

Cafe con Leche in a Mexican Forest: a Rare Hairstreak Makes a Guest Appearance in Mexico

by Jeffrey Glassberg
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On July 24, 2005, Glassberg was butterflying between Palenque and Bonampak, just east of Chancala, in the southernmost Mexican state of Chiapas. A hairstreak flew down from the trees and perched on a leaf about 3 feet above the ground. At a distance of about 12 feet, two photographs were taken before the hairstreak flew off.

Because of its very distinctive pattern, which can be confused with no other Central American hairstreak, the butterfly was thought to be a cafe-au-lait hairstreak (*Thereus lausus*), even though this species has not been previously reported from Mexico. Subsequent examination of the photographs confirmed this to be a female cafe-au-lait hairstreak. A female collected by William Schaus in Guatemala more than a century ago (now in the collection of the Smithsonian Institution and shown below) has the same color and markings, but is markedly faded. Other species

noted at this site included orange kite-swallowtail (*Eurytides thyastes*), black-barred cross-streak (*Panhiades phaleros*) shining grayler (*Menander menander*), white-patched heliconian (*Heliconius sapho*), white-edged red-ring (*Pyrrhogyra otolais*), beautiful beamer (*Phocides belus*) and great bent-skipper (*Ebrietas osyris*)

Thereus lausus was discovered more than 125 years ago and occurs widely in lowland forest from southern Brazil to Belize (recent report) and now Mexico (this report). However, little is known about its biology, probably because this species is exceedingly rare. The caterpillars of close relatives in the genus *Thereus* eat mistletoes (plant family Loranthaceae), and males occupy mating territories along forest and shrub edges in the early morning before about 9:00 am. It is likely that cafe-au-lait hairstreaks share these biological traits. The English name refers to the underside pattern, with swirling white on a dark brown ground color.



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