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New butterfly species endemic to Western Ghats discovered in Karnataka

The species was first sighted in 2008, followed by an extensive research in 2021



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By Himanshu Nitnaware (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/author/himanshu-nitnaware-169360>)
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Photo: Rohit Girotra / National Centre for Biological Sciences

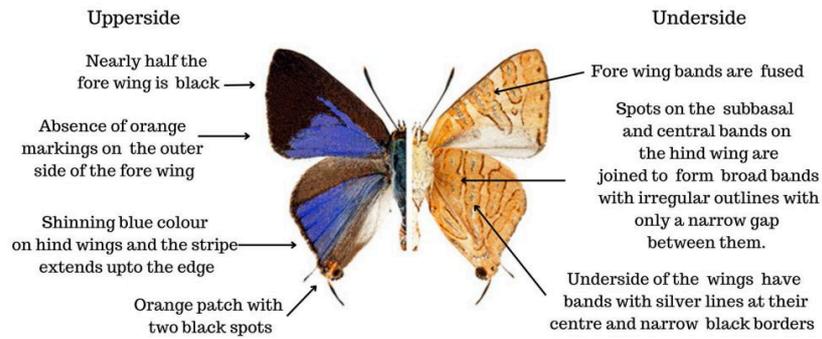
A new species of silverline butterfly has been identified in the biodiversity hotspots in India's Western Ghats and described in a new research paper.

This unique species, named *Cigaritis conjuncta* or the "conjoined silverline", was first spotted in 2008 but came under extensive research in 2021. The discovery was made by a team of scientists from the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS-TIFR) in Bengaluru, in collaboration with researchers from the Indian Foundation for Butterflies Trust.

The researchers found five male and four female specimens of the conjoined silverline butterfly in Honey valley, Kodagu district of Karnataka. They published their findings in the journal *Zootaxa*.

On the upperside, nearly half of the top wing is black, and there's a shiny blue colour on the lower wings. There's an orange patch with two black spots on the lower wings. The outer edge of the top wing doesn't have any orange markings.

On the underside, which is the side of the wings facing down, bands of colours are visible. The bands on the top wings are fused together without separation, and the lower wings have spots that are connected to form broad bands with irregular outlines. The underside also features bands with silver lines down the centre and thin black borders along the edges.



Krushnamegh Kunte, one of the authors and researchers, said in a press statement that he initially encountered and photographed this butterfly in 2008 during a field trip to Iruppu Falls in Brahmagiri Wildlife Sanctuary, but at that time, they lacked the necessary research permits for an in-depth study.

In 2021, more sightings of the butterfly prompted the research team to conduct a thorough investigation, leading to the discovery of this newly described species.

During their field research, the scientists identified 30 individuals of the conjoined silverline butterfly, which belongs to the Lycaenidae family. In India, there are 16 species of silverline butterflies, with 11 of them found in both peninsular India and Sri Lanka.

While these butterfly species are widespread in India, some are limited to the Himalayan region. The newly described conjoined silverline butterfly is only the second endemic species discovered in the Western Ghats and is primarily found in dense mid-elevation evergreen forests, indicating specialised habitat preferences.

Although the conjoined silverline appears similar to other silverline butterflies from a distance, closer examination reveals distinct wing patterns that set it apart. This unique characteristic, consisting of fused bands on the underside of the wings, led to the species being named "conjoined silverline".

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Marginal increase: There are 1,811 saltwater crocodiles in Odisha's Bhitarkanika, annual census reveals

Bhitarkanika, in the state's coastal Kendrapara district, is one of 3 'salties' strongholds in India; the Sundarbans and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands are the other two



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(<https://www.downtoearth.org>)

By Ashis Senapati (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/author/ashis-senapati-2149>)

Published: Sunday 14 January 2024



📷 A saltwater crocodile sighted in Bhitarkanika during the census. Photo provided by Ashis Senapati

The population of saltwater or estuarine crocodiles (*Crocodylus porosus*) in and around Odisha's Bhitarkanika National Park has marginally increased in 2024. There are 1,811 crocodiles in the park located in Kendrapara district, according to forest officials who conducted the annual census. Last year, the crocodiles numbered 1,793.

"We formed 22 teams in 51 segments to count estuarine crocodiles in all creeks and rivers within the park and its nearby areas. The census was conducted from January 10-12, a suitable time to count the animals owing to the peak winter, exposure of more than 50 per cent of mud banks and the lunar cycle," Sudarshan Gopinath Yadav, the divisional forest officer of Bhitarkanika National Park, told this reporter.

Bhitarkanika is the second-largest mangrove forest in India after the Sundarbans in West Bengal. Both areas are among the three strongholds of saltwater crocodiles – the largest reptiles in the world – in India, the third being the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Yadav added that the headcount drive was conducted under the supervision of wildlife personnel. The enumerators, assisted by trained local forest staff and some herpetologists including noted crocodile researcher Sudhakar Kar, covered the Bhitarkanika river system as well as innumerable creeks, water inlets and *nullahs*.

“During the census, we sighted 582 hatchlings (two feet in length), 387 yearlings (2-3 feet), 327 juveniles (3-6 feet), 167 sub-adults (6-8 feet long) and 348 adults (more than 8 feet long),” Kar said. Last year, 569 hatchlings, 388 yearlings, 325 juveniles, 166 sub-adults and 345 adult reptiles had been sighted, he added.

The results of past censuses were:

- 1,192 (in 2000)
- 1,330 (in 2001)
- 1,308 (in 2002)
- 1,342 (in 2003)
- 1,355 (in 2004)
- 1,449 (in 2005)
- 1,454 (in 2006)
- 1,482 (in 2007)
- 1,482 (in 2008)
- 1,572 (in 2009)
- 1,610 (in 2010)
- 1,654 (in 2011)
- 1,646 (in 2012)
- 1,649 (in 2013)
- 1,644 (in 2014)
- 1,665 (in 2015)
- 1,671 (in 2016)
- 1,682 (in 2017)
- 1,698 (in 2018)
- 1,742 (in 2019)
- 1,757 (in 2020)
- 1,768 (in 2021)
- 1,784 (in 2022)

Human-saltie conflict

Conflict between humans and estuarine crocodiles has been very high of late in Bhitarkanika and its nearby areas. Six persons, including a 10-year-old boy, were killed in crocodile attacks in and around the park between June and August last year.

Only adult and sub-adult crocodiles have the capacity to kill human beings. This means 515 of Bhitarkanika’s 1,811 animals are capable of attacking human beings, added Kar.

BC Choudhury, a former senior scientist at the Wildlife Institute of India in Dehradun, also noted that fatal crocodile attacks have recently been reported from the Jajpur and Bhadrak districts, around 70 to 100 kilometres away from the water bodies of Bhitarkanika.

This means that the estuarine crocodiles from Bhitarkanika have ventured beyond the boundaries of the park. It is not possible on the part of the forest officials to bring them back to

Bhitarkanika.

He said this situation was very similar to national parks near the city of Darwin in Australia's Northern Territory.

"Many crocodiles travel up to 1,800-2,000 kilometres away from these parks and the forest officials bring them back. But they again venture out and reach faraway places," Choudhury added.

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