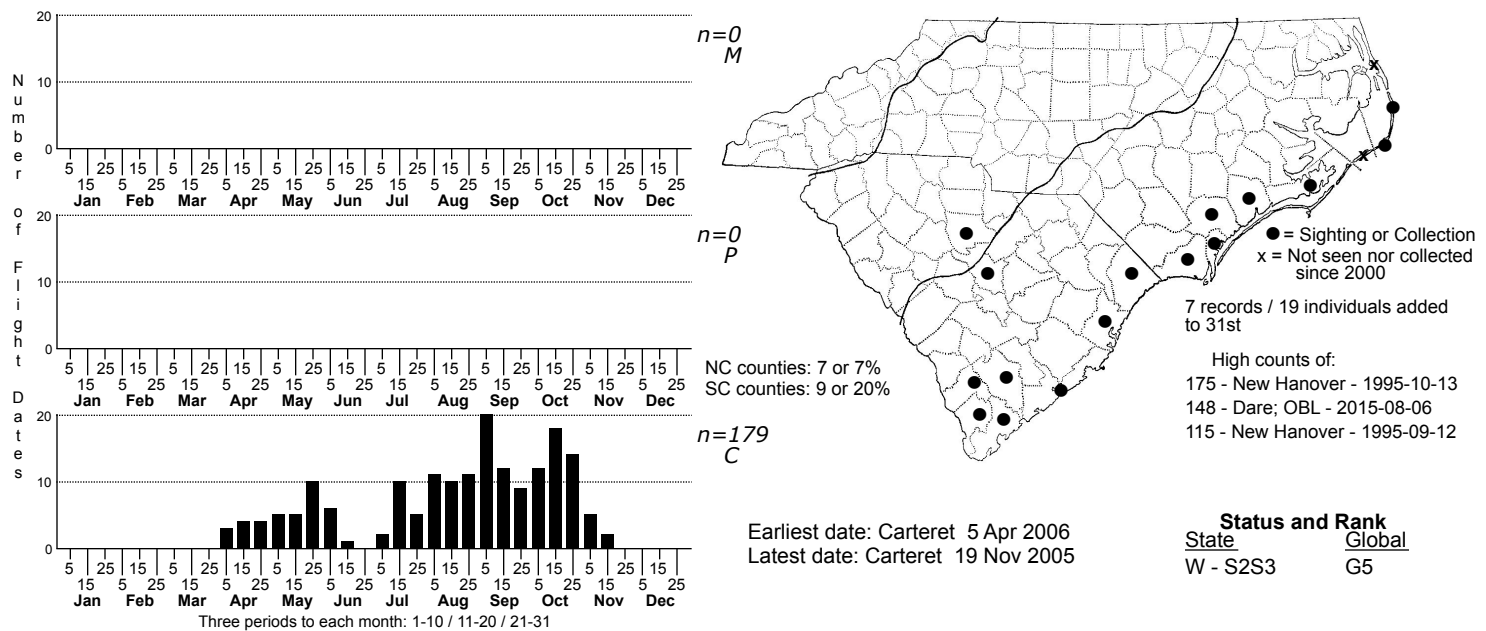


## Phaon Crescent *Phyciodes phaon*



**DISTRIBUTION:** Through 2010, known strictly on the immediate coast, generally on barrier islands. However, in fall 2011, large populations were found a few miles away from tidal water in the southeastern part of Wilmington, and a few additional sites were found on the north side of that city. It has also been found more recently at additional sites on the nearby mainland, in other counties. It ranges north to the Kill Devil Hills area of Dare County, though it was found in coastal VA in 2000.

**ABUNDANCE:** Declining in recent years, likely owing to harsh late-winter freezes/ice and to hurricanes; however, populations can rebound within a year or two. Common at least locally, where suitable habitat exists. At times, was formerly abundant at Fort Fisher in southern New Hanover County. Status not clear on many coastal islands, and seemingly absent on some islands; mysteriously scarce in Brunswick County, though found on the mainland in 2020. Very common to abundant along several roads in southeastern Wilmington, at least prior to 2016; abundance not clear along the northern part of the city.

**FLIGHT PERIOD:** Apparently three broods, at a minimum, in NC; early April to early June, and a continuous period of at least two broods from early July to late October, sparingly into November. Some of the populations in fall have been suggested in books to represent migrants from south of the state, but this species is not a migrant. Individuals remain close to their foodplants at all times. The species seems much more common in fall than in spring and summer.

**HABITAT:** The habitat in NC is very restricted -- weedy or vacant lots, lawns, low dunes, marsh edges, or roadsides along the coast, but only where patches of frogfruit (*Phyla* spp.) are present. The habitat is often sandy, but may be moist. Most habitats are disturbed sites as opposed to natural grasslands. In Wilmington, the habitats are mainly borders of woodlands, where stands of the foodplants occur along the adjacent roadsides, especially where sandy; also, found in some private yards and a church yard.

**FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS:** The foodplants are *Phyla* (formerly called *Lippia*) species; in NC, primarily on *P. nodiflora*, but may also be on *P. lanceolata*, a marsh species. The species is usually seen nectaring on frogfruit (its foodplant), but they may nectar on other very low plants such as Coastal Water-hyssop (*Bacopa monnieri*) and White Clover (*Trifolium repens*).

**COMMENTS:** This is a tiny, yet very attractive, butterfly that flies closer to the ground than any other species in NC. Often it confines its total activities to within 3-6 inches of the ground. Its strong ties to patches of frogfruit make it easy to survey for, as I have often found colonies where the frogfruit is common. It is noticeably smaller and more brightly colored than the Pearl Crescent, which may at times be seen with the Phaon Crescent.

The fact that the species has recently being found at a handful of sites on the mainland, from Brunswick County north to Onslow County (if not also Carteret County), lessens the concern for the species to be highly threatened by coastal development or coastal flooding from hurricanes and other tropical storms. For now, however, the species remains on the NC Natural Heritage Program Watch List.