

Colorado Insect of Interest

Colorado Hairstreak (State Insect of Colorado)

Scientific Name: *Hypaurotis crysalus* (W.H. Edwards)

Order: Lepidoptera (Butterflies, Moths, Skippers)

Family/Subfamily: Lycaenidae/Theclinae
(Gossamer-wing butterflies/Hairstreaks)



Figure 1. Colorado hairstreak resting on leaf.
Photograph by Bob Hammon

Description and Distinctive Features: The Colorado hairstreak is a small to medium sized butterfly with a wingspan of about 1.25-1.5 inches (3.2-3.8 cm). The upperside of the wings is purple, with a darker border; coloration is brighter in the males. Small orange spots mark the lower outside edge of each wing. The underside of the wings is light blue with faint dark bands and orange spots at the base of the hind wing. (The western Colorado populations of the Colorado hairstreak tend to be lighter shaded than those that occur in the east.) Typical of other hairstreak butterflies a delicate “tail” protrudes from the hind wings.



Figure 2. Colorado hairstreak male, upper view (left) and lower view (right).

Distribution in Colorado: The distribution of the Colorado hairstreak within Colorado generally overlaps that of its host plant, Gambel oak, which grows widely in the foothills areas of

the state. The Colorado hairstreak is also found in several other southwestern states and northern Mexico (Figure 3).

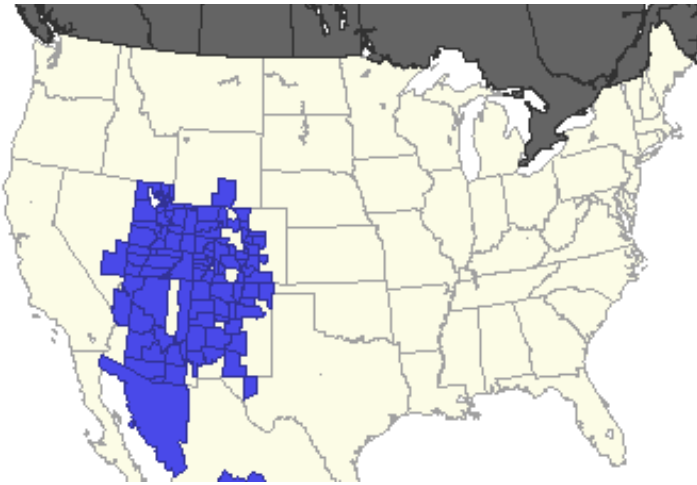


Figure 3. Distribution of the Colorado Hairstreak. Map courtesy of *Butterflies and Moths of North America* (<http://www.butterfliesandmoths.org/>)

Life History and Habits: Adults of the Colorado hairstreak may be seen from June through August making patrolling flights among stands of Gambel oak or occasionally resting on leaves. They are fast fliers that are often in motion, so they are difficult to observe. The butterflies are thought to feed on tree sap and honeydew, but do not visit flowers for nectar.

Winter is spent in the egg stage, attached to twigs of oak. Larvae feed on the newly emerged leaves in spring and pupate in late spring or

early summer. They then pupate and subsequently emerge in the adult form. A single generation is produced annually.

Related Species: Several other hairstreak butterflies occur in Colorado. The most widespread species is the gray hairstreak, *Strymon melinus* (Hubner). This insect has a wide host range of plants within the mallow (Malvaceae) and legume (Fabaceae) families. In areas of juniper scrub forest the juniper hairstreak, *Callophrys gryneus* (Hubner), is a common hairstreak species.



Figure 4. Gray hairstreak butterfly.



Figure 5. Juniper hairstreak butterflies on milkweed.

History of the Colorado Hairstreak as the State Insect: The Colorado hairstreak became the Official Insect of the State of Colorado on April 17, 1996. With signing of the bill to produce Colorado Revised Statute 24-80-913 Colorado became the 37th state to have a state insect/state butterfly.

The path to establishing the Colorado State Insect was a long one and was the culmination of

several years of sustained work. This effort was coordinated through the fourth grade class of Melinda Terry at Wheeling Elementary in Aurora but eventually involved fourth grade classes throughout the state, which used the bill as a civics lesson and lobbied for it.

The Colorado Hairstreak was chosen among other possible insects after consultation with numerous entomologists and others around the state. It was selected because it well met certain criteria, including that it was native to the region, did not have any associated pest issues, and had features of interest (e.g., attractiveness, name).

Another species that can be found in the state is **Sheridan's green hairstreak**, *Callophrys sheridanii* (W.H. Edwards). This species was formalized as the State Butterfly of Wyoming in 2009.