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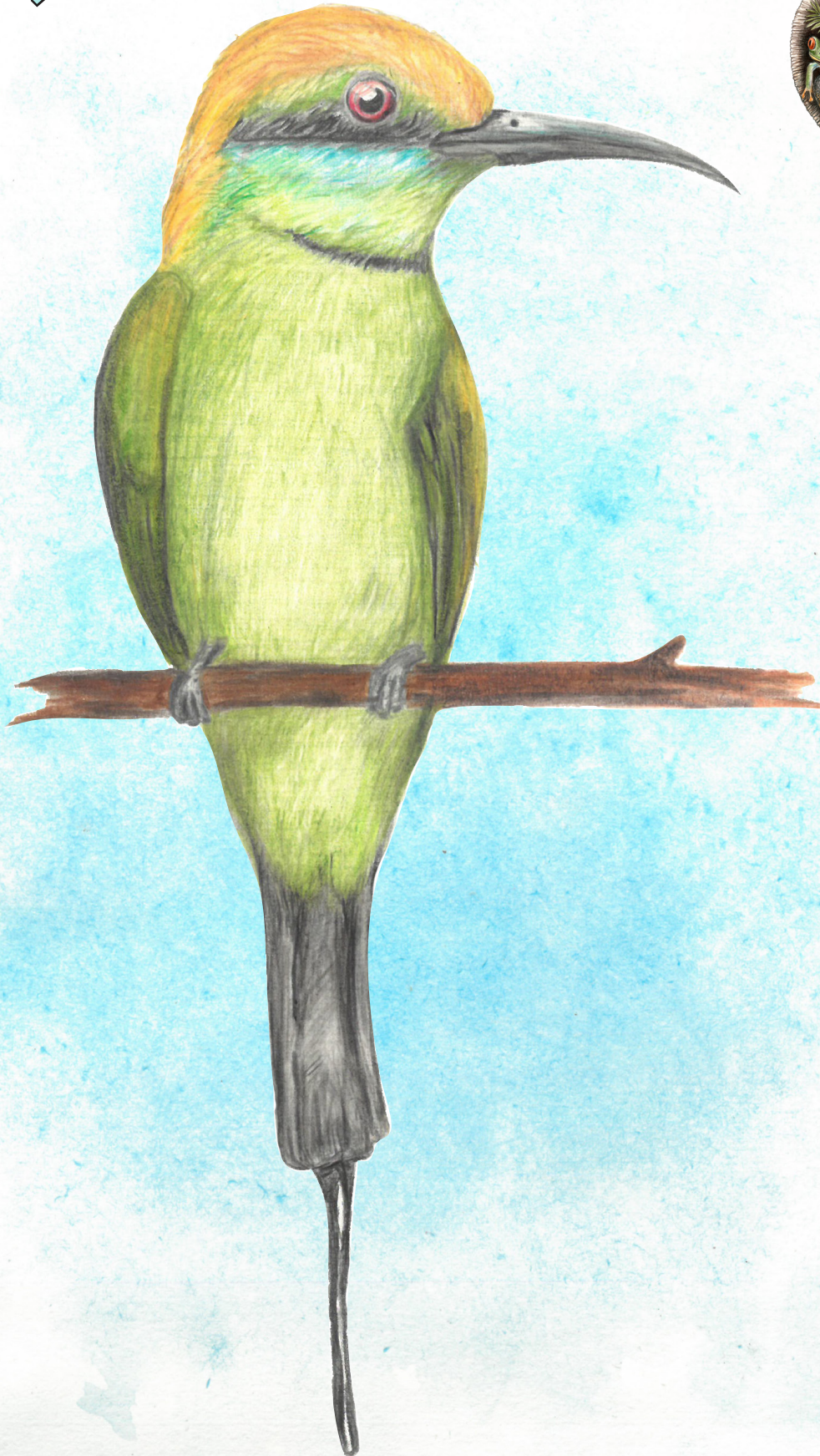
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continued on the back inside cover

Cover: Green Bee-eater with colour pencils and watercolor wash by Elakshi Mahika Molur.



## First record of Brilliant Flash *Rapala melida nicevillei* (Swinhoe, 1911) (Lepidoptera: Lycaenidae: Theclinae) to Meghalaya, India

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*Rapala* Moore, [1881] is a genus in the sub-family Theclinae and family Lycaenidae of the insect order Lepidoptera. The genus accounts for about 19 species in India (Varshney & Smetacek 2015) with distribution from west to east Himalaya including northeastern India, peninsular & central India, and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. They are found throughout southern and southeastern Asia, with a few species extending to Australia and into the eastern Palaearctic region, worldwide.

*Rapala melida* was first described by de Nicéville, 1895 as *Rapala rhoecus* with description of two subspecies and their distribution – *Rapala rhoecus nicevillei* (Northeastern India and Rangoon in Myanmar) and *Rapala rhoecus rhoecus* (Shan states in Myanmar). Fruhstorfer (1912) described *Rapala rhoecus* as *Rapala melida*. In 1932, Evans redescribed this species as *Rapala sphinx* where subspecies *nicevillei* described by de Nicéville was replaced by the synonym *sphinx* (*Rapala sphinx sphinx*). In 1962, this species was redescribed by Cantile as *Rapala elcia*. At present *nicevillei* is considered as a subspecies of *Rapala melida* following Swinhoei,

1912 (Van Gasse 2013).

We planned an opportunistic survey on 21 March 2017 to document the butterflies of Khasi Hills District near Dawki (25.1900°N, 92.0073°E; elevation about 130 m). As usual we were searching butterflies near hills streams, forest edges, grasslands, and supporting vegetations. After surveying about four hours in Dawki, we spotted a *Rapala* on a sunny patch of the nearby vegetation at about 14.22 h. we took a few photographs of the species including the underside of the butterfly. While searching literature for identification of the species, it exactly matched the original description of *Rapala melida* (Evans 1932; *Rapala sphinx*). The species can be easily distinguished from *Rapala varuna* in having: (a) underside bands on both wings very dark brown, and (b) bands on underside forewing not white-edged. The underside bands of *Rapala varuna* are not dark brown and bands on forewing are white-edged.

The precise localities from which *Rapala melida nicevillei* was previously collected is Sylhet, Bangladesh. This species is recorded for the first time in Meghalaya,

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Image 1. Sidewise comparison of a—*Rapala melida* with the most similar species | b—*Rapala varuna*.



Image 2. A view of the habitat where *Rapala melida* was recorded at Dawki, Meghalaya (21/03/2017).

eastern Himalaya, and is not found in the major historic and taxonomic works done by various authors in the state (Butler 1879; Swinhoe 1893, 1896; Parsons & Cantlie 1948; Cantlie 1952; Radhakrishnan et al. 1989; Alfred 1999; Hatter et al. 2004; Sondhi et al. 2013). We

present here the first photograph of the live butterfly of the Indian subspecies.

At present, the exact habitat of *Rapala melida* is not known in India. But our field observation suggests that the species might be a forest dweller and can be found

perching on shrubs and bushes (Image 2). The males like other *Rapala* species can be seen flashing their bright upperside to mark their presence.

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