



Identity of *Euploea orontobates* Fruhstorfer, 1910 (Lepidoptera: Nymphalidae), a milkweed butterfly from Thailand and Vietnam

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Abstract

Euploea orontobates Fruhstorfer, 1910, described from south-eastern Thailand (Si Racha district), is demonstrated to be a senior synonym of *Euploea conbuom* Saito & Inayoshi, 2006, from southern Central Vietnam. The relationships and biogeography of this rare butterfly are discussed, and presented together with comments on the principal mimicry complex among the *Euploea* species of Indochina.

Key words: Danainae, *Euploea orontobates*, *Euploea conbuom*, synonymy, relationships, Thailand, Vietnam, Sundaland, endemism, biogeography

Introduction

The milkweed butterflies (Nymphalidae: Danainae: Danaini) comprise one of the most well-known groups of tropical and subtropical butterflies. Not only are most species common and conspicuous in their various habitats, they are also of great interest to biologists because of their host-plant relations, chemical defences, courtship behaviour, migration and mimicry (e.g. Ackery & Vane-Wright, 1984; Boppré, 1984; Ackery *et al.*, 1999; Brower *et al.*, 2007). Of the 12 genera of Danaini currently recognised (Ackery *et al.*, 1999; Vane-Wright *et al.*, 2002), *Euploea* is the largest, comprising well over 50 species distributed from the Seychelles and Mascarene Islands in the western Indian Ocean, eastwards to the Society Islands in the central Pacific. The region of greatest richness is Sundaland. According to Holloway (1969, 1974), the “centre of origin” for *Euploea* is the Sunda Islands.

The first author is currently preparing a series of books on the butterflies of Vietnam, two of which have already been published (Monastyrskii, 2005; 2007b). It was during preparation of the Danainae volume that the problem concerning the identity of *E. orontobates* Fruhstorfer came to light. Both authors are also involved in a collaboration intended to revise the complex systematics of *Euploea* by use of molecular data, and the success of this venture will depend on sampling as many of the numerous species and subspecies as possible. The present paper thus contributes to these research programmes.

Original description of *Euploea orontobates*

In his account of the South East Asian milkweed butterfly fauna in ‘Seitz’, Fruhstorfer (1910) described *Euploea orontobates* as a new species from south-eastern Thailand, based on a single male that he collected at Chanthaburi on 1st January 1901. Fruhstorfer stated that *orontobates* formed “a transition” from *E. core*