

Project Update: July 2010

Funds were received in December 2009. Since winter was not a useful season for surveying moths, it seemed a good idea to do up my mother's rooms into a place where the reference collection of butterflies and moths built by my wife and I could be put on public display. The collection went on public display in April 2010 and has attracted hundreds of visitors. It is the only reference collection in India accessible to the general public. For most of the visitors, it was an eye-opening experience, for they had never heard of poisonous butterflies, seen leaf butterflies, stick insects, mimetic relationships, two headed behaviour, etc. or, indeed, seen a well-kept collection!

Giving in to popular requests for displaying live butterflies, we have set up a 25m x 15m butterfly house where the groundwork for establishing populations of roughly 50 species of local butterflies has been laid. At present, it is inhabited by a few atlas moths and three butterfly species, but there should be many more species about in the months to come. All this has necessitated naming the place accordingly, so it was named the Butterfly Research Centre and is advertised as such.

Surveys were begun along the 79° E meridian. When one came down to it, searching for a suitable site proved remarkably difficult, for the simple reason that there was practically no broadleaf forest suitable for surveys! The middle ranges of the Himalaya in this area have been inhabited for millennia and all the forests are highly degraded by human pressure and forest fires, leaving vast tracts of Chir pine (*Pinus roxburghii*). Only two small patches of surveyable broadleaf forest were discovered in the sub-tropical belt. The first is part of an army cantonment, the second a religious place. I decided to survey the religious place.

Early on, it proved productive, yielding up a new subspecies of a bushbrown butterfly (*Mycalopsis*), which I have just named and described and sent off for publication. Low elevation forest proved even more difficult to discover in the interior. Eventually, it proved necessary to establish the survey site on the southern border of Almora district, where there is enough tropical deciduous forest to provide material for assessing the lepidopteran fauna.

The review of a group of butterflies mentioned in the interim report has been accepted for publication and should be out shortly.

Three publications related to the previous projects have been published:

Additions and corrections to the list of moths recorded from different elevations in Nainital district, Kumaon Himalaya, India. *Bionotes*, **11(4)**: 117 – 118

A new species of *Ceryx* Wallengren (Lepidoptera: Arctiidae: Syntominiæ) from the Kumaon Himalaya. *Journal of Threatened Taxa*, **May 2010**.

The hitherto undescribed male of *Calocalpe abraxidia* Hampson (Lepidoptera: Geometridae: Larentiinae). *Journal of Threatened Taxa*, **July 2010**.

The latter two may be viewed by accessing the site www.threatenedtaxa.org.