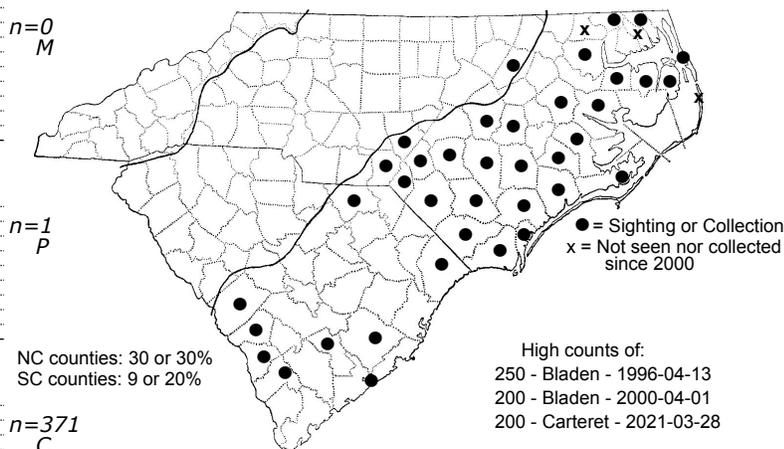
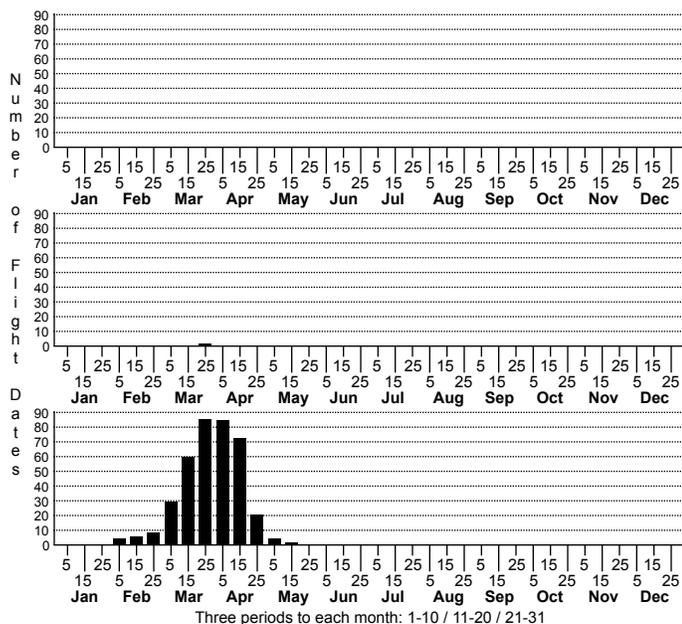


## Holly Azure *Celastrina idella*



n=371  
C

New for 33rd: Dare; Mainland

Earliest date: Craven 2 Feb 2016  
Latest date: Camden 14 May 2019

**Status and Rank**  
State: S4  
Global: G4G5

Synonym: "*Celastrina* sp.", *Celastrina ladon* (complex)

Other Name: American Holly Azure, Atlantic Holly Azure, Eastern [Spring] Azure, Holly [Spring] Azure, Spring Azure

**DISTRIBUTION:** Probably the Coastal Plain only, but the inner edge is not known; it may range to the Fall Line, if not beyond. It undoubtedly ranges inland to meet the range of the Spring Azure, but how much overlap in range there is we do not know. There is almost certainly no gap in the ranges of Spring and Holly, at least there is no place in NC that lacks some species of azure in the spring season.

**ABUNDANCE:** Somewhat local, but can be common to locally abundant in its mostly blackwater/pocosin habitats. Seemingly scarce away from areas with evergreen hollies, such as near brownwater floodplain forests, especially in the upper Coastal Plain. Dozens can be seen in a day, and daily counts of 50 or more are not unusual in a few places.

**FLIGHT PERIOD:** A single spring brood only; late February to late April, rarely to early May. Most numerous in late March and early April.

**HABITAT:** This species is found in a wide variety of wooded or semi-wooded sites, in the vicinity of hollies (*Ilex* spp.). These can be roads through swamps and pocosins, blackwater bottomlands, and maritime forests and thickets -- rarely in upland forests. I have found it most numerous along dirt roads through pocosins and swampy woods with much evergreen vegetation, particularly in Bladen County. The food plants of the Holly Azure are so widespread in Coastal Plain forests and thickets -- very few such places lack some species of evergreen holly -- that the observer might have difficulty associating the azures with hollies.

**FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS:** The primary foodplants are evergreen species of hollies, which may be American Holly (*Ilex opaca*), Yaupon Holly (*I. vomitoria*), and presumably gallberries (*I. glabra* and *I. coriacea*), among others. It has also been documented to use Virginia Sweetpire (*Itea virginica*) along the VA coast (Harry Pavulaan, pers. comm.). As with all azures, the species nectars on many flowers, as well as consuming moisture and minerals at mud and other damp soil.

**COMMENTS:** In 1999, Wright and Pavulaan formally described this taxon as a species. They suggested the common name of Holly Azure in the paper. Paul Opler (pers. comm.) notes that an azure in England has the common name of Holly Azure and that *C. idella* should be named the Atlantic Holly Azure, to avoid confusion. Within the past several years, the Butterflies and Moths of North America [BAMONA] website and NatureServe have changed the common name to American Holly Azure. However, the Butterflies of America (2020) website uses the name Holly Azure, and we have now used that name starting with the 19th Approximation.

This species is known to occur from NJ southward at least to the Carolinas. It looks quite a bit like the Summer Azure, in that it is quite pale gray to whitish below. It is a small to medium-sized azure and can even be reminiscent of Appalachian Azure, which is the largest species of azure. At any rate, it averages slightly larger, and lighter blue above, than the Spring Azure (Pavulaan, pers. comm.). Separation from Summer Azure can be tricky; though Holly Azure averages slightly smaller in size, it is best identified by its association with forested habitats containing much evergreen hollies and by its locally abundant numbers. The Summer Azure seems to avoid moist areas with considerable broadleaf evergreen vegetation and usually is seen singly or in small numbers at a locale, at least in spring.

**NOTE:** An azure photographed in the eastern Piedmont at Occonechee Mountain State Natural Area, Orange County, by Randy Emmitt, is thought to be a Holly Azure by Harry Pavulaan. If this were confirmed (probably not possible from a photo), then our concept of this species' range would need to be re-evaluated.