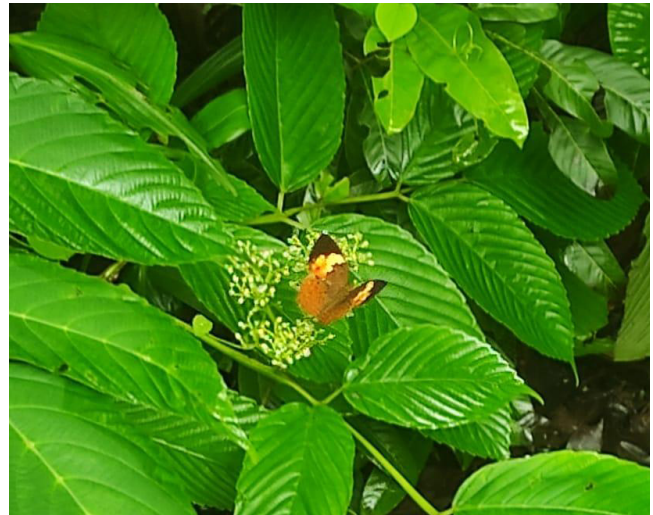


## Occurrence of Sahyadri Rustic Butterfly in Mumbai and Sanjay Gandhi National Park



Sahyadri Rustic *Cupha erymanthis maja*. © Akash Mhadgut (Left); © Satish Gundgire (Right).

Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) has a spread of 104 km<sup>2</sup> in Mumbai suburban and Thane District; it has around 142 reported species and seven unconfirmed species of butterflies (Patwardhan 2014). On 13 July 2024 morning, during a nature walk in Nagla block (19.29527° N, 72.91167° E) an adult individual of Rustic Butterfly *Cupha erymanthis* nectaring on flowers of Bandicoot Berry *Leea indica* was observed. Photographs were taken for documentation.

*Cupha erymanthis* has a wingspan of 50–60 mm and the wings are ochre yellow with black coloured apex of forewings with a broad yellowish or white central band. The hind wings have a few black spots, with tiny white and dark

brown dots and primarily yellowish-brown on the underside. The male and female have similar appearances (Kunte 2000).

India is home to four of its subspecies: Sahyadri Rustic *Cupha erymanthis maja* Fruhstorfer, 1898; Himalayan Rustic, *Cupha erymanthis lotis* (Sulzer, 1776); Andaman Rustic *Cupha erymanthis andamanica* Moore, [1900]; and Nicobar Rustic *Cupha erymanthis nicobarica* (C.Felder, 1862) (Anon 2025).

Sahyadri Rustic *Cupha erymanthis maja* is a sub-species of Nymphalidae butterfly known to be found in the entire region of Western Ghats starting from Maharashtra and further down south in India (Kumar & Tonk 2023; Kunte et al.

2024; Anon 2025). In Maharashtra the species is known to be distributed all over the western terrain, the occurrence spans from Banda and Tillari in south to Matheran in the north. This species has not been reported from Sanjay Gandhi National Park (Kasambe 2012; Rodrigues 2012; Patwardhan 2014; SGNP 2014).

Belonging to the subfamily Heliconiinae and tribe Vagrantini Rustic is weak and a restless flyer, spending much of its time in the middle layer of canopy staying near pathways and sunlit openings (Bhakare & Ogale 2018; Anon 2025). The males sometimes visit wet soil whereas the females are observed to only feed on flowers and usually prefer more shaded places, it also quite pugnacious and chases away other butterflies that may fly around its perch (Kunte 2000).

Several host plants of *Cupha erymanthis* from the *Salicaceae* family were recorded in Sanjay Gandhi National Park. *Flacourtia indica* (Wynter-Blyth 1957; Kunte 2000), *Flacourtia jangomas* (Kawthankar et al. 2025), and *Flacourtia montana* (Wynter-Blyth 1957; Kunte 2000; Kawthankar et al. 2025) were observed in several patches. In addition to these, a caterpillar was recorded by Ulla (2020).

Thus, *Cupha erymanthis maja* can be assumed as a part of local rhopaloceran diversity with a very rare occurrence, also a supporting observation from Godrej mangroves by Mhadgut, (2024) confirms a sighting from Mumbai and an observation of adult individual

emerged through chrysalis by Gurjar (2022) suggest the first reported sighting on iNaturalist from Sanjay Gandhi National Park - Nagla block. This will add to the list of rhopaloceran diversity in SGNP and demonstrate the range extension of this species in the districts of Mumbai and Thane as northernmost extent of this species was previously reported only till Karnala Wildlife Sanctuary and Matheran situated in Raigad District of Maharashtra.

Insects are quite sensitive towards their surroundings and are often used as biodiversity indicators, *Cupha erymanthis* is a forest loving butterfly and thus its presence in SGNP indicates that the national park has a live thriving forest which provides an ideal habitat for species like these.

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