

Field Identification: Diagnostic for the Gray Blue Butterfly

Identifying Blues

Blues are members of the Lycaenidae family, also known as the gossamer winged butterflies. This is the second largest family of butterflies and also includes coppers, hairstreaks, and harvesters. Butterflies in this family share some basic characteristics:

- Antennae usually banded
- Eyes of adults indented near antennae and face is narrow
- Forelegs of males reduced
- Coloration often bright, iridescent

Blues belong to the subfamily Polyommatainae. As their name suggests, these butterflies are characterized by their blue wing coloration, especially in the males. Females are typically gray or brown with blue highlights. Many species of blues exhibit orange crescents (aurorae) and shiny metallic rings (scintillae) along some of the dorsal and/or ventral wing edges.

When identifying blues, pay particular attention to the ventral side of the hind and forewings. Spots, chevrons, blotches, and cell bars are some of the primary characteristics used to separate out the various species.

Basic Butterfly Anatomy

Ventral View

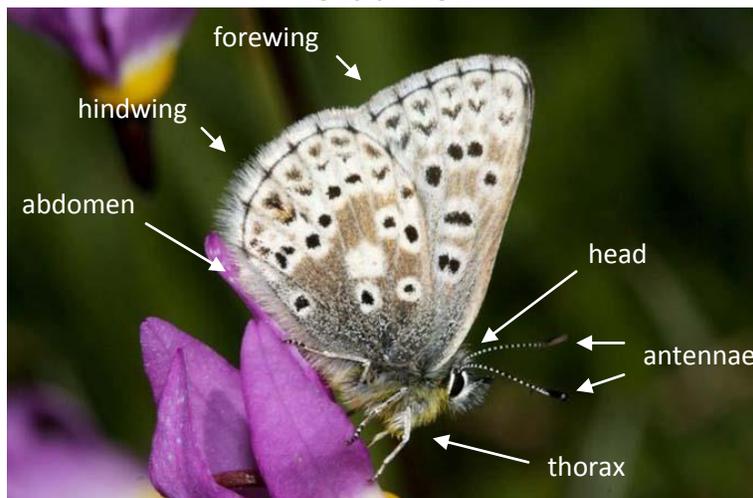


Photo by Kim Davis & Mike Stangeland

Field Identification: Diagnostic for the Gray Blue Butterfly

Gray blue (*Plebejus podarce klamathensis*)



Photo by K. Davis & M. Stangeland



Photo by Kim Davis & Mike Stangeland

General characteristics

Tan below with prominent black pupils in the white wing spots. Ventral hindwing spots fused and occluded by heavy white blotches against a dark brown or olive-gray background, especially in hindwing cell. Prominent dorsal forewing and dorsal hindwing cell bars.

Size

Wingspan of 2.2 to 2.6 cm.

Host plants

Dodecatheon spp.

Flight period

July and August (rarely June and September)

Boisduval's blue (*Plebejus icarioides*)



Photo by Caitlin LaBar



Photo by Kim Davis & Mike Stangeland

General characteristics

Ventral hindwing spots smaller than forewing, all-white to mostly white with small black pupils. Often larger than gray blue, deeper blue, and lacking the ventral hindwing cell bar.

Size

Wingspan of 2.1 to 3.2 cm.

Host plants

Lupinus spp.

Flight period

Early April to early September (peak in May-July)

Arrowhead blue (*Glaucopsyche piasus*)



Photo by Caitlin LaBar



Photo by Kim Davis & Mike Stangeland

General characteristics

Large for a blue. Tannish-gray below, with bands of white-ringed black dots. Black-checked white fringe w/ band of gray and a row of orange-faced, black chevrons topped with a row of sharp white arrowheads, pointing toward one isolated white arrowhead.

Size

Wingspan of 2.9 to 3.5 cm.

Host plants

Lupinus spp. (including *L. laxiflorus*)

Flight period

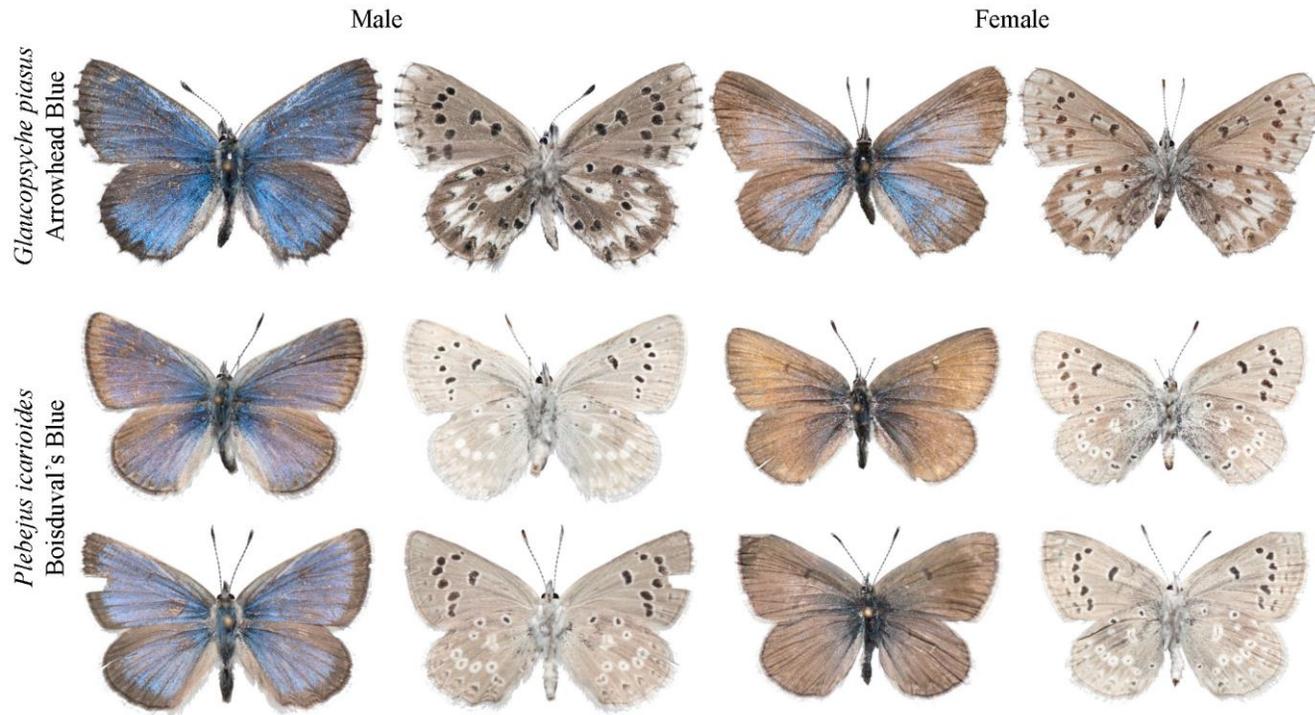
Early April to late August (peak in May)

Gray Blue Butterfly Field Identification: Quick Reference Guide



Gray blue
Plebejus podarce klamathensis

Gray blue photos by Kim Davis and Mike Stangeland



Arrowhead and Boisduval's blue specimens photographed and compiled by Caitlin LaBar.
 Specimens from Kittitas & Okanogan counties, WA