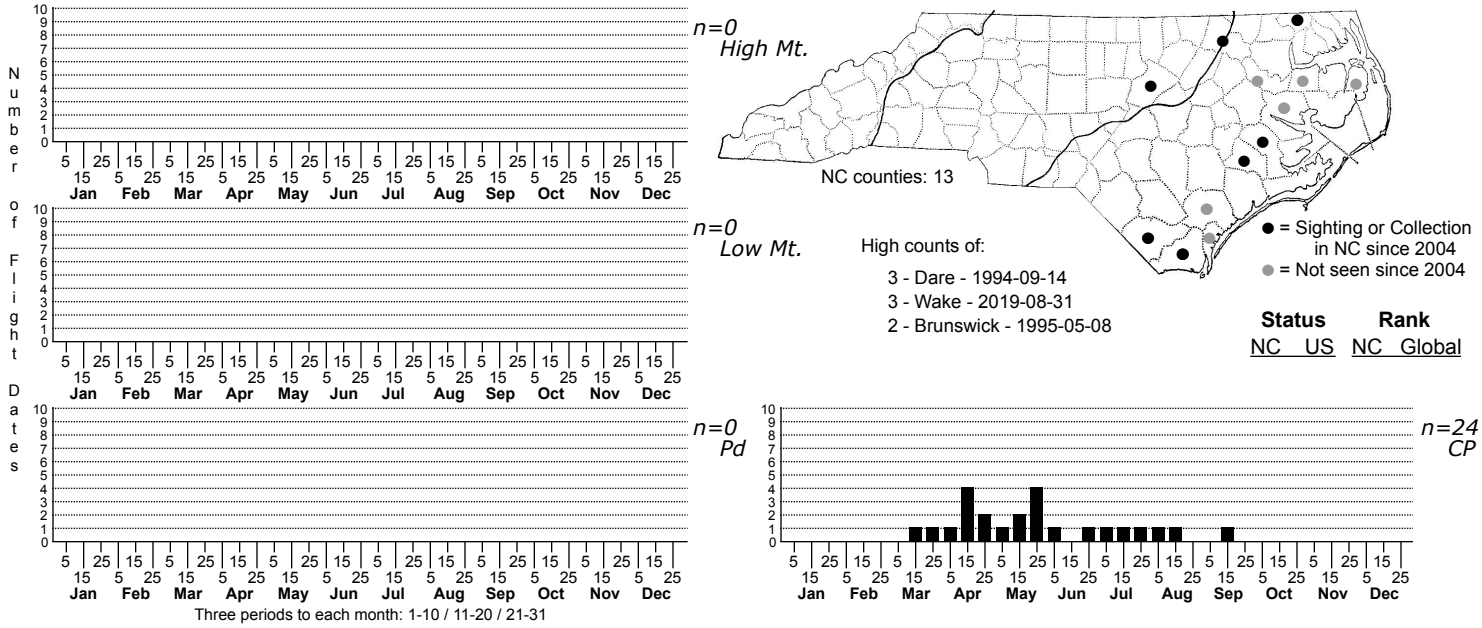
Isoparce cupressi Bald Cypress Sphinx



FAMILY: Sphingidae SUBFAMILY: Sphinginae TRIBE: Sphingini
TAXONOMIC_COMMENTS: For many years a single species occupied the genus but a second Mexican species has now been described.

FIELD GUIDE DESCRIPTIONS: Covell (1984); Leckie and Beadle (2018)
ONLINE PHOTOS: MPG, Bugguide, BAMONA
TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, ADULTS: Hodges (1971); Tuttle (2007)
TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION, IMMATURE STAGES: Dominick (1973); Wagner (2005); Tuttle (2007)

ID COMMENTS: Isoparce is one of our smaller sphinx moths, with warm brown tones and fine streaking. Unlikely to be confused with any species other than Paratrea plebeja with which it is often captured. Sexes similar but females considerably larger. Larvae of all instars were well described and illustrated by Dominick (1973) and also illustrated by Wagner (2005).

DISTRIBUTION: All of our records come from the Coastal Plain (Cypress extends into the Piedmont along a few rivers but our limited sampling in those areas -- e.g., at Louisburg in Franklin County -- did not turn up this species)

FLIGHT COMMENT: There are two broods, April-May and July-August. Strays into September so perhaps a partial third brood can be accommodated.

HABITAT: Cypress swamps. Not recorded in Carolina Bays or other Cypress Savannas where only Pond Cypress occurs.

FOOD: Monophagous. So far only observed in association with bald cypress.

OBSERVATION_METHODS: Adults have a shortened tongue and likely do not visit flowers; no records of such behavior known. They come to 15 watt blacklights in small numbers with up 3 individuals collected in a single trap. No records from bait traps. The larvae like so many evergreen feeding species is perfectly camouflaged and often feed low enough to be collected while beating branches. Larvae are easy to rear if given fresh cypress foliage.

NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM RANKS: G4 [S3S4]

STATE PROTECTION: Has no legal protection, although permits are required to collect it on state parks and other public lands

COMMENTS: Long thought to be a very rare species, elucidation of the life history has shown it to be a habitat specialist and investigators were simply looking in the wrong places. Adults rarely occur outside swamps which may indicate that populations will decrease as swamps are drained and fragmented.