

Assessment of Lepidoptera pollinator species diversity data in East Africa

Butterfly Fact Sheet

Duncan Mwinzi, Esther Kioko, Alex Mutinda, Augustine Luanga, and Oliver Cramswel Genga

Invertebrate Zoology Section, Zoology Department, National Museums of Kenya

FOREST KING CHARAXES

The Forest king charaxes belongs to a family of butterflies known as Nymphalidae (brush footed butterflies with reduced and modified forelegs). The scientific name for Forest king charaxes is *Charaxes xiphares desmondi*. The species experiences pronounced sexual dimorphism. Males are generally blue in colour have a light blue band on the upper side of the hind wing. The females is dark brown with discontinuous white apical band on the forewing. Female hind wing has light ochreous band. Caterpillars of this butterfly feed on Euphorbiaceae (*Drypetes*)



Figure 1. Female forest king charaxes (left) and a male forest king charaxes (right)

Wingspan

Males 6.5–8.0 cm

Females 7.0–9.5 cm

Distribution

The species inhabits semi-montane forests between 1000m to 3000. The species is only found in Taita Hills. Found within the indigenous forest fragments in Taita Hills

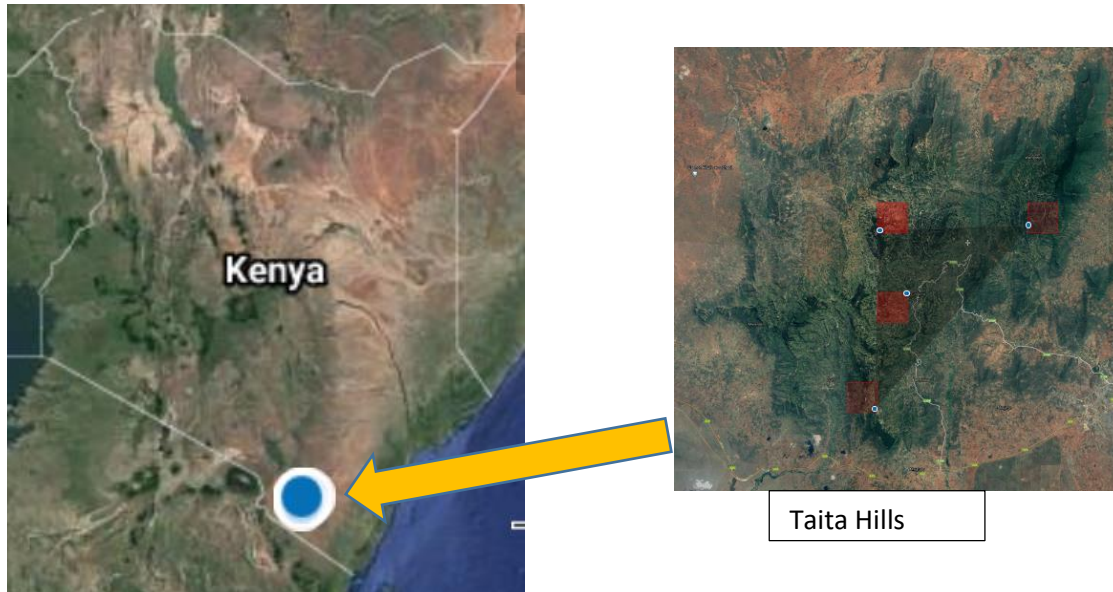


Figure 2. Map of Kenya showing the distribution of *Forest king charaxes*

Habits

Males defend territories from perches on twigs of trees on forest edges and in forest clearings.

Females often fly rapidly along forest margins and along forest roads

Both sexes come to fermenting fruit

Feed from sap oozing from wounds in trees.

Threats to Forest king charaxes

- Deforestation and invasion of forested areas for agricultural activities.
- Prolonged droughts due to Climate change
- Clearings of the forest edges where the adult forage
- Use of chemical pesticides on farmlands

Species conservation strategies

- Awareness creation to the local communities on importance of the butterflies in the ecosystem
- Reduce or eliminate the use of chemical pesticides.
- Promotion of forest conservation as the habitat of the species
- Establishment of tree nurseries for butterfly host plants
- Promotion of establishment of pollinator gardens within the homesteads and institutions to act as foraging habitat for butterflies



Figure 3. Members of Dawida Biodiversity Conservation Centre establishing a pollinator garden

The Project “Assessment of Lepidoptera pollinator species diversity data in East Africa” is a regional collaboration of partners, National Museums of Kenya, Makerere University and National Museum of Tanzania working together to enhance the understanding of butterflies and moths and other insect pollinators in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.

For more information please contact the project PI
Dr Esther N. Kioko
Zoology Department, National Museums of Kenya
P.O Box 40658-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
Email. Ekioko@museums.or.ke