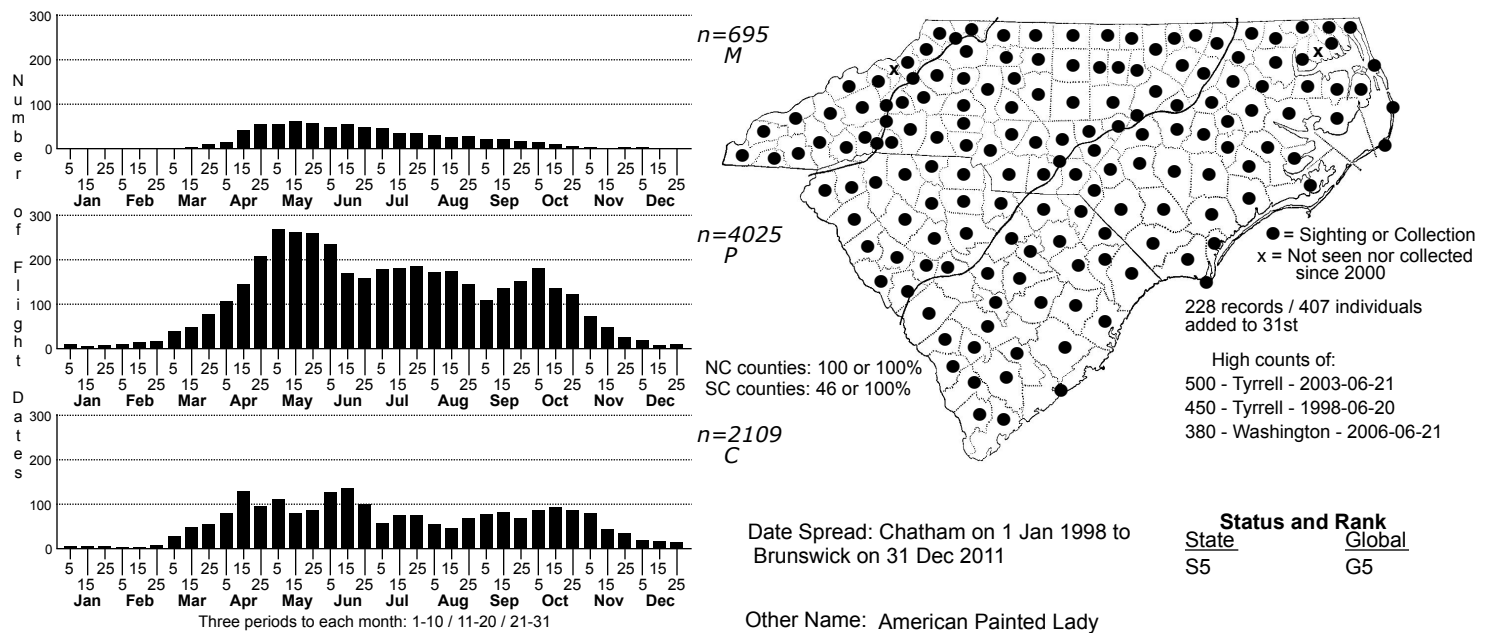


American Lady *Vanessa virginiensis*



DISTRIBUTION: Statewide, occurring in all 100 counties, including the Outer Banks.

ABUNDANCE: Generally common over most of the state, though seldom seen in colonies or large numbers. Somewhat more numerous in the Coastal Plain than farther westward, but certainly not uncommon in any region. The species undergoes unpredictable population changes and can be quite scarce for much of a given year. In recent years, it has often been uncommon in summer and early fall, but it then is seen again in larger numbers in fall. Thus, it is most numerous in spring and in fall than in late summer.

FLIGHT PERIOD: Three or four broods, with a continuous flight period. Present in NC without gaps from February to November; a few may fly briefly in winter, at least in the Piedmont and Coastal Plain. The first flight in the Mountains does not begin until late March or early April. The first flight of newly-hatched individuals downstate begins during the latter half of March.

HABITAT: Very widespread, and not showing any favoritism toward damp places (as the Red Admiral tends to do). Occurs in fields, wooded borders, powerline clearings, yards and gardens, dunes, savannas, and a great variety of open or mostly open sites.

FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS: Foodplants are primarily pussy-toes (*Antennaria* spp.) and cudweeds (*Gnaphalium* spp.), less often other composites (*Asteraceae*). The species has a wide nectar preference, often in gardens; also feeds on tree sap and damp soil.

COMMENTS: This is the commonest of the three *Vanessa* butterflies in NC, and it can be seen on the majority of full-day trips, though usually only one to several individuals are seen per day. Nonetheless, it is such a widespread species that its "common" status is warranted. For some unknown reason (drought?), American Ladies were very scarce across NC in the last half of 2002. They (as did the other two *Vanessa* species) had another poor year in 2006, at least in the latter half of the year, and also in the latter half of 2010.