

## Cotton Square Borer<sup>1</sup>

The larvae of **cotton square borer** (*Strymon melinus*) are pale green (sometimes brownish), fuzzy caterpillars that may reach about ½-inch length when full grown. Adults are an attractive butterflies, with an overall blue-gray coloration, and small thread-like “tails” extending from the hindwing. The adult is also known as the **gray hairstreak**.

Winter is passed in the pupal stage, and adults may be first seen in late spring. Females lay single eggs (not in a mass) on leaves and eggs typically hatch in 4-6 days. Young larvae feed on the leaf surface; later

stage larvae may tunnel into stems, leaf midribs and, perhaps, buds. When full-grown, about 3-4 weeks after egg hatch, the larvae then pupate, attaching themselves to the plant with a small



**Figure 2.** Larva of the gray hairstreak, also known as the cotton square borer. This caterpillar is rarely found in hemp. Its appearance has some superficial resemblance to that of some syrphid fly larvae.



**Figure 1.** Mating pair of gray hairstreak butterflies, the adult stage of the cotton square borer.

bit of silk. A week or two later adults emerge to repeat the cycle and there are probably two, perhaps three, generations completed annually in Colorado.

This is an uncommon species in hemp. Feeding injury to leaves is minimal and insignificant. Some bud tunneling may occur, although it has not yet been documented to occur in hemp.

<sup>1</sup> Lepidoptera: Lycaenidae