

# Hold the nectar, these butterflies feed on galls and honeydew

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While most butterflies feed on nectar from flowers, researchers from the University of Connecticut believe that northern oak hairstreaks feed on non-nectar sources such as oak galls and honeydew from aphids and other insects.

In addition, this "rare" butterfly may not be so rare after all. The researchers believe that the perceived rarity of the northern oak hairstreak (*Satyrrium favonius ontario*) may be due to the fact that it lives covertly, hidden from the eyes of butterfly watchers as it feeds and breeds overhead in the leaves and branches of the [forest canopy](#).

"It is our guess that the adult's behavior places it outside the typical zone for human detection and consequently that much of its rarity is one of perception," wrote Benedict Gagliardi and David L. Wagner in a paper published in the *Annals of the Entomological Society of America*.

In other words, scientists who have searched for the northern oak hairstreak may have been looking in the wrong places.

"Most butterfly watchers look around flowers near the ground," Gagliardi said. "They usually don't look up."

If indeed the northern oak hairstreak is more common than thought, the authors suggest that conservation agencies seeking legal protection for the species should do so guardedly.

**More information:** Benedict L. Gagliardi et al, 'Northern' Oak Hairstreak () (Lepidoptera: Lycaenidae): Status Survey in Massachusetts, False Rarity, and Its Use of Non-nectar Sugar Resources, *Annals of the Entomological Society of America* (2016). [DOI: 10.1093/aesa/saw012](https://doi.org/10.1093/aesa/saw012)

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