

REDISCOVERY OF THE SOUTH INDIAN POPULATION OF THE BRUSH FLITTER BUTTERFLY *HYAROTIS* *MICROSTICTUM COORGA* FROM KARNATAKA

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INTRODUCTION

The southern Indian population of the Brush Flitter *Hyarotis microstictum coorga* Evans, 1949 is a skipper butterfly whose known distribution is restricted to Karnataka. The butterfly is so rare that there is no live image available and the species has not been sighted in the last 95 years, the most recent confirmed record of the species being from 1927 (Yates, 1931). However, during our recent surveys in Sampaje Ghats of Karnataka we regularly observed the butterfly from 18th March to 18th April 2022. Our observations suggest that the butterfly is restricted to small pockets of Sampaje Ghats near Payaswini River at an elevation of 225 m. We surveyed all the localities around it and found that the butterfly was found on both sides of the road and individuals were found nectaring on the roadside flowers of *Leea indica*. It is also seen at similar elevation in NE India viz. 20 m-200 m (Monsoon Jyoti Gogoi, 2022 pers. comm.).

The taxon *coorga* was originally described as a subspecies of *H. microstictum* by Evans (1949). *H. microstictum* has a distribution range from Assam to Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Langkawi, W. Malaysia, Borneo, Sumatra, Luzon (Y. Inayoshi, 1996-2022). Although *Hyarotis coorga* is treated as a species in some web

resources, the change in status from subspecies to species is not validated in any published literature and appears to be frivolous. Evans (1949) and Gaonkar (1996) treated it as subspecies of *H. microstictum*. The taxon was described on the basis of a male collected from Sati river, Coorg by J.A. Yates on 2nd December 1927. The typical subspecies on the other hand was described by Wood-Mason & de Nicéville (1887) from Cachar hills of Assam.

The subspecies *coorga* differs from *H. m. microstictum* in having larger white spots on the upperside forewing (Evans, 1949). *H. m. coorga* is rare in Karnataka (Gaonkar, 1996) and *H. m. microstictum* is very rare and variable according to Evans (Yates, 1931).

DISCUSSION

Our photographs of *H. m. coorga* are the first ever of the taxon in nature. Our observations suggest that the species is locally not rare in Sampaje Ghats, although the species is reportedly very rare (Yates 1931). The species was seen at an elevation of around 200 m and the recent records from *H. m. microstictum* from S. Cachar hills and Jaintia hills in NE India also share the same elevation range with *H. m. coorga*.



Hyarotis microstictum coorga,
April, Sampaje Ghat of Karnataka ♂



Hyarotis microstictum coorga,
April, Sampaje Ghat of Karnataka ♂



Hyarotis microstictum coorga,
April, Sampaje Ghat of Karnataka ♀



Hyarotis microstictum coorga,
April, Sampaje Ghat of Karnataka



Hyarotis microstictum (Feb 2012, Jaintia hills, Meghalaya, Pic: Monsoon J Gogoi) ♂



Hyarotis microstictum (Feb 2012, Jaintia hills, Meghalaya, Pic: Monsoon J Gogoi) ♂

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