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### **Hazards of butterfly collecting — Nigeria 1989**

I shall never forget 11.vi.1967. I was seated on a dilapidated VeloSolex moped kindly loaned to me by a member of the Danish Volunteer Service who was on home leave. I was chugging along the Agege Motor Road, an hour's drive from my parents' house in Lagos. It was imperative to find a good butterfly place within striking distance of town. I did not have a driving license at the time, and in any case my father was deeply possessive of the car.

Four miles north of Agege, after a giant church, a promising road led into the secondary forest, mainly consisting of cola-nut and cocoa plantations, with open spaces of newly cleared ground of nearly virgin forest, too — *ju-ju* — sacred to the ancestors. And there were lots, and lots, and lots of butterflies.

During the next three months I visited and revisited the locality. There were always new things to be found. Two colleagues in Lagos, Michael Cornes and John Riley, began accompanying me from time to time. We discovered that the small river running through the place probably provided a band of riverine forest with contact to the Ilaro Forest Reserve much further north, the closest intact rainforest to Lagos.

I went back to Lagos for another three months in 1969. The 4 m. NW of Agege locality was still splendid. In the intervening years Cornes and Riley had revisited the site and kept meticulous records. During my three months in Nigeria in 1969, hundreds of net-days were consecrated on the locality. Every visit turned up new things. All were recorded in the card index that my two friends maintained. And they continued to visit. I paid brief visits to Nigeria in 1970, 1971 and 1972. On each I managed yet a visit to Agege — one or two new species were always found.

In 1978, after much additional work by Cornes and Riley, we sat down and consolidated all the records for publication (1980. *J. Res. Lepid.*, **18**(1): 4-23), including two more gained by me on a brief sentimental visit to the locality. To our surprise the total came to 376 species, one of the largest numbers recorded in a limited locality anywhere outside of the Amazon area, and nearly half of all species ever recorded in Nigeria west of the Niger River.



In 1981 I spent a couple of hours at Agege. It was more or less unchanged, but there were ominous signs. Survey teams were mapping the area. Still, I managed to see more than 100 species and to get yet another species new to the locality, as well as a statistically significant set of observations on the delightful Lycaenid, *Oxylides faunas*. This is a small butterfly whose underside hindwings carry a wonderful false head, intended to make predators attack the wrong end of the butterfly. This particular one has the added twist of turning 180 degrees in the air a fraction of a second before landing, thus adding to the deception.

It was only in March 1989 that I was able to revisit the locality. Alas, it was no more. Jerry built housing was everywhere. Only along the small river were trees still to be found, though a surprising number of butterflies were clinging on by the skin of their probosces. I found the little pool on whose banks my brother and I had once been engaged in serious conversation suggesting that we should get ourselves a Nigerian wife — big lads like us still unmarried, with no children! ! ! Here I had tied a net with vines to a four metre stick, trying to capture a rare species of *Epitola* from a tall palm, in front of a rapt audience of market women bringing *kola* nuts to Agege. Their cheers, when the contraption crashed to earth with the precious booty inside, still rang in my ears (as described in a previous instalment these same women had seen me ignominiously strip in public to rid myself of hordes of driver ants (*Ent. Rec.* 92: 865-87)).

But there is not much point in being sentimental. Lagos has grown from a small hamlet of a few thousand people to a conurbation of more than 15 million in less than a century. It has tripled since I paid my first visit in 1967. Well, Agege is gone. Sentimentality aside, I can live with that. After all, Agege was on the fringes of one of the most vibrant megapolises in the world. I do have problems living with the fact that in a few years there will be no "Ageges" left, unless conservation efforts manage to harness a level of political will and administrative skill that is not evident today. — TORBEN B. LARSEN, 358 Coldharbour Lane, London SW9 8PL.

**A pale ochreous form of *Herminia tarsipennalis* Treischke, the Fan-foot (Lep.: Noctuidae), in Dumfries.**

From 1985 to 1988 several specimens of *H. tarsipennalis* were caught in the Rothamsted Insect Survey light trap at Mabie, Dumfries (Site No. 454, OS grid ref. NX951 707). These records in themselves are important as the distribution of this species in northern England and Scotland is poorly known. However, the morphology of the individuals caught at Mabie makes the captures even more noteworthy. Rather than the usual leaden colour of typical English specimens, the Mabie individuals are sandy ochreous brown, reminiscent of a pale *Paracolax derivalis* Hübner. No specimens of the type have so far been caught in the trap. Although not mentioned by Skinner (1984), Heath and Emmet (1983) state that a





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