely tied to salt or strongly-brackish marshes. Sometimes the only problem in finding them is the often scarcity of suitable nectar plants found in tidal marshes! When you are searching for the elusive Aaron's Skipper, you are likely to encounter many Salt Marsh Skippers. Despite its abundance, flight periods still need more elucidation -- are there two broods, or three?