



BUTTERFLY SPECIES DIVERSITY AND ECOLOGICAL INSIGHTS AT LOWER DIR, PAKISTAN

By

FAWAD KHAN^{1*}, SAMINA YASMIN², INAM ULLAH³, AKHTAR BADSHAH KHAN⁴, SUMBAL BIBI⁵, KEHKASHAN⁶, MAJEED ULLAH⁷, MUHAMMAD YOUNAS⁸.

^{1*}Health Department Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa

²Zoology Department Hazara University Mansehra

³5-6 Entomology Department Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa

⁴Zoology Department University of Malakand

⁷⁻⁸Department of Zoology Shaheed BB University Dir Upper



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Abstract

This work outlines the general diversity of butterflies in Lower Dir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and records an overall noteworthy assemblage of 79 species representing six families. The general survey conducted throughout different localities in the area reflects particularly high levels of diversity within the family Nymphalidae, wherein species such as Junonia orithya and Argynnis kamala have been found with both widespread and localized distributions. Record of Junonia orithya from Timergara, Khall, and Balambat and the rarity of Argynnis kamala confirm not only the earlier-recorded distribution but also extend new information on their ecological adaptability. Members of the family Pieridae were very common especially Colias erate and Eurema hecabe while Catopsilia pyranthe was uncommon which corroborates the earlier recorded distribution of the latter. Hipparchia parasites and Ypthima asterope form the record in the Satyridae family, confirming their previous distribution and rarity. The established pattern of the distribution and rarity in the Papilionidae family is shown by abundant Papilio demoleus and rare Papilio polyctor. Danaus chrysippus was found to be abundant, and this corresponds with its wide distribution in Pakistan, while the family Libytheidae was represented by the rare Libythea lepita. This study will not only enrich our understanding of butterfly fauna in Lower Dir but also integrate new species records with historical data regarding the ecological importance of the region and the need for ongoing conservation efforts.

Keywords: Butterflies, species diversity, entomological survey, Lower Dir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

INTRODUCTION

Butterflies belong to the order Lepidoptera, derived from two Greek words, i.e. "Lepis" and "Ptera". The meaning of the word "Lepis" is scale, and the meaning of "Ptera" is wings, which means the insects whose wings are covered with scales (Stroke, 1964). The order Lepidoptera is further divided into two suborders on the types of antennae and the base of wing coupling structures. Sub-order Rhopalocera (butterflies) and Heterocera (moths). In this respect, the suborder Rhopalocera has been further divided into two superfamilies: Superfamily Papilionoidea (actual butterflies) and Superfamily Hesperoidea (skippers) Ross 1965. In the superfamily Hesperoidea (skippers), the color is usually brown or orange-

brown, and the antennae are clavate but hooked and recurved apically. However, the superfamily Papilionoidea (actual butterflies) is brightly colored, and the antennae are club-shaped more or less rounded apically. Skippers are different from butterflies by darting flights. butterflies are fascinating insects. Due to their beautiful color pattern, a dramatic transformation in the life cycle, and the exciting phenomenon of mimicry and transmigration, they have acquired an uncommon status among insects (Gay et al., 1992). Most of us draw pleasure from their fantastic colors. All the butterflies, though similar in appearance, vary from one another in their characters, which may either be inborn or due to external climatic appearance. They have complete metamorphosis: egg, larva or caterpillar, pupa or chrysalis, and adult or imago.

*Corresponding Author: FAWAD KHAN..



The compound eyes of the adult butterfly are large, antennae club shaped, while long coiled proboscis is used to feed nectar. Their wings are colored and membranous with rare wing venation. The pad is present at their legs, which are typically walking type. Female butterflies usually select the proper places to deposit their eggs after fertilization. Some species lay their eggs in chains or ringlets singly or in rows or groups (Staneek, 1977). Butterflies can be easily identified. Among the species, their size is different and may range from a few millimeters to over 300 millimeters (Hassan, 1994). West pugmy blue has a minimum size of 15mm whereas the Alexandra bird has a maximum size that is 250mm (Carter 1992, Collins and Morris 1985). There are more than 28,000 species of butterflies in the world out of which approximately 80 % of butterflies are found in the tropical regions. A total number of 5,000 insect species have been reported in Pakistan among which up to 400 spp. of moths and butterflies are reported. (Khan et al. 2015).

Butterflies can be treated both as enemies and friends of man. The butterflies can relate to agriculture in three ways. Adult butterflies use flowers for nectar which also assists in pollination. Caterpillars of the butterflies are mostly herbivorous, some species are likely to nourish on carpets, crops, and clothes (Owen, 1971). It is said that their fauna exists in all parts of the world, wherever their host flowering plants are found. They are capable of colonizing even high altitudes excluding the Antarctic, Arctic, and snow and glacier-concealed mountain peaks of Mani, 1986 and Hassan, 1994. Each species possesses its geographical region and some could be endemic or cosmopolitan in distribution. Due to its geographical location at the junction of the oriental and Palaearctic zones, Pakistan possesses an interesting fauna of butterflies containing all types of habitats: mountains, forests, rivers, deserts, grasslands, tropical, subtropical, plains, etc. (Mani, 1986).

The human endeavors for increased production have rendered the butterfly fauna of the region insecure. Pakistan already has scanty natural resources. If these resources are spoiled by disturbing the habitats, many species of butterflies will lead to extinction Gay et al. 1992; Hassan, 1994.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Dir Lower

The investigation narrows down to the bumblebee populations in Lower Dir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. It is located south of District Chitral and shares borders with Swat, Afghanistan, and others. There was a princely state called Lower Dir until 1970 when it joined Pakistan. In 1996, the bifurcation of the sub-division of lower and upper Dir was carried out. The district covers an area of approximately 1,584 km², ranging from valleys to mountains and plains. It is essentially a hilly district with severe winters and aboveaverage snowfall and distinct temperature variations. The entomological survey was conducted in four tehsils, namely, Timergara, Balambat, Khall, and Arang.

Timergara: This is a central tehsil and also an important commercial hub, consisting of a combination of villages.

Collection of bumblebees was collected from 15-20 spots within seven villages.

Balambat: This region consists of both plain and mountainous areas along with riverbank soil. In this area, the survey has covered 17 villages, depicting some villages to have leishmaniasis.

Khall: Comprises mountainous terrain and fertile land. From this area, the bumblebee samples were collected from eight villages each depicting variation in building structures and biodiversity.

Collection:

The butterflies were collected using an aerial net during the daytime. The aerial net has a handle about 3 to 4 feet long, the diameter of the ring is 25 cm while the net is transparent mesh. The specimens were collected by netting in one square kilometer area from each sample site. Each site was netted for 30 – 60 minutes. Each site was sampled after an interval of 10-15 days till the end of November.

Killing and Preservation:

A killing jar containing ethyl acetate-soaked cotton swabs which are used for killing the collected specimen. After killing, with the help of a stretching board, the butterfly specimen was stretched. The specimens were first transfixed by entomological pins, passing through the thorax above. The antennae and body were straightened. Some dry specimens that are difficult to stretch were relaxed by putting them in the relaxing jar for 2-3 days before stretching. To maintain their permanent spread position, the specimens were left on the stretching board to dry at least for 4 days. Each specimen was provided with a field label. Then all the dried specimens are transferred from the stretching board to wooden boxes. Special care was taken to safeguard the specimen from museum pest attacks. To prevent the attack of ants and dampness, naphthalene balls and complex powder were sprinkled in the collection box.

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Fig. 2.1: Google Earth map of the study sites

Photography was done with a digital camera of the whole specimen body, and with the help of the microscopic camera, the important taxonomic character was captured.

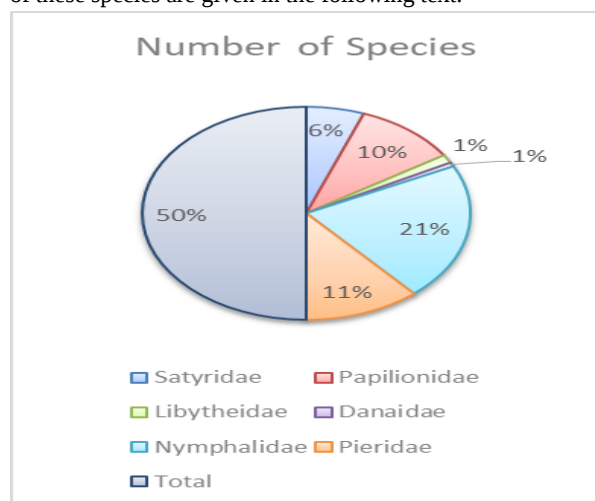
Identification:

The specimens collected were identified with the help of available literature up to the lowest possible taxa. The identification of the specimens was done through the help of

previously identified ones and those present in the National Insect Museum (NIM), NARC Islamabad. Taxonomic keys for the classification of the families, genera, and species collected were worked out for the area under study.

Depository: The identified specimens after identification were deposited in AWKUM

The survey was conducted in district Dir lower, and a total of about 150 specimens of butterflies were collected from all three tehsils of Dir lower localities. The specimens up to the species level were identified. Results showed that 79 species are occurring in these areas of 6 families, as shown in below Table No.1. Key to the classification of the species and details of these species are given in the following text.



DISCUSSION

A good diversity of butterflies was recorded during the extensive study, and a total of 79 species belonging to six families were recorded in Lower Dir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The paper will contribute considerably towards enriching the knowledge of local biodiversity as well as in comparing previous records against species found in Pakistan. Family Nymphalidae Family Nymphalidae was better represented in the study area, represented by 11 species in Lower Dir. Of these, the blue-winged *Junonia orithya* was very common in the areas of Timergara, Khall, and Balambat. This species was recorded for the first time from Karachi by Swinhoe in 1887. Reports from various regions of Pakistan prove its wide adaptability. Another common species, *Junonia almana* showed a wide distribution, which ranged from Karachi to Lahore with new records from Lower Dir. Although rare, *Junonia hierta* was present in both Timergara and Khall, which reflects its incidental occurrence in the country. The species *Argynnis kamala* was exclusively collected in Timergara, but its historical records were recorded from Chitral and Karachi, which proves that it has limited distribution within these districts. *Argynnis hyperbius* was fairly common at all the sites surveyed and appeared to be quite widely distributed. *Vanessa cardui* is a migratory species and showed up everywhere in Lower Dir, with records as farreaching as major cities in Pakistani territory. The rarer *Neptis hylas* were recorded at Timergara and Khall, with historical records extending from Chitral to Islamabad.

Hypolimnas bolina, relatively rare, at Timergara and Khall, reaffirms its scattered distribution. In contrast, *Ariadne merione* was relatively common and is widely spread over Pakistan. Family Pieridae The family Pieridae was represented by nine species. *Colias erate* and *Colias electo* were particularly ubiquitous throughout Lower Dir and ranged from Chitral to Azad Kashmir. *Catopsilia pyranthe*, flying with its characteristic greenish tint, was infrequent and sighted only at Timergara and Khall; *Catopsilia crocale* was a less common yellow butterfly recorded at Balambat. *Eurema hecabe*, another bright yellow species, was collected both in Timergara and Balambat and demonstrated a wide distribution across Pakistan. *Pontia daplidice* was particularly common throughout all the sites in Lower Dir and it has also been recorded from different other areas of Chitral and Kohat etc. *Gonepteryx rhamni* is a spring flying and recorded at Timergara and Balambat while *Pieris brassicae* was quite common and widely distributed indicating that it is adaptable to all kinds of habitats Family Satyridae A total of three species belonged to the family Satyridae. The rare species, *Hipparchia parasites*, was collected from Khall with old-time records from Chitral and elsewhere. *Lethe rohria* was collected in Timergara and Khall and is a relatively uncommon species that had been previously recorded from Islamabad and Murree hills. *Ypthima asterope* was relatively common and was collected in Timergara and Balambat, reflecting a wide distribution in Pakistan. Family Papilionidae The Papilionidae family was represented by four species. *Papilio demoleus* was very abundant in Lower Dir, and records extended across Pakistan. *Papilio polyctor* was rare, collected from Khall, and historical records were reported from hilly areas like Chitral and Dir Lower. *Papilio polytes* and *Papilio mechaon* were also rare; observed in Timergara and Khall respectively, and their distributions were limited.

Family Danaidae This small family was represented by *Danaus chrysippus*, which was abundant in Timergara and Balambat. It has a wide distribution in Pakistan, extending to other parts also; thus, indicating its ecological success.

Family Libytheidae the Libytheidae family was represented by the *Libythea lepita*, which was not abundant and was collected from Timergara and Khall. Previous records from Chitral and Dir Lower give an insight into its distribution.

Generally speaking, the paper gives an overview of butterfly diversity in Lower Dir with the addition of new records and confirmation of many species that belong to different families. The study develops an understanding of local biodiversity and, at the same time, increases knowledge about the distribution and adaptiveness of various butterfly species in Pakistan.

Family Nymphalidae: Indeed, the survey highlighted remarkable diversity in the family Nymphalidae, which included the species *Junonia orithya* and *Argynnis kamala*, whose distribution and abundance were in congruence with historical records from many parts of the Pakistani districts. *Junonia orithya* has been recorded previously from Karachi and other cities due to its adaptable and widespread range and was reported widely within the Lower Dir District. The

Argynnis kamala was exclusively collected in the Timergara District, reflecting its already-known localized distribution. The resultant distribution patterns for Junonia almana, Argynnis hyperbius, and Vanessa cardui further confirm the established range across Pakistan mentioned in past studies by Ali (1990) and Khan et al. (2015). Results for Neptis hylas, Hypolimnas bolina, and Ariadne merione further confirm their recorded presence and rarity from earlier surveys, reinforcing the continuity of butterfly distributions reported from historical surveys.

Family Pieridae: The range within the Pieridae family, comprising Colias erate and Eurema hecabe, boasts their long-established presence and distribution patterns throughout Pakistan, which were recorded in previous studies. Similarly, the abundance of Colias erate and Colias electo in Lower Dir agreed with its known distribution from Chitral to Azad Kashmir. Contrariwise, Catopsilia pyranthe was rare, agreeing with the population presence being reported earlier as smaller within Chitral. The high abundance of Pontia daplidice, and the extensive distributions of Gonepteryx rhamni and Pieris brassicae confirm their common country status in the literature, hence it assured the authenticity of the survey result.

Family Satyridae: Hipparchia parasites and Ypthima asterope were the species recorded during this survey, the distributions of which agree with the earlier recordings. Rarity in Hipparchia parasites and abundance in Ypthima asterope in Lower Dir agree with previous records for Chitral and Islamabad; hence, this is in correlation with the historical trend of these butterflies. Findings for Lethe rohria also agree with the earlier records, which confirm its relatively rare presence in particular areas.

Family Papilionidae: The recorded abundance of Papilio demoleus as very abundant in Lower Dir corroborates its wide distribution in Pakistan as stated in the literature. The records

of Papilio polyctor, Papilio polytes, and Papilio mechaon as rare species agree with prior knowledge regarding their restrictive occurrence in hilly Chitral and Dir Lower. These records thus further establish the established pattern of rarity and distribution of these species.

Family Danaidae: The abundance of Danaus chrysippus in Lower Dir further corroborates its wide distribution reported across Pakistan, which has established the species as ecologically successful and widespread.

Family Libytheidae: The sighting of Libythea lepta in Lower Dir was rarely recorded, which also comes from previous records in Chitral and Dir Lower, further establishing its sporadic distribution and consistency with earlier records. This study further expands the knowledge of butterfly fauna in Lower Dir by amalgamating new records with previous knowledge to present an overall regional biodiversity.

SUMMARY

The research project was related to the diversity and distribution of butterflies in District Dir Lower, reporting a total number of 79 species that belonged to six families. Collection and preservation technique was done in different localities for the specimen to be identified in detail. The result indicated that the butterfly fauna in the area is rich and the family Nymphalidae is the most represented, with the genera Junonia, Argynnis, and Vanessa. Other families included Pieridae, which contains such genera as Colias and Eurema; Papilionidae, represented by species of the genus Papilio; and smaller families like Satyridae, Libytheidae, and Danaidae. The order of Lepidoptera for this study provided information with detailed descriptions, images, distribution data, and flight seasonality in pointing out the rich diversity of butterflies within this region. The study underlines the ecological value of butterflies and the need for conservation conducive to environmental threats.

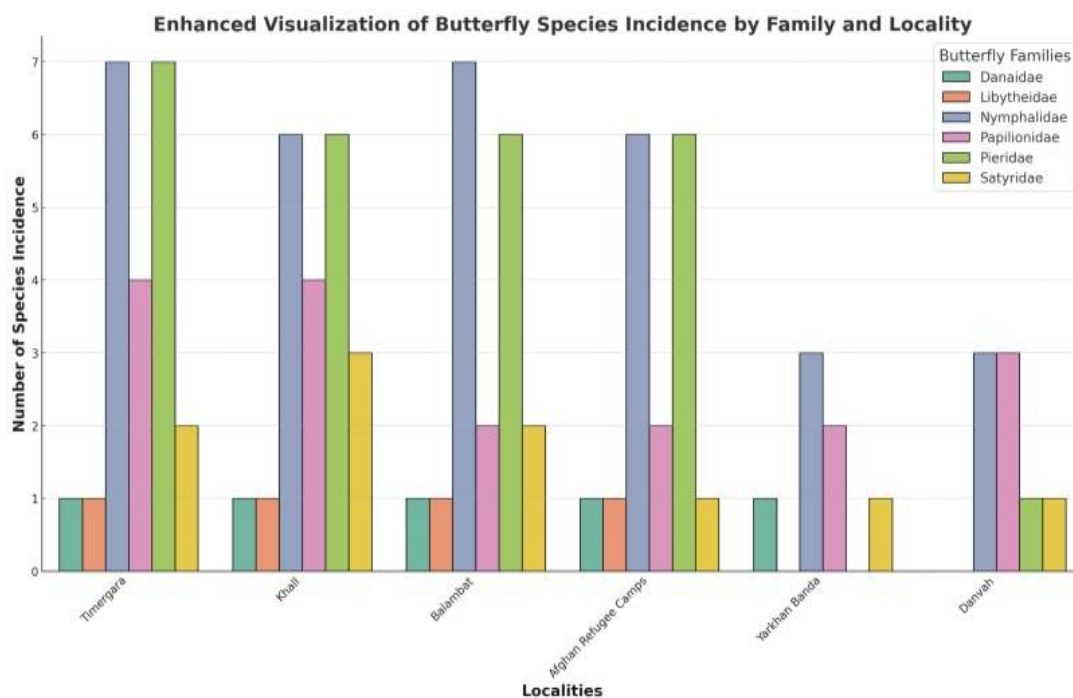
Table 1 Comprehensive Survey of Butterfly Species Diversity in Lower Dir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

Family	Genus	Species	Common Name	Appearance	Wingspan	Activity Months	Localities
Papilionidae	<i>Papilio</i>	Papilio demoleus	Lime Butterfly	Females: black with yellow specks and spots; males: similar but less pronounced	80-110 mm	April to August	Timergara, Khall, Balambat, Afghan Refugee Camps (1 and 2), Yarkhan Banda,
							Danvah, Siar, Saddo, Sikaolae

Pieridae	Danaidae	Libytheidae			Satyridae				
<i>Pontia</i>	<i>Danaus</i>	<i>Libythia</i>	<i>Lethe</i>	<i>Ypthima</i>	<i>Hipparchia</i>				
Pontia daplidace	Danaus chrysippus	Libythia lepita	Lethe rohria	Ypthima asterope	Hipparchia parasitas	Papilio mechaon	Papilio polytes	Papilio polycctor	
Bath White	Plain Tiger	Common Beak	Common Tree Brown	African Ringlet	White-edged Rock Brown	Mechaon Butterfly	Common Marmon	Common Peacock	
Both sexes: distinctive black	Females: black forewings and tawny hindwings with black spots; males are similar but without sex marks	Females: dark brown with orange-yellow streaks and dark spots	Females: brown with white spots and oblique discal band; hindwings with ocellar spots	Both sexes: brown with ocelli and fringed hindwings	Females: dark brown with white border and ocelli; underside with larger ocelli and stripes	Females: yellow scaling on forewings; hindwings with red tornal spots and slender tail	Females: black with light brown flash; hindwings with yellow and reddish-yellow marks	Females: dark green with scent strips; forewings with narrow band, hindwings with blue-green patch	
40-50 mm	70-80 mm	35-43 mm	60-70 mm	40-50 mm	65-70 mm	66-75 mm	100-110 mm	100-115 mm	
April to August	April to August	March to August	April to July	May to August	May to July	May to August	May to August	March to August	
Timergara, Khall,	Timergara, Balambat, Afghan Refugee Camps (1 and 2), Yarkhan Banda	Timergara, Khall, Balambat	Timergara, Khall, Balambat	Timergara, Balambat, Khall, Afghan Refugee Camps (1 and 2), Yarkhan Banda	Khall, Danvah, Siar	Timergara, Khall, Danvah	Timergara, Khall, Afghan Refugee Camps (1 and 2), Yarkhan Banda	Timergara, Khall, Danvah, Siar	

[illegible]

							Nymphalidae
							<i>Argynnis</i>
Vanessa indica	Vanessa cardui	Junonia orithya	Junonia hierta	Junonia almana	Argynnis kamala		Argynnis hyperbius
Indian Red Admiral	Painted Lady	Blue Pansy	Yellow Pansy	Peacock Pansy	Common Silver Trip		Indian Fritillary
Females: dark brown forewings and red hindwings with black spots	Females: reddishyellow forewings and olive-brown hindwings	Females: dark forewing and blue hindwing	Males: yellow with black borders and blue patches	Females: orangeyellow with dark bands and ocelli	Golden yellow with black spots and transverse lines		Females: dark brown with blue band and white spots
52-60 mm	54-64 mm	40-50 mm	45-55 mm	60-65 mm	50-55 mm		50-60 mm
February to May	March to July	February to October	April to November	February to September	March to July		March to August
Timergara, Khall, Balambat, Afghan Refugee Camps (1 and 2)	Timergara, Khall, Balambat, Afghan Refugee Camps (1 and 2)	Timergara, Khall, Balambat, Afghan Refugee Camps (1 and 2)	Timergara, Balambat	Timergara, Khall, Balambat, Afghan Refugee Camps (1 and 2), Yarkhan Banda	Timergara, Khall, Balambat, Afghan Refugee Camps (1 and 2)	2)	Timergara, Khall, Balambat, Afghan Refugee Camps (1 and 2)



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