

Azures



For New Jersey butterflyers, Azures are a sign that spring is here. These beautiful – and variable - butterflies, whose caterpillars feed on flower parts, have created taxonomic controversy almost since their discovery. Many – perhaps most - observers feel that Azures constitute a single species, whose local populations have flight times adapted to the flowering times of their hostplants. Others feel that some populations are so distinct as to be considered separate species. The issues are discussed in detail by Jack Connor on the South Jersey Butterfly/B-log <https://blogs.stockton.edu/sjbfs/2021/05/02/five-ways-of-understanding-south-jerseys-azures/>, Monroe and Wright in *Butterflies of Pennsylvania* (2019), Gochfeld and Burger in *Butterflies of New Jersey* (1997), and Czech and Tudor in *Butterflies of the East Coast* (2005). Out of curiosity, I assembled my Azure photos and thought they might be of interest to others. To avoid treading on anyone's taxonomic toes, photos are labelled only by location and date. (There is a north-Jersey bias here; like an Azure, I don't wander far from my hostplants.) I'd be happy to hear comments. Thoughts about identity are on a following page.

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Thoughts on ID.

Third row: Most Azures in the Great Swamp are heavily marked and associate with Highbush Blueberry. They do not seem different from those from farther north, in the first two rows. I observed one such ovipositing on Blueberry, near Crater Lake Road, and one ovipositing on Viburnum, at Jenny Jump SF. My best guess is that these belong to the blueberry-associated form “Northern Azure” or “lucia”.

How paler individuals could be distinguished in photos from the dogwood-associated form (“Edwards’ Azure” or “violacea”) I do not know. I have not found Flowering Dogwood in the Great Swamp in areas where Azures occur. Loss of dogwoods from anthracinose blight may have eliminated this species from many locations, and Azures with it. I looked for Azures several times at Scherman-Hoffman, where Dogwood was abundant, but did not find any. Long ago I saw one Azure associating with Dogwood at the Watchung Reservation but was unable to get a photo.

Fourth row: Warren Grove/Rte 72 Azures were all on the ground or nectaring; their pale ground color and small crisp dark markings suggest they belong to the holly-associated form “idella”.

Fifth row: Azures from Dismal-Harmony Reservation (a few miles west of Mendham) were all on or near Black Cohosh, so likely to be “Appalachian Azures” (“neglectamajor”). Those from the Sourlands were perched or on dog/bird droppings; they look similar.

Bottom row: First-brood “Summer Azures” (“neglecta”) in my area (Glenhurst, Great Swamp, Passaic River Park) associate with native dogwoods, mostly *Cornus amomum*, and I have photos of several ovipositing on it. Most are slightly darker gray and slightly more heavily marked than “Appalachians” but one of the 6/14 individuals would be a tough call. (I have not yet found any Black Cohosh in the Great Swamp, where that photo was taken).