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Short Communication

NEW HOST PLANT RECORDS OF THE SHORT-BANDED SAILER, *NEPTIS COLUMELLA* (CRAMER) AND THE CHESTNUT-STREAKED SAILER, *NEPTIS JUMBAH* (MOORE) [NYMPHALIDAE : LEPIDOPTERA : INSECTA]

INTRODUCTION

During our monitoring surveys of Butterflies around the sacred groves of Kannapuram, Kannur district, Kerala, India, we encountered many larvae and pupae of butterflies that are common around the locality. On 26th October 2003, we collected a bluish green larva from *Gmelina arborea*, a Verbenaceae plant. The larva was voraciously feeding on the leaves of the plant with its typical manner of scraping the edge of the leaf. We observed the larva for sometime and noticed its nature of feeding. It consumed several leaves partly and left the leaves half eaten. We collected the larva along with the leaf and kept it in an insect cage for two days. Apparently due to the dryness of the leaf, the larva was reluctant to feed the leaf. However, we provided leaves of the Changing Rose (*Hibiscus mutabilis*, family : Malvaceae), a common plant available in our gardens. The caterpillar accepted the leaf and in due course, pupated successfully and emerged in to an adult butterfly, *Neptis columella* (Cramer) [Nymphalidae : Lepidoptera : Insecta]. Later, we searched *Hibiscus mutabilis* plant for the butterfly larvae and we could collect many caterpillars of *Neptis columella* (Cramer) during October and November months in 2003. Fed by the leaves of *Hibiscus mutabilis*, we could rear the caterpillars into adults.

Wynter-Blyth (1957) and Kunte (2000) listed *Dalbergia* sp. (Fabaceae) as the only host plant known for the Short-banded Sailer. The present observations add two more species namely, *Gmelina arborea* and *Hibiscus mutabilis* to the host plant inventory of the Short-banded Sailer, *Neptis columella* (Cramer).

Locally, the Short-banded Sailer is not so common, but appears in small numbers immediately after the southwest monsoon in October and November.

Our next observation deals with the Chestnut-streaked Sailer, *Neptis jumbah* (Moore) [Nymphalidae : Lepidoptera : Insecta]. The Chestnut-streaked Sailer is a locally common butterfly

frequenting wooded country mostly at low elevations. In north Kerala, the species is commonly found flying in the vicinity of sacred groves and nearby areas and can be observed during the rainy season and thereafter.

During early October 2003, we observed a Chestnut-streaked Sailer laying eggs on the leaf tip of *Cassia fistula* (Caesalpiaceae) tree. After a week, we observed a butterfly larva at the tip of the same leaf feeding on it. It was dirty brown in colour without any markings on its body and spiny in appearance. Subsequent to its pupation, we collected the pupa and an adult Chestnut-streaked Sailer emerged out of it after 8 days.

Similarly, we collected a fairly grown caterpillar of the same butterfly, while it was feeding on the leaf of the plant *Sterculia guttata* (Sterculiaceae) on 9th November 2003. In 3 days, it pupated and after 8 days an adult Chestnut-streaked Sailer emerged out of the pupa.

The earlier known larval food plants of the Chestnut-streaked Sailer are *Bombax ceiba* (Bombacaceae), *Moulluva spicata* (Caesalpiaceae), *Xylia xylocarpa* (Mimosaceae), *Thespesia populnea* and *Hibiscus* sp. (Malvaceae), *Byttneria* sp. (Sterculiaceae), *Pongamia pinnata* and *Dalbergia* sp. (Fabaceae), *Elaeocarpus* sp. (Elaeocarpaceae), *Grewia* sp. (Tiliaceae) and *Ziziphus* sp. (Rhamnaceae) [Wynter-Blyth, 1957 and Kunte, 2000]. Based on our present observations, *Cassia fistula* and *Sterculia guttata* form new host plant records for the Chestnut-streaked Sailer.

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