

Hazards of butterfly collecting – Tracking down a *Cymothoe* – Oban Hills, Nigeria, 1995

We left the little village of Mkpot early one morning in late March 1995. It was to be the “swanwalk” of a month in the Oban Hills Division of the Cross River National Park in eastern Nigeria. During the six days at Mkpot I had chalked up nearly 300 species of butterflies in what must have been one of the best entomological week’s of my life.

We had entered Mkpot by the southern route, a rugged 23km trek. We were now heading north to Itaka, another 23km. Now, 23km may not seem like much, but in a tropical climate when doubling back to collect butterflies on a rough track, it is a good seven-hour walk. Fortunately the Oban Hills are so pristine that you can have a refreshing drink from any of the streams or rivers that have to be forded on the way.

Butterflies were not quite as numerous on the walk out as they had been around Mkpot, though several new to Nigeria were taken, the most interesting of which was *Euphaedra imitans* Holland. Instead of having the usual green shades of the *Euphaedra* Hübner it is black with red and white markings, being an excellent mimic of highly toxic day-flying moths. Not just an excellent mimic in terms of colour pattern, mind you, but also in terms of behaviour, which differs from other non-mimetic members of the genus. OK . . . that is my subjective judgment, and I would actually like to quantify it by videos, but please take my word for it.

After five hours of walking we exited the national park proper and started tramping through cocoa-plantations and open agricultural lands. This is a double nuisance: (1) the number of interesting butterflies drops precipitously; and (2) the temperature notches up another five degrees. An hour later we reached a lovely little forest in very good condition. Just where our by now fairly substantial path joined another substantial path I caught a splendid large orange-yellow *Cymothoe* that I could not recognise. A few minutes later my assistant, Emmanuel Bebiem, arrived, having caught what seemed to be the female. Problem! We needed a series of this thing, but we also needed to be in Itaka by 1600 hours to be sure of arranging accommodation and a boat out the next day. This gave us just over half-an-hour, but no more specimens of the *Cymothoe* were seen.

Next day, back at base camp in Calabar it became clear that the species was new to Nigeria, and there was nothing resembling it in D’Abrera’s book on Afrotropical butterflies. New species? Surely not! Beautiful, larger than any British butterfly . . . too much to hope for.

Nothing similar was in the collections of the Natural History Museum, London. Nothing similar was in the Musée Royal d’Afrique Centrale in Tervuren, Brussels, nor in the Allyn Museum in Sarasota. There were none in the collection of my friend Steve Collins in Nairobi – whose collection of African butterflies is beginning to approach that of the largest public

collections. None of my correspondents with knowledge of Cameroun had a clue. Nothing like it in the pictures in Seitz.

I returned to Nigeria in November/December. Emmanuel Bebiem had sharpened his skills with a net, and I was also joined by Peter Namakana Walwanda, an ace collector for Steve Collins. We went back to Mkpot, where we had an even better week than last time – three good nets! The total for two weeks in Mkpot rose to nearly 400 species.

We headed for Itaka at the crack of dawn. I wanted to have three hours in the small forest just beyond the park limits. On the way out we caught *E. imitans* in exactly the same spot as in March. Was this an omen? I knew we had reached the exact spot when I saw the merging of the two tracks. At that very moment, I took a female of the desired booty . . . just where I caught the male nine months earlier. “Well guys, it’s here! . . . let’s get going!”. We criss-crossed the area for three hours. None were seen. We took a rest. I set out first. While the others were getting up, a large butterfly passed me. A male *Cymothoe* flew towards Peter and Emmanuel, an easy catch. With a sickening crunch, their nets intermeshed as they both struck on the narrow path, and the prize flew off. They were suitably dejected, though basically lacking in culpability.

Back in London, a small footnote in Arnold Schultze’s (1920) splendid report on the Africa-expedition led by Adolf Friedrichs, Herzog zu Mecklenburg in 1910/1911, gave the final clue. It might not be a new species, it might be *Cymothoe hesiodina* Schultze, 1908. I rushed to the Royal Entomological Society to copy Schultze’s paper. And sure enough . . . through the meticulous German description gradually emerged my male.

My species was not new to science. Schultze personally caught the single male holotype on the Upper Cross River in Cameroun, just over the Cameroun border, not far from mine. The species has never been illustrated, and the female was unknown. But Schultze’s type was destroyed in the firestorms in Hamburg during WWII, and my male and two females seem to be the only ones now known. So here it is – yet another scoop for the *Entomologist’s Record and Journal of Variation* – the male (Plate F, Fig. 3) and the previously unknown female (Plate F, Fig. 4) of *Cymothoe hesiodina*.— TORBEN B. LARSEN, 358 Coldharbour Lane, London SW9 8PL.

Stolen cabinet drawers

While I can well believe that the thief who stole a cage containing several hundred stick insects from the Department of Zoology here in Cambridge many years ago may well have been an entomologist, perhaps a dealer intending to offer them for sale, I am of the opinion that cabinet drawer contents, be they microlepidoptera or even a valuable Large Copper, are of



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