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11. A NEW RECORD OF LARVAL HOST PLANT OF TAWNY COSTER *ACRAEA VIOLAE* (FABRICIUS)

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Tawny Coster *Acraea violae* (Fabricius) belonging to Family Nymphalidae can be easily identified by its slow fluttering flight (Wynter-Blyth 1957) and is fairly common at lower Bengal plains (Kehimkar 2008). On September 07, 2009, on a sunny morning, while walking through an abandoned rail track near a small village – Belun, Burdwan district (location: 23° 41.568' N; 88° 04.459' E); altitude: 12 m above msl) West Bengal, India, dozens of Tawny Coster larvae of different instars were spotted creeping on the railway tracks. After close observation they were found feeding on a small herb called 'Spade Flower' or 'Pink Ladies Slipper' *Hybanthus enneaspermus* (L.) F. Muell (= *Ionidium suffruticosum* Ging) of Family Violaceae (Paria 2005). The herb grows up to a height of 60 cm and has pink-purple spade-shaped solitary flowers. The plant is well-distributed throughout India. Common Hindi and Bengali names of this plant are 'Ratanpurush' and 'Nunbora' respectively. The known larval host plants of Tawny Coster are *Passiflora foetida*, *P. edulis*, *P. subpeltata*, *Adenia hondala* (Family Passifloraceae), and *Aposora lindleyana* (Family Euphorbiaceae) (Kunte 2000; Robinson *et al.* 2001; Kehimkar 2008), which are mostly climbers. But record of *Hybanthus enneaspermus* (L.) F. Muell as larval host plant for this butterfly has not been documented earlier. It indicates the diversification of known larval host plant for Tawny Coster.



Fig 1: Caterpillar of *Acraea violae* (Fabricius) feeding on the leaves of *Hybanthus enneaspermus* (L.) F. Muell

This new source of food for the larva will help to strengthen the chance of survival of this species in the wild. It may also lead to a record of range extension of this butterfly, where these plants are found in abundance.

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