

Brown Elfins: Known Range Now Includes Florida

by Mary Ann Friedman

It was Friday the 13th of March in Okaloosa County, in northwestern Florida. We were finally getting some warm temperatures after an unusually frigid February, 2009. My camera was fresh out of the box from the repair service and needed to be tested. Surely a fresh Henry's Elfin, with its subtle markings which seem to come to life under the spell of a powerful lens in crisp focus, would be the

to check the image. "Hmmm, this is a mighty drab Henry's or maybe my camera is not fixed after all!"

I know the Florida species list pretty well, so there was no reason to consider anything else at that point. Then to my surprise, another, just as tiny, just as worn out looking and also without tails came cork-screwing down. Snap, zoom and oh my gosh! This was not Henry's.

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perfect test subject. If we (husband Norm, Dagmar the Doberman, and I) overcame the jinx of the date we'd get some good photos.

We stopped at our usual spots: places that bring forth memories of thrilling encounters, one of which was my first Hessel's Hairstreak, wearin' o' the green, on St. Patrick's Day in 2004. For some reason Henry's Elfins of the Western Panhandle love to mess with your mind by engaging their elfin cousins in games of spinning and darting in the tops of Atlantic white cedar. One must never assume that the Whirling Dervish in the white cedar is a Hessel's Hairstreak, just because it is THEIR host tree, nor should one ever give up the hope of crashing a *Callophrys* puddle party.

And so, a single "tiny, beat up Henry's" came fluttering weakly down to perch on a dried leaf. It seemed exhausted. Without wasting time to use my binoculars, I thought out loud, "this one has been partying too much. It's all pooped out and its white markings, frosting and tails are worn right off!" I snapped a few frames and zoomed in

Now Brown Elfin is not the find of the century, especially to those who live where it can be seen each spring in good numbers along with other more highly prized elfins. I've been encouraged by my expert butterfly enthusiast mentors to look for such species as Mottled Duskywing and Common Roadside-Skipper and have been lucky to be able to provide recent documentation for these and other coveted species to the Florida map. But Brown Elfin was not a species "on the radar."

For the next few weeks the Panhandle received large amounts of rain. Several rivers in the area rose above flood stage, washing out smaller roads and destroying wooden creek crossings. Boggy areas became flowing streams and many dirt roads were either too treacherous to use or closed entirely. I was able to hike in during brief sunny intervals and got to watch adult Brown Elfins sit atop small perches low to the ground, fight, flirt and fly up to nectar on common sweetleaf (*Symplocos tinctoria*) and devilwood (*Osmanthus americanus*) blossoms. The lovely mountain



Top: A Brown Elfin, March 18, 2009 in Okaloosa County, Florida.
Bottom: A Brown Elfin caterpillar feeding on a Mountain Laurel flower.
April 4, 2009. Okaloosa County, Florida