Take up Streaking!

This issue focuses on hairstreaks. Personally, I’ve been focused on hairstreaks since about the age of 10, when I spotted my first Striped Hairstreak in what we called Woodmere Woods, a long-gone refuge for wildlife immortalized in Robert Arbib’s “The Lord’s Woods” (about the losing fight to save Woodmere Woods). That first Striped Hairstreak was stunning, having been so many of thousands of individuals of this species that I have now seen. It’s hard to overestimate the power of a Striped Hairstreak!

There are many species of hairstreaks. Here in the New World, there are roughly 1250 species of hairstreaks. An amazing number of fascinating animals!

Hairstreaks are thought to have given their name because of the hair-like lines that many species have on the undersides of their hindwings or, alternatively, because of their thin, hair-like “tails.” However, you can see page 42 of this issue for another possible explanation of the name.

Also in this issue, you’ll learn, or be reminded, about the false head patterns that many hairstreaks display at the outer angle of their hindwings. For a long time these have been believed to protect hairstreaks from predators, by fooling them into attacking the wrong end of the butterfly. The new twist in the article by Andrei Sourakov, is that the predators may be primarily spiders, rather than the birds that most people assumed.

Many of the hairstreak subgroups (genera and groups of genera) are recognizable in the field as members of that subgroup — although sometimes only after one has had much field experience. For example individual scrub-hairstreaks (genus Strymon), greenstreaks (genus Cyanophrys), groundstreaks (genus Calycopis and related genera) and ministreaks (genus Ministrymon) are all usually recognizable in the field as belonging to their appropriate group, even if the observer is unfamiliar with the particular species. The ministreaks are the subject of an article in this issue of the magazine, and I’m pleased to say that I’ve just been fortunate to name a new species for my wife, Jane Vicroy Scott.

The “streak” in these group names, as in ministreaks or groundstreaks, gives you a clue that the butterflies in question are hairstreaks. So, without ever seeing one, you would know that an Imperial Sunstreak was a species of hairstreak and if you were familiar with sunstreaks, then you would have a reasonable idea of the species’ appearance.

People’s names also sometimes give a clue to their ancestry. For example, most people with surnames ending in ian are of Armenian ancestry, although a fair number of ian-ers are Persian Jews. What does this have to do with hairstreaks? Nothing. Although it does have something to do with NABA.

Twelve years ago I wrote an editorial in this magazine in which I lamented the lack of ethnic diversity among NABA members (and members of all “nature” organizations) and suggested some modest ways that NABA members might change this.

Twelve years later NABA (and other organizations) is still not doing so great. But, I think that we have made some progress! Especially with the growth of the National Butterfly Center, in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, the numbers of Hispanic Americans that are involved with butterflies has greatly increased. Participants surnames help us to estimate this increase. We still have a lot of work to do, but we’re heading in the right direction!