Hill Gynura plant, *Gynura cusimbua*, as a possible new larval host plant of the Common Onyx butterfly, *Horaga onyx*, from southern Western Ghats, Kerala

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The author visited Silent Valley National Park, Palakkad District, Kerala (11°08'N 76°28'E) on 23 November 2011 during the field visit of the International Conference on Indian Ornithology. The Park is spread over an area of 236.74 sq.km.

During the visit the author photographed many birds and butterflies, one of the butterflies being Common Onyx *Horaga onyx*. This butterfly was sighted in an evergreen forest patch near the watch tower from where a panoramic view of the park is seen. It was noted that the butterfly was laying eggs on the calyx of flower buds and returning to the plant repeatedly. Also it opened its wings and basked for short durations of few seconds on nearby plants. The eggs were laid singly, were white in colour and looked disc-like with intricate design on its surface.

The larval host plant was photographed. From the photographs it was identified as Hill Gynura, *Gynura cusimbua* (Family Asteraceae). This could be a new larval host plant for Common Onyx butterfly, as out of the three important publications on butterflies of India (Evans, 1932, Wynter-Blyth 1957 and Kehimkar, 2008) only Kehimkar (2008) mentions *Coriaria nepalensis* as the single larval host plant for Common Onyx.

Notably, the Common Onyx is widespread across south Asia. In India it is found in the Western Ghats southwards of Maharashtra, in the Himalaya from Himachal Pradesh to Arunachal Pradesh and other countries including Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka.

When the author informed this finding to butterfly experts, Mr. Peter Smetacek and Mr. Isaac Kehimkar, they informed that ovipositing does not necessarily mean larval acceptance and development. However, Peter added that, given this butterfly's wide choice of host families, a new record in the Asteraceae does not seem surprising. He gave me a list of larval host plants which range and include various plants belonging to Fabaceae, Malvaceae, Sapindaceae, Phyllanthaceae, Sabiaceae, Rosaceae and Rhamnaceae. Hence, the report of a possible new larval host plant belonging to Asteraceae family and that too in Southern India may help lepidopterists in India to study the larval stages of the species in India and confirm the use of the host plant by the species.

Photographic documentation

The author uploaded the photographs of his observation on Wikimedia Commons website.

A photograph of Common Onyx laying egg on *Gynura cusimbua* is uploaded here:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/19 Common _ Onyx _ Horaga _ onyx _ egg _ laying _ on _ Gynura_cusimbua_by_Dr._Raju_Kasambe_1.jpg

A close-up photograph of the egg of Common Onyx is uploaded here:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki File: Egg _ of _ Common _ Onyx _ Horaga _ onyx _ on _ Gynura _ cusimbua _by_Dr._Raju_Kasambe_(2).jpg

And a photograph of the plant *Gynura cusimbua* is uploaded here:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki File: Gynura _ cusimbua _ plant _ at _ Silent _ Valley _ National _ park _ Kerala_by_Dr._Raju_Kasambe_(2).jpg

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References

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Wynter-Blyth, M.A. 1957. *Butterflies of the Indian Region*. Bombay Natural History Society, Bombay: 523 pp.