

Defoliation of sentul tree by atlas moth caterpillars

Subjects: Atlas moth, *Attacus atlas* (Insecta: Lepidoptera: Saturniidae);
Sentul, *Sandoricum koetjape* (Magnoliophyta: Sapindales, Meliaceae).

Subjects identified by: Contributor, with Lee Yuan Chun & Lee Shi Yun.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Yishun Ring Road, between lamp-posts 176 and 179; 16 Jan 2017; 1000 hrs.

Habitat: Urban. Along the road in a public housing estate with concrete highrise buildings.

Observers: Contributor, with Lee Yuan Chun & Lee Shi Yun.

Observation: Numerous caterpillars of the atlas moth, each around 10 cm in length, were found crawling on the trunk (Fig. 1) and branches (Fig. 2) of a sentul tree which they apparently have stripped of leaves. Some of the caterpillars have already pupated on the tree (Fig. 3). Many caterpillars were observed on the ground moving away from the tree. Smaller sized juvenile instars were found on other sentul trees nearby.

Remarks: The atlas moth seems to be common in Singapore, especially from November to January. The larvae is a general feeder and many types of cultivated trees are among its food plants. The gregarious larvae defoliating an entire tree in the featured observation apparently occurs only occasionally. It is likely that they have hatched from eggs laid on a single tree by an injured or immobilised female moth (Morrell, 1973: 81). The caterpillars found on the ground and moving away from the tree they had defoliated were presumably on their way to infest nearby trees.

Reference: Morrell, R. C. R., 1973. Butterflies and moths. In: Chuang S. H. (ed.). *Animal Life and Nature in Singapore*. Singapore University Press. p. 74-84.



Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.

Photographs by Raem Tan Zhi Yan

Contributor: Raem **Tan** Zhi Yan

Contact address: RAEM_TAN@nparks.gov.sg