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Cover: A female Javan Leopard Panthera pardus melas in rehabilitation phase at Cikananga Wildlife Center. © Yayasan Cikananga Konservasi Terpadu.
Two new records of Lilac Silverline *Apharitis lilacinus* (Lepidoptera: Lycaenidae) from northeastern India

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Abstract: Lilac Silverline *Apharitis lilacinus* is a butterfly native to southern, northeastern, & northern India and northern Myanmar. In northeastern India it was known from a single record: H. Stevens from N. Lakhimpur, Assam in 1925. Four individuals were photographed on 15 May 2018 in D’Ering Wildlife Sanctuary, Arunachal Pradesh, which is the first record of the species after more than 90 years in northeastern India and the first record from Arunachal Pradesh. The species was again recorded on 22 June 2020 from Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, Assam. The aerial distance between both records was 36.5 km. This species is legally protected under Schedule II, Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

Keywords: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, butterfly, distribution, new record.

*Apharitis* ranges from southwestern Sahara (Afrotropical) to the northeastern Himalaya (Indo-Malayan). There are 11 species in total with three reported in India. *Apharitis* was previously placed under *Cigaritis* and *Spindasis*. It is different from *Aphnaeus* in having 11 veins instead of 12 (unlike *Cigaritis* and *Spindasis*). Lobe to hindwing not very marked in *Apharitis*, whereas in *Cigaritis* there is no lobe to hindwing, and lobe well developed in *Spindasis*. The species of this genus can be separated readily from *Cigaritis* by the shape of the wing, and from *Spindasis* by the coloration (Riley 1925).

Lilac Silverline *Apharitis lilacinus* belongs to the blues butterfly family, measuring 32–36 mm. This group is called Silverline because brilliant and faded silver lines run through the red bands of the butterfly. The species is endemic to India and Myanmar. In northeastern India, the species was previously known from North Lakhimpur, Assam based on a single record by H. Stevens (Riley 1925) which is the only record of the species in northeastern India. On 15 May 2018, one male and three females were photographed from D’Ering Wildlife Sanctuary, Arunachal Pradesh (27.925N, 95.435E) (Image 1, 2). Two years later, another female was recorded from Dibru Saikhowa National Park, located at Tinsukia & Dibrugarh district of Assam (27.606N, 95.361E) on 22 June 2020 (Image 3, 4). The aerial distance between the two records is 36.5 km. The specimens from northeastern India appear to have darker pigmentation than those from southern India.

The habitat of *A. lilacinus* is medium height mostly *Imperata cylindrica* in D’Ering Wildlife Sanctuary, Arunachal Pradesh and *Vivtiveria sp.*, *Sacrrum spontaenium* in Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, Assam.

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whereas the other *Spindasis* sp. in northeastern India, prefer woodland/forest habitats. The species is possibly not rare in a few localities of D’Ering Wildlife Sanctuary and Dibru-Saikhowa National Park. British North Lakhimpur covers the present Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Dhemaji and Tinsukia district, so the exact record of the species by H. Stevens could not be ascertained and it could be within Dibru Saikhowa National Park. This species is legally protected under Schedule II, Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

The species is presently known to occur from Hessarghata Lake, Bengaluru, where it was photographed for first time in 2012 (https://www.ifoundbutterflies.org/sp/2125/Apharitis-lilacinus). It was also reported from Agastya Campus, Andhra Pradesh (unpublished data) & Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajasthan (Sundar et al. 2020) (Figure 1), however the paper wrongly mentions the record from North Lakhimpur as Uttar Pradesh instead of Assam. Other than these, there are no present known record of the species in India.

Figure 1. Map showing distribution of Lilac Silverline *Apharitis lilacinus* in India

Historically, the species was known to occur in Mhow, Madhya Pradesh after it was described in 1884 (Swinhoe 1887); Malda, West Bengal (de Nicéville 1890). Also known from Mysore, Karnataka; Kasaul, Himachal Pradesh; Hardwar, Uttarkhand, (N Lakhimpur) Assam (Riley 1925) and from Coorg, Karnataka (Yates 1931). The species is known from Assam based on lone record of the butterfly in North Lakhimpur by H Stevens (Riley 1925; Evans 1932), the only record of the species in northeastern India (Figure 1).

The species is also known to occur in Myanmar and possibly in northern Thailand (De Abera 1986), however no recent record is available from either of these countries. Also, there is no specific locality of the species mentioned by De Abera 1986 in northern Thailand (Ek-Amnuay 2012). Hence, the species occurring in northern Thailand is doubtful.

Although the species is historically known from many locations in India, the record from North Lakhimpur, Assam (Riley 1925) is the lone record of the species in northeastern India. Our records from
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D’ering Wildlife Sanctuary, Arunachal Pradesh in May, 2018 and Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, Assam in June, 2020 confirms the existence of the species in northeastern India and first record of the species after more than 90 years in the region. The record of the species from D’ering Wildlife Sanctuary, Arunachal Pradesh is also the first record of the species from Arunachal Pradesh and the record of the species from Dibru-Saikhowa National Park of Assam is the second record of the species from Assam since the record of H. Stevens from North Lakhimpur (Riley 1925). On both the occasions, the species was recorded in grassland habitats of D’ering Wildlife Sanctuary and Dibru-Saikhowa National Park respectively, which emphasis the importance of grassland habitat in Brahmaputra floodplains for butterflies and other invertebrates. The species was not recorded in the unprotected grassland habitat in Brahmaputra floodplain lying adjacent to D’ering Wildlife Sanctuary or Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, suggesting that the species might not occur in non-protected grasslands and the butterfly probably prefer medium height grasses with no cattle grazing in protected areas of Brahmaputra floodplains.

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