



Finding the forgotten gems

Revisiting the butterflies of Matheran after 125 years

Mumbai, August 10: Scientists from the Bombay Natural History Society and Somaiya Vidya Vihar University have published a research paper on the forgotten butterflies of Matheran in the community peer-reviewed 'Biodiversity Data Journal'. The research paper titled 'Finding the forgotten gems: Revisiting the butterflies of Matheran after 125 years, with the introduction to the novel colour barcode for depicting seasons and activity of the Indian butterflies' is an outcome of 8 years of fieldwork and usage of Colour Bar-Coding system by Mandar Sawant, Dr Nikhil Modak & Sagar Sarang in the forests of Matheran.

JA Betham in April and May 1894 surveyed the hills of Matheran- a famous hill station near Mumbai for its butterfly diversity. He had reported 78 butterfly species back then and had hoped that someone from Bombay (now Mumbai) would take up future survey and might report some more butterflies.

After a huge span of almost 125 years, this was the first of a kind authentic work ever done to describe the butterfly fauna of Matheran hill station. BNHS scientist Mandar says, "While roaming in the forests of Matheran and clicking these flying beauties, we never thought that somewhere in future we will be working on this data so as to give it a form of a research paper". About 140 butterfly species and more than 22000 butterfly observations were made during this study from 2011 to 2019. The paper was a result of countless trips to Matheran, record keeping of interesting sightings and elaborate discussions about the fluttering insects.

Co-author Dr Nikhil Modak from BNHS has been instrumental in using biostatistical techniques. The introduction of the Colour Bar-Coding system has been the salient feature of the manuscript which makes it easier and presentable for readers to understand effectively. The scientists recommend use of colour coding while uploading records on open databases which will help in conveying information regarding the seasons and activities of butterflies.

Butterflies are not just beautiful creatures, but also indicators of a healthy environment and ecosystem. Long-term study of butterflies will surely help the scientific community to understand and conserve the health of the ecosystem. You can read the paper here: <https://bdj.pensoft.net/article/54333/>

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