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RE-DISCOVERY OF THE PRICKLY ASH ELFIN *AHLBERGIA HARADAI* (IGARASHI, 1973) (INSECTA: LEPIDOPTERA: LYCAENIDAE) IN NEPAL

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Introduction

On 14 June 1963, the Japanese Lepidoptera Expedition to Nepal collected six larvae at 2400m in the forest above Godavari, east of Kathmandu. Two were on the trunk and four were feeding on the fruits of timur (*Zanthoxylum oxyphyllum*, a local tree also known as the Prickly Ash). One larva was conserved. The other five larvae turned into pupae 6-10 days later and were taken to Japan. One pupa was conserved. One butterfly, a female, emerged on 23 April 1964. In 1973, Igarashi described it as a new species, naming it *Ahlbergia haradai*, the Prickly-Ash Elfin. Colin Smith (2017) has referred to it as “Harada’s Hairstreak”.

On 16 March 2016 a male *A. haradai* was discovered by M.L., high on a branch of a tree in the forest above Godavari at about 2400m. On 4 May 2016, a female was photographed by P. v. d. P. sitting on bare ground near Shivapuri NP at about 2000m. And on 20 May 2016, M.L. saw another one in the same tree. This was 53 years after the first caterpillars of the species were collected. In 2017, 2018 and 2019 M.L. surveyed the *Z. oxyphyllum* trees above Godavari. No *A. haradai* were found in the first two years but in 2019 on 1, 5 and 10 May some 11 individuals, including a mating

pair, were observed high in the same timur tree or a nearby *Quercus semecarpifolia*.

The first two observations of *A. haradai* adults were mostly due to chance, as M.L. was taking out visitors to see the Blue Peacock (*Papilio arcturus*), while P.v.d.P. was on a bicycle trip. This chance was most likely increased by 2016 being a good year for the species. 2017 and 2018 were probably poor years for the species and 2019 good again. Before 2016, *A. haradai* was never seen in Nepal, due to a combination of low numbers of butterfly observers in the area, the early time of the year when *A. haradai* starts flying and the fact that *A. haradai* stays mostly high up in the trees where chance observations are low. For the same reasons, *A. haradai* may not have been found yet outside Kathmandu Valley. Kathmandu Valley has 25 species that have never been found outside the valley, and belongs with Pokhara valley to the best surveyed areas for butterflies in Nepal. Another species only encountered in Kathmandu Valley and flying even earlier in spring at altitudes above 2000m is *Amblopala avidiëna nepalica*, the Chinese Hairstreak.

M.L. has observed *A. haradai* flying with other early spring and often fairly rare butterflies, such as *Teinopalpus imperialis* Hope, 1843 (Kaiser-i-Hind), *Graphium*

eurous (Leech, [1893])(Six-Bar Swordtail), *Papilio arcturus* Westwood, 1842(Blue Peacock), all of Nepal's *Byasa* Moore, 1882 species (*B. latreillei* (Donovan, 1826), *B. polyeuctes*, *B. dasarada* (Moore, 1858), *B. plutonius* (Oberthur, 1876): Rose, Common, Great and Chinese Windmills), *Dilipa morgiana* (Westwood, [1850])(Golden Emperor), *Hestina nicevillei* (Moore, [1895])(Scarce Siren) and *Neope pulaha* (Moore, [1858])(Veined Labyrinth). Unlike many other Lycaenidae, *A. haradai* has so far not been observed to chase butterflies belonging to different species.



Fig 1: *Ahlbergia haradai* (male)

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This report describes the first records of a male and a female *Ahlbergia haradai* flying in Nepal. For the time being the species is endemic to Nepal. It is likely that *A. haradai* and several others of the 25 species which have up till now only been recorded from Kathmandu valley are also found in other parts of Nepal.

References

Igarashi, S. 1973. *Ahlbergia haradai*, a new Lycaenid Butterfly from Nepal. *Transactions of the Lepidopterological Society of Japan* 23(3-4): 68–74.



Fig 2: *Ahlbergia haradai* (female)