

***ERANTHEMUM ROSEUM* (ACANTHACEAE) A NEW
LARVAL HOST PLANT FOR THE CHOCOLATE PANSY
BUTTERFLY *JUNONIA IPHITA* (LEPIDOPTERA:
NYMPHALIDAE)**

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The BNHS Nature Reserve is a 33-acre forested area nestled between Sanjay Gandhi National Park and Dadasaheb Phalke Chitra Nagari (aka Film City) in Goregaon, Mumbai, Maharashtra. The Conservation Education Centre (CEC) of BNHS is located here. A large dark brown caterpillar was seen on a Blue *Eranthemum* (*Eranthemum roseum* (Vahl) R. Br. (Acanthaceae)) plant at the BNHS Nature Reserve on 13.vii.2020 and was collected. The caterpillar was kept in a semi-transparent container for rearing along with leaves of the same plant. The caterpillar was seen feeding on the leaves of the plant and excreta was seen in the container.

The caterpillar pupated on 16.vii.2020 on a newspaper which was kept inside the container for absorbing moisture. The caterpillar and pupa were identified as that of a Chocolate Pansy *Junonia iphita* (Cramer, [1779]) using Bhakare & Ogale (2018). An adult Chocolate Pansy emerged from the pupa on 22.vii.2020, thus confirming the identification.

A literature search revealed that Jungli Aboli *Eranthemum roseum* (Family Acanthaceae) was not reported as larval host plant of the species, hence it was decided to rear a caterpillar once again to

confirm the record of new host plant for *J. iphita*. The author is familiar with *E. roseum* as he had photographed it last year when it was flowering and had confirmed the identification from botanists acknowledged below. The plant seems to be common in the BNHS Nature Reserve.

On 24.vii.2020, a small dark brown caterpillar was found on an *E. roseum* plant. The caterpillar was collected along with a good stock of leaves for it to feed on. It was kept in a plastic container along with some leaves. The same afternoon it moulted and devoured the moulted skin. The leaf on which it was found had holes, leaving the main veins intact, possibly indicating its feeding method.

The container was cleaned of the excreta daily and one or two fresh leaves were added to the container for the caterpillar to feed on. The caterpillar grew in length every day.

On 01.viii.2020, however, the caterpillar stopped eating and was seen moving erratically in the container. There were no excreta in the container on that day and next day, indicating that possibly it had not eaten anything on those days. On 02.viii.2020, at 07.00 am the caterpillar was seen hanging upside down from a

leaf and had assumed a circular shape. At 11am, the caterpillar had pupated and a pupa was seen hanging on the underside of the leaf.

On 8.viii.2020, the pupa became nearly black. An adult Chocolate Pansy emerged at 11.30 hrs. from the pupa. It expanded and dried its wings in some time and flew away around 12.10 hrs. Images of each life cycle stage was taken (see images).

Robinson *et al.* (2001) mentioned *H. costata*, *H. auriculata*, *Justicia micrantha*, *J. neesi*, *J. procumbens*, *J. sphaerosperma*, *Lepidagathis formosensis*, *Strobilanthes*, *S. formosanus* and *S. callosus* as recorded larval host plants. The author has seen *J. iphita* using *S. callosus* as larval host plant in the BNHS Nature Reserve very regularly and *H. auriculata* in Thane district of Maharashtra.

Nitin *et al.* (2018) mention many larval host plants for the species, namely *Barleria cristata*, *Dipteracanthus prostratus*, *Ruellia elegans*, *R. simplex*, *R. tuberosa*, *R. tweediana*, *Achimenes grandiflora* and *Strobilanthes ciliata*. Thus, *Eranthemum roseum* has not been reported as the larval host plant

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for *J. iphita* butterfly and hence it is a new record.

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Fig.1: Caterpillar Moulting



Fig.2: Caterpillar



Fig.3: Caterpillar pupating



Fig.4: Pupa ready for eclosion



Fig.5: Freshly eclosed adult



Fig.6: Adult ready to take off



Fig.7: *Eranthemum roseum*



Fig.8: *Eranthemum roseum* flowering