

**NEWSLETTER** of the

ISSN: 2395-065X

# NILGIRI NATURAL

# HISTORY SOCIETY

For private circulation only  
ISSUE 8.2 - December 2019



# EDITORIAL BOARD

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Newsletter of the Nilgiri Natural History Society is available at

**www.nnhs.in**

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### Indian ornamental tree spider

(*Poecilotheria regalis*)

An endangered species, the yellow thigh spider (*Poecilotheria regalis*) is an arboreal tarantula found in the monsoon forests of south India below the altitude of 1000m. Considered to have venom and a bite that can cause intense pain, they are known to be defensive spiders. Moving rapidly, they prefer flight to fight and nest in tree holes. The population is severely fragmented with habitat loss, collection for the pet trade and persecution acting as threats to the species.

Photo Credit : TNA Perumal

# EDITORIAL

The winter edition of the NNHS newsletter is a collection of stories of 'creepy crawlies' that many people are quite freaked about! Spiders have made it to the front cover of the newsletter in the past but here is one edition dedicated mostly to these fellow lives. National geographic tells us that there are 45000 species of spiders' world over! Surely we want to know some of them that are here in the Nilgiris? We also have a natural history note on seduction in spiders which bring to mind first lines of Mary Howitt's poem- "Will you walk into my parlour?" said a spider to a fly' though in the article featured here it would be "Will you walk into my parlour?", said a spider to a spider'.

Moving from spiders to honey bees, a young researcher is mesmerised with the forests of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve as he takes part in a survey team to revisit transects and plots that were done 10 years ago to count honeybees. He discovers the bees but finds that the Malabar tree nymph (a species of butterfly) has stolen his heart! We also have a record of the Southern Ghats Slender Gecko from Sigur plateau to report, this species is reported only from few locations in South India.

We have an article about an action research initiative called the 'Conservation Agreements' which was a two year project implemented by a team in Keystone Foundation. This effort showcases how local farmers became partners in conservation. Protected areas and tiger reserves are home to many local communities and they share these spaces with tigers and elephants. A strong belief system in the forest deities is part of the culture of these communities and this makes the landscape a sacred landscape for them. A young tribal boy from Sathyamangalam writes about this and shares snippets of his research into his own community's ties with the sacred forests.

The NNHS has been buzzing with activities ranging from walks and trails for schools, tourists and workshops for all. Finally we are happy to end with a photo from one of our regular contributors on the Nilgiri Sholakili. Endemic and endangered this beautiful bird has seen so many changes in its name. Well "what's in a name?"- "Everything" a taxonomist would reply!!

As always the newsletter tries to cover a diversity of stories and we enjoy bringing them together. Happy reading!

Best wishes

**Anita Varghese**

Chief Editor



Photo credit: N Moinudheen, Wellington

*Sholicola major*  
(Jerdon 1841) – Nilgiri sholakili

The Nilgiri sholakili is an endangered and endemic bird species found in the Nilgiris at altitudinal ranges of over 1000m, mainly north of the Palghat gap. Also known as the Nilgiri shortwing or Nilgiri blue robin, it is a song bird found in the shola forest lower canopy and forest floor, a threatened habitat. The two subspecies of shortwing distributed in western ghats are the *Sholicola major* (Jerdon 1841) and the *Sholicola albiventris* (Blanford 1868) also known as the white-bellied shortwing. The white-bellied shortwing is found mainly around the Palni hills and south of the Palghat gap. The Nilgiri sholakili is a small dark slaty blue bird, with a buff white upper belly and tan/ rufous towards the flanks. For a bird its size, its song is longwinded, composed of high warbling notes and buzzy whistles.



Photo credit: N Moinudheen, Wellington