

## Extension of the known distribution of Moore's Five Ring Butterfly *Ypthima nikaia* to Pakistan, Nepal and Meghalaya, India (Lepidoptera: Nymphalidae: Satyrinae)

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### Abstract

Casual surveys were carried out to determine the richness of butterflies in Godavari and Pokhara in Nepal and Meghalaya, India. Moore's Five Ring (*Ypthima nikaia* (Moore, [1875])) was recorded from all the sites in Nepal in the month of May and August, 2017 and from Meghalaya in October, 2016. The presence of *Y. nikaia* in Pakistan is discussed and its known distribution extended to Nepal and Meghalaya.

### Introduction

Moore's Five Ring *Ypthima nikaia* (Moore, [1875]) was described from specimens from the North West Himalaya. Elwes & Edwards (1893) synonymised this taxon with *Y. sakra* Moore (1857), treating it as the west Himalayan subspecies. The nominotypical race of *Y. sakra* was reported by them from the North-West Himalaya to North-East India and Myanmar. Evans (1932) reported *Y. sakra nikaia* from Murree (Pakistan) to Kumaon (India); *Y. sakra sakra* from Sikkim (India) and *Y. sakra austeni* Moore (1893) from Assam (India) to the Karen Hills (Myanmar). Shima (1988) recognised that the two taxa *Y. nikaia* and *Y. sakra* were distinct and restored *Y. nikaia* to species rank.

Elwes & Edwards (1893) noted that *Y. sakra* occurred in present day Himachal Pradesh in India making the two taxa sympatric in the west Himalaya. Varshney & Smetacek (2015) reported *Y. nikaia* from Jammu and Kashmir to Uttarakhand and *Y. sakra* from Jammu and Kashmir to North east India.

### Observations

In Nepal, during a casual butterfly survey in Godavari on 17 May, 2017 and from 7 to 29 August, 2017 in Pokhara, many specimens of *Y. nikaia* were observed. Some were photographed. *Y. nikaia* was recorded between 800m and 1600m.

In Godavari, this species was observed in company with *Y. sakra*, while in Pokhara it was observed in the com-

pany of *Y. baldus*. In Godavari, it was observed in mixed broadleaf forest. In Pokhara, it was common along roadsides, on grassy hillsides and in *Shima-Castanopsis* forest.

On 10 October, 2016, several specimens of *Y. nikaia* were recorded from Sohra, Meghalaya in a grassy compound of a resort by PS.

The species is fond of mud-puddling and attracted to low growing flowers such as thistles (*Cirsium* sp.). Rarely, individuals visit flowers of horse chestnut (*Aesculus indica*) in the western Himalaya.

### Discussion

The confusion caused by synonymising the taxa *sakra* and *nikaia* by Elwes & Edwards (1893) resulted in the latter taxon being overlooked outside the western Himalaya by earlier workers. Tshikolovets & Pages (2016) ignored Shima (1988) and treated *Y. nikaia* under *Y. sakra sakra*, although true *Y. sakra* has so far not been reported from Pakistan. While Butler (1886, 1888) reported *Y. sakra* from Murree on the basis of specimens collected there by Major Yerbury, it appears that these were in fact *Y. nikaia*, since Butler (1886, 1888) does not mention *Y. nikaia* at all, while Elwes & Edwards (1893) note, "specimens from Murree (*nikaia*) are usually smaller and paler coloured than specimens from the east, but true *sakra* also occurs in the N. W. Himalaya." All four specimens of "*Y. sakra sakra*" illustrated by Tshikolovets & Pages (2016) are clearly *Y. nikaia* on the basis of the hindwing subapical ocelli on the *verso* surface being separated by a yellow ring, which is absent in *Y. sakra sakra*. While there are no reports of *Y. nikaia* from Arunachal Pradesh, its presence in Meghalaya and Nepal suggest that populations may exist in the intervening areas such as Sikkim and Bhutan.

In terms of altitude, *Y. nikaia* is more widely distributed than *Y. sakra*. It is at least bivoltine over its range with a large summer brood and smaller autumn brood in the western Himalaya. No seasonal variation has been observed

between the broods.

#### Conclusion

The distribution of *Y. nikaia* is hereby extended from northern Pakistan through Nepal to Meghalaya. It was probably overlooked in the eastern part of its range by earlier workers due to the confusion arising out of its synonymy with *Y. sakra* before 1988. *Y. sakra sakra* is also formally removed from the list of butterflies of Pakistan, since there is no evidence that it occurs in that country.

#### References

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## 7 Leaves to a Sprig

The saptaparni tree (*Alstonia scholaris*) outside my window has not yet bloomed. Normally, it blooms from October to December, sending gusts of sweet, spicy scent my way. Why is this tree late this year, I wonder, and look reproachfully at Delhi's polluted skies.

Saptaparni is sanskrit for 'seven-leaved'; this tree's leaves grow seven or eight to a sprig. Saptaparni is also a name for girls. Said to be introduced to Delhi as recently as 1940, this tree has an ancient past elsewhere in the land, especially in the annals of Ayurveda.

Its bark-extract is said to boost immunity and help treat deep tummy disorders, malaria and epilepsy.

Out south, the saptaparni is duly called 'Seven-leaved' in Kannada, Tulu, Malayalam and Tamil—the words are Paala, Paalai, and Ezh-ilai.

I have read a theory that Palakkad, celebrated as the 'Granary of Kerala' and the 'Gateway to Kerala' from the Western Ghats and famous for the Silent Valley National Park and scenic Malampuzha, may have got its name from being covered, once upon a time, by a kaad (forest) of Paala trees.

On the eastern seaboard, the saptaparni is the state tree of West Bengal. It is called Chhatim in Bengali. Graduating students of Vishwa Bharti University are ceremonially handed a sprig of saptaparni at convocation. I am told there is a story behind this graceful cultural tradition.

Vishwa Bharti University was originally founded as

an alternative Indian school in 1921, by Rabindranath Tagore, at Shantiniketan in Birbhum district, West Bengal. But before that in the 19th century, Shantiniketan was apparently the name given to the only pukka building in a quite, scenic village called Bhubandanga, after Bhuban Mohan Sinha, the zamindar of Raipur.

One day in 1862, Debendranath Tagore, the poet's father, happen to pass by while on a journey to Raipur. Charmed by the beauty of the village and given to serious spiritual practice, he halted there for some days and spent time meditating in a grove of saptaparni trees.

He felt so light and happy there that he bought himself 20 bighas of land and built a spiritual retreat that he named Shantiniketan, where his son eventually set up his school. And that is why the sprig of saptaparni is still handed to each graduating student at Vishwa Bharti.

Another tree that is famously been called 'seven-leaved' is the banana plant. In the Aranya Kand, sarga 75, of the Ramayana, while in search of Sita, Ram and Lakshman halt at the lovely Pampa Lake.

The trees, plants, flowering bushes and creepers around it listed by Valmiki may still be found across India, and some of their names may be found even today as people's names : Tilaka, Bakula, Mallika, Ashoka, Malati, Kunda, Madhavi, Lata. In this list is the other 'Saptaparna'.

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