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Research Centre, Bhimtal, India
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Please E-mail to editorbionotes@gmail.com

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Butterfly Research Centre, Bhimtal, India
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Zdenek F. Fric, Biology Centre, Czech Academy
of Sciences, Institute of Entomology, Branisovska
31, CZ-37005 Ceske Budejovice, Czech Republic.
fric@entu.cas.cz.

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sn@saturniidae.com

Address for Correspondence

Jatishwor Irungbam, Institute of
Microbiology, CAS, Centrum
ALGATECH, Novohradská 237 -
Opatovický mlýn 379 01 Třeboň,
Czech Republic
jatishworirungbam@gmail.com

Butterfly Research Centre, Bhimtal,
Uttarakhand 263 136, India. Phone: +91
8938896403.
Email: editorbionotes@gmail.com

Devanshu Gupta, Zoological Survey of India,
Kolkata, India devanshuguptagb4102@gmail.com

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NEW DISTRIBUTION RECORD OF *HALPE AUCMA* SWINHOE, 1893 (LEPIDOPTERA: HESPERIIDAE) FROM SIKKIM, INDIA

SONAM WANGCHUK LEPCHA¹ & MONISH KUMAR THAPA^{2*}

¹Noom Panang Village, GPU Passingdang Saffo, Upper Dzongu, North Sikkim, 737116

²Department of Zoology, The Assam Royal Global University, Betkuchi, Guwahati, Assam-781035, India

*Corresponding author: monish.awrro@gmail.com

Reviewer: Peter Smetacek

INTRODUCTION

A very uncommon species of butterfly, Gold-spotted Ace *Halpe aucma* Swinhoe, 1893 from the family Hesperidae has been sighted at Dzongu, Mangan district of Sikkim during a rigorous field survey, on 27.vii.2024. The species was previously not sighted from the state. This report extends the known geographical distribution of *H. aucma* to Sikkim.

Description: Under-hindwing (UNH) markings less well defined and the central band is indistinct. The topmost third apical spot on the under-forewing (UNF) may be small (Kehimkar, 2016).

Taxonomic Notes: *Halpe aucma* is commonly known as Gold-spotted Ace. Evans (1949) initially classified this taxon as a subspecies of *H. homolea* Hewitson, 1868. However, Huang (1998) elevated it to species status, citing its sympatry with *H. homolea* and distinct male genitalia as key differences. *H. homolea*, a species native to Singapore and Southeast Asia, has been erroneously reported in India. Subsequently, Poel & Smetacek (2022)

adopted Huang's classification, a view that we are adopting in the present report.

Distribution: This species has been documented on the Indian subcontinent, specifically from Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland (Varshney & Smetacek, 2015) and Assam (Singh, 2017) in Northeast India. Van Gasse (2018) further refines this range to south of the Brahmaputra River and includes sightings from south-eastern Arunachal Pradesh and north-eastern Bangladesh. Sajan & Neupane (2021) recently reported its presence in eastern Nepal. Moreover, the species was very recently reported from Bhutan by Poel *et al.* (2023).

CURRENT RECORD

Recently, we observed *H. aucma* from Noam Panang Village, under Passingdang Saffo GPU, upper Dzongu, Mangan District (27°30'54"N, 88°3'44"E), Sikkim, at an altitude of 841 meters AMSL on 27. vii. 2024 (Fig. 1). The species was observed on a bright, sunny day, engaging in puddling near a water body around 11:45 hrs.

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Figure 1(a-b): Gold-spotted Ace (*Halpe aucma*) puddling near water body.