Spring Azure  *Celastrina ladon*

**DISTRIBUTION:** Because of difficulty in identification from other azures, the range is speculative. Throughout the mountains and Piedmont, and apparently the western two-thirds of the Coastal Plain (Wright 1995; Pavulaan, pers. comm.). A 2007 report for Pender County, if correct, extends the range eastward toward the coast.

**ABUNDANCE:** Almost certainly declining. Common to formerly very common in the mountains, but only fairly common at best now in the Piedmont, and seemingly uncommon in many areas; rare to uncommon in the western Coastal Plain. Many individuals of what might have been called Spring Azures in the past were probably in actuality first-brood Summer Azures; in many 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. Thus, the flight period is approximately two months at any given location.

**HABITAT:** This species is found primarily along woodland trails and clearings, usually far from open country. It associates with flowering dogwood; 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 less likely to occur in open areas than is the Summer Azure and is very seldom seen in yards, gardens, and other residential habitats.

**FOOD AND NECTAR PLANTS:** The caterpillar foodplant is primarily flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*). The adults nectar on many species, but they are commonly seen on mud or dirt or at puddles.

**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 and the Butterflies of America (2011) website 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.

This species of the Spring Azure complex has a medium to dark blue color above with little sheen. It is slightly smaller than the next species (Holly Azure). The underparts are a medium gray, darker in shade than the next species and also the Summer Azure, both of which are very pale gray to whitish in ground color below. 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 uncertain size in March or April, 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.

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).