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TABLE OF CONTENTS

REDISCOVERY OF SMALL SILVERFORK, <i>LETHE JALAUROIDA</i> (INSECTA: LEPIDOPTERA: NYMPHALIDAE) FROM GARHWAL, UTTARAKHAND, INDIA by Harish Bhatt, Shankar Kumar & Paramjit Singh	198
<i>AEGLE MARMELOS</i> (RUTACEAE): A NEW LARVAL HOST PLANT FOR THE BLUE MORMON BUTTERFLY <i>PAPILIO POLYMNESTOR</i> by Raju Kasambe & Dilip Giri	201
CONFIRMATORY RECORD OF WAX DART <i>CUPITHA PURREEA</i> MOORE, 1881 (INSECTA: LEPIDOPTERA: HESPERIIDAE) FROM JHARKHAND, INDIA by Rajib Dey, Soumyajit Mondal, Supratim Deb, Subhajit Roy & Sourabh Biswas	205
NEW RECORD OF TAWNY RAJAH <i>CHARAXES BERNARDUS</i> (INSECTA: LEPIDOPTERA: NYMPHALIDAE) FROM KUMAON, UTTARAKHAND, INDIA by Shankar Kumar, Param Jit Singh, Sagar Balmiki & Kasim Bilal	207
<i>BURMEIA LEESI</i> MINET, 2013 (LEPIDOPTERA: EPICOPEIIDAE): A NEW GENUS AND SPECIES FOR INDIA by Peter Smetacek	209
REPORT ON ADULT BEETLE <i>CELOSTERNA SCABRATOR</i> (FABRICIUS, 1781) (COLEOPTERA: CERAMBYCIDAE: LAMIINAE) FEEDING ON VEGETABLE PIGEONPEA by Harshita A. P., Gopali, J. B., Ramanagouda S. H. Mudassar & Sangamesh, R. H.	211
FIRST RECORD OF <i>PRIONOMMA BIGIBBOSUM</i> (COLEOPTERA: CERAMBYCIDAE) FROM NEPAL by Sajjan K.C., Rajkumar K.C. & Bhanubhakta Adhikari	214
REDISCOVERY OF TIGER HOPPER <i>OCHUS SUBVITTATUS</i> (INSECTA: LEPIDOPTERA: HESPERIIDAE) FROM UTTARAKHAND, INDIA by Shankar Kumar, Param Jit Singh & Sundar Kumar	216
NEW HESPERIIDAE (INSECTA: LEPIDOPTERA) LARVAL HOST PLANT ASSOCIATIONS FROM WEST BENGAL, INDIA by Rajib Dey	218
SOME NEW DISTRIBUTION RECORDS OF LYCAENID BUTTERFLIES IN NEPAL by Sajjan K.C. & Anisha Sapkota	226
<i>ERANTHEMUM ROSEUM</i> (ACANTHACEAE) AS NEW LARVAL HOST PLANT FOR THE BENGAL SPOTTED FLAT <i>CELAENORRHINUS PUTRA</i> (MOORE, [1866]) by Raju Kasambe & Dilip Giri	230
FIRST RECORDS FOR NEPAL OF TWO HESPERIIDAE: <i>GEROSIS SINICA</i> AND <i>CEPHRENES ACALLE</i> by Piet van der Poel	233
CONFIRMATION OF <i>RAGADIA CRISILDA</i> (HEWITSON 1862) (LEPIDOPTERA: SATYRINAE) AND <i>MATAPA CRESTA</i> (EVANS 1949) (LEPIDOPTERA: HESPERIIDAE) IN WEST BENGAL, INDIA	

by Sourabh Biswas, Sandip Das, Rahul Biswas, Amartya Bagchi, Ram Chandra Sha & Lakhu Mahato	236
<i>PSILOGRAMMA VATES</i> (LEPIDOPTERA: SPHINGIDAE) IN GUJARAT by Peter Smetacek, Rajashree Bhuyan & Pratiksha Patel	238
AN ADDITION TO THE KNOWN AGANAINAE FAUNA (INSECTA: LEPIDOPTERA: EREBIDAE) OF INDIA by B. Lalnghahpuii & Peter Smetacek	240
A NEW RECORD OF <i>FLOS CHINENSIS</i> (INSECTA: LEPIDOPTERA: LYCAENIDAE) FROM WESTERN HIMALAYA, INDIA by Shankar Kumar, Param Jit Singh, Sundar Kumar & Niharika Bisht	242
LIFE CYCLE OF <i>OLIGONYCHUS ORYZAE</i> (HIRST, 1926), AN IMPORTANT PEST OF PADDY ON 3 DIFFERENT <i>KHARIF</i> CULTIVARS AND <i>BORO</i> CULTIVAR UNDER LABORATORY CONDITIONS by Sugandha Mukhopadhyay & Salil Kumar Gupta	244
A NEW ALTITUDINAL RECORD FOR <i>PORITIA HEWITSONI</i> (INSECTA: LEPIDOPTERA: LYCAENIDAE) FROM UTTARAKHAND, INDIA by Akash Gulalia	249
EXTENSION OF THE KNOWN DISTRIBUTION OF THE CLUB SILVERLINE BUTTERFLY, <i>SPINDASIS SYAMA</i> (HORSEFIELD, 1829) (LEPIDOPTERA: LYCAENIDAE) TO SATPURA TIGER RESERVE, MADHYA PRADESH by Anupam Sisodia & Himanshu Yadav	251
EDITORIAL: REGARDING A CASE OF PLAGIARISM by Peter Smetacek	253

ERANTHEMUM ROSEUM (ACANTHACEAE) AS NEW LARVAL HOST PLANT FOR THE BENGAL SPOTTED FLAT CELAENORRHINUS PUTRA (MOORE, [1866])

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Introduction

The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) Nature Reserve is a forested area spread over 33 acres and is nestled between Dadasaheb Phalke Chitra Nagari (aka Film City) and Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Mumbai City of Maharashtra, India. The Reserve also has a small butterfly garden spread over an area of around quarter of an acre.

The Bengal Spotted Flat butterfly *Celaenorrhinus putra* (Moore, [1866]) (Insecta: Lepidoptera: HesperIIDae) is a rare Hesperiid. Historically, the species was known to occur in Eastern Himalayas and Northeast India (Evans 1949). The species has been reported to occur in South India in since 2013 and has been photographed in Western Ghats from Mumbai southwards to Kerala (Bhakare *et al.* 2020). It was recently reported by RK from BNHS Nature Reserve in Mumbai, Maharashtra (Kasambe, 2018).

Since September 2020, we were rearing caterpillars of Malabar Spotted Flat *Celaenorrhinus ambareesa* butterflies (Family HesperIIDae). We got its caterpillars on *Strobilanthes callosus* as well as on *Eranthemum roseum* which are known larval host plants of the species.

Observations

On 14 (two) and 15 October 2020 (one) we found three caterpillars on *Eranthemum roseum* plants with dark brown head; those

were resting in triangular cells (made by cutting and folding a part of the same leaf) with its back towards the leaf surface, head turned round to one side (see image). The cells were on the upper surface of the top leaf of the plant (see image). Parts of two leaves were eaten leaving the veins intact.

We reared these caterpillars on a diet of the leaves of *E. roseum* and cleaned the container of frass every day. All ate well and two pupated in the respective cells on 27 October 2020 (collected on 14 October) and 22 October 2020 (collected on 15 October) on the upperside of leaves. Third caterpillar, collected on 14 October 2020, pupated on 23 October 2020 between two leaves by weaving them together (see images). The pupae were shiny brown and also had antenna cases.

Three adult *C. putra* butterflies eclosed from the pupae on 2 and 5 November 2020 and 30 October 2020 (see images). The adult *C. putra* butterfly can be distinguished from similar looking Common Spotted Flat *C. leucocera* by the absence of white spots between cell and costa. Also, the male and female *C. putra* can be differentiated, as the male have white antennae (see images).

Meanwhile we found few more caterpillars of the *C. putra* on *E. roseum* plants and documented different larval stages (see image).

The only larval host plant reported for the species is *Strobilanthes ciliata* (Kalesh & Prakash 2015; Nitin *et al.* 2018) (Acanthaceae). The above observations, rearing of *C. putra* caterpillars on a diet of *E. roseum* plants to eclosion proves *E. roseum* to be a new larval host plant for the species in India.

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Fig.1: Caterpillar initial instar



Fig.2: Caterpillar final instar



Fig.3: Caterpillar cells on leaf



Fig.4: Pupating



Fig.5: Pupa



Fig.6: Pupa resting between two leaves



Fig.7: Freshly eclosed female



Fig.7: Freshly eclosed male