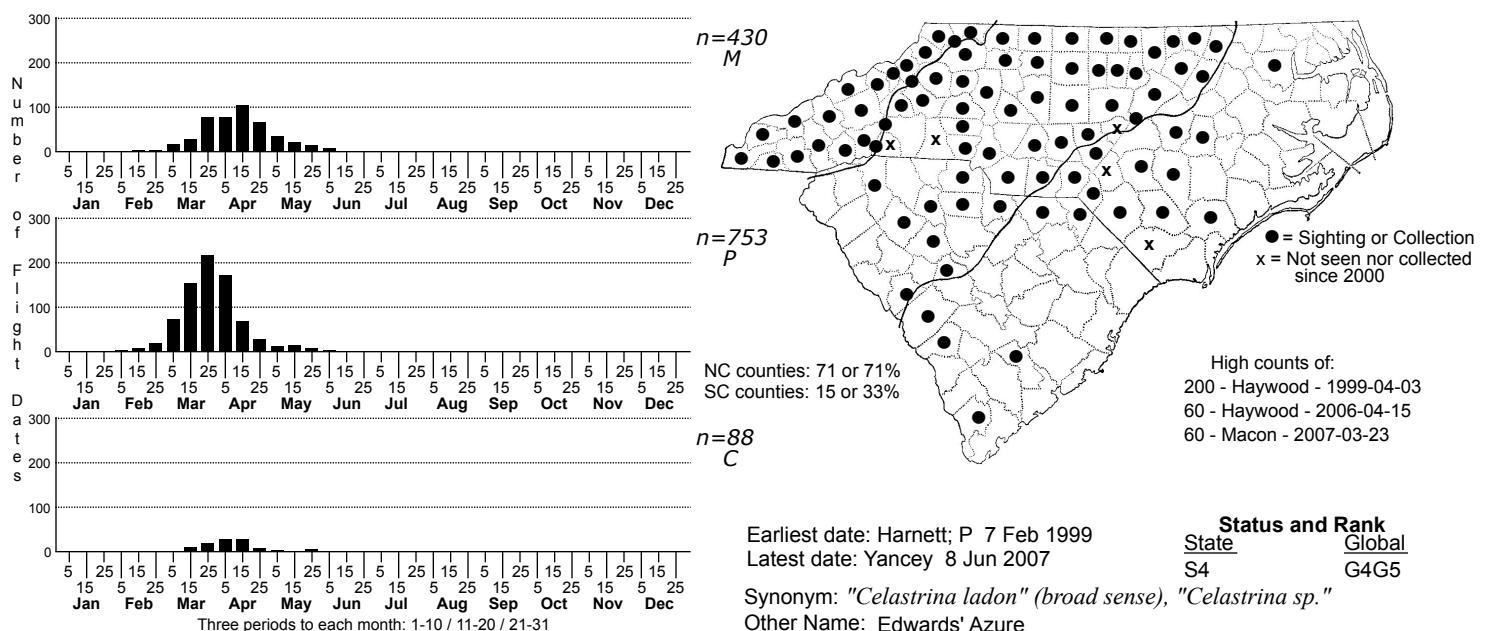


Spring Azure *Celastrina ladon*



DISTRIBUTION: Because of difficulty in identification from other azures, the range is speculative. Throughout the Mountains and Piedmont, and perhaps the western portion of the Coastal Plain. A 2007 report for Pender County, if correct, extends the range eastward toward the coast. Two photos from Bertie County in 2025, taken by Jeff Pippen, were confirmed as this species by Harry Pavulaan, an expert on the genus; this confirms its presence at least south into the northern Coastal Plain.

ABUNDANCE: Almost certainly declining, but difficult to document by sightings. Formerly, common to very common in the Mountains, but only fairly common (at best) now. Apparently just uncommon now -- at best -- in the Piedmont, and seemingly rare in many areas; very rare now in the western Coastal Plain. Many or most individuals of what might have been called Spring Azures in the past were probably in actuality first-brood Summer Azures; in most areas of the state, it appears that Summer Azures actually outnumber Spring Azures during the spring season -- the only season in which the latter species flies.

FLIGHT PERIOD: A single brood everywhere. In the Coastal Plain and Piedmont, the flight is primarily from early March (rarely February) to the end of April or early May. In the Mountains, the flight begins in mid-March (rarely February) and ends apparently in late May. However, in reality, the flight period at a given locale is likely just about four weeks long.

HABITAT: This species is found primarily along woodland trails and clearings, usually far from open country. It associates with Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*); however, as this is such a widespread tree, found in nearly all forests, most people will have difficulty finding any correlation between the tree and the butterfly. It is not likely to occur in open areas of yards, gardens, and fields, nor either along woodland margins; the Summer Azure often ranges to such open areas.

FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS: The caterpillar foodplant is primarily Flowering Dogwood. The adults nectar on many species, but they are often seen on mud or dirt or at puddles within hardwood or mixed forests.

COMMENTS: The former "Spring Azure complex" is now generally considered to consist of the Spring (=Edwards') Azure, Cherry Gall Azure (not known for certain in NC), Holly Azure, and Summer Azure, as well as a few others nowhere near NC. This listing of species conforms with NatureServe, the Butterflies of America (2020) website checklist, and Pelham's (2023) checklist. Several older references, such as the NABA checklist (2001) and Brock and Kaufman (2003), still do not have these taxa split into separate species.

The male of this species of the Spring Azure complex has a medium to dark blue color above with little sheen (and no white veins). It is slightly smaller than the Holly Azure. The underside is a medium to sooty gray, darker in shade than that species and also the Summer Azure, both of which are very pale gray to whitish in ground color below. The black spots of Spring Azure average larger than the large "dots" of Holly or Summer azures. In the Mountains, it flies with the rare Dusky Azure, and the end of the flight overlaps with that of the Appalachian Azure. Recent data suggest that the Summer Azure has a brood of moderate (if not large) size in March or April, that precedes the beginning of the Spring Azure flight by one or two weeks, and that the Holly Azure may occur into the eastern Piedmont. If so, we cannot assume an azure found in the Piedmont prior to May is a Spring Azure; most recent photos in the spring season are now being identified as Summer Azures.

This species is in strong decline from the mountains of northern VA northward (Pavulaan, pers. comm.), following the death of Flowering Dogwood trees, the main foodplant. Trends of Spring Azure numbers in NC are not well known, but it appears to be much less numerous than formerly considered (with numbers in early spring being replaced by the first brood of Summer Azure). As a result, the State Rank has been moved from the former S4S5 to the current S4.