

172 LARSEN, T. B. 1992. *Platylesches ayresii* Trimen and *P. langa* Evans are distinct species (Lepidoptera; Hesperiiidae). *Metamorphosis*, 3:25-27.

PLATYLESCHES AYRESII AND P. LANGA ARE DISTINCT SPECIES (LEPIDOPTERA; HESPERIIDAE)

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I recently caught the first Botswanan specimen of *Platylesches ayresii* Trimen, 1889 on a hill top near Kanye on 8 September, 1991. It was much whiter on the underside than those figured in Pennington (1978), so I decided to compare the genitalia with Zimbabwean specimens referable to the taxon *langa* Evans, 1937 kindly placed at my disposal by R. M. Plowes. There were quite evident differences. S. Woodhall and S. F. Henning kindly placed at my disposal Transvaal material from near Johannesburg, the genitalia of which wholly matched the Botswana male. The larval host plant, *Parinari capensis* (Chrysobalanaceae) (S. Woodhall, pers. comm.) was present on the hills, where I collected a female on 27.x.1991.

Evans (1937) described *P. ayresii langa* for Zimbabwe and neighbouring areas, but several authors have tended to treat this as a mere form. According to Pennington (1978), Pinhey certainly held this view, probably because he saw the two taxa more or less sympatrically. Specimens of *langa* tend to be slightly larger than *ayresii*, to have the inner margin of the forewing underside much more white, and to have less white dusting on the hindwing underside. The brown upperside ground-colour tends to be more glossy.

In fact, Kielland (1978) had already formally promoted ssp. *langa* from southeastern Tanzania to full species rank because of genitalic differences from *P. ayresii*. Examination of his excellent genitalia drawings show that his *P. langa* fully matches the Zimbabwean male that I dissected, and that it differs considerably from Kielland's putative *P. ayresii* from the same area. However, his genitalia drawing differs considerably from true *P. ayresii*. Kielland (1990) shows in colour the underside of the two taxa. That of *P. langa* matches Zimbabwean material, while that of *P. ayresii* is an undescribed species - it lacks the white marginal lines at the tornus of both forewings and hindwings, and the white irroration is more extensive, covering much of the forewing underside (not just the apex) as well as the anal fold of the hindwing underside. It is also very large for *P. ayresii*.

The genitalia of the three taxa differ as follows:

Platylesches ayresii. The uncus is more narrow than in *P. langa*, and the space between the two distal lobes is much more narrow. In the undescribed species the uncus is hardly bifid. The valves of *P. ayresii* are proportionately more narrow than in the two other species, while the serration at the distal end of the valve is less robust than in *P. langa* (one specimen from Botswana and two from Transvaal are very consistent).

Platylesches langa. The uncus is much broader than in *P. ayresii*, and the distance between the two distal processes much wider (this cannot be due to the mounting process, as the feature has been studied in unmounted material as well). The relative size of the entire uncus-tegumen structure is larger than in *P. ayresii* and in the

undescribed species. The valve is clearly relatively broader than in P. ayresii and with a more serrated distal end (a Zimbabwe male matches that illustrated by Kielland).

Platylesches species. The entire tegumen-uncus structure is proportionately smaller than in P. langa. The valve is broader than in P. ayresii. The heavily chitinized distal end of the valve is much shorter than in the two other species and its shape at the base is also different.

Thus, it is certain that three distinct species are involved. Kielland (1978) was right to raise P. langa to species level, though the comparison with the undescribed species was not the right one. The genitalic differences between P. ayresii and P. langa are too large to be ignored. In addition there is also some evidence that the two are more or less ecological vicariants, with P. ayresii being adapted to bushveld of Botswana and western Transvaal, while P. langa is restricted to more mesic environments. I have no records of sympatry, but the two might well meet. Kielland (pers. comm.) agrees with these conclusions after studying a Transvaal P. ayresii which I sent him. He will eventually describe the new species.

[It has since been described as *Platylesches larseni* Kielland]

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Figure 1. Uncus, tegumen, and right valve of:

- a) Platylesches langa, Tanzania (after Kielland, 1978);
- b) Platylesches langa, Zimbabwe (coll. Larsen, prep. AVS);
- c) Platylesches sp. nov., Tanzania (after Kielland, 1978).
- d) Platylesches ayresii, Botswana (coll. Larsen, prep. AVR);