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continued on the back inside cover

Cover: A digital art of water birds of Noyyal River and its wetlands in Coimbatore District by Megha A. Kashyap.



New record of the antlion *Palpares contrarius* Walker, 1853 (Insecta: Neuroptera: Myrmeleontidae) in Tamil Nadu, India

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Madras Christian College (MCC) is a 320 acre scrub jungle with a plethora of flora and fauna peculiar to the urban landscape. The campus is home to many insects like the butterflies and moths, dragonflies and damselflies, beetles and weevils, and many more groups of insects. A few insects are rarely seen because of their cryptic lifestyle where their existence is rarely seen in the open or they spend less time conspicuous to human identification. One such group is the order Neuroptera, which includes the lacewings, mantidflies, and antlions. The antlion under the family Myrmeleontidae, with its slender body, is often mistaken for damselfly except for its curved or clubbed antenna (Mares 1999) and its distinct fluttering flight (poor fliers).

Neuroptera consists of over 5,939 species in 15 families world over (Figure 1) (Pandher 2024) and about 337 species under 120 genera in India (Figure 2) belonging to 11 families (Oswald 2023) in India (Figure 1) of which 128 species from 69 genera and 11 families are reported from northeastern India (Gosh 2000). The family Myrmeleontidae is the largest group in Neuroptera and is popularly called the antlions, consisting of over 2,000 species the world over (Engel et al. 2018). Among the many groups of family Myrmeleontidae, genus *Palpares* are large-sized antlions with magnificently speckled wings with dark spots and patterns. The lifecycle of the

species of Myrmeleontidae is complicated as most of their life is spent as a larva inside the soil and debris and the adult stage is relatively for a short period with an average lifespan ranging from 20 to 25 days (Yasseri & Parzefall 1996).

The insect is cylindrical and long with a small head, short thorax with subequal wings, and a relatively long 10-segmented abdomen. The head is small, hypognathous with lateral eyes and a pair of segmented antennae longer than the head. Legs are slender or stout based on species.

Insect collection details

Collector's name: Dr. Anita Pearline Esther

Collection date and time: 12 June 2023 & 2015 h.

Collection locality: An illuminated house located near scrub vegetation in the Madras Christian College Campus, Tambaram, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600059, India (12.9181°N & 80.1242°E).

Source for identification: S.K. Ghosh 2000. Neuroptera fauna of northeastern India and Chandra et al. 2011. Fauna of Madhya Pradesh (including Chhattisgarh).

Genus *Palpares* Rambur, 1842

The genus *Palpares* consists of the most distinguishable and attractive species of the antlions. The

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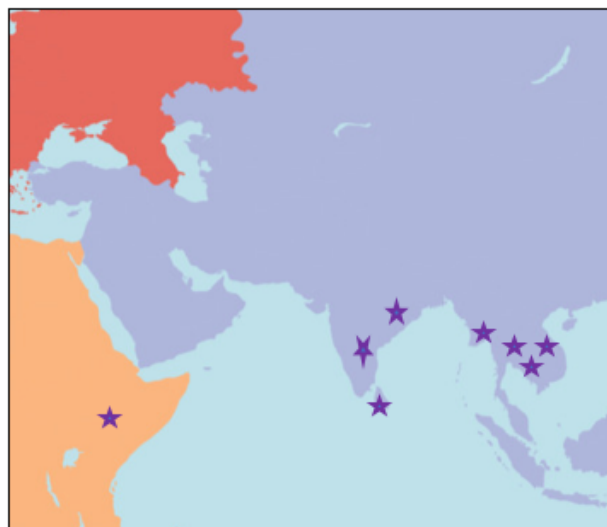


Figure 1. Distribution of *Palpares* sp. worldwide



Figure 2. Distribution of *Palpares* sp. in India ★; new record in Tamil Nadu ★

species are differentiated on a relatively minor scale of differences in the marking on the forewings, hindwings, sinuation, and the length of the antenna.

Palpares contrarius (Walker, 1853)

It is a large species found mostly in Africa, Myanmar, Thailand, and Sri Lanka and seen in isolated parts of India (Figure 2) like Odisha, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Mizoram, Uttarakhand, and Madhya Pradesh (Ghosh & Sen 1977; Ghosh 2000; Chandra & Sharma 2013; Giacomino & Abraham 2018). The insect is large with a wingspan of more than 110 mm in length (Image 1). The antenna is black; thorax with three dark stripes; forewings undulating in the borders, mostly pale in colour, median band crosses the wing, stigma spot projects towards the median, distinct with no spot at the fork of the cubitus in the hind wing but has dark bands or spots spread across the hind wing. The margin of the forewing is sinuate, tips of the hind wings do not falcate. Abdomen is darker towards the apex (Ghosh 2000; Chandra et al. 2011).

Entire insect: Large (Image 2).

Head: Small with antenna, prominent lateral eyes (Image 2b), antenna longer than the head, multisegmented, black, clubbed, and flattened at the tip.

Vertex: Has two black bands and a black spot behind the hind band (Image 2c).

Thorax: Pronotum has a median stripe and also a stripe on either side. The mesonotum and metanotum have three interrupted black stripes.

Wings: About 55 mm per wing (Image 2d), pterostigma inconspicuous, wings undulating along the hind border.

Forewing: A pale brown tint, especially at the tip, the forewing has four oblique dark brown bands on the disc



Image 1. *Palpares contrarius*. © Pranay Umesh.

(Image 2). The first band is broken at the center, with a spot between it and the base; the second band extends to the hind border; the third band is shorter; and the fourth band is interrupted at the middle.

Hindwing: Three dark brown bands: the apical band wider toward the hind border, the stigmal band extending to the hind border with a projection towards the tip of the median band, the median band reaching the fore-and hind border, and an oblique blackish streak



Image 2 . a—*Palpares contrarius* (habitus) | b—head & antenna | c—thorax | d—forewing | e—hindwing. © Pranay Umesh.

along the postcosta on the hind border (Image 2e).

The incidence of *Palpares contrarius* in Madras Christian College is a new record in Tamil Nadu. This was confirmed, and the specimen was deposited in the Zoological Survey of India, Chennai Station (Reg. No. I/ NE-01 Dtd. 01.09.2023).

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Articles

Insights into human-wildlife interactions and community views on mangrove restoration in Kendrapada District, Odisha, India
– Mohd Qayyum, Vijai Dharmamony, Muralidharan Manoharakrishnan, Sadhwi Sindura, Janmejy Sethy & Murali Krishna Chatakonda, Pp. 25951–25961

A checklist of avian fauna of Suang Reserve Forest, Nagaon, Assam, India with notes on some species of interest
– Chiranjib Bora, Neeraj Bora, Chandan Bhuyan, Rajkumar Das & Raktim Jyoti Das, Pp. 25962–25978

Age structure of carp and catfish catch as a tool to assess ecological health of fished stocks from the Ganga River system with special reference to Mahseer *Tor tor* (Hamilton, 1822)
– Prakash Nautiyal, Amitabh Chandra Dwivedi & Asheesh Shivam Mishra, Pp. 25979–25989

Communications

Importance based on avian diversity of Pakhibitan Bird & Wildlife Sanctuary, Jalpaiguri District, West Bengal, India
– Arjan Basu Roy, Tarak Samanta, C.S. Samrat, Anjan Guha, Debarpan Datta, Abhik Rong & Lina Chatterjee, Pp. 25990–26000

A drastic decline in avian diversity in and around the Bordoibam-Bilmukh Bird Sanctuary, Lakhimpur, Assam, India
– Lakhijyoti Saikia, Siddhartha Suman Bora & Khirod Sankar Das, Pp. 26001–26006

Bits and fragments: documenting an unreported coral genus *Heterocyathus* Milne Edwards & Haime, 1848 from northwestern Bay of Bengal (Odisha coast) and a call for further assessment
– Durga Prasad Behera & Rocktim Ramen Das, Pp. 26007–26012

Evaluating the IUCN conservation status of *Tritaxis kurnoolensis* (R.R.V.Raju & Pull.) R.Y.Yu. & Welzen (Euphorbiaceae), an endemic tree species found in the Eastern Ghats region of Andhra Pradesh, India
– Sarojinidevi Naidu & Raja Kullayiswamy Kusom, Pp. 26013–26021

Notes on the extended distribution of *Ceropegia gardneri* Thwaites and other rare species of *Ceropegia* from southern Western Ghats, India
– E.J. Josekutty, P. Biju & Jomy Augustine, Pp. 26022–26026

Short Communications

First sighting record of a Ruddy Mongoose *Urva smithii* Gray, 1837 feeding on a pipistrelle bat in Nagarahole Tiger Reserve, India
– Chikkanaragund Harshakumar, Rajesh Puttaswamaiah & K.S. Chetan Nag, Pp. 26027–26029

Taxonomic significance of seeds and seedling morphology in the threatened Indian endemic palm genus *Bentinckia* (Arecaceae)
– Mayur Yashwant Kamble, J.H. Franklin Benjamin & Vivek C. Poulse, Pp. 26030–26034

***Impatiens devendrae* Pusalkar (Balsaminaceae): an addition to the flora of Jammu & Kashmir, India**
– Naresh Kumar, Diksha Kumari, Dhani Arya & T.S. Rana, Pp. 26035–26039

Notes

New photographic and distribution records of the Beautiful Nuthatch *Sitta formosa* (Blyth, 1843) and Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* (Horsfield, 1821) from the Tsirang District landscape in Bhutan
– Birkha Bahadur Mongar, Bishal Mongar, Chhimi Dorji, Phuntsho Tobgay, Tshering Wangchuk & Jigme Tenzin, Pp. 26040–26043

First photographic record of Brown Bullfinch *Pyrrhula nipalensis* (Aves: Passeriformes: Fringillidae) from Jammu & Kashmir, India
– Mohsin Javid, Khursheed Ahmad, Intesar Suhail & Orus Ilyas, Pp. 26044–26045

New record of the antlion *Palpares contrarius* Walker, 1853 (Insecta: Neuroptera: Myrmeleontidae) in Tamil Nadu, India
– Pearlina Esther Anita & J. Logamanya Tilak, Pp. 26046–26048

Extended distribution of *Trillium govanianum* Wall. ex D.Don (Melanthiaceae), an endangered species from Arunachal Pradesh, India
– Bikash Kalita, Saurov Jyoti Roy, Khencha Aran, Kuladip Sarma, Amal Bawri, Dhruvajyoti Sahariah & Bhaben Tanti, Pp. 26049–26052

***Typhonium inopinatum* Prain (Araceae): a new plant record to the flora of Uttarakhand, India**
– Sachin Rawat & Navendu Page, Pp. 26053–26057

Response & Reply

Response to “First record of *Pieris napi* L. (Lepidoptera: Pieridae) from Kashmir Valley, India”
– Taslima Sheikh, Pp. 26058–26059

Reply to Sheikh’s Response to First record of *Pieris napi* L.
– Firdousa Rasool & Altaf Hussain Mir, Pp. 26060–26062

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