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Newsletter of the Invertebrate Conservation & Information Network of South Asia (ICINSA)

Sighting of two rare butterflies from the northern Western Ghats, India



[A] Upperwings (UP) and [B] Underwings (UN) of *Horaga onyx cingalensis*.

The Western Ghats along with Sri Lanka together is a globally recognized biodiversity hotspot. The butterfly fauna of the Western Ghats of India is well documented (Kunte 2008). It hosts around 336 butterfly species of which approximately 12% species are endemic to the Western Ghats and 59 species are legally protected in India (Nitin et al. 2018). In this article, we describe the sighting of two rare butterflies, namely, Common Onyx *Horaga onyx cingalensis* from Maharashtra and Purple-spotted Flitter *Zographetus ogygia* from Goa, in the northern Western Ghats. A description of their observations of species is given below:

Common Onyx *Horaga onyx cingalensis* (Moore, 1857)

Horaga onyx cingalensis is a rare butterfly subspecies found in the southern Western Ghats of India and recorded up to 2,000m above sea level (Bhakare & Ogale 2018). On 24 October 2016, while surveying butterflies on Mahadevgad road, Amboli, Maharashtra, India (15.964°N; 73.994°E) at 652m in the morning, the authors along with Hemant Ogale saw a small blue butterfly basking on a small shrub. In the first instance, it superficially resembled the Monkey Puzzle *Rathinda amor*. The butterfly remained active for 15 minutes. Its flight was weak and not



sustained for long. The butterfly did not open its wings much. Authors photographed the butterfly and on comparison of its images with other species belonging to the Lycaenidae family and description and distribution mentioned in the literature (Varshney & Smetacek 2015; Bhakare & Ogale 2018), the species was identified as the Common Onyx *Horaga onyx cingalensis*.

Currently, four species of *Horaga* are known from India: *onyx*, *viola*, *syrinx*, and *albimaculata*. *H. onyx* is protected under Schedule II category of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act 1972, known to occur from Himachal Pradesh to Assam, Nepal, Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh, Bangladesh, Myanmar, southern India, and Sri Lanka. In the Western Ghats, the subspecies of *Horaga onyx*, namely *cingalensis* is distributed from Kerala to Maharashtra (Varshney & Smetacek 2015). Here, we report its occurrence in the form of photographic evidence from Maharashtra which confirms its existence in the northern Western Ghats.

Purple-spotted Flitter *Zographetus ogygia* (Hewitson, 1866)

On October 19 2017, while photographing butterflies at Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary, Cancona, southern Goa (14.972° N; 74.204° E, at 30m), the first author saw a small, fast-flying brownish-orange skipper adjoining to the dense evergreen forest trail near a fast flowing stream in riparian habitat. The



Underwings (UN) of *Zographetus ogygia*.

butterfly basked on the leaf of a shrub for a short while permitting the first author to photograph it. It was identified as the Purple-spotted Flitter *Zographetus ogygia* (Hewitson, 1866) on the basis of description and distribution mentioned in the literature (Sondhi et al. 2013; Bhakare & Ogale 2018). The Purple-spotted Flitter is a rare butterfly species which is recently known to occur in the Western Ghats of India (Nitin et al. 2018).

Presently, three species of *Zographetus* are known from India: *ogygia*, *rama*, and *satwa* (Varshney & Smetacek 2015). *Zographetus ogygia* (Hewitson, 1866) is known to occur in India from Sikkim to Arunachal Pradesh, northeastern India (Sondhi et al. 2013; Varshney & Smetacek 2015). Out of 336 butterfly species recorded from the Western Ghats, a total of 254 occur in Goa (Rangnekar & Dharwadkar 2009). Previously, the existence of species was not documented in the available literature on the fauna of Goa (Gaonkar 1996; Borkar & Komarpant 2002;

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Rangnekar 2007; Sharma & Borkar 2008). So far in the Western Ghats species have been observed in the states of Kerala and Karnataka with a single observation in the state of Goa and documented in the form of photographic evidence on the website www.ifoundbutterflies.org/sp/1022/Zographetus-ogygia. Hence, this article confirms its existence in the northern Western Ghats and represents its northernmost observations which increase the total number of butterflies recorded from Goa State to 255 species.

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