



BIOLOGICKÉ CENTRUM AV ČR, v.v.i.

Entomologický ústav

adresa: Branišovská 1160/31, 370 05 České Budějovice

IČ: 60077344

DIČ: CZ60077344

telefon: +420 387 775 211

číslo účtu: 5002209089/5500, Raiffeisenbank a.s.

fax: +420 385 310 354

www.entu.cas.cz | e-mail: entu@entu.cas.cz

Supervisor assessment

Several years ago, Jatishwor Irungbam, at that time working as a teacher in Bhutan, asked me via Facebook if we have an opportunity for a Ph.D. study. I knew him as an active fan of Lepidoptera, who was frequently asking for help with ID, already writing his numerous reports about butterflies and moths and trying to establish a Lepidoptera-studying group in Bhutan (Butterfly and Moths of Bhutan, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/bhutanmoths>) and running butterfly monitoring at Tsirang district and working as a focal person for Lepidoptera surveys by Bhutanese National Biodiversity Centre. At the same time, I also tried to get into touch with somebody seriously working on Lepidoptera from the Indian subcontinent. Thus, I immediately agreed to supervise his Ph.D. thesis. We set that his topic would be about butterflies and moths along the elevational gradient in Bhutan and Jatishwor made an agreement with Bhutanese authorities that they will cooperate and support us.

The start of Jatishwor was not easy. First, he had troubles with his visa so he could start in Budějovice with a four-month delay. The second trouble was that the Bhutanese part stopped to cooperate. We were looking on an alternative and we selected Manipur, the home state of Jatishwor and his family. However, contrary to Bhutan, almost nothing was known about the fauna of this state. Manipur was for a very long time closed for foreigners and even Indian researchers could only rarely access its territory. Thus, Jatishwor had to start with everything from scratch. He had to ask the authorities for advices on regulations and how to obtain study permits, he had to contact the local tribe chiefs and ask them for permission to work on their territories, he had to get local helpers – which lead him to establish a group of butterfly and moth enthusiasts in Manipur (Manipur Butterfly Club, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/manipurbutterfly>), now containing 508 members. Already this is an amazing result, which will have a long-time impact on research of butterflies in India.

It is not easy to start to study Lepidoptera in a state, where almost nothing is known. Moreover, Manipur lies on the easternmost parts of India, thus Indian field guides only loosely covered the Manipuri fauna, and the same applies for literature about butterflies and moths from Thailand or China. Therefore, Jatishwor had to spend a huge amount of time and effort to collate all available resources and to work out checklists, records and to describe new species of diverse Lepidoptera inhabiting Manipur. Together with this, he established an elevational gradient study in Shirui Hill, located in border area with Myanmar and Nagaland and inhabited by local Naga tribes. Once I assisted him in the field and I have seen the difficulties with my own eyes – not only regarding the field work,



but also cars with leaking oil or not working batteries, low quality roads, frequent security checkpoints, etc.

In his thesis, we can see fruits of his efforts. He showed that he is capable of independent and almost endless work in identification of the species, he established a cooperation with many Lepidoptera experts around the world and described several species new for science with them.

Last but not least, he showed that he is able to conduct not only taxonomic work, but he is also skilled in molecular work in lab, and he is able to analyze the results using statistics and publish them in recognized international journals. His publication record is incredible – how many other Ph.D. students have published almost 40 papers?

So far, I have never regretted my decision to accept Jatishwor as a Ph.D. student to my team. He has shown not only his scientific qualities. We spend together many hours talking about diverse topics, from linguistic peculiarities of Indian languages to Indian history and international politics. I also must add that Jatishwor is excellent cook, capable to prepare delicious Indian food using very limited Czech resources, showing that he is able to navigate in difficult environment not only in his home country.

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RNDr. Zdeněk Faltýnek Fric, Ph.D.

tel. +420 387 775 341

mobil +420 736 122 028