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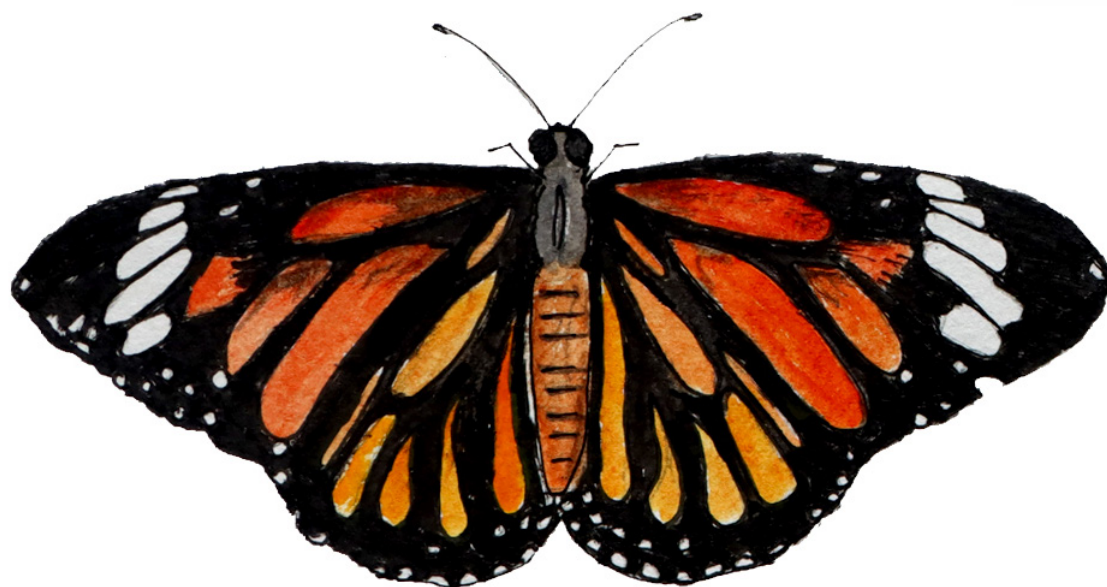
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Cover: Watercolour illustrations—Striped Tiger *Danaus genutia*, Common Silverline *Cigaritis vulcanus*, Tamil Lacewing *Cethosia mahratta*. © Mayur Nandikar.



INTRODUCTION

Centipedes are the largest group of terrestrial carnivorous invertebrates and have an important role in balancing the ecosystem or controlling harmful organisms (Lewis 1981). Therefore, it is very essential to have a better understanding of this group. The large centipede fauna (Scolopendromorpha) in Vietnam was initially studied by foreign researchers such as Attems (1930) and Schileyko (1992, 1995, 2007). Recently, Vietnamese systematists started to conduct more research on the taxonomy and diversity of scolopendromorph centipedes, such as Tran et al. (2013), Vu et al. (2020, 2022), and Le et al. (2018, 2021, 2023).

Núi Chua National Park (NP) in Ninh Thuan province, south-central Vietnam, has been recognized as a World Biosphere Reserve since 2021 (Figure 1). This is in recognition by the international community of its natural landscape, biodiversity, and indigenous cultural values. The biosphere reserve has a total area of 106,000 ha, including forests, seas, and semi-deserts. With the core area being Núi Chua National Park, this region possesses much biodiversity value for its rare species of animals and plants. In addition, it has a harsh climate, low rainfall, and hot weather all year round, creating for Núi Chua a natural landscape with unique characteristics of the dry climate region of Ninh Thuan. This is also a unique and rare characteristic of Vietnam and southeastern Asia. However, up to now, large centipedes in the Núi Chua NP area are still poorly known. According to Tran et al. (2013), *Scolopendra morsitans* is the only species recorded in Ninh Thuan province. The recorded location is about 20 km south-west of Núi Chua NP.

This study aims to provide the species composition of the large centipedes and their distribution pattern in Núi Chua NP.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Field surveys were carried out in September 2023 and February 2024 in different habitats in Núi Chua NP, including natural broadleaf forests (NF), planted forests (PF) and coniferous forests (CF). Samples were also collected at different altitudes (including below 300 m, 300–600 m, and 600–1,000 m) according to Vu (2012) and Bain & Hurley (2011).

Centipede samples were collected by pitfall trapping (Mesibov & Churchill 2003), leaf-sifting (Górny & Grum 1993) and manually collecting from rotting trees, under rocks, and forest litter. A total of 156 samples were

collected during the two field surveys. All specimens were preserved in 75–80 % ethanol and kept at the Joint Vietnam-Russia Tropical Science and Technology Research Centre (VRTC).

Specimens were identified using Attems (1930), Schileyko (2007, 2020), Siriwtut et al. (2016), and Vu et al. (2020). Ecological indices including the number of species, Shannon-Weaver (H'), and uniformity (J') were calculated using the software Primer ver. 7.0 for each habitat type and altitude. A similarity index was calculated using the software R ver. 4.0.4.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Diversity composition and distribution of Scolopendromorpha

From 156 specimens collected in the Núi Chua NP, 12 species/subspecies of five genera belonging to two families were identified. Eleven species were new records to the fauna of Núi Chua, including *Scolopendra morsitans*, *S. subspinipes*, *S. dehaani*, *S. japonica*, *Scolopendra* sp., *Otostigmus spinosus*, *O. scaber*, *O. multidentis*, *Asanada brevicornis*, *Ethmostimus rubripes platycephalus*, *Cryptops* (*Cryptops*) sp., and *Cryptops* (*Paracryptops*) *indicus* (Table 1).

With the harsh climate in the area, the rainy season is of short duration, from September to November, while the dry season lasts from December to August of the following year. The seasonal diversity of large centipedes in the Núi Chua NP area does not differ significantly. In the rainy season, 10 species were recorded, while in the dry season nine species were recorded. Centipedes are likely to be more active in the rainy season than in the dry season. This is evident from the number of specimens collected in each season, with 106 specimens found during the rainy season compared to 50 during the dry season. This phenomenon can be explained by the characteristic of centipedes to prefer to live in humid environments.

Three species, *Scolopendra morsitans*, *S. dehaani*, and *Scolopendra* sp., were recorded only in the rainy season, while *Scolopendra japonica* and subspecies *Ethmostimus rubripes platycephalus* were found only in the dry season.

Among the habitats, the NF is the most diverse one in terms of species and collected specimens (12 species and 123 individuals). The PF habitat is less diverse with five species and 27 individuals. The lowest number of species and collected specimens was recorded in the CF habitat (four species and only six individuals). This result

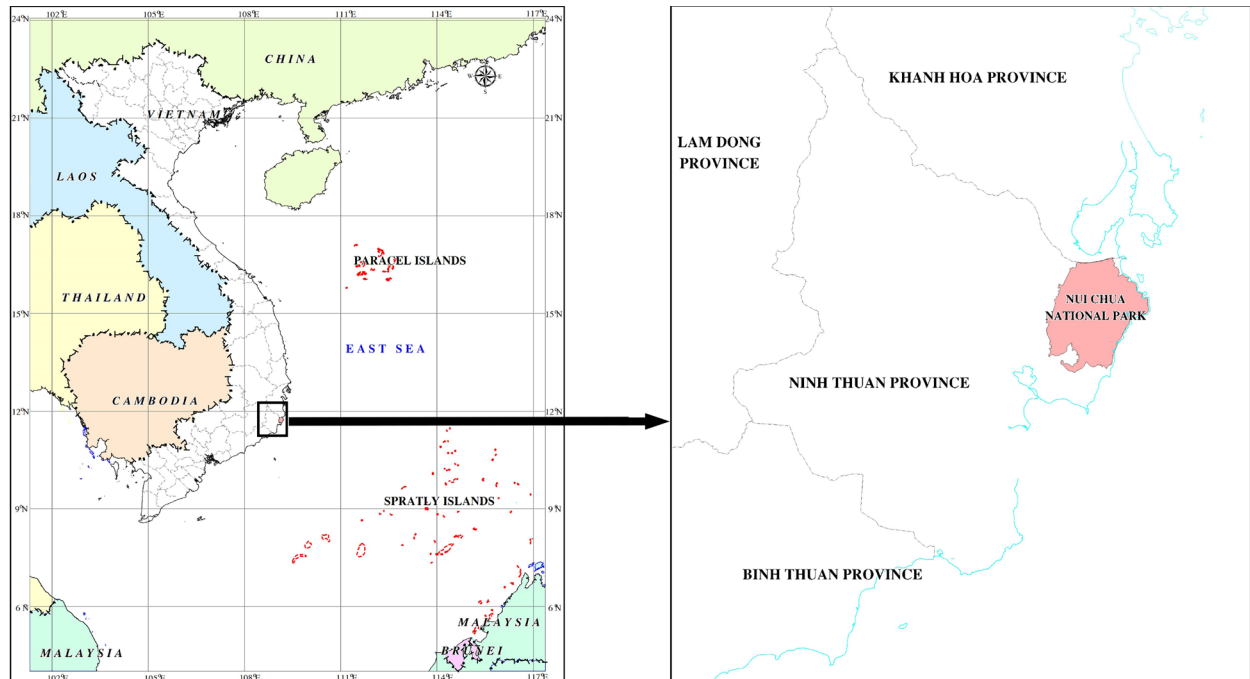


Figure 1. Location of Nui Chua National Park, Vietnam.

Table 1. Species composition and distribution of scolopendromorphs in Nui Chua National Park, Ninh Thuan province.

	Taxon	Season		Elevation range (m)			Habitat		
		Dry	Rain	0–300	300–600	600–1,000	NF	PF	CF
	Family Scolopendridae Pocock, 1895								
	Genus <i>Scolopendra</i> Linnaeus, 1758								
1	<i>Scolopendra morsitans</i> Linnaeus, 1758		+(6)	+(4)	+(2)		+(2)		+(4)
2	<i>Scolopendra subspinipes</i> Leach, 1815	+(13)	+(2)	+(4)	+(7)	+(4)	+(15)		
3	<i>Scolopendra dehaani</i> Brandt, 1840		+(1)	+(1)			+(1)		
4	<i>Scolopendra japonica</i> Koch, 1878	+(2)				+(2)	+(2)		
5	<i>Scolopendra</i> sp.		+(2)	+(2)			+(2)		
	Genus <i>Otostigmus</i> Porat, 1876								
6	<i>Otostigmus spinosus</i> Porat, 1876	+(4)	+(26)	+(24)	+(3)	+(3)	+(19)	+(11)	
7	<i>Otostigmus scaber</i> Porat, 1876	+(6)	+(3)	+(2)	+(1)	+(6)	+(9)		
8	<i>Otostigmus multidentis</i> Haase, 1887	+(9)	+(5)	+(3)	+(4)	+(7)	+(12)	+(2)	
	Genus <i>Asanada</i> Meinert, 1886								
9	<i>Asanada brevicornis</i> Meinert, 1886	+(7)	+(24)	+(19)	+(12)		+(26)	+(4)	+(1)
	Genus <i>Ethmostigmus</i> Newport, 1845								
10	<i>Ethmostimus rubripes platycephalus</i> (Newport, 1845)	+(1)				+(1)	+(1)		
	Family Cryptopidae Kohlrausch, 1881								
	Genus <i>Cryptops</i> Leach, 1815								
11	<i>Cryptops</i> (<i>Cryptops</i>) sp.	+(6)	+(33)	+(28)	+(7)	+(4)	+(28)	+(10)	+(1)
12	<i>Cryptops</i> (<i>Paracryptops</i>) <i>indicus</i> Silvestri, 1924	+(2)	+(4)	+(3)	+(3)		+(6)		
	Total number of individuals	50	106	90	39	27	123	27	6
	Total species	9	10	10	8	7	12	5	3

NF—natural broadleaf forests | PF—planted forests | CF—coniferous forests | +—present | The number in parantheses indicates samples collected.

is similar to previous research in other areas, in which the CF habitat has a lower number of species in comparison with the other habitats (Le & Vu 2018; Le et al. 2021). This is even more clearly shown in Núi Chua NP, where the terrain and climate are typical, and coniferous forests are concentrated mainly on the coast, so only species with wide distribution and adaptability can be found. There are only two species, *Asanada brevicornis* and *Cryptops* (*Cryptops*) sp. recorded in all three habitats; *Scolopendra morsistans*, *Otostigmus spinosus*, and *Otostigmus multidentis* were recorded in two habitats; the remaining species were only recorded in NF.

Regarding topological distribution, the highest species diversity was recorded in the elevation range of less than 300 m (10 species), while other elevation ranges had lower diversity, with eight species recorded in the elevation of 300–600 m, and seven in the elevation of 600–1,000 m. Five species were recorded at all three different altitudes, including *Scolopendra subspinipes*, *Otostigmus spinosus*, *O. scaber*, *O. multidentis*, and *Cryptops* (*Cryptops*) sp. Two species, *Scolopendra dehaani* and *Scolopendra* sp., were recorded only at altitudes below 300 m, while *Scolopendra japonica* and *Ethmostimus rubripes platycephalus* were recorded only at altitudes of 600–1,000 m. The remaining species were recorded at two altitude ranges below 600 m.

Taxon diversity

Only two families, Scolopendridae and Cryptopidae, were recorded in Núi Chua National Park. Of these, Scolopendridae had a higher diversity in terms of the number of recorded genera and species (four genera and 10 species). Cryptopidae had only one genus and two species recorded (Figure 2). This result is similar to previous studies on large centipede fauna in Vietnam (Tran et al. 2013, 2018; Le & Vu 2018; Nguyen et al. 2019).

Of five genera (Figure 3), *Scolopendra* was the genus with the highest number of species (five species, accounting for 42% of the total number of species), followed by *Otostigmus* with three species (accounting for 25%). The remaining two genera, *Asanada* and *Ethmostigmus*, had only one species each (accounting for 8%).

Biological indicators

The results of the biological indicators are presented in Table 2, in which the NF habitat had the highest H' index of 2.06, this value showing that the diversity in this habitat was quite high. In contrast, the CF habitat had very poor diversity ($H' = 0.87$). The PF habitat presented an average diversity ($H' = 1.21$). For the altitude, all

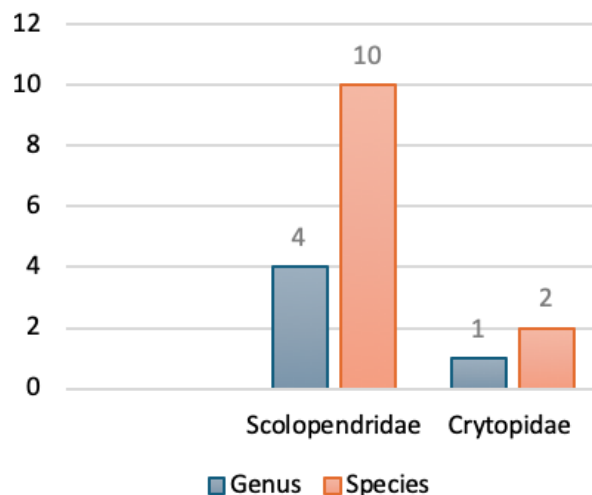


Figure 2. Family taxon diversity - Number of species in families.

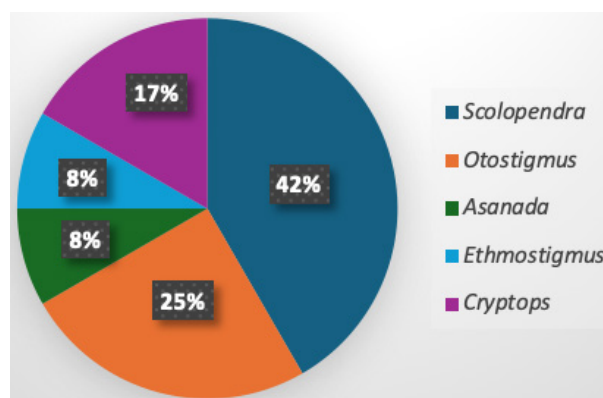


Figure 3. Generic taxon diversity - Percentage of species in genera.

Table 2. Diversity index and uniformity index by habitat and altitude.

Habitat/elevation (m)	Amount		Index	
	Species	Individual	J'	H'
NF	12	123	0.83	2.06
PF	4	27	0.87	1.21
CF	3	6	0.79	0.87
0–300	10	90	0.77	1.77
300–600	8	39	0.89	1.85
600–1,000	7	27	0.93	1.81

three altitudes showed moderate diversity with H' ranging from 1.77 (0–300 m) to 1.81 (300–600 m). The uniformity index J' showed that this index did not differ significantly among habitats. The uniformity was highest in the PF habitat (0.87), and lowest in the CF habitat (0.79). Regarding the altitude, J' index expressed more

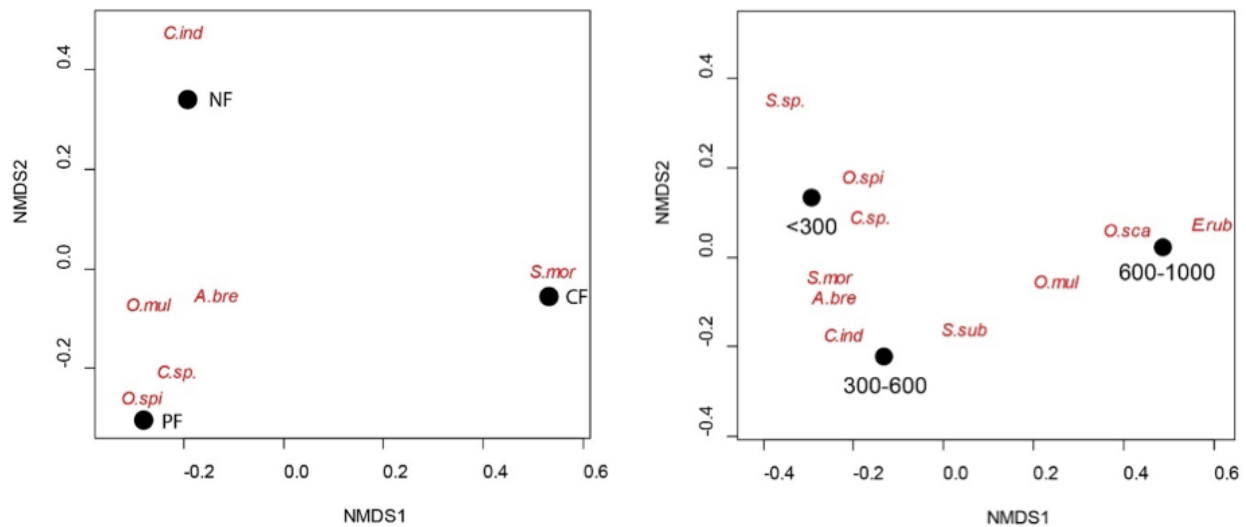


Figure 4. Non-metric multidimensional scaling (NMDS) analysis: A—by habitat | B—by elevation | *A.bre*—*Asanda brevicornis* | *C.ind*—*Cryptops (Cryptops) indicus* | *C.sp.*—*Cryptops (Cryptops) sp.* | *E.rub*—*Ethmostimus rubripes platycephalus* | *O.mul*—*Otostigmus multidentis* | *O.spi*—*Otostigmus spinosus* | *O.sca*—*Otostigmus scaber* | *S.deh*—*Scolopendra dehaani* | *S.jap*—*Scolopendra japonica* | *S.mor*—*Scolopendra morsitans* | *S.sp.*—*Scolopendra sp.* | *S.sub*—*Scolopendra suspinipes*.

difference, whereby it was highest at altitudes of 600–1,000 m, with 0.89, and lowest at altitudes below 300 m with 0.77. Thus, at an altitude of 300 m, although there was the greatest diversity and richness, the uniformity of species is the lowest. This was due to differences in the number of collected specimens such as *Cryptops (Cryptops) sp.* (28 specimens), *Otostigmus spinosus* (24 specimens), while *Scolopendra dehaani* was represented by only one specimen.

The similarities in species composition among habitats and altitudes are shown in Figure 4 by NMDS analysis. According to the results in Figure 4A, the habitats express little similarity in species composition, made plain by the distance among the habitats in the figure. The close relationship of species to habitats is also clearly shown, whereby the species *Cryptops (Cryptops) indicus* is close to the NF, the *Scolopendra morsitans* is close to the CF habitat, three species (*Asanda brevicornis* (Image 1), *Cryptops (Cryptops) sp.*, *Otostigmus multidentis*, and *Otostigmus spinosus*) are closer to PF, but *Otostigmus spinosus* was the closest. Other species have not been seen to have associations with habitats.

The similarity by altitude (Figure 4B) shows that altitudes below 300 m are closer to altitudes 300–600 m than to altitudes 600–1,000 m. The recorded species also show close relationships with different altitudes. Among them, *Ethmostimus rubripes platycephalus* and *Otostigmus scaber* are closely related at altitudes of 600–1,000 m, *Cryptops (Cryptops) sp.* and *Otostigmus spinosus* are closer to altitudes below 300 m, while

Cryptops (Cryptops) indicus and *Scolopendra suspinipes* are closer to altitudes of 300–600 m.

DISCUSSION

Nui Chua NP is located in the hottest and driest area in Vietnam with a very short rainy season, little annual rainfall, and a long dry season. The species diversity of the large centipedes was not very low (12 species). The results are similar to the diversity of Hoang Lien National Park, Thuong Tien, and Xuan Nha Nature Reserve in the northwestern region of Vietnam, where there is more diversity in habitat types, altitudes, and humid climates, more favourable for the growth and development of centipedes (Nguyen et al. 2018, 2019a,b).

In previous studies, it was noted that the genus *Otostigmus* has the highest diversity, but in this study, *Scolopendra* is shown to be the most diverse genus. Notably, the species *Scolopendra japonica* was recorded, previously mentioned by Siriut (2016), to be distributed in Sapa (altitude above 1,600 m) in the north of Vietnam, in which the climate is completely different from Nui Chua NP. The geographical distance of the two recorded locations is very far apart, which shows that this species is most likely widely distributed in Vietnam. Additional studies are needed for different regions in Vietnam to confirm its distributional pattern.



Image 1. *Asanada brevicornis* Meinert, 1886.

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Articles

The past and current distribution of the lesser-known Indian endemic Madras Hedgehog *Paraechinus nudiventris* (Mammalia: Eulipotyphla: Erinaceidae)

– R. Brawin Kumar & Willam T. Bean, Pp. 25639–25650

Declining trends of over-summering shorebird populations along the southeastern coasts of Tamil Nadu, India

– H. Byju, H. Maitreyi, N. Raveendran & S. Ravichandran, Pp. 25651–25662

Seasonal changes in waterbird assemblages in Chambal River at Mukundra Hills National Park, Rajasthan, India

– Arun George, Megha Sharma, Kavin Duraisamy, P.C. Sreelekha Suresh, Bijo Joy, Govindan Veeraswami Gopi, S.A. Hussain & J.A. Johnson, Pp. 25663–25674

An updated checklist of the skippers (Lepidoptera: Hesperidae) of Bhutan

– Karma Wangdi, Piet van der Poel & K.C. Sajan, Pp. 25675–25688

Conservation imperatives for swallowtail butterflies (Lepidoptera: Papilionidae): a case study in the north bank landscape of river Brahmaputra, Bodoland Territorial Region, India

– Kushal Choudhury, Pp. 25689–25699

The present state of leech fauna (Annelida: Hirudinea) in Dal Lake, Jammu & Kashmir, India

– Niyaz Ali Khan, Zahoor Ahmad Mir & Yahya Bakhtiyar, Pp. 25700–25711

First report of five monogonont rotifers from Jammu, J&K UT, India, with remarks on their distribution

– Nidhi Sharma, Sarbjit Kour & Aayushi Dogra, Pp. 25712–25719

Diversity of vascular epiphytes on preferred shade trees in tea gardens of sub-Himalayan tracts in West Bengal, India

– Roshni Chowdhury & M. Chowdhury, Pp. 25720–25729

Communications

Identification and chemical composition analysis of salt licks used by Sumatran Elephants *Elephas maximus sumatranus* in Tangkahan, Indonesia

– Kaniwa Berliani, Pindi Patana, Wahdi Azmi, Novita Sari Mastiur Manullang & Cynthia Gozali, Pp. 25730–25736

Occurrence of a female melanistic leopard *Panthera pardus delacouri* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Mammalia: Carnivora: Felidae) in Ulu Sat Permanent Forest Reserve, Machang, Kelantan, Peninsular Malaysia from camera traps reconnaissance survey 2023

– Wan Hafiz Idzni Wan Mohammad Hizam, Muhammad Hamirul Shah Ab Razak, Hazizi Husain, Aainaa Amir & Kamarul Hambali, Pp. 25737–25741

Diversity and distribution of large centipedes (Chilopoda: Scolopendromorpha) in Nui Chua National Park, Vietnam

– Son X. Le, Thinh T. Do, Thuc H. Nguyen & Binh T.T. Tran, Pp. 25742–25747

Diversity of butterfly habitats in and around Udanti-Sitanadi Tiger Reserve, Chhattisgarh, India

– H.N. Tandan, Gulshan Kumar Sahu, Kavita Das, Gulab Chand, Ravi Naidu & Ramanand Agrawal, Pp. 25748–25757

A short-term impact of enriched CO₂ [eCO₂] on select growth performance of *Spodoptera littoralis* (Boisd.) (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae) and its host plant *Gossypium barbadense* L. (Malvaceae)

– A.A. Abu ElEla Shahenda & Wael M. ElSayed, Pp. 25758–25764

Diversity and distribution of springtails (Collembola) from Jharkhand, India

– Koushik Kumar Roy, Guru Pada Mandal & Kusumendra Kumar Suman, Pp. 25765–25773

Short Communications

***Lindernia tamilnadensis* (Linderniaceae) from Indo-Gangetic plains: no more endemic to the Deccan**

– Umama Khan, Revan Yogesh Chaudhari, Bhupendra Singh Adhikari, Syed Ainul Hussain & Ruchi Badola, Pp. 25774–25778

Discovery of a new *Myristica* swamp in the northern Western Ghats of India

– Pravin Desai, Vishal Sadekar & Shital Desai, Pp. 25779–25786

Note

***Ophioglossum jaykrishnae* S.M.Patil et al. (Pteridophyta: Polypodiophyta: Ophioglossaceae): a new distribution record from Kanha National Park, Madhya Pradesh, India**

– Tarun Nayi, Mayur Bhagwat, Sanjay Saini, Soham Haldikar, Ishtayaque Patel, Shivaji Chavan, Nudrat Zawar Sayed & Sunil Kumar Singh, Pp. 25787–25790

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