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New gall midge species named after Singanallur lake

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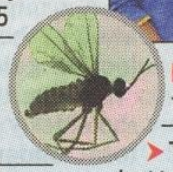
Coimbatore: In 2015, a team led by Durai Vasanthakumar, a researcher from the western regional centre of Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), spotted a small bulge on the middle vein of a leaf of Indian jujube (Ziziphus mauritiana) near Singanallur lake in the city during a field visit. It turned out to be a new gall midge species pupa.

Zootaxa, an international journal, published the research paper in March 2020, naming the species Asphondylia singanallurensis Vasanthakumar and Sharma, sp. nov.

Director of the Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding C Kunhikannan along with district forest officer D Venkatesh released the paper during a function organized by the Centre for Urban Biodiversity Conservation and Education (CUBE) on Sunday to mark World Wetlands Day.

HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

- The pupa was first spotted in an Indian jujube (Ziziphus mauritiana) leaf near Singanallur lake in the city during a field visit in 2015
- A paper was published in international journal Zootaxa in March 2020
- The insect was named Asphondylia singanallurensis Vasanthakumar and Sharma, sp. nov
- The species was identified by Vasanthakumar, Senthilkumar Palanisamy, Vinny R Peter and Radheshyam M Sharma, members of Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) and the Centre for Urban Biodiversity Conservation and Education (CUBE)
- The insect is 2mm long



NO SMALL FEAT: The research paper was released during a function on Sunday to mark World Wetlands Day

The insect is found only in the leaves of Indian jujube and only for two to three months during the rainy season starting September or October, Vasanthakumar said. "We found 20 to 30 such insects in a tree. They are 2mm long. Females would lay an egg near the middle vein of leaves and it is covered by leaf tissues, thus trapping it inside. Within five to six days, larva is hatched. After 14 to 15 days, it becomes pupa and takes another seven to eight days to become an adult when it will come out of the gall. Until it becomes an adult, it grows eating leaf tissues," he said.

While the life cycle of the male insect ends as soon as it mates, the female insect is expected to live for some more days, Vasanthakumar said. "We are yet to conduct a detailed study to understand its behavior and other features."

The team comprised Vasanthakumar, Senthilkumar Palanisamy, Vinny R Peter and Radheshyam M Sharma.

Meanwhile, four species – one spider and three insects – found along the lake are suspected to be new species.

4. News in Times of India, Coimbatore, 15.02.2021