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Cover: *Euphaea pseudodispar* shot at Kalindi River, Thirunelly, Wayanad district, Kerala. © Muneer P.K.



Comments on “The Dragonflies and Damselflies (Odonata) of Kerala – Status and Distribution”

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Abstract: This is a rejoinder to the article “The Dragonflies and Damselflies (Odonata) of Kerala – Status and Distribution”. In the said paper, certain species are of doubtful occurrence in Kerala and the Western Ghats. First reports of certain species which were available in open-access biodiversity portals and published articles in peer-reviewed journals were ignored. Additions to the checklists have been made without conducting taxonomic investigations, or in one case, even presenting a photograph. These shortcomings will lead to confusion and misunderstanding among odonatologists and naturalists in the region.

Keywords: Biodiversity documentation, checklist, insecta, rejoinder, research ethics, Western Ghats.

We would like to commend Nair et al. (2021) for attempting to compile checklists of Odonata species recorded from the Western Ghats and within the political boundaries of Kerala state. Regional checklists form the baseline of biodiversity documentation and are crucial for conservation planning. However, in the said paper, certain species are of doubtful occurrence in Kerala and the Western Ghats. First reports of certain species which were available in open-access biodiversity portals and published articles in peer-reviewed journals were ignored. Additions to the checklists have been made without conducting taxonomic investigations, or in one case, even presenting a photograph. These shortcomings will lead to confusion and misunderstanding among odonatologists and naturalists in the region. The missteps

in the paper can be discussed under four heads:

1. Misappropriation of first records

a. *Platylestes platystylus* (Rambur, 1842) was recorded for the first time from Kerala by Rison Thumboor in 2018 from Thrissur district. This record is available in the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (Ueda 2021). There are also published records of the species from the state (Emiliyamma et al. 2020; Rison & Chandran 2020; Chandran et al. 2021), but these records were ignored by the authors.

b. *Pseudagrion australasiae* Selys, 1876 was also recorded for the first time from the state by Rison Thumboor from Thrissur district. This record is also available in the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (India Biodiversity Portal 2021). In this case also, published records of the species (Chandran et al. 2020, 2021) were ignored.

2. Addition of species in the checklist without presenting the results of taxonomic examination

a. *Crocothemis erythraea* (Brullé, 1832)

This species is common in southern Europe and throughout Africa. It also occurs across western Asia as far as southern China (Clausnitzer 2013). It is known to occur within Indian limits

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(Subramanian & Babu 2017), but has not been recorded from the Western Ghats (Subramanian et al. 2018). The authors claim to have recorded this species from Munnar, Kerala and have provided a photograph as evidence. However, *C. erythraea* very closely resembles *Crocothemis servilia* (Drury, 1773), a species seen commonly throughout Kerala. Hence, it is unwise to include it in the checklist of Kerala or the Western Ghats without proper taxonomic examination of specimens.

b. *Zygonyx torridus* (Kirby, 1889)

This species is widespread across many African countries, parts of Europe and Asia (Dow et al. 2016). In the Western Ghats, it has been recorded only from Karnataka state (Subramanian et al. 2018). The authors claim to have recorded the species from Kerala without presenting any photographic evidence of it.

c. *Tamea virginia* Rambur, 1842

This species is known to occur in parts of India and many southeastern Asian countries (Dow 2020). In the Western Ghats, there are records from Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu (Subramanian et al. 2018). The authors have added the species to the checklist of Kerala based on a published record (Sharma et al. 2007) and provide no further evidence for its occurrence in Kerala. It has to be noted that in the paper cited by the authors, no taxonomic description or photograph of *T. virginia* is given.

3. Extralimital species added in the checklist of Kerala without presenting any evidence

a. *Heliogomphus kalarensis* Fraser, 1934

This species is known only from the type specimen, a male, collected by Fraser from Kalar, at the foot of Mettupalayam Ghat (Fraser 1934). The location clearly falls in Tamil Nadu. The authors have added it to the checklist of Kerala without presenting any evidence.

b. *Macromia flavicincta* Selys, 1874

This species is endemic to India and has been recorded only from Maharashtra and West Bengal (Subramanian et al. 2018). The authors have included the species in the checklist of Kerala without presenting any evidence.

c. *Idionyx nadganiensis* Fraser, 1924

This species is known only from two female

specimens collected by Fraser (1936). The type locality is mentioned as “Nilgiri Wynaad” and the geographical locations mentioned as its range probably fall outside the present political boundaries of Kerala (Fraser 1924). It should be noted that the boundaries between Kerala and the neighbouring states were redrawn after independence and also during the reorganisation of states. Keeping these caveats in mind, Subramanian et al. (2018) chose to show its distribution only in Tamil Nadu. Again, the authors have included this species in the checklist of Kerala without presenting any evidence of its occurrence here.

d. *Idionyx periyashola* Fraser, 1939

This species is also known only from the type specimen and the type locality is uncertain (Subramanian 2011). Subramanian et al. (2018) show its distribution only in the state of Tamil Nadu. The authors have chosen to include it in the checklist of Kerala without giving any evidence of its occurrence here.

4. Other errors/omissions

a. *Bradinopyga konkanensis* Joshi & Sawant, 2020

This species, described recently from Maharashtra, has been recorded from Kidoor in Kasaragod district of Kerala (Haneef et al. 2021). Its identity was confirmed in the paper by diagnosing its wing venation and structure of secondary genitalia of a male specimen. Even though the authors have referred this paper, the species has not been included in the list. The authors state that the species “has not been authentically reported from Kerala.”

b. *Idionyx minima* Fraser, 1931

The photograph presented as of *Idionyx minima* (Figure 5E) is actually of a female *Macromidia donaldi* (Fraser, 1924). In the case of *I. minima*, the abdomen is black and unmarked (Fraser 1931). A close inspection of the photograph given reveals a yellow mid-dorsal stripe on the individual’s abdomen characteristic of *M. donaldi*.

c. *Indolestes pulcherrimus* (Fraser, 1924) and *Indothemis limbata* (Selys, 1891)

Even though Muneer P.K. has been credited with the records of these two species, a published record of which he is the first author has not been cited (Munier & Chandran 2020). Presenting these records as published for the first time is misleading.

Citizen scientists contribute their observations to open-access biodiversity portals such as iNaturalist and India Biodiversity Portal with the hope that their contributions would further research and aid in the conservation of species and their habitats. It is with this purpose in mind that the observations are pooled into the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF). Only 'research grade' observations of iNaturalist and 'publication grade' observations of India Biodiversity Portal are sourced into GBIF, which enhances the authenticity of such records. If the authors are of the opinion that these records are insufficient, they should have at least considered papers already published in peer-reviewed journals before claiming their own observations as first records. The misappropriation of such records is unacceptable. Further, considering the fact that odonates are insects, any new record from the region should be backed with detailed taxonomic examination. If specimens are not available for such study, detailed photographs showing taxonomic features are necessary to establish the presence of the species in the region. Even though the authors have included photographs of many common species such as *Pantala flavescens* (Fabricius, 1798) and *Urothemis signata* (Rambur, 1842), they have not presented photographs of species such as *M. flavicincta* and *Z. torridus* which they claim as new records.

The comments provided above need to be considered before the checklists prepared by Nair et al. (2021) are used by biodiversity managers, researchers, and interested public. It will be beneficial if the authors address the issues pointed out and publish a corrigendum.

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