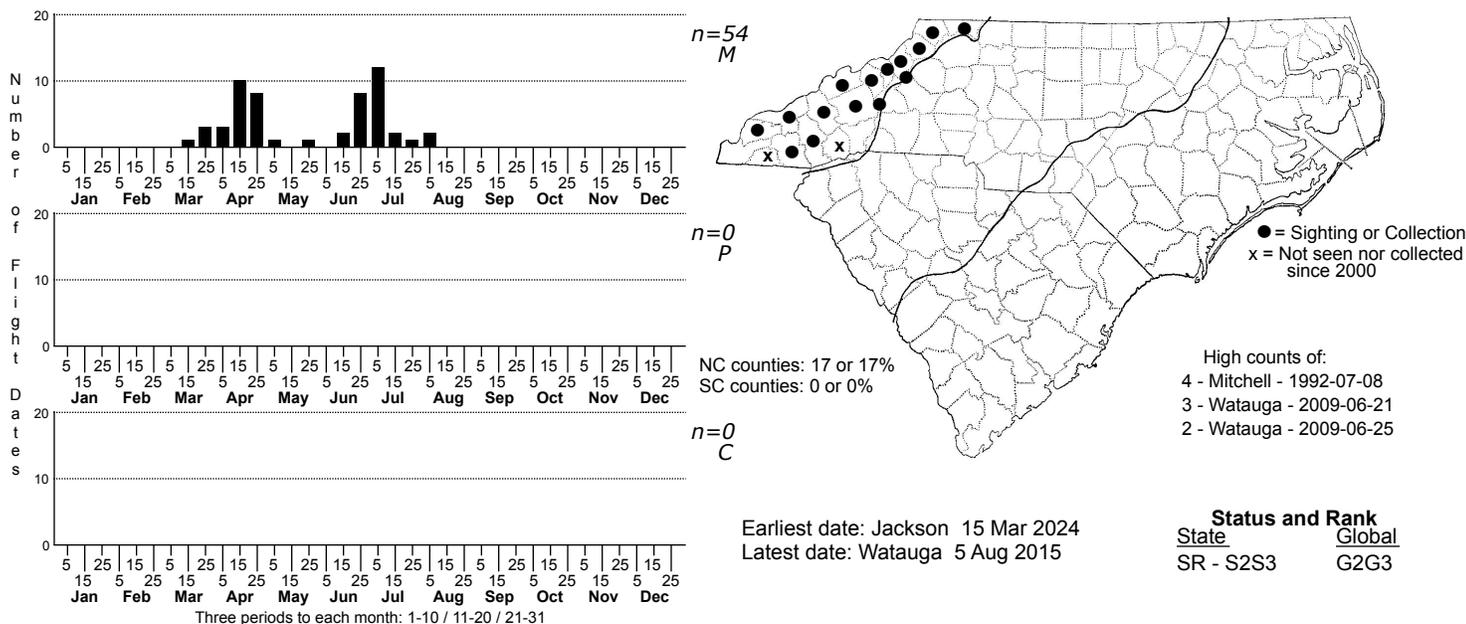


Early Hairstreak *Erora laeta*



DISTRIBUTION: Restricted in NC to the Mountains, where it apparently occurs throughout the province mainly at middle and higher elevations (over 3500 feet), but numerous records are below 3000 feet. In fact, a 2018 record from Madison County came from a site at an elevation of about 1300 feet!

ABUNDANCE: Rare, or at least seldom encountered; this is a real "prize" to find. The fact that the all-time state one-day count is just four individuals is a strong indication of the difficulty in finding this species. Most records are found by accident, often by people simply photographing butterflies and posting photos to iNaturalist.

FLIGHT PERIOD: Two broods; mid- or late March to early May (and rarely to late May), and the last half of June to early August. Most likely to be seen in mid-late April or in early July.

HABITAT: The species inhabits edges and openings in mid- to high elevation hardwood forests. Typical sites include edges of dirt roads and sunlit trails through northern hardwood forests, and hardwoods along the margins of rock outcrops. It is not an inhabitant of the shade of forest interiors.

FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS: The major foodplant in NC is apparently American Beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), but Beaked Hazelnut (*Corylus cornuta*) has also been reported. The species nectars on many plants, but Oxeye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) and fleabanes (*Erigeron annuus* and *E. strigosus*) are most frequently used.

COMMENTS: This is one of the rarest and most prized butterflies in the Eastern United States. Part of its rarity can be explained by its habit of spending most of the day perched on leaves 20+ feet off the ground.

Early Hairstreaks can be searched for by walking along dirt roads (and probably also paved roads) at mid- to high elevations (over 3500 feet) through hardwood forests, examining flowers such as fleabanes and Oxeye Daisy along the edge of the road. They have also been seen at several overlooks near the southern end of the Blue Ridge Parkway. As with most hairstreaks, the butterflies are very tame when nectaring and can be poked to observe the blue on the upper wings, though the bright aqua blue-green and scarlet of the under wings (on fresh individuals) is striking enough for easy identification. However, the green scales wear off quickly, and most individuals, even some not obviously worn, are gray below with scarlet bars (as in many photos on this website).

Prior to 2014, there seemed to be just one to several photos of this species taken in the state, of an individual in Mitchell County. Thankfully, Owen McConnell photographed one in Graham County on April 24, for a first county record; and Doug Allen photographed two on July 2 along the Blue Ridge Parkway in Haywood and Jackson counties. Excellent photos were taken of an Early Hairstreak by Dave Patton in 2015 in Watauga County, also documenting a first county record. In recent years, a number of photos have appeared on the iNaturalist website -- most apparently by non-butterfliers on montane walks or even finding them in their wooded yards.