

Common birdwing butterflies at Yishun Central

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Subjects: Common birdwing, *Troides helena cerberus* (Insecta: Lepidoptera: Papilionidae: Papilioninae).

Subjects identified by: Simon Kee Mun Chan.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Yishun Central, Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, Butterfly Garden behind Learning Centre; 19 February 2020 at 1401 hrs, 9 April 2020 at 1410 hrs, and 18 April 2020 at 1015 hrs.

Habitat: Urban parkland in the compound of the hospital. A small patch of Indian birthwort vine (*Aristolochia acuminata*), a host plant of the common birdwing, was cultivated and growing on a fence in the garden (Fig. 1)

Observer: Simon Kee Mun Chan.



Fig. 1. Entrance to the hospital's Butterfly Garden with a view of the fence with a thriving patch of Indian birthwort, host plant of the common birdwing butterfly. Photograph by Simon Kee Mun Chan

Observations: Three separate observations at the same location.

1) On the hot afternoon of 19 February 2020, at 1401 hrs, a gravid female butterfly with wingspan of about 15 cm was spotted flying among the trees at canopy level. She then landed on a leaf of a tree close to the patch of Indian birthwort vine (Fig. 2). It was noted that her left hindwing was torn.

2) On 9 April 2020, at 1410 hrs, a female butterfly with intact wings was flying about, and landed at around the same area as the female in the earlier observation (Fig. 3). She appeared to have eclosed earlier in the day.

3) On 18 April 2020, at around 1015 hrs, at least nine pupal cases of the common birdwing were noted hanging from the fence, branches of bushes and twines of creepers (Fig. 4). All were empty except one in which a butterfly had died while breaking out of its pupal case.



Fig. 2. Dorsal view of a gravid female common birdwing with torn left hand wing on 19 February 2020.

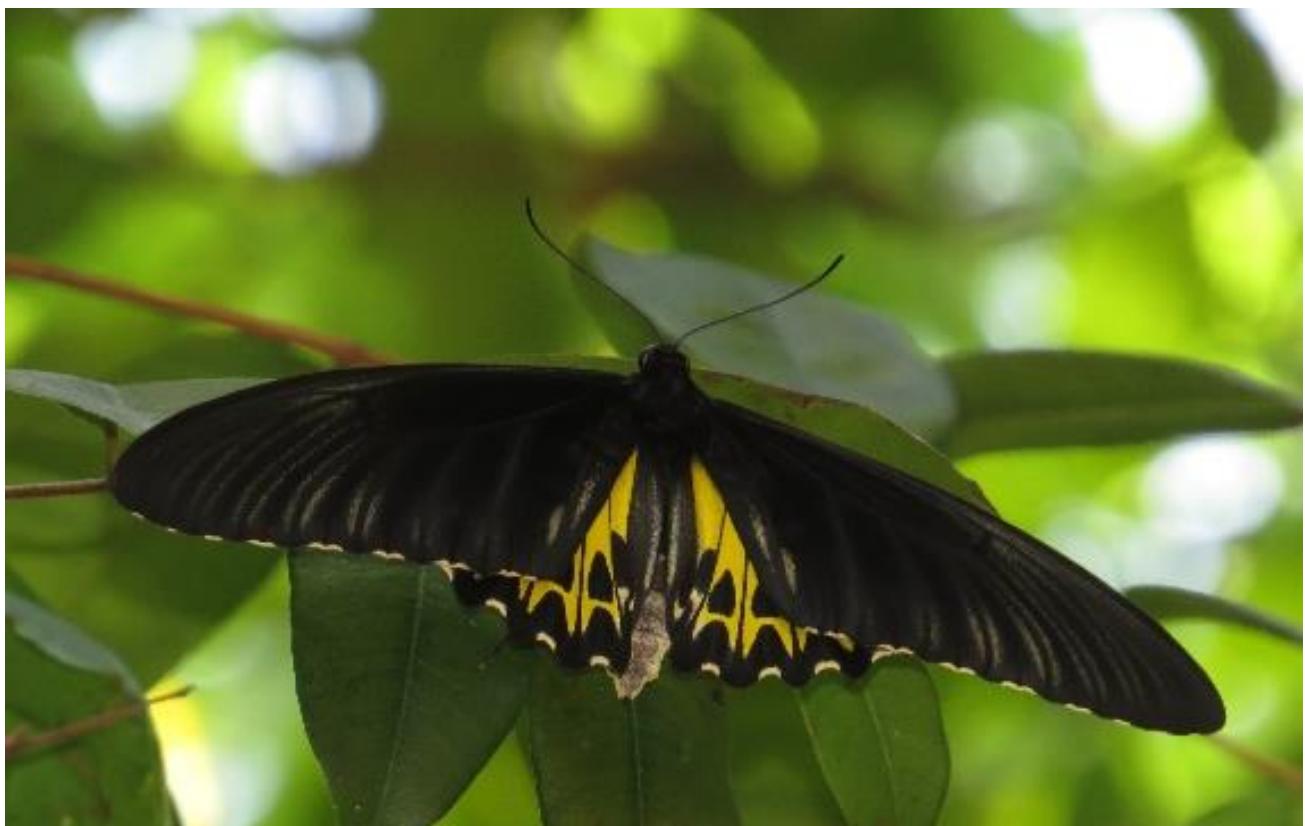


Fig. 3. Dorsal view of a female common birdwing with intact wings on 9 April 2020, resting at almost the same place as the female in Fig. 2.

Photographs by Simon Kee Mun Chan



Fig. 4. Composite of nine different pupal cases of the common birdwing found in the Butterfly Garden at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital. All cases are empty except for the image on the left lower corner, in which butterfly had died while breaking out of the pupal case. Photographs by Simon Kee Mun Chan.

Remarks: The featured observations show that a wild population of the common birdwing is successfully reproducing in the garden of the hospital. This is in no doubt facilitated by the cultivation of its host plant, the *Aristolochia acuminata* (Angiosperms: Piperales: Aristolochiaceae).

The common birdwing is a large and attractive butterfly that is regarded as a ‘vulnerable’ species in Singapore (Khew, 2008: 82). It used to be rare, but seems to be more frequently seen today due to the cultivation of its food plants in gardens all over Singapore (personal observation).

Reference: Khew SK (2008) Butterflies (Insecta, Lepidoptera: Rhopalocera). In: Davison GWH, Ng PKL & Ho HC (eds.) The Singapore Red Data Book. Threatened Plants & Animals of Singapore. Nature Society (Singapore). Pp. 81-94.