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Journal of Threatened Taxa

The international journal of conservation and taxonomy

www.threatenedtaxa.org

ISSN 0974-7907 (Online) | ISSN 0974-7893 (Print)

NOTE

RECENT SIGHTINGS OF KAISER-I-HIND *TEINOPALPUS IMPERIALIS* HOPE, 1843 (LEPIDOPTERA: TEINOPALPANI) FROM MANIPUR, INDIA

Baleshwor Soibam

26 June 2016 | Vol. 8 | No. 6 | Pp. 8930–8933
10.11609/jott.2871.8.6.8930-8933



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ISSN 0974-7907 (Online)
ISSN 0974-7893 (Print)

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Kaiser-I-Hind *Teinopalpus imperialis* Hope, 1843 is one of the most elusive swallowtail butterflies, with about a 90–120 mm wingspan. It occurs in Darjeeling, Sikkim, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya in India, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, southern China, Vietnam and Laos (Wynter-Blyth 1957; Kehimker 2008; Savela 2011; Inayoshi 2012). Found at high elevation mountains between 1828–3048 m in well wooded areas. The flight is strong and rapid. The butterfly keeps to the top of trees and is therefore difficult to capture. It was once plentiful in the Khasi Hills, near Cherrapunje (Antram 1924). The species is rare (Evans 1932; Talbot 1939). It is represented by three subspecies: *Teinopalpus imperialis imperialis* Hope, 1843 - Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya; *T. imperialis himalaicus* Rothschild, 1898 - Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, West Bengal; *T. imperialis imperatrix* de Nicéville, 1899 - northern Burma southwards to Ataran River (Talbot 1939; Varshney & Smetacek 2015), southern China, Vietnam and Laos (Savela 2011; Inayoshi 2012). As per Smetacek (pers. comm. April 2016), the subspecies *imperialis* and *himalaicus* occurs only within the India subregion. The subspecies *himalaicus* is different from *imperialis* only in the females. upper hindwing (Uph) grey, discal area generally paler than *imperialis*, posteriorly more extended yellow. Uph discal black lunules thinner, a few black scales between veins 5 and 6.

The species was locally common 60 years ago in Meghalaya, but probably extirpated due to habitat

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loss and the export business of the specimen as trophies. “Obtainable at Laitryngew and Laitlyngdoh and neighbourhood on the Cherrapunje Road on fine days in May and early June especially on the bare tops of the hills which have trees on their lower slopes. They fly from dawn till 10 o’clock after which they retire to tree tops. Males occasionally settle on stones and are easily taken; females are rather rare. The butterfly is confined to a particular area in Khasi Hills, it provides export business to professionals, which may cause its extinction” (Parsons & Cantile 1948). “Occurs very commonly in the Manipur Hills at a high elevation. A few females were taken at Koubru Peak between May and July. The spring females are somewhat smaller than those occurring in rains” (Tytler 1915).

The species has not been photographed in the field from India till date. A dead specimen of the species was photographed from northern Sikkim by Usha Lachungpa during September 2007 which confirms the presence of the species in northeastern India (<http://www.flutters.org/home/html/photos.php?level=picture&id=832>).

Later, the sighting of Kaiser-I-Hind (*Teinopalpus*

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11609/jott.2871.8.6.8930-8933> | ZooBank: urn:lsid:zoobank.org:pub:A429A35D-DCD2-478C-A318-3F80869C2C0E

Editor: Anonymity requested.

Date of publication: 26 June 2016 (online & print)

Manuscript details: Ms # 2871 | Received 27 December 2015 | Final received 06 May 2016 | Finally accepted 09 June 2016

Citation: Soibam, B. (2016). Recent sightings of Kaiser-I-Hind *Teinopalpus imperialis* Hope, 1843 (Lepidoptera: Teinopalpani) from Manipur, India. *Journal of Threatened Taxa* 8(6): 8930–8933; <http://dx.doi.org/10.11609/jott.2871.8.6.8930-8933>

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Funding: Self-funded.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no competing interests.

Acknowledgements: A big thanks to UFO (Universal Friendship Organization) of Langthabal- Phuramakhong branch for guiding me on the trip. I would also like to thank Harmenn Huidrom for sharing the valuable photo. Finally, I am grateful to Mr. Monsoon Jyoti Gogoi, (PhD scholar Department of Ecology, Assam University, Silchar) and Mr. Jatishwor Singh Irungbam (PhD Scholar, Faculty of Science, Department of Zoology, University of South Bohemia Ceske Budejovice, Czech Republic) for helping me with publishing this article.

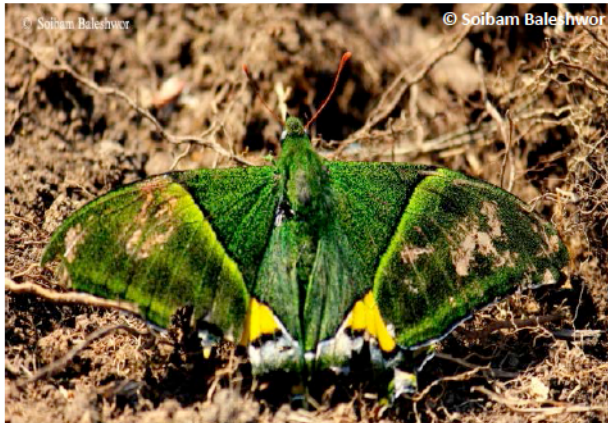


Image 1. Upper side of *Teinopalpus imperialis* from Koubru Peak



Image 2. Underside side of *Teinopalpus imperialis* from Koubru Peak



Image 3. Underside of *Teinopalpus imperialis* (male) from Koubru

imperialis) (Images 1 & 2) from Koubru peak (25°03'45.33"N & 93°52'22.81"E, at an altitude of 2516.73m) (Images 4 & 5) on 15 April 2014 confirms the continued presence of the species in Manipur State. The sighting of this Red Listed Near Threatened (NT) species (Gimenez 1996) from Koubru Peak is the pride of Manipur State. Later in the same month on 27 April 2014, from the same locality, Harmenn Huidrom also photographed a healthy male of Kaiser-I-Hind *Teinopalpus imperialis* (Image 3). Thus, it seems that the species have inhabitat at Koubru peak and its vicinity range in the recent times. Jordan in Wynter-Blyth (1957) mentioned that the species is very local and only occurs at medium and higher elevations in the mountains (1,800–3,000 m) in

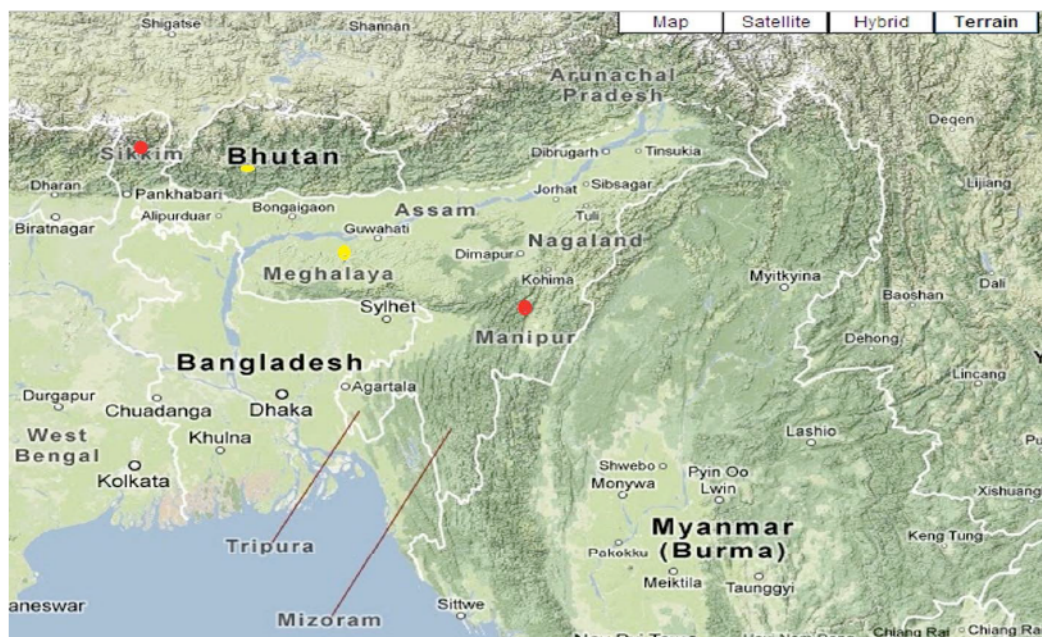


Image 4. Map showing the presence of *Teinopalpus imperialis* in northeastern India (red dot - recent sighted place, yellow dot - literature place)



Image 5. The sighted location at Koubru Peak, Senapati District, Manipur



Image 6. Victims of wild fire



Image 7. Habitat of *Teinopalpus imperialis* at Koubru Peak



Image 8. Setting of wildfire on the other range from Koubru



Image 9. Burning down of a lifeless tree at Koubru

wooded areas. They best prefer localities with open places on the tops of mountains surrounded by forest. The same habitat was found at the top of Koubru Peak where the species was sighted. At the lower elevations the mountain has good forest, but the species was not

encountered during the survey.

Koubru mountain is highly disturbed through anthropogenic disturbance like logging, agriculture, wildfire for the cultivation of crops by nearby local tribal communities, and is the major threat to the existence of



Image 10. Logging practice taking up by local community at Koubru



Image 11. Employing buffalo for extraction of timber from Koubru

the species in the area (Images 6–11). Timely consultation with the concerned authority and community about the existence of this magnificent butterfly species in the area and protection of their habitat is needed to support the existence of this species in the area.

Further, an effort should be created for conserving the Kaiser-I-Hind and its habitat to reestablish the population of this rare species in Manipur. The tradition of setting of wildfires and deforestation in the mountains ranges and hills should be stopped by making the local communities aware of the presence of this endangered butterfly in the locality through awareness campaigns. Encouraging the planting of trees like Campbell's Magnolia *Magnolia campbellii* (Magnoliaceae) and Nepalese Paper Plant *Daphne bholua* (Thymelaeaceae) (Kehimkar 2008; Khanal et al. 2013) which are the known host plants for the larvae of the species in the mountains will help the species' population and habitat to reestablish.

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ISSN 0974-7907 (Online); ISSN 0974-7893 (Print)

June 2016 | Vol. 8 | No. 6 | Pages: 8849–8952
Date of Publication: 26 June 2016 (Online & Print)
DOI: 10.11609/jott.2016.8.6.8849-8952

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