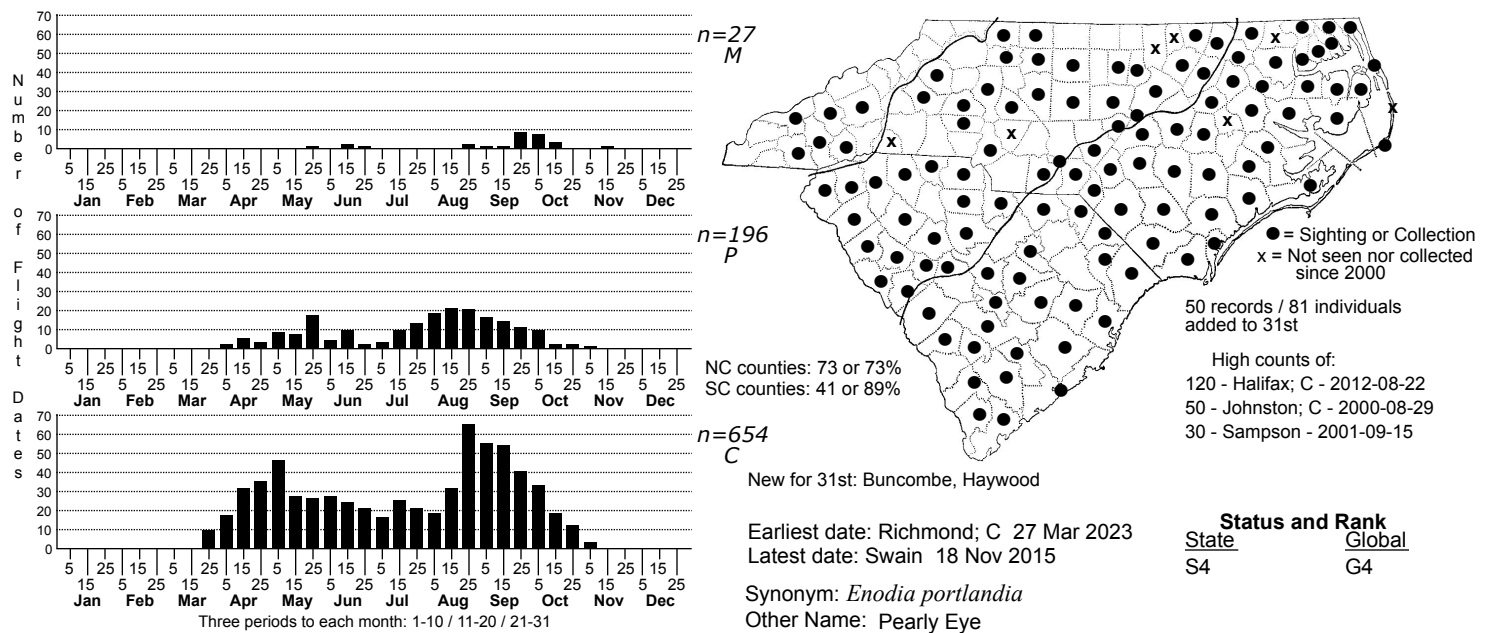


## Southern Pearly-eye *Lethe portlandia*



**DISTRIBUTION:** Throughout the Coastal Plain and in most of the Piedmont; possibly absent in a few northern and a few foothill counties in the Piedmont. Only known in the Mountains (photos) from the southern half, north to Buncombe County, but still not yet found from well-worked Madison County nor from the southwestern tip of the province. Confusion with the very similar Northern Pearly-eye has caused much uncertainty about the range in the Piedmont, but there are photos for Surry and Stokes counties in the northwestern corner for solid documentation. A 2015 photo record from Swain County, shockingly in mid-November (!), extends the range slightly northward in the Mountains; photos added Buncombe and Haywood counties in 2023.

**ABUNDANCE:** Locally fairly common to common in the Coastal Plain; uncommon in the eastern and southern Piedmont, and rare in the remainder of the province. Very rare in the Mountains, so far limited to the southern half of the province. As this is a Southern species, it would not be expected in the northern Mountains anyway.

**FLIGHT PERIOD:** Two broods in each province. In the Coastal Plain and Piedmont, the first brood flies from late March or early April until late June or early July. The second brood flies between late June (Coastal Plain) or early July (Piedmont) and late October. Most Mountain records are for the second brood; there is a small brood at least from late May (and certainly earlier) through June, and a larger brood from August into October, with an exceptional record for November 18.

**HABITAT:** Habitats are generally bottomlands, other moist forests (such as bay forests or moist maritime forests), and less frequently in upland forests. Cane (*Arundinaria* spp.) is always present in the habitat. They seldom venture far from forests, but they will fly along wooded trails, partly shaded roads through bottomlands, etc. Pearly-eyes (all three species) fly more in shaded places and more towards twilight than most other butterflies.

**FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS:** The foodplants are canes (*Arundinaria* spp.), especially Switch Cane (*A. tecta*), a mainly Coastal Plain species. The butterflies do not nectar; they feed on sap, decaying fruit, mud or moist ground, etc.

**COMMENTS:** This species can be quite common in a few places, such as in Kitty Hawk Woods and Nags Head Woods in coastal Dare County and in Howell Woods in Johnston County. The species looks quite similar to the Creole Pearly-eye, and is often found with it. Fortunately, these two species often perch on trails, on the ground, or on tree trunks, where they can be studied at leisure. Creole usually has 5 fore wing eyespots as opposed to mainly 4 in Southern (and Northern); and it shows a "knuckled" fore wing brown line on the under side of the wing, as opposed to a straighter line in the other two species.

The species is very similar to Northern Pearly-eye and can only be separated by male genitalia and by antennal club color; wing pattern and coloration are mostly unreliable. Southern have a completely orange club. Northern have black on the club, generally with an orange tip. Jeff Phippen discovered an apparently "new" field mark in 2020 by carefully examining photos of both species, and this has been corroborated by others checking their photos and locations. On both species, check the white "pupil" mark inside the hind wing eyespots below; Northern have all of these as distinctly round "dots", whereas Southern almost always have at least one (if not more) of these white pupils as lines or bars and not clear rounded "dots".