

***NYMPHALIS ANTIOPA* (INSECTA: LEPIDOPTERA:
NYMPHALIDAE) IN THE HIMALAYA**

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Introduction

Nymphalis antiopa is a very widespread butterfly species, with a known distribution from Europe in the west to Japan in the east as well as on the North American continent. Across this wide range, there is little variation. Fruhstorfer (1909) described a subspecies from Szechuan, which differed from Japanese specimens in being smaller, the pale outer margin of the underside narrower and more heavily marked with black spots; the distal margin of the upperside darker yellow than the European forms, with the subapical spots narrower, reminding one of the North American form. He named the subspecies *yedanula* after the Chinese Empress.

Some years before this, native collectors of Captain Elwes and Otto Muller had collected the species at high elevation in native Sikkim and across the passes in Chumbi valley. It had also been recorded in Bhutan (Marshall & de Niceville, 1886). Bailey (1912) mentioned that "It occurs in Bhutan, where I have taken it. I had also found it in the Chumbi Valley, where I believed it to be rare until one day, going up an exposed spur, I saw dozens feeding on the nectar of the wild, cream-coloured scabious." Both these reports give no exact location within the Indian subcontinent for this species. Evans (1927) placed the Himalayan population under *yedanula* (Fruhstorfer, 1909), thus extending the known distribution of the subspecies from the type

locality in Siao Lou, Szetchuan, China. On 23.iii.2013, P.v.d.P. photographed an individual at Tshalunang, MewangGewog, Thimphu, Bhutan at an elevation of 2950m. It was basking in an open area in mixed forest. On 5.iv.2015, he saw several individuals near Tsochekha, Genekha Gewog, Thimphu Dzongkhag, Bhutan at around 3100m, of which he photographed one. These were flying around some bushes in fallow agricultural fields not far from the forest edge. The last observation, by Tshulthrim Drukpa and Karma Wangdi was an individual photographed on 31.vii.2019 at Chelela pass (3791m; 27.3709 N 89.2924 E). It was active at 11.45 am and was flying about low sub-alpine vegetation. It perched on an Aster flower, but did not feed. It later settled on the ground on some wet mud, where it fed. In Bhutan, the species has also been reported from Bumthang (3.vii.2010; 2892 m; N:27 32 44.0 E:90 43 29.1); Pelala (2.vii.2013; 3439 m; N:27 32 12.92 E:90 12 07.84) and Phrumshingla (6.vi.2009; 3746 m; 27 24 06.68 E:90 59 46.22) by Karma Wangdi. There are no known localities for this butterfly in India other than the mention of it being taken by native collectors at high elevation in Native Sikkim by Marshall & de Niceville (1886). For this reason, this species has not been included by Varshney & Smetacek (2015) (Peter Smetacek, *pers. comm.*). It is not known why it is included in Schedule 1 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, which is the

highest level of protection afforded to a wild creature under Indian law, since it is a very widespread and common butterfly over most of its range. The occurrence of *N. antiopa* across central and western Bhutan, indicates that it is not unlikely that it may also still be found in Sikkim.

References

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Fig: *Nymphalis antiopa* (underside)