



First-ever butterfly survey in Mudumalai Tiger Reserve records 175 species

26 December 2022

The Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (MTR) not only provides a crucial habitat for a variety of endangered species of birds and mammals, but is also home to 175 species of butterflies, a survey conducted for the first time in the area has revealed.

According to C. Vidhya, Deputy Director of MTR (Core Area), a recent assessment carried out by naturalists, volunteers and Forest Department staff over three days has revealed that the 688.5-sq.km reserve is home to 175 species of butterflies, including the Red Helen, Common Banded Peacock, Malabar Banded Peacock, Spotless Grass Yellow, Chocolate Albatross, Nilgiri Tiger, Common Sergeant, Blackvein Sergeant, Colour Sergeant, Yellowjack Sailer, Cruiser, Gaudy Baron, Centaur Oakblue, Common Onyx, Banded Royal, Plum Judy, Angled Flat, Wax Dart and the Contiguous Swift.

“Highlights of the survey include sighting of Yellowjack Sailer, a species from Nymphalidae which is known to appear very rarely in Tamil Nadu. This species was sighted from the Kargudi range of MTR and is only the second photographic sighting for the State. The State butterfly, Tamil Yeoman, was also recorded during the survey. Other interesting sightings include the Malabar Banded Peacock, a rare beautiful Swallowtail butterfly, and a butterfly bearing the local nomenclature – Nilgiri Tiger. Species which were in abundance include Common Four-ring, Common Five-ring and Common Grass Yellow,” Ms. Vidhya said.

The butterfly survey, organised for the first time at the reserve, was conducted on the advice of the Field Director of MTR, D. Venkatesh, with surveys being conducted in both the core and buffer zones. Officials said the survey was conducted in the reserve with the assistance of The Nature and Butterfly Society (TNBS), Coimbatore, and the Worldwide Fund For Nature (WWF-India).

A total of 16 teams, comprising 41 naturalists, butterfly enthusiasts and over 100 field staff from the Forest Department participated in the assessment across eight forest ranges in the core and buffer zones of MTR. Participants included volunteers from the Nilgiris, Erode, Salem, Madurai, Kancheepuram, Chennai, Pondicherry and parts of Kerala. The assessment was planned by the Forest Department with assistance from A. Pavendhan, TNBS, and D. Boominathan, landscape coordinator for WWF-India.

“All representative habitats were sampled and designed to get the maximum butterfly species diversity present. Participants were briefed on the survey methodology and safety on the inaugural meeting held on Friday, with the survey being conducted on December 24 and 25,” officials said. The survey surprised officials due to the high species count recorded within the reserve. All 175 butterfly species were classified under the butterfly families – 12 species of Swallowtails, 22 Whites and Yellows, 53 Brush-footed Butterflies, 48 Blues, two Metalmarks and 38 Skippers being recorded.

Ms. Vidhya highlighted the importance of documenting butterflies occurring within MTR as they are a critical indicator of the health of the local ecosystem. “The survey is aimed at formulating baseline data for the butterflies present in the reserve, which will be used for drawing up a specific management plan for their protection. Visitors to the reserve will also have access to more information about the nature and habitat usage in the reserve beyond mammals and the knowledge gained from such surveys will be directed to facilitate butterfly ecotourism,” she added.