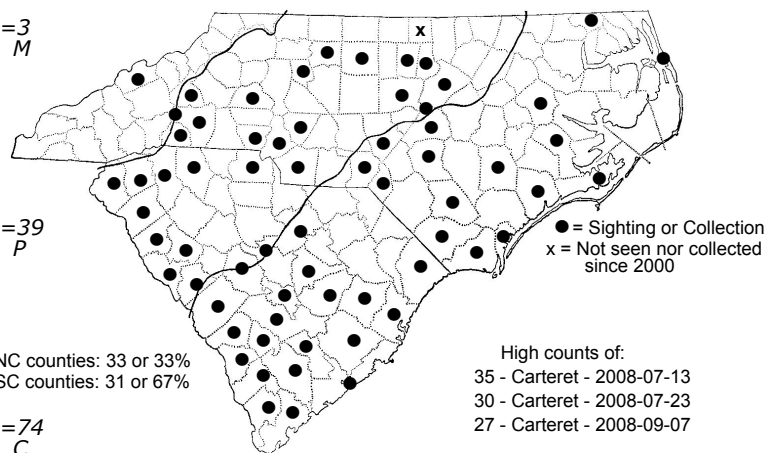
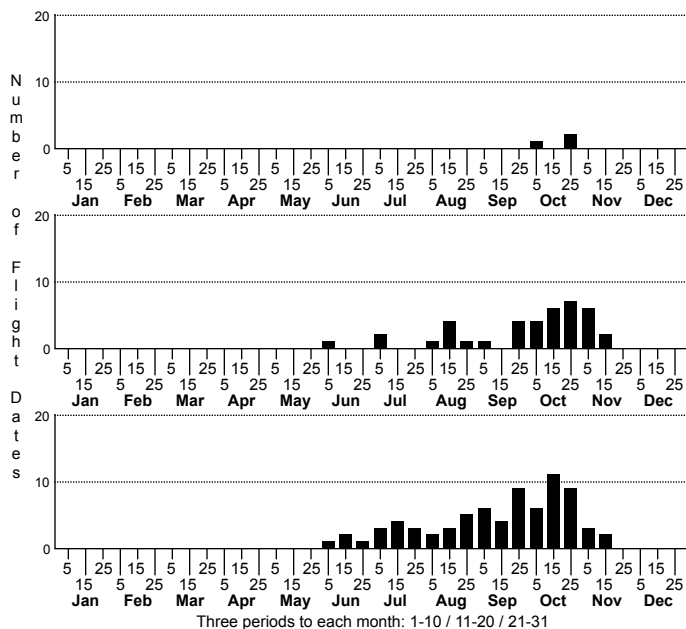


## Zebra Longwing *Heliconius charithonia*



High counts of:  
35 - Carteret - 2008-07-13  
30 - Carteret - 2008-07-23  
27 - Carteret - 2008-09-07

Earliest date: Richmond; C 1 Jun 2016  
Latest date: Mecklenburg 20 Nov 2003

**Status and Rank**  
State Global  
SZN G5

Synonym: *Heliconius charithonius*, *Heliconia charitonius*  
Other Name: Zebra, Zebra Heliconian

**DISTRIBUTION:** Sparse migrant from the south, on very rare occasions actually laying eggs in the state and producing a new progeny of adults (as in 2008 and 2020) before frost and other cold weather sets in to kill life stages. The records are widely scattered in the Piedmont and Coastal Plain (primarily the southern coast), plus several in the Mountains (Madison County). In 2008, a remarkable outbreak of the species occurred along Bogue Banks in Carteret County, and it is likely that adults dispersing from that county were responsible for new records in neighboring Craven and Onslow counties. In 2020, there was an outbreak in upstate SC and the NC southern Piedmont; a remarkable 12 new NC county records were made!

**ABUNDANCE:** Very rare to rare stray along the southern coast, north to Carteret County. Casual elsewhere in the Coastal Plain and Piedmont, though in 2020 it was "rare" in parts of the state.

**FLIGHT PERIOD:** The dates fall between early June and mid-November, though most sightings are from mid-August into November.

**HABITAT:** Most likely to be seen around the margins of maritime forests and thickets near the coast (its usual habitat in FL). It can also occur in wooded residential areas and gardens. Not likely in wide open habitats such as fields.

**FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS:** Foodplants are passionflower (*Passiflora*) species. Females were seen ovipositing on both *P. lutea* and *P. incarnata* at Fort Macon State Park in 2008. The species has been seen nectaring on butterfly-bush (*Buddleja* spp.) and Lantana (*Lantana strigocamara*) in yards in NC.

**COMMENTS:** This species has been reported from all coastal SC counties, including Horry (adjacent to NC). Thus, it is not a surprise that it has been seen in NC. One was photographed (photo on the internet) in Orange County, by Randy Emmitt, in October 1997; this apparently was the first tangible documentation of the Zebra Longwing for North Carolina. In 2003, we received a remarkable 11 records, and surprisingly 10 of these were from the Piedmont. The 2020 season, mentioned above, surpassed even that!

On June 19, 2008, Randy Newman (ranger at Fort Macon State Park) saw one or two adults at the park, and over the next few months a number of other butterflyers made visits to the park to see them. Not only were 20 or more adults seen at the park, but observers found them at several other maritime forests on Bogue Banks, even westward toward Emerald Isle. Not surprisingly, a few adults were seen on the Carteret County mainland, and they were seen as far north as Craven County and west to Onslow County. This "outbreak" was not detected along the coast farther to the south, and it must have started with a single gravid female laying eggs at the state park in early summer. It seems highly unlikely that a good number of adults were simply blown to Carteret County from FL or GA, for example, as some butterflies should have been found farther south along the coast. Sadly, no "offspring" survived the winter of 2008-2009, as no adults were reported from anywhere in the state in 2009. The 2020 outbreak inland seemed to have started in upstate SC, and one or more gravid females there probably created the plethora of adults that moved northward into NC in the fall season. In fall 2024, there was a small "outbreak" of the species in the New Bern area of Craven County, perhaps owing to a gravid female laying eggs earlier in the summer.

**NOTE:** In 2021, there was a controversy about observations of this species at Airlie Gardens in Wilmington. Thankfully it was determined that this is one of a handful of native species that is raised in a butterfly house there (from chrysalids), and it is assumed that at least one gravid adult female escaped and produced a progeny of several dozen adults a few months later. Thus, records from these gardens have not been included in the database.