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Srivari Illam, No. 61, Karthik Nagar, 10th Street, Saravanampatty, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu 641006, India
Registered Office: 3A2 Varadarajulu Nagar, FCI Road, Ganapathy, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu 641006, India
Ph: +91 9385339863 | www.threatenedtaxa.org
Email: sanjay@threatenedtaxa.org

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Cover: Mixed media with fine liners, colour pencils, and watercolour background of an Indian funnel web spider. © Elakshi Mahika Molur.



Fairies of the day and angels of the night

Chitra Narayanasami

Department of Agricultural Entomology, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu 641003, India.
chitra.n@tnau.ac.in

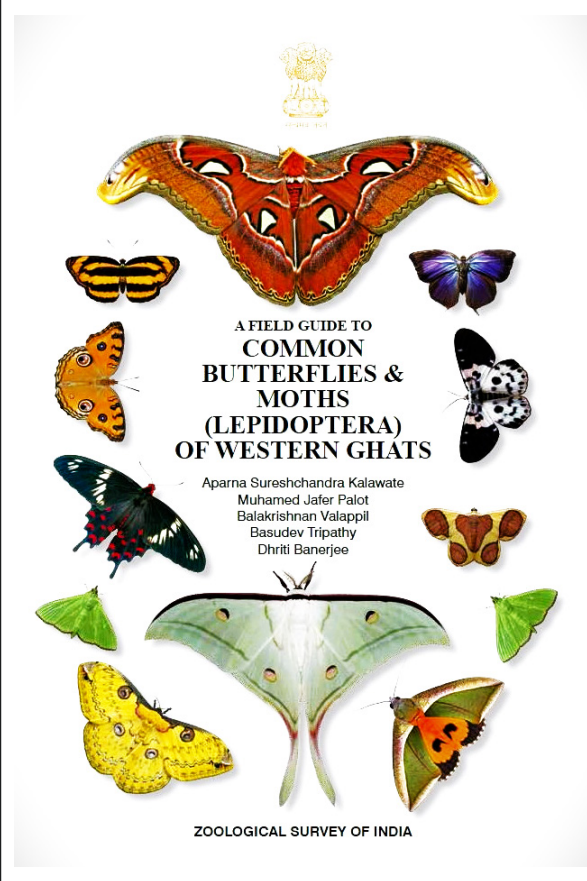
After the publication of Edward Osborne Wilson's magnum opus 'Biodiversity' in 1988, the term biodiversity became the most-spelt word across the globe in relation to conservation of nature. Subsequently, Meyers's classification of biodiversity hotspots in 1988 was another eye opener raising concern over the protection of the crucially important natural treasure troves that housed unique flora and fauna in these hotspots. The most widely accepted definition of biodiversity hotspots, viz., according to The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund biodiversity hotspots is "areas on Earth that house a minimum of 1,500 species of vascular plants, known as 'endemic' species, and have experienced the loss of at least 70 per cent of their primary native vegetation". In India, the Western Ghats are one of the biodiversity hotspots of international reputation endowed with unique endemic flora and fauna besides their rich cultural values and immense ecological importance. Running parallel to India's western coast the Western Ghats traverse across the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra, and Gujarat occupying an area of 1,40,000 km². Wilson's "little things that run the world" and "the silent majority" namely the insects, generally, are under appreciated and have received lesser attention as compared to the other flora and fauna in these regions. For example, as per the estimate from the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation, around 54% of plants, 65% of amphibians, 62% of reptiles, and 53% of fishes are categorized as endemic. The status of the invertebrates, particularly insects, remain to be studied extensively in the Western Ghats.

Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths), especially the butterflies, are admired for their beauty, colour, elegance, while the moths are not as popular as the butterflies. This may be attributed to their nocturnal habit and lesser appeal. In the recent days, moths are a volatile subject of study in the field of biology considering their significance and their role in the functioning of

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the different ecosystems. Apart from this, Lepidoptera gained importance in the field of agriculture as crop pests, pollinators, and are also commercially exploited, for instance, the variety of silkworms that provide the much favoured special fibre “the silk”. In addition, Lepidoptera is part of the cuisines either raw or cooked in different parts of the world. They have captured the vivid imagination of innumerable poets also in different languages globally.

Previous recent publications like ‘South Indian Butterflies’ by K. Gunathilagaraj, T.N. Perumal, K. Jayaram, & M. Ganesh Kumar (2015) and ‘A Guide to the Butterflies of Western Ghats’ by Milind Bhakare & Hemant Ogale (2018) seized the minds of butterfly enthusiasts. As mentioned earlier, moths despite their enduring beauty and significance suffer step-motherly treatment in comparison to the butterflies. Thus, the publication of ‘A Field Guide to Common Butterflies & Moths (Lepidoptera) of Western Ghats’ is a progressive step in knowing the Lepidoptera of the Western Ghats. The authors are to be applauded for including the moths.

In the preface, the authors have indicated that this field guide is an extended part of DST-SERB-Accelerate Vigyan Scheme. The book encompasses 122 species of butterflies and 349 species of moths. In the introduction, the biology, common resting positions, collection & preservation of Lepidoptera, and the status of the butterfly diversity in the Western Ghats are provided. Next family-wise Lepidoptera are illustrated with mind-blowing and captivating photographs, with details of the distribution, status of protection as per the Wildlife

(Protection) Act, 1972, larval host plants, and brief diagnostic characters and some special remarks for a few species. Diagnostic characters are provided only for the butterflies. The common “step-motherly syndrome of the moths” prevails in this book. If the diagnostic characters of the moths had also been included this beautiful field guide would be consummate. Fascinating and fabulous photography speak volumes on the beauty of the Lepidoptera and is the forte of this field guide.

Two species of moths, viz., *Maruca fuscalis* Yamanaka, 1998 (Crambidae) in p. 90 and *Ambulyx matti* (Jordan, 1928) in p.110 require further scrutiny on their identity. This may be new records for India if the identity is correct. Trivial inadequacies of the field guide are: host plant family names Leguminosae and Fabaceae are given instead of Fabaceae only as per the recent nomenclature of plant family names, older names of countries like Ceylon, Burma and their present names Sri Lanka and Myanmar are spilled across the guide without uniformity, the plant family names those given in brackets for example in p.110 it is written as (combretaceae) with the first letter of the plant family name in lower case, and in the title of the book “the” before the Western Ghats is missing which is generally given for a group of mountains, hills, islands, states. Trivial things make perfection but perfection is not trivial.

The authors are to be congratulated for their commendable efforts to document the Lepidoptera of the Western Ghats. Further, the cost of the book is reasonable, and this field guide should be a part of every nature lover’s bookshelf.



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