

**ARECA PALM *DYPsis LUTESCENS* (ARECACEAE) AS NEW
LARVAL HOST PLANT FOR THE INDIAN PALM BOB
SUAStus GREMIUS (FABRICIUS, 1798) (INSECTA:
LEPIDOPTERA: HESPERIIDAE)**

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Since September 2020, the author (RK) has been rearing caterpillars of butterflies in the Mumbai area and especially in the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) Nature Reserve, which is a forested area spread over 33 acres nestled between Dadasaheb Phalke Chitra Nagari (aka Film City) and Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Mumbai City of Maharashtra, India. The Reserve also has a small butterfly garden spread over an area of around quarter of an acre. The second author (GM) is rearing caterpillars in Borivali urban area in Mumbai.

Eggs and caterpillars of Indian Palm Bob *Suastus gremius* (Fabricius, 1798) were found on multiple occasions since September 2020 in the BNHS Nature Reserve as well in Goregaon and Borivali urban areas of Mumbai on *Dypsis lutescens* plants on the upperside of leaf blades. One such caterpillar found on 01.x.2020 was reared. The caterpillar pupated in the morning of 7.x.2020. An adult butterfly eclosed on 18.x.2020 at around 6.30 am. RK has a photograph of an egg clicked on as early as 21.ix.2017 on this plant.

After hatching out of a pink dome-shaped egg, the caterpillar partially eats the eggshell. The

caterpillar prepares a cell, on the upperside of the same leaf or on an adjacent leaf blade by folding a small piece of the leaf and fixing it using silken threads. The caterpillar changes colour from wine red when hatched to greenish with a dark head in the fifth instar.

The caterpillar was observed coming out only at night to feed and is very sensitive to any threat and slides backwards into the cell to hide. It pupates in a cell made of a leaf fold till eclosion. Sometimes the pupal cell may hang just on the mid-rib as the leaf is eaten, leaving the mid-rib.

The complete list of larval host plants reported till date for *Suastus gremius* includes the *Arecaceae*: *Borassus flabellifer*, *Calamus*, *Caryota urens*, *Cocos nucifera*, *Corypha umbraculifera*, and *Phoenix sylvestris* (; and *Tamarindus indica* (*Fabaceae*) and *Licuala chinensis* (Robinson *et al.*, 2021; Nitin *et al.*, 2018).

Conclusion

The repeated sightings of eggs and caterpillars of *Suastus gremius* on *Dypsis lutescens* (Family *Arecaceae*) plants and its rearing till eclosion of an adult butterfly clearly indicates the regular use of the plant as a larval host.

Looking at the cited list of larval host plants reported previously, this is clearly a new record of this larval host plant for *S. gremius*. Also, the plantation of this plant as ornamental plant in cities like Mumbai could be helping it spread in the urban areas on Mumbai.

References

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Fig.1: Indian Palm Bob laying egg of *D lutescens*



Fig.2: Indian Palm Bob laying egg



Fig.3: Egg hatching



Fig.4: First instar preparing cell



Fig.5: First instar cell



Fig.5: Caterpillar



Fig.6: Caterpillar



Fig.7: Pupal cell



Fig.8: Freshly eclosed adult