

**CONFIRMATION OF THE  
OCCURRENCE OF THE COMMON  
GRASS DART BUTTERFLY  
TARACTROCERA MAEVIUS IN DELHI  
(LEPIDOPTERA: HESPERIIDAE)**

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The butterflies of Delhi were surveyed by Julian Donahue (1966) and Torben Larsen (2002). In these surveys, *Taractrocera maevius* was not recorded. Varshney & Smetacek (2015) also do not include the Gangetic Plain in the range of the species. Biswas et al. (2017) reported this species from Delhi with no supporting evidence.

Dr Surya Prakash (pers. comm.) informed the authors that this species had been observed previously by Dr Aysha Sultana in Aravali Biodiversity Park (Vasant Vihar, Delhi). However, the authors could not find any photographic or voucher evidence for the presence of the species in Delhi.

On 13th February, 2018, a single individual of *T. maevius* was observed in Asola Bhatti Wild Life Sanctuary inside the rockery. The individual was perched on a cornflower but not feeding. It was observed for a period of 15-20 minutes. It was photographed and the identity suggested by Aniruddha Singhamahapatra and Fahim Shahriyar Labab and confirmed by consulting Kehimkar (2017).

The species was not observed in that location subsequently, although authors diligently searched for it in the following days. Since the first record mentioned by Dr Surya Prakash as found by Dr Aysha Sultana is also of a single individual it is likely that both specimens observed so far in Delhi were not part of a resident population.

In the case of the Large Cabbage White (*Pieris brassicae* (Linnaeus, 1758)) it was reported from Delhi for the first time by Smetacek (1997) on the basis of specimens. As mentioned in Larsen (2002), only two ♀ specimens of Large Cabbage White were observed by his friend B. Bogh-Anderson in 1961. Although recorded during the winter months from Delhi frequently this species has been unable to colonise the area because the larvae are unable to tolerate the summer heat.

It is possible that, like the Large Cabbage White, the Common Grass Dart is also a winter migrant to the Gangetic plains and is unable to colonise here due to unknown limiting factors.

**References**

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**Illegal Trade of Keeda Jadi**

As snow begins to melt in the alpine meadows of Uttarakhand in May and June, tents spring up overnight on the green pastures. Come morning, and a treasure hunt of sorts starts. The occupants of the camps, mostly residents of nearby villages, children in tow, scamper around in search of a prized commodity—a yellow brown mummified caterpillar (*Cordyceps sinensis*) also known as Keeda Jadi.

At the end of the day the lucky ones are able to spot as many as 15 pieces while their not-so-nimble counterparts will renew their quest next morning. By the end of August 2017, much of the Keeda Jadi has been 'harvested', the camps are gone and the flurry of activity in the bugyals has died down. The gatherers of the herb, now back in their villages in Pithoragarh, Chamoli and Bageshwar sell their bounty to middlemen, each kilo fetching anywhere between Rs. 10 lakh to 15 lakh. These middlemen use far-flung hill routes to smuggle the Keeda Jadi across the border to Nepal and China where the aphrodisiac is in high demand in the black market.

General Manager of the Uttarakhand Forest Development Corporation, said, "In 2003 the state government empowered van panchayats to grant license to local residents for collection of the herbs." Over 12,000 van panchayats issue permits to local residents to collect Keeda Jadi. But local residents often bypass van panchayats as it is more lucrative for them to sell it to middlemen.

Additional Superintendent of police, special task force, said "It is illegal to sell the fungus to anyone other than van panchayats. While an individual will get Rs. 2 lakh for 1Kg of Keeda Jadi from the van panchayat, selling 1 kg of it to middleman will fetch them Rs. 8 lakh to Rs 12 lakh per kg. This is why they prefer bargaining with the latter."