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Butterflies have been one of the most studied group of insects and have received reasonable scientific attention throughout the world since the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Al Haidar 2014). Around 19,238 species (Heppner 1998) of butterflies have been estimated around the world of which 800–900 species are estimated from Bhutan (van der Poel & Wangchuk 2007). The butterfly diversity in Bhutan is fairly well documented. Several naturalists and researchers from pockets of Bhutan have studied and published guide books and papers (e.g., van der Poel & Wangchuk 2007; Singh 2012; Wangdi et al. 2012; Wangdi & Sherab 2012 a,b; Singh & Chib 2014, Nidup et al. 2014; Nidup 2015); however, till date there is no compressive checklist of butterflies for Bhutan.

The Nymphalidae butterfly *Acraea violae* Fabricius (1775) was encountered on 12 August 2014 along the southern foothills of Bhutan at a place called Jigmeling under Sarpang District at 26°54'N & 90°22'E, 434m (Fig. 1). My four year old son and I saw this species when we were out on our regular butterfly exploration on a bright sunny day at around 10:00hr (GMT+ 06:00) on a flower of *Bidens pilosa* (Images 1,2). I managed to take a few photographs with my camera Cannon 60D with 18-270 mm lens. Till date this species has not been reported from Bhutan. Even the recent study carried out by Nidup

## A FIRST SIGHTING OF TAWNY COSTER *ACRAEA VIOLAE* FABRICIUS, 1775 (LEPIDOPTERA: NYMPHALIDAE) FROM THE SOUTHERN FOOTHILLS OF BHUTAN

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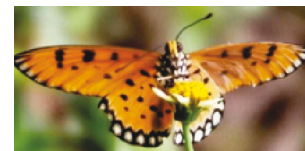
et al. (2014) and Nidup (2015) in the southern foothills of Bhutan in Royal Manas National Park do not mention the presence of this species. Kehimkar (2008) has stated in his book “The Book of Indian Butterflies” that this species is common in the region but this contradicts Saji et al. (2014) who indicate that this species is rarely found in northern and northeastern as compared to southern India. Further, Kehimkar (2008) does not mention the time, place or how he encountered this species in Bhutan. Kanwar (2014) has stated that the Tawny Coster is a rare species in Chandigarh. Apart from Bhutan this species is distributed in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (Kehimkar 2008).

This species is found flying in shrub land and edges of the forest up to 1500m above the sea level in the Himalaya (Haribal 1992; Kehimkar 2008). The adults visit flowers for nectar and are sluggish and gentle



DATA DEFICIENT	LEAST CONCERN	NEAR THREATENED	VULNERABLE	ENDANGERED	CRITICALLY ENDANGERED	EXTINCT IN THE WILD	EXTINCT
DD	LC	NT	VU	EN	CR	EW	EX

*Acraea violae*  
Tawny Coster



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Figure 1. Red dot on map of Bhutan showing the location where Tawny Coster was encountered.



Image 1. Open canopy habitat occupied by *Eupatorium odoratum*, where Tawny Coster was encountered.



Image 2. Tawny Coster *Acraea violae*

on their wings which measure about 53–64 mm. This species is locally common (Kehimkar 2008) in west and south Sikkim (Haribal 1992). The species is on the wing throughout the year in forest, open country, scrubby grassland and flower gardens. This is a colony forming species and even in marginal habitats it is uncommon to see less than half a dozen butterflies (Hoskins 2015) but in this encounter I saw a single butterfly hovering from flower to flower of *Bidens pilosa*. Larva feeds on *Aporosa lindleyana*, *Passiflora edulis*, *P. foetida*, and *P. subpeltata* (Haribal 1992; Kehimkar 2008)

It was observed that there was some degree of

cannibalism within the species such as a larva being observed feeding on a pupa (Haribal 1992). The adult butterfly is unpleasant to predators. The female develops a hard pouch at the abdominal tip after mating to prevent further mating (Kehimkar 2008).

**Discussion:** Despite being a part of Nymphalidae, the richest family having around 6000 species, *Acraea violae* is rarely seen along the southern foothills of Bhutan and the presence of this species was unknown until date. This species is also found in the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and Uttarakhand

but rarely towards the north or the northeast of India (Saji et al. 2014). It was also not reported from along the Indo-Bhutan border. The sighting along the southern foothills of Bhutan adds a new species to the list of butterflies of Bhutan. However, further study is required to understand the distribution and habitat of this species.

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