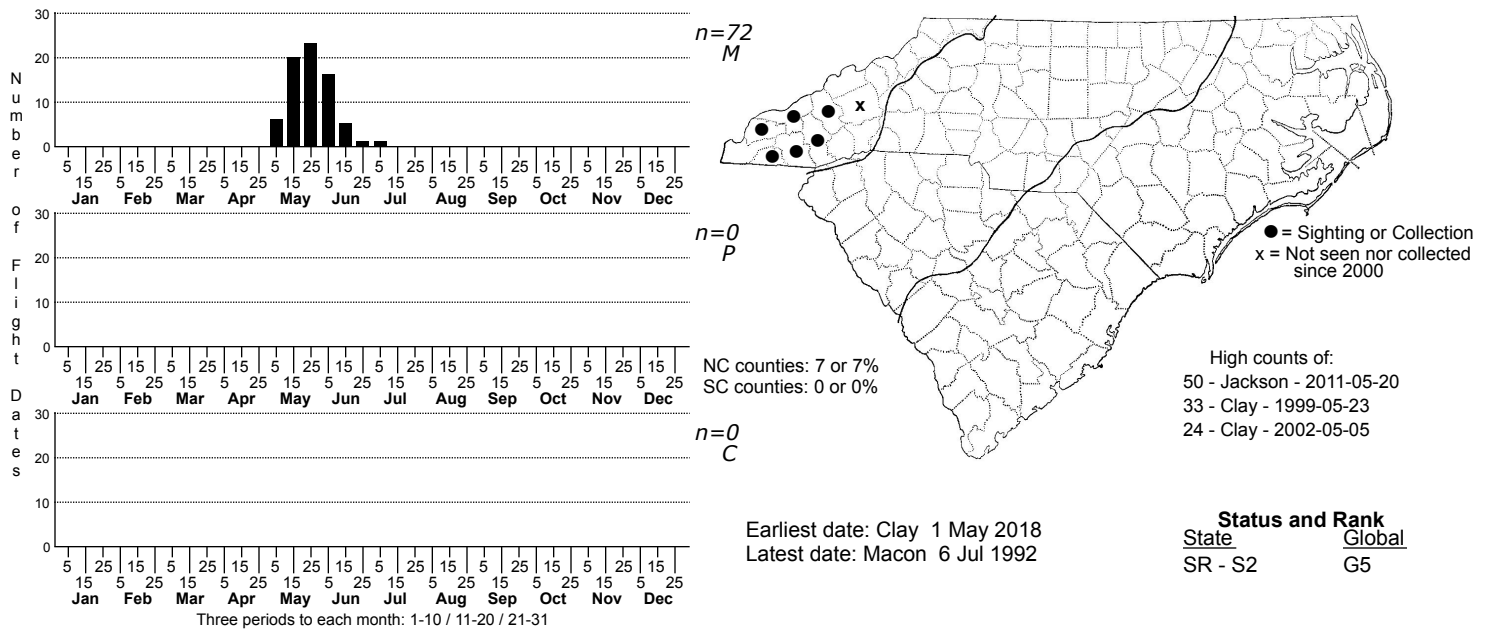


## Tawny Crescent *Phyciodes batesii*



**DISTRIBUTION:** Apparently restricted to the southern half of the Mountains (seven county records known). We are not aware of Mountain records north of Buncombe County, and the species likely is absent in the northern half of the Mountain region. Though this is a Northern species, it seems to be extirpated in many states to the north, such that there is now an isolated population in southwestern NC and adjacent GA.

**ABUNDANCE:** Rare to locally uncommon, though common at a few sites in Clay County, and quite common at a site in Jackson County discovered in 2011. Elsewhere in the range, the species is undergoing a decline (Spongy Moth [= Gypsy Moth] spraying?), but there is no reason to suspect a decline in NC.

**FLIGHT PERIOD:** A single brood; from early May into early July, with peak numbers in mid- to late May. The flight dates are advancing in the last two decades. Formerly, late May into early July was the flight period, but now the adults are emerging by early May and can be locally common then, as evidenced by the count made by Derb Carter, Jeff Phippen, and me of a remarkable 24 individuals on May 5, 2002. I suspect the flight is over in many places by the end of May or early June now.

**HABITAT:** Generally in mid- to high-elevation openings (mostly over 3500 feet), such as open rocky ridges or dry and open roadbanks through forests. The habitats are typically small openings and, though such openings may not be rare, each habitat "patch" is often very small (under an acre in size). Most recent records have been along logging roads and at sparsely vegetated road-cuts.

**FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS:** Asters (genus *Symphyotrichum*), supposedly only Wavyleaf Aster (*S. undulatum*), but it is hard to believe that a single aster species is the sole foodplant. Nectar plants are not well known in NC.

**COMMENTS:** The Southern Appalachian race (*P. batesii* *maconensis*) was a Federal Species of Concern, until that designation was ended in 2017. Considerable effort was made by biologists from several state and federal agencies, plus butterflyers working on their own, to locate the species in 1999. Thankfully, Tawny Crescents were found at a number of new sites, and a previously known site yielded a remarkable one-day count of 33 individuals! A few new sites have been found in the last 20 years in Clay County, and a new, large population was found in Macon County in 2006. The largest known population, an estimated 50 individuals seen, was found in 2011 by Kevin Caldwell at a fairly high-elevation site in northern Jackson County; he photographed several individuals for documentation. Tawny Crescents average slightly larger than Pearl Crescents and have restricted amounts of orange on the upper fore wings (i.e., usually more black than orange); the under wing is creamy or ochre in color with little or no dark or white blotches.