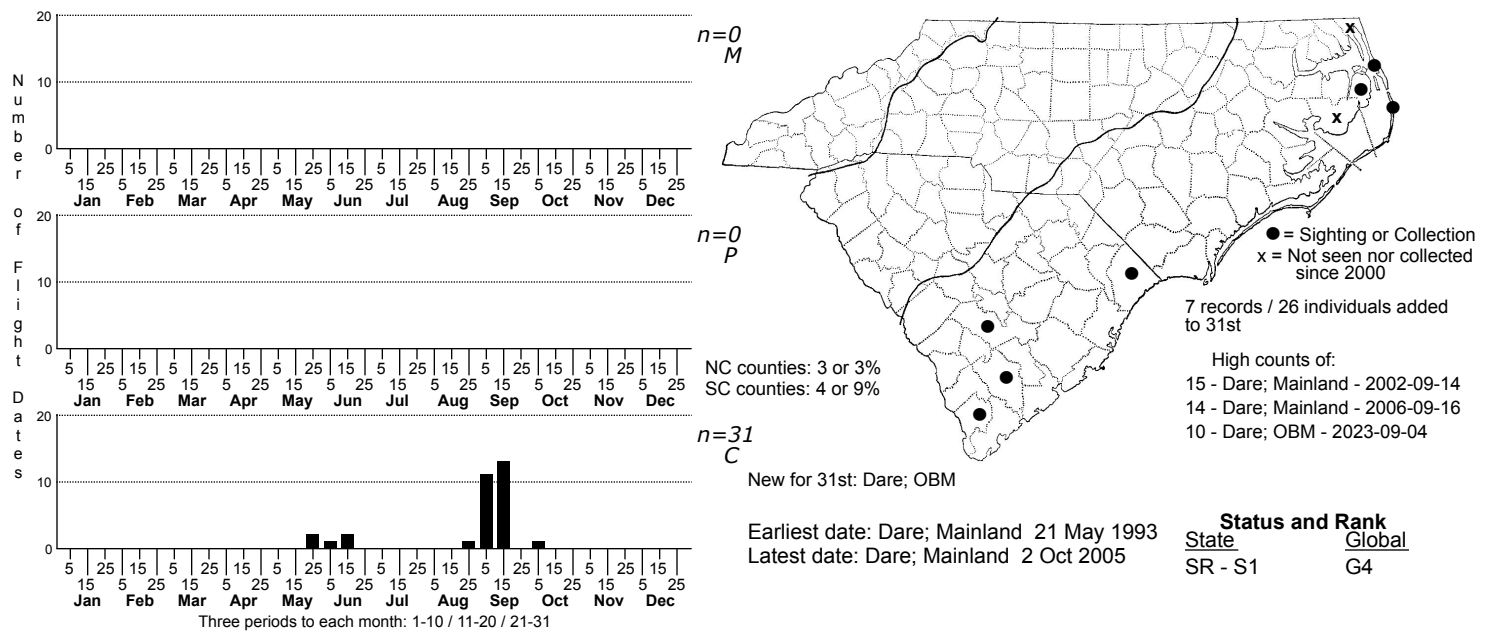


Aaron's Skipper *Poanes aaroni*



DISTRIBUTION: So far as known, found only along the northern coast, from Currituck County south to the mainland of Hyde County. The species ranges along and near the coast as far north as NJ and south to FL. The northern subspecies -- *P. a. aaroni* -- supposedly ranges south to Hyde County, and a different subspecies -- *P. a. minimus* -- is found just in southern SC, according to the Butterflies of America website. However, that website shows NC photos (Dare County) as being the subspecies *minimus*, contra the range listing! And, the SC map shows a record(s) for Horry County, along the northern coast. Thus, the exact subspecies to which the NC and Horry County, SC, population(s) belong is muddled. Nonetheless, the gap along the southern NC coast, between Hyde County and Horry County, appears to be real; many people have searched coastal marshes from Carteret County into Brunswick County without finding the species (of any subspecies).

ABUNDANCE: Rare, along the northern portion of the coast, but uncommon to locally fairly common in southern mainland Dare County near Pamlico Sound. Should occur in (or near) other brackish marshes along the northern coast. Abundance there is uncertain at the present time, but it seems to be absent along the southern coast.

FLIGHT PERIOD: Two broods; mid-May to mid-June (at a minimum), and early September (and likely in late August) to early October. More data are needed to clarify the flight periods, but there is a large gap between broods. The sole 2021 record (with a photo) was a badly-needed first brood one, only our fifth record for this brood.

HABITAT: In NC, the primary habitat is brackish marshes, but the species moves well away from marshes to find suitable nectar sources. In fact, one was photographed in 2019 in the central part of Dare County, seemingly several miles from suitable tidal marsh breeding habitat. In 2022, several were photographed at Lantana (*Lantana strigocamara*) plantings on Roanoke Island, within a few hundred yards of tidal marsh. Thus, they can be seen in fields, wood margins, and marsh edges, and even nectar plantings, as long as these habitats are relatively close (mainly within a mile) of tidal marshes.

FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS: Seashore Saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*) is the most likely foodplant in NC, though this is speculative, based on foodplants elsewhere. The skipper nectars on many flowers in the marshes and adjacent fields. I have seen them nectaring on Yellow Thistle (*Cirsium horridulum*) in May; and on Blue Mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*), camphorweed (*Pluchea* sp.), and various goldenrods (*Solidago* spp.) in September-October.

COMMENTS: This species has been found to be locally numerous in some marshes north of NC. However, it is seemingly very local or scarce south of VA. I suspect it is truly absent south of Dare and adjacent Hyde counties, for marshes in Carteret County and in the Wilmington area have been worked reasonably well. Sadly, in recent years few observers have been looking for butterflies in our coastal marshes, and working out the details of the range and flight period of this and several other species (such as the Rare Skipper) will probably be years in coming. Thankfully, several observers noted as many as ten in a day nectaring on Sneezeweed (*Helenium amarum*) on a lawn close to brackish marshes along the central Dare County coast in September 2023. Starting with the 27th Approximation, the State Rank was moved to a more realistic S1 (where it should have been all along), as there are barely 4-5 known breeding sites for it in the state.