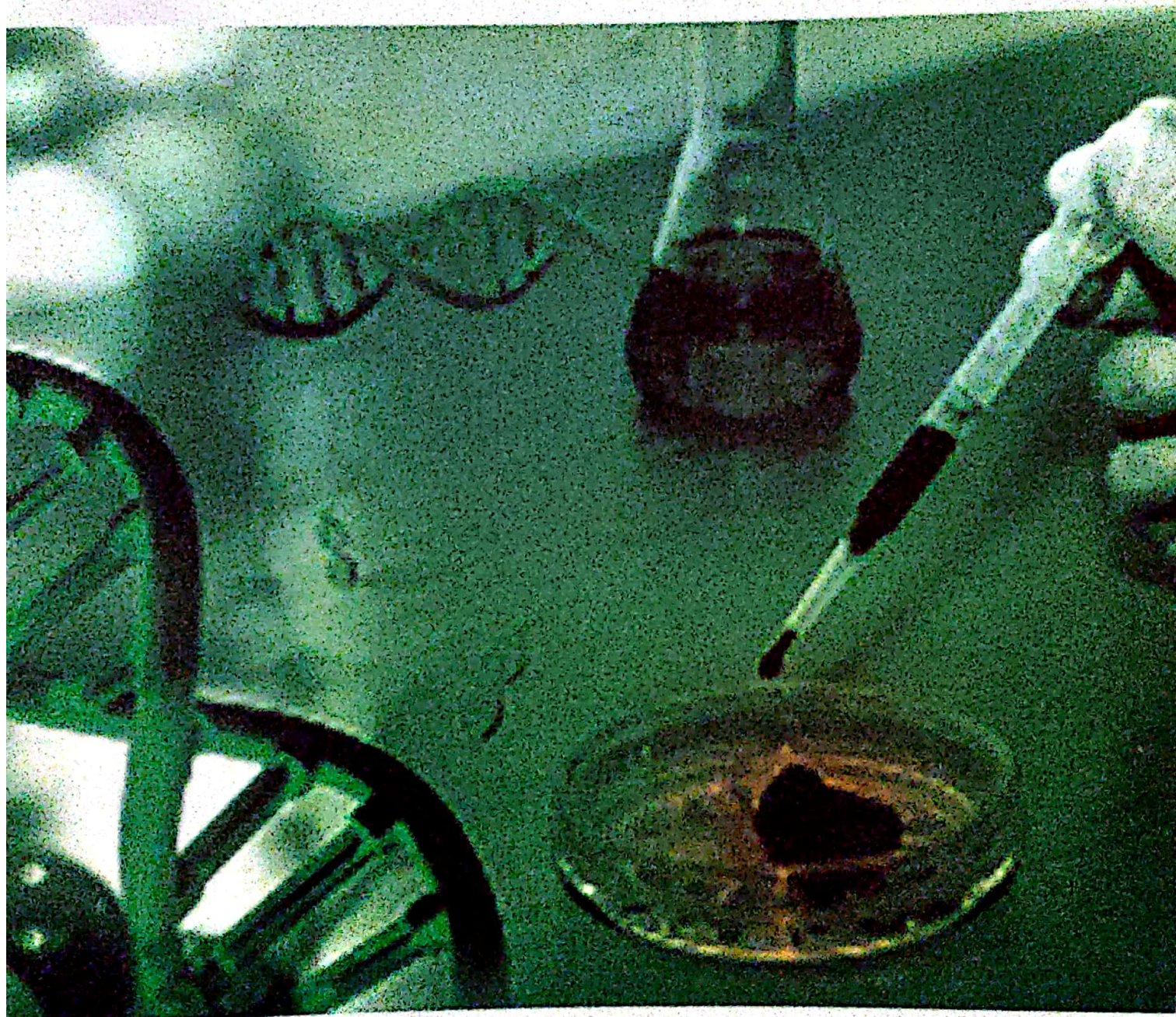


PERSPECTIVES IN LIFE SCIENCES



Editor: Dr. M.V. Sudhakaran





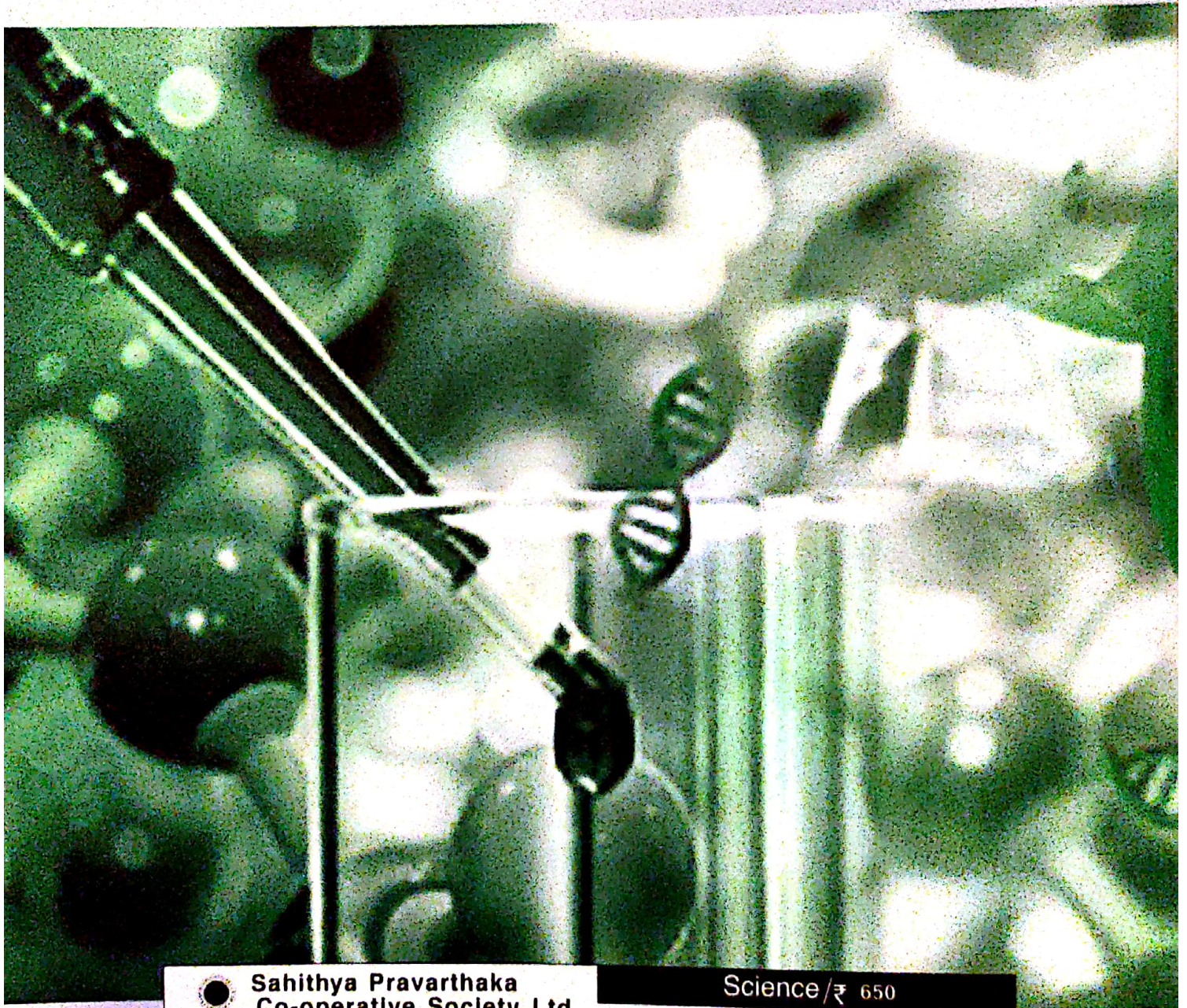
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Science / ₹ 650

ISBN-978-93-88992-90-9



9 789388 992909



(English)

PERSPECTIVES IN LIFE SCIENCES SCIENCE

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Chief Editor

Dr. M. A. Joseph

Editor

Dr. M. V. Sudhakaran

Published by

UGC-HRDC University of Calicut

Malappuram, Kerala

In association with

Sahithya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society Ltd. No. 2458

Kottayam, Kerala

Email: spcsktm@gmail.com

Price: Rs. 650.00

Cover Design

Vinod Kumar C. S.

First Published December 2019

Printed at

Romanson Print House, Thiruvananthapuram

ISBN 978-93-88992-90-9

978000031767

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BUTTERFLY DIVERSITY OF VENGALAM MANGROVES, CALICUT, KERALA

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Introduction

Butterflies, one of the most beautiful insects with large and brightly coloured wings and conspicuous fluttering flight, regarded as one of the best taxonomically studied group of insects, stemmed in the Palaeocene period about 56 million years ago [1]. These winged Lepidopterans belong to the Class Insecta of Phylum Arthropoda. Butterflies are represented by three super families - the large super family Papilionoideae, and two smaller groups, super family Hesperioideae (the skippers) and super family Hedyloideae (moth-butterflies). Hesperioideae consists of a single family of Hesperidae (skippers) and Papilionoideae comprises four families *viz.*, Papilionidae (swallow tails), Pieridae (whites and yellows), Nymphalidae (brush footed butterflies) and Lycaenidae (blues). A total of 18,000 species are identified till date in the world. The Indian subcontinent bearing a diverse terrain, climate and vegetation hosts about 1504 species of butterflies.

Butterflies enable sustenance of ecosystem services through their role in pollination and serve as important food chain components. Being potential pollinating agents of their nectar plants as well as indicators of the health and quality of their host plants and the ecosystem as a whole, exploration of butterfly fauna thus becomes important in identifying and preserving potential habitats under threat. Of late, we are rapidly losing greenery in the name of development. There has also been an alarming rise in industrial and automobile pollution in Indian metropolitan cities. With the shrinking of greenery and increase in pollution, butterflies, birds and all