

***MALLOTUS PHILIPPINENSIS* (EUPHORBIACEAE): A NEW
LARVAL HOST PLANT FOR LOBSTER MOTH *STAUROPUS
ALTERNUS* WALKER, 1855 (LEPIDOPTERA:
NOTODONTIDAE)**

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The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) Nature Reserve is a forested area spread over 33 acres and is nestled between Dadasaheb Phalke Chitra Nagari (aka Film City) and Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) in Mumbai City of Maharashtra, India. The Reserve also has a small butterfly garden spread over an area of around quarter of an acre.

On 25.viii.2021, while searching for butterfly caterpillars near the butterfly garden, the authors found three caterpillars on branches of *Mallotus philippinensis* (Euphorbiaceae) locally known as Kumkum tree. These caterpillars mimicked carpenter ants *Camponotus* spp. The caterpillars were collected and kept in a container for rearing. The caterpillars were provided with fresh leaves of the same plant every day. The rearing container was cleaned of frass every day.

One caterpillar pupated in a silk cocoon between two leaves on 26.viii.2021 and the adult moth eclosed on 8.ix.2021. The remaining two caterpillars pupated in silk cocoons between two leaves on 30.viii.2021. An adult moth eclosed from one of these two on 07.ix.2021. Thus, the moths took 13- and 7-days in pupal diapause before eclosion. However, in the third cocoon, three parasitoid

pupae were seen on 31.viii.2021. A parasitoid fly (resembling a House Fly) eclosed from one of these three pupae on 8.ix.2021. The adult moths were identified as Lobster Moths *Stauropus alternus* Walker, 1855 (Lepidoptera: Noctuoidea: Notodontidae) from images.

On 30.ix.2021, we also found four eggs on the same *M. philippinensis* plant. The eggs hatched on 4.x.2021. The caterpillars were provided with leaves of *M. philippinensis* to feed on. They pupated in silk cocoons between two leaves, three on 24.x.2021 (one eclosing on 3.xi.2021, and two on 4.xi.2021) and the fourth on 28.x.2021 (eclosing on 8.xi.2021). These also were *Stauropus alternus* moths. Thus, it took 21-22 days to complete the caterpillar stage and 10-11 days of pupal diapause before eclosion.

Stauropus alternus has been mentioned as an occasional and minor pest of Red Gram (*Cajanus indicus*), Tamarind (*Tamarix indica* L.), tea (*Camellia sinensis*), *Mangifera indica*, *Mangifera* sp., *Theobroma cacao*, *Xylia dolabriformis* (Syn. *X. xylocarpa*) and *Terminalia paniculata* (Ayyar, 1960; Mathur & Singh, 1959, 1960). Siddappanji *et al.* (1974) reported it to be pest on Sapota grafts (*Achras sapota*). In a recent publication,

Vaylure (2018) has mentioned *Flacourtia indica*, *Ricinus* sp., *Careya* sp., *Cajanus* sp., *Cassia* sp., *Ougeinia* sp., *Pithecllobium* sp., *Wagatea* sp. as the larval host plants of *S. alternus*. It is clear that *Mallotus philippinensis* (Euphorbiaceae) has not been reported as a larval host plant for *S. alternus* and is a new record. Occurrence of eggs and caterpillars and rearing of the caterpillars on the leaves of *M. philippinensis* till eclosion of adult moths proves it to be a larval host plant of *S. alternus*.

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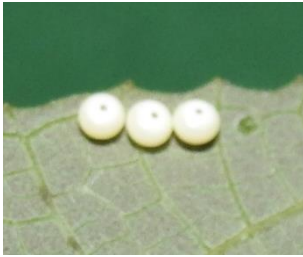


Fig.1: Lobster Moth eggs on *Mallotus philippinensis* leaf



Fig.2: Lobster Moth caterpillar



Fig.3: Lobster Moth Caterpillar



Fig.4: Lobster Moth Caterpillar



Fig.5: Lobster Moth Caterpillar



Fig.6: Lobster Moth cocoon



Fig.7: Lobster Moth pupa



Fig.8: Freshly eclosed Lobster Moth



Fig.9: Freshly eclosed Lobster Moth