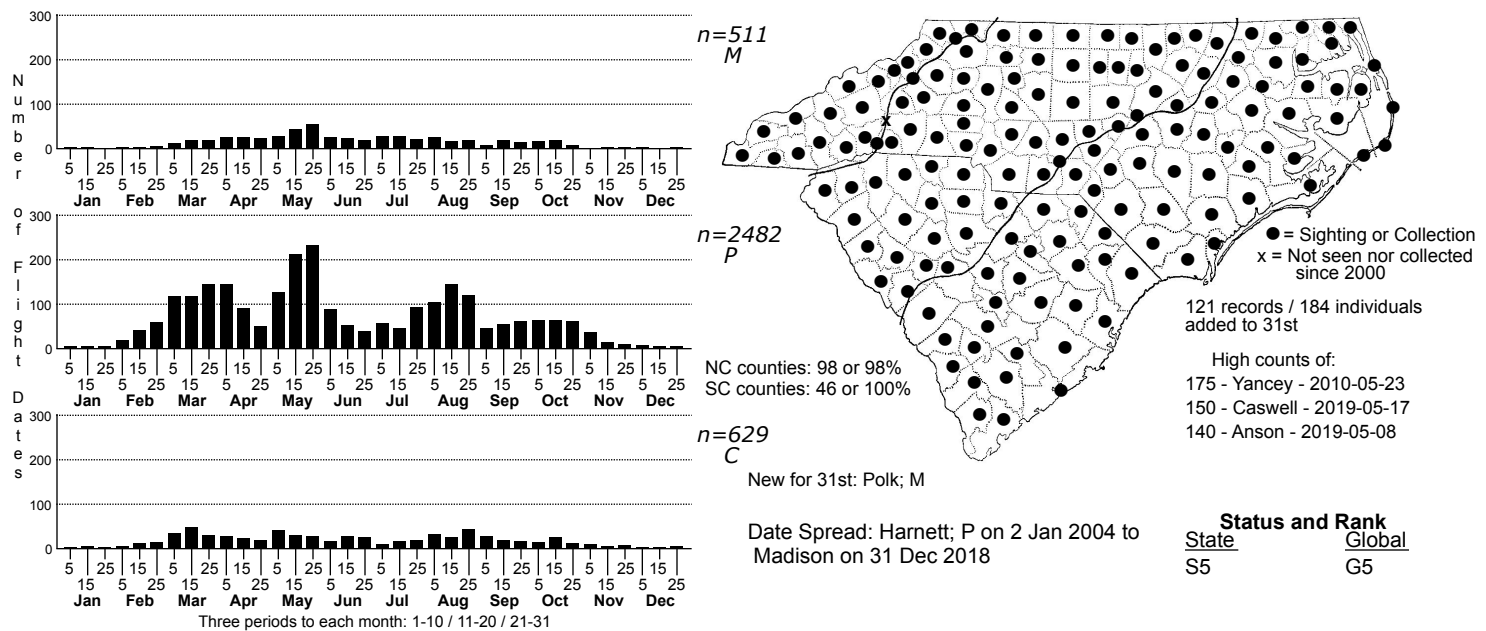


## Question Mark *Polygonia interrogationis*



**DISTRIBUTION:** Statewide, presumably occurring in all counties, though few records from the northeastern corner of the state. Present on the Outer Banks.

**ABUNDANCE:** Widespread; fairly common, to occasionally common. The species is somewhat more common in the Piedmont than in other provinces; it is scarce in the higher Mountains and in some counties in the lower Coastal Plain.

**FLIGHT PERIOD:** Complex; two broods. This species overwinters as an adult, and it can be seen on the wing as early as February, and even on warm days in January. It is frequent from late February to mid-June, except for a period around late April (when most of the overwintering adults have passed away and before the next brood emerges). The first new brood emerges in early to mid-May and flies until mid-June, when many individuals aestivate. They again emerge by mid- or late July. The second brood emerges in July and August and can be seen at least to late October, rarely to mid-December, when they "hibernate" as adults. Worn individuals of the previous brood may be seen with fresh individuals of the new brood both in spring and in late summer.

**HABITAT:** This species is usually not seen far from deciduous or mixed forests, though it migrates to an undetermined extent. It is often seen along dirt roads or wide trails through hardwood forests, both uplands and lowlands, as well as along the margins of such forests. It is also seen in the dappled shade of forest interiors.

**FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS:** The foodplants are primarily elms (*Ulmus* spp.) and hackberries (*Celtis* spp.), but nettles (*Urticaceae*) have also been mentioned. The species does not usually nectar at flowers, but adults feed at sap, decaying fruit, carrion, damp ground, etc. Thus, it is usually seen perched on leaves, tree trunks, or especially on dirt roads.

**COMMENTS:** This species is often seen, and most easily observed, along dirt roads passing through moist forests, where the adults can be seen perched on the roads, obtaining moisture from the mud. As this is a fast flier, and can easily be confused with the Eastern Comma, many individuals seen on the wing must be left as unidentified, though the Question Mark is somewhat larger than the Comma and does not fly quite as fast or erratically as that species.

As with most butterfly species, the Question Mark can have poor years and big years. For whatever reason, the species was shockingly scarce across the state in 2014. For example, despite it potentially being able to be seen afield on most dates within a calendar year (on days with mild to hot temperatures), there were only 7 reports from the Mountains and just 8 from the Coastal Plain for the entire year (2014). In 2019, there were several remarkable one-day counts in the spring from the lower Piedmont -- 150 in one county (Caswell) and 140 in another (Anson).