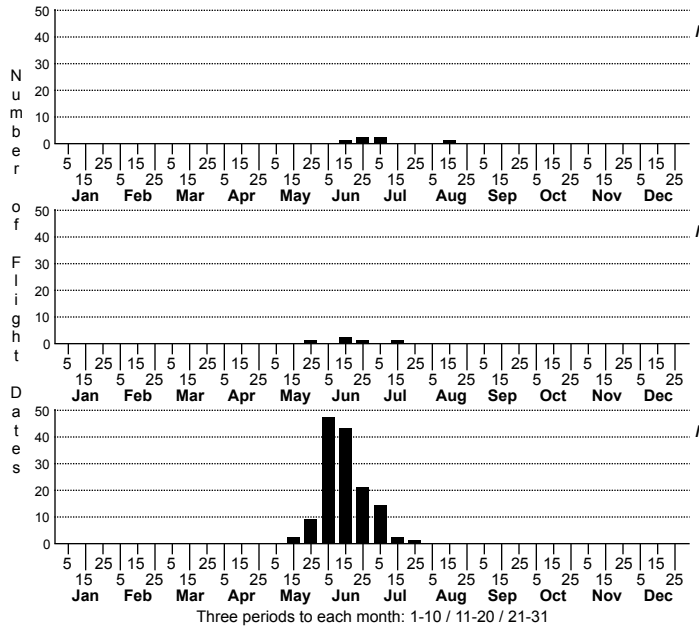
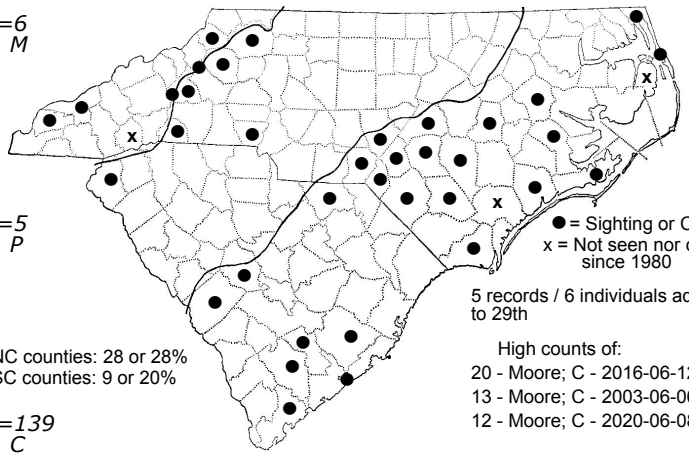
King's Hairstreak *Satyrium kingi*





NC counties: 28 or 28%
SC counties: 9 or 20%

New for 29th: McDowell; P, Wilkes; P

Earliest date: Carteret 13 May 2012
Latest date: Transylvania 11 Aug ?

5 records / 6 individuals added to 29th

High counts of:
20 - Moore; C - 2016-06-12
13 - Moore; C - 2003-06-06
12 - Moore; C - 2020-06-08

Status and Rank

State	Global
W - S3S4	G3G4

DISTRIBUTION: The southern half of the Coastal Plain; and also sparingly near the northern coast, the southern Piedmont, Piedmont foothills, and southern mountains, with an outlier record for the northern mountains (Watauga County in 2008). Records for Currituck and Pitt counties in 2014 helped to fill in a large gap in the range in the northern Coastal Plain; the species is known from southeastern VA. Until a few years ago, known only from Gaston, McDowell, Polk, Transylvania, and Watauga counties west of the Coastal Plain; however, in the past few years, photo records have been made in Wilkes, Caldwell, Burke, Swain, and Graham counties. Still lacking records for the northern Piedmont and most of the northern Coastal Plain.

ABUNDANCE: Very local in the Coastal Plain; rare to uncommon in the southern half of the province, from the Sandhills east to Craven County, and very rare in the northern half of the province. Very rare in the western Piedmont and low mountains. Fairly common at Weymouth Woods preserve in Moore County, though in 2021 observers could not find the species there at all on several visits.

FLIGHT PERIOD: From late May to late July in the Coastal Plain; though the peak counts are around June 10, it is often found well into July, being the latest flying Satyrium species in the Coastal Plain. The mountain records are from mid-June into August. Piedmont colonies have been found at Crowders Mountain State Park by me in 2001 and by David Campbell in Polk County in 2015; the flight there likely occurs from very late May to mid-July.

HABITAT: Pocosin ecotones, especially where longleaf pine forests meet pocosins, are the primary habitat in the Coastal Plain; also present in pine flatwoods and swamp/bottomland margins, but always near Sweetleaf (Symplocos tinctoria). In the mountains and western Piedmont, the habitats are upland woods where Sweetleaf is present. At Crowders Mountain the habitat is a monadnock with a good stand of Sweetleaf near the summit, whereas the Polk County site is a pine/oak heath stand.

FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS: The primary, if not sole, foodplant is Sweetleaf (also called Horse-sugar). Some references indicate that azaleas may also be used. Sourwood (Oxydendrum arboreum) appears to be the primary nectar source in the Coastal Plain; at Weymouth Woods Sandhills Nature Preserve, New Jersey Tea (Ceanothus americanus) is also used for nectar. There are relatively few flowers in bloom in the pocosin habitats when adults are on the wing.

COMMENTS: To find this species, you will have to look where Sweetleaf is common. You will generally fail to find King's Hairstreaks, as they are quite colonial. In 1995, I observed colonies at Weymouth Woods and adjacent Paint Hill in Moore County, but I failed to find them in seemingly good habitat at Holly Shelter Game Land in Pender County. This butterfly has been found in 28 counties in NC, so it is not truly rare, and suitable habitat is probably common. However, all Satyrium species have single broods and generally can be found for only a few weeks in any given locality. Remarkable was the individual photographed (confirmed by the authors) along the Blue Ridge Parkway in Watauga County in 2008 by Lillian McElrath. The hostplant -- Sweetleaf -- is presumed to occur in these areas; however, this shrub is present in most counties in the Piedmont, and yet there are just three known records in that province despite a heavy amount of field work. In the northern half of the Coastal Plain, Jeff Pippen and Salman Abdulali photographed individuals in Currituck and Pitt counties, respectively, in June 2014.

Bo Sullivan finds larvae of this species readily by tapping on the Sweetleaf limbs with a stick or butterfly net. Based on his experience, he suggests that the species is not rare enough for the NC Natural Heritage Program to track records; thus, we have downgraded its NC Status to Watch List. Even so, finding adults requires much searching, as they typically do not perch on Sweetleaf leaves, but on seemingly any leaves of various shrubs and small trees in its pocosin or swamp edge/opening habitats in the Coastal Plain.