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Atlas moth caterpillars at Yishun

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Subjects: Atlas moth, *Attacus atlas* (Insecta: Lepidoptera: Saturnidae).

Subjects identified by: Marcus F. C. Ng.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Yishun Avenue 1; 21 July 2018 at around 1800 hrs and 22 July 2018 between 1600 and 1700 hrs.

Habitat: Urban parkland.

Observers: Nicole Wong & Marcus F. C. Ng.

Observation: Fairly high numbers (about 12 on an almost defoliated tree, 5 to 6 on the next tree, and several squashed bodies on the nearby pavement) of these atlas moth caterpillars (Fig. 1), each around 10 to 12 cm, were seen on trees of the genus *Ardisia*. These trees were around 2 to 3 m tall and planted on the slope between the road and adjoining apartment buildings. Most of the caterpillars appeared to be of the penultimate instar (prior to pupation), and a few were noticeably assuming a prepupal position with abdominal claspers holding on to a branch and the torso hanging vertically below. One tree had about two dozen pupal cases (Fig. 2) on it. This particular tree was producing mainly young foliage.

From a pupa obtained on 22 July 2018 for observation, an adult male moth (Fig. 3) of 15-16 cm wingspan emerged on 12 August 2018 at around 2 to 3 am. The individual was released. During the emergence period on the second and third weeks of August and ongoing, the first to eclose appeared to be mostly males. The females began to show up about one week after the first males emerged.

Remarks: Two instances of atlas moth infestation of roadside trees were reported earlier from the Yishun housing estate, in January and April 2017, specifically along Yishun Ring Road (Foo, 2017; Tan, 2017). The present observation is along an adjacent street. In every instance, trees were almost completely defoliated by the caterpillars. However, the tree with the pupal cases in the present observation was noted to be producing new leaves. This could be taken as evidence that the atlas moths do not cause permanent damage to healthy host plants. If this temporary unsightliness can be tolerated, there is no necessity for the caterpillars to be destroyed.

References:

Foo, M., 2017. An atlas moth infestation at Yishun. *Singapore Biodiversity Records*. 2017: 80-81.

Tan, R. Z. Y., 2017. Defoliation of sentul tree by atlas moth caterpillars. *Singapore Biodiversity Records*. 2017: 22.

Fig. 1. One of the atlas moth caterpillars.

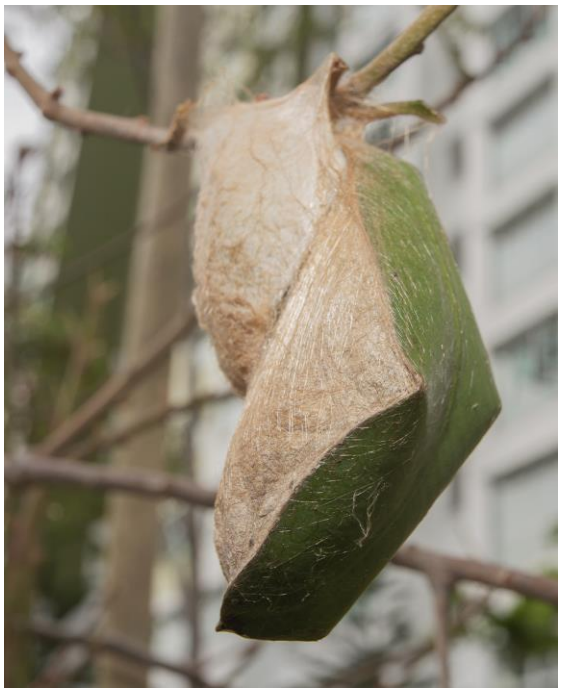

Fig. 2. Pupa of atlas moth.

Photographs by Nicole Wong

Fig. 3. An adult male moth emerged on 12 August 2018 from a pupa obtained on 22 July 2018. Photograph by Marcus F. C. Ng