

Research Notes

NOTE ON THE SPOTTED ROYAL BUTTERFLY *TAJURIA MACULATA* (LEPIDOPTERA : LYCAENIDAE) IN POKHARA, NEPAL

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Spotted Royal (*Tajuria maculata*) is a Lycaenid butterfly that occurs from Nepal to Borneo and in the hills of southern India (Savela, *e-resource*). Along this range, it has been sporadically reported except in Assam, where Fruhstorfer (1912) reported it as very common. This species has been recorded in Nepal in the months of March, May, July, September and October (Smith, 2011) as a rare species. Suguru Igarashi Insect Collection at the University of Tokyo, Japan, has specimens of it recorded on 3 January, 30 May, August, November and 10 December from different parts of its range (Teshirogi et al., *e-resource*).

Spotted Royal butterflies are found near forest streams, on hill tops and rarely at flowers (Smith, 2011). The larvae have been reported feeding on *Loranthus* (Robinson et al., 2001).

Institute of Forestry (IOF) is a campus belonging to Tribhuvan University, Nepal. The western edge of the campus aligns along Seti River. The IOF campus is situated in Pokhara valley (28°23'80" N, 83°99'56" E) covering 13 ha of built up area and 32.7 ha of *Schima-Castaenopsis* forest (Banpaledanda forest) at an altitude between 800-860 m above msl. The site belongs to sub-tropical region with 3350 mm mean annual rainfall per year.

The butterflies of IOF were surveyed between 15 February 2017 and 16 April 2017. Photographs of butterflies were taken and later identified with the help of guide books and experts.

Among the butterflies photographed, a specimen of *T. maculata* was recorded on 6 March on flowers of *Rubus ellipticus*. It was observed again the next day on the same flowers. It was next recorded on 18th March on flowers of *Eupatorium odorata*. All the observations were in the afternoon between 12:30 and 3 pm on sunny days.

There is a specimen of this species in Annapurna Natural History Museum, Pokhara, recorded on 3rd Sept. 1966. This was the westernmost record of the species. Since it is at the extremity of its known distribution, it was not certain whether the specimen in the museum belong to a local colony or was a straggler from further east. The present report

strongly suggest that there is a breeding colony in Pokhara that has one generation in March.

The butterfly has been reported from March, May, July and September/October in Nepal and from November to 3 January, 30 May and August from other parts of its distribution. This leaves a gap of roughly two months between records, suggesting that this species has a brood every two months.

The butterfly feeds on species of *Loranthus* in the larval stage. Since *Loranthus* usually grows on high trees, it is likely that this species spends the morning hours at the tree canopy level but descends to flowering bushes in the afternoon. There are no flowering trees on the campus in March, so it is likely that the butterflies descended to the flowering bushes due to the lack of any flowering tree at that time. During other parts of the year they might visit flowering trees and therefore descend less often to flowering bushes and be observed. Perhaps for this reason they are rarely seen at flowers (Smith, 2011).

Although the life history of the species has been documented, its status in Pokhara, the westernmost record, can only be confirmed by breeding it locally. It is known to be myrmecophilous and the tree ant *Oecophylla smaragdina* is common in the Pokhara valley. It is not unlikely that *T. maculata* has several generations and is well established in the valley, but is not often observed due to its habit of occupying the canopy layer where its requirements are met.

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