CONFIRMATION OF *DICHROSTACHYS CINEREA* (L.) WIGHT & ARN. AS LARVAL HOST PLANT OF THE AFRICAN BABUL BLUE BUTTERFLY *AZANUS JESOUS* (GUÉRIN-MÉNEVILLE, 1849) (INSECTA: LEPIDOPTERA: LYCAENIDAE) IN INDIA

RAJESH CHAUDHARY

Department of Biomedical Science, Acharya Narendra Dev College (University of Delhi), Govindpuri, Kalkaji, New Delhi -11001

Corresponding author: rajeshchaudhary@andc.du.ac.in

The butterfly African Babul Blue (*Azanus jesous*) is distributed in Africa, Middle East, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Myanmar (Larsen, 1986; Kehimkar, 2016; Williams, 2018). In India, *Azanus jesous* is found throughout the country except east of West Bengal (Varshney & Smetacek, 2015). It uses several plants of the family Fabaceae as larval host plants *viz*. *Adenopodia spicata*, *Dichrostachys* sp., *Entada* sp., *Medicago* sp., *Senegalia caffra*, and *Vachellia* sp. (Williams, 2018). *Vachellia farnesiana* and *Vachellia leucophloea* have been reported as larval host plant of *Azanus jesous* from India (Wynter-Blyth, 1957; Nitin, 2018). *Dichrostachys cinerea* has also been mentioned as larval host plant from India in a recent report (Theivaprakasham, 2020). This report however does not provide further details on the life cycle of *Azanus jesous* bred on *Dichrostachys cinerea*.

The present communication reports rearing of *Azanus jesous* on *Dichrostachys cinerea* (L.) Wight & Arn. (Fabaceae), confirming this plant as larval host plant of African Babul Blue butterfly in India.

A. jesous is commonly sighted ovipositing on naturally growing or planted *Dichrostachys cinerea* in hilly Aravalli areas of Delhi and its surroundings. The butterfly is a common sight in Aravalli Biodiversity Park, Gurugram, Haryana (an ecological restoration area adjacent to Delhi), which has several patches of *D. cinerea*. A freshly laid egg of *A. jesous* from the aforementioned location was reared under ambient temperature (minimum and maximum temperatures 11–20°C and 24–32°C, respectively) and variable humidity in the months of October–November, 2022. The egg hatched on the 6th day of ovipositing. The mature larva measuring about 8–10 mm in length, pupated 16 days after the hatching of the egg (Figure 1B–D). The pupa eclosed after 11 days of pupation (Figure 1E). The total duration of the life cycle of *A. jesous* was 33 days. The observed longer larval and pupal stages in the present study could be due to lower ambient temperature prevalent in the month of November.

The above observations confirm *Dichrostachys cinerea* as larval host plant of *Azanus jesous* in India.

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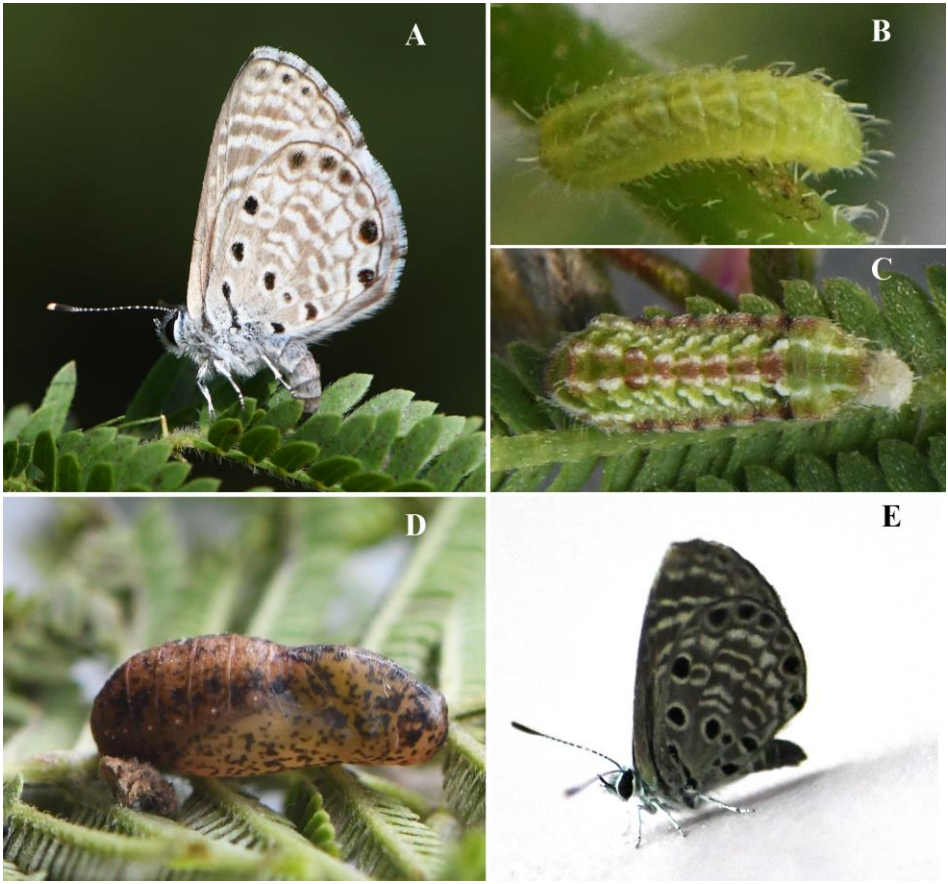

Figure 1: Oviposition by African Babul Blue on *D. cinerea* (A); larval stages (B–C); pupa (D); adult emerging from the pupa (E).