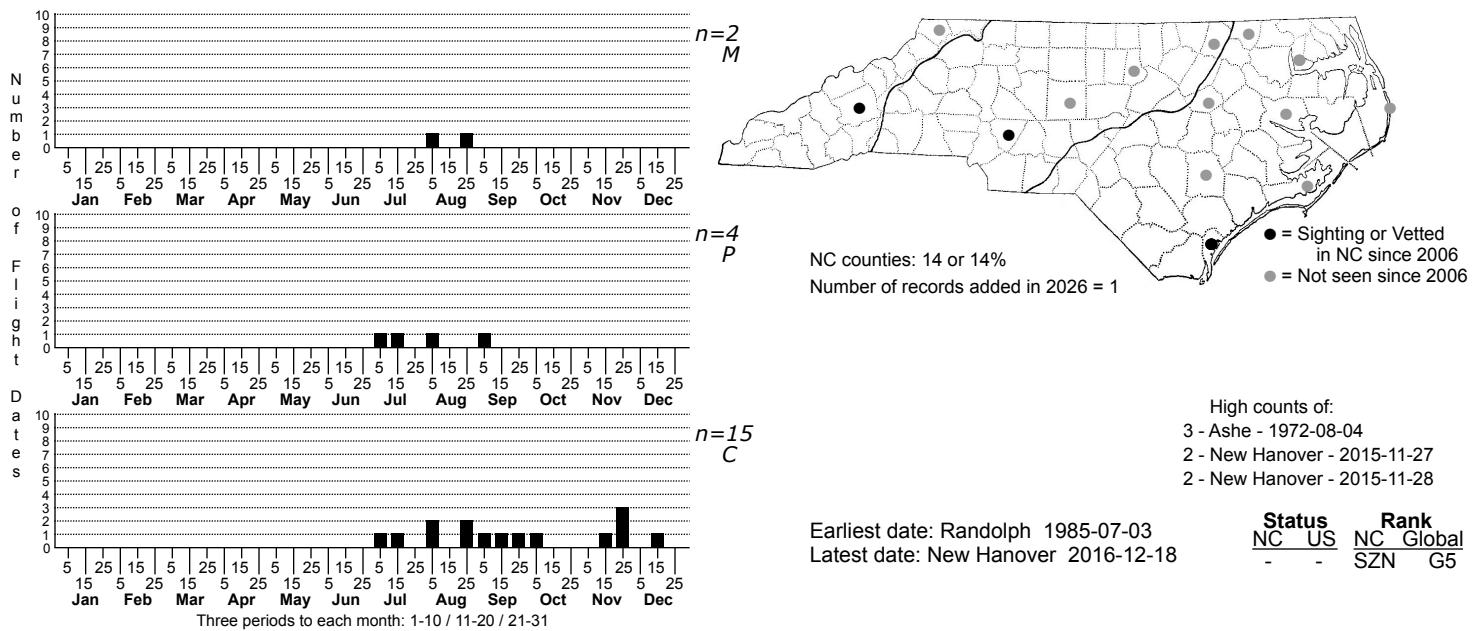


Tramea onusta Red Saddlebags



DISTRIBUTION: This is a species primarily of the western and central parts of the United States, and is a migrant or stray to most Atlantic Coast states. The status in NC is very confusing. A few references indicate that NC lack records; Paulson (2011) states that there are "no North Carolina records". The OdonataCentral database gives only three NC records -- a photograph from Dare County in 2003 from Pea Island NWR, two photos from New Hanover County in 2015, and another from the latter county in 2016. (These records from 2003, 2015, and 2016 are also documented by photos on this website -- see below). Several other unconfirmed reports have appeared in the literature. The University of Florida database, containing thousands of specimens from Duncan Cuyler, actually gives a stunning ten county records for Red Saddlebags! Are all of these specimens correctly identified (i.e., are not the very similar Carolina Saddlebags)?

ABUNDANCE: Presumed very rare migrant, and perhaps mainly near the coast, as the only records confirmed by photos are from coastal counties. However, as it looks very similar to Carolina Saddlebags, most people would easily overlook the species.

FLIGHT: Presumably only in summer and fall. The photo records are for 22 August; 19, 25, 27, and 28 November; and 18 December. The collection records, if correct, fall between 3 July and 2 October.

HABITAT: The NC photo records are presumably from the vicinity of coastal ponds -- Pea Island refuge (perhaps around an impoundment) and Carolina Beach State Park (limesink ponds). Paulson (2011) indicates that lakes and ponds are primary habitats, as well as canals and other slow-moving waters.

BEHAVIOR: Probably similar to other saddlebags, which typically fly above or at head height over mainly open areas -- ponds, fields, etc. They perch somewhat infrequently, and when they do perch, not surprisingly it is often over a person's eye level.

COMMENTS: No species in the state has more confusing data and status than the Red Saddlebags. Is it a not-so-rare migrant/stray, easily overlooked amid the common Carolina Saddlebags, or is it casual to very rare as a stray? This is a difficult species to separate from the common Carolina Saddlebags through binoculars or the naked eye. In fact, a handful of photos of "Red Saddlebags" from NC have been posted on the iNaturalist website; however, nearly all seem to be Carolina Saddlebags, or the separating characters are not clear from the photos. The Red Saddlebags has a somewhat smaller hind wing patch, a somewhat duller red abdomen (despite the common name) with smaller areas of black on the terminal segments, and several other characters. Unraveling this mystery might take a few years, if ever! Thankfully, Mark Shields observed and photographed two individuals on both 27 and 28 November 2015 at Carolina Beach State Park, to further confirm its presence in the state. He also photographed two individuals at that park in November 2016, and another there in December 2016, suggesting that the species may be a regular fall visitor to southeastern NC and not just a casual stray far out of its normal range.