Odonata from a remnant patch of disturbed peatswamp forest on the outskirts of Kuching, west Sarawak

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Before large-scale human alterations began, much of the surroundings of what is now Kuching, the state capital of Sarawak, consisted of various types of swamp forest, including much peatswamp forest. Later, rubber was planted in parts of this swamp forest. M.A. Lieftinck (1953: 236), under the description of Podolestes harrisoni, gave an incomplete list of species collected in "an old rubber garden" on the Matang Road outside of Kuching, on September 22, 1950. This list included a number of apparently very scarce species (e.g. Amphicnemis madeleinae, Nannophyopsis chalcosoma and Pseudagrionoptera diotoma). Since Lieftinck's day Kuching has expanded considerably and there has been extensive development along the Matang Road, so that most of the peatswamp(old rubber habitat has gone. However, one patch remains, although probably not for much longer. Indeed, it may already have been bulldozed; we last passed the site in July 2010, when building work was occurring immediately adjacent to it.

We first visited this site in January 2006, and made return visits in 2008 and 2010. The site is small, consisting of disturbed peatswamp with many old rubber trees that are still being tapped (on his last visit, RAD was ordered out of the site by machete-wielding rubber tappers). This site is at least near to Lieftinck's site, but remarkably we have collected a number of species not found by Lieftinck, illustrating the biodiversity of this kind of habitat in west Sarawak, and the extreme localisation of some species.

Most notable of our discoveries at the Matang road was Pachycypha sp cf aurea. P. aurea, a tiny chlorocyphid, was described from the south of Kalimantan, and remains the only named species in the genus, which has not been recorded outside of Kalimantan until now. Despite the small size of the Matang Road site, it was not until May 2010 that we found this minute taxon, along one short section of a tiny stream. Both sexes descended from the canopy only in full sunlight, typically perching high. They were at low densities, and no interactions were observed between the sexes. They typically returned to the canopy almost immediately after the sun became obscured by clouds.

A full list of the 26 species we have collected at the site is given below. Most of them were not listed by Lieftinck, but probably a number of these were actually collected by him; six species (at least) collected by Lieftinck were not collected by us. At least two of the species listed here are as yet unnamed; descriptions of both are being prepared by RAD.
Zygoptera
Chlorocyphidae
1. Libellago hyalina Selys, 1859 – ♂, 22 i 2006, RAD; ♀, 23 i 2006, RAD; ♂, 27 x 2009, RAD; ♀, 28 v 2010; ♂, 30 v 2010, GTR.
Megaodagriionidae
Protoneuridae
6. Prodansinaea dorsalis (Selys, 1860) – 2 ♂♀, 30 v 2010, RAD.
Coenagrionidae
8. Amphicenemis madeleinae Laidlaw, 1913 – In May 2010 a female was collected whilst it was eating a teneral male. ♀, 22 i 2006, GTR; ♂, ♀ (in tandem), 22 i 2006, RAD; ♂, 2 ♀♀, 23 i 2006, GTR; ♂, 23 i 2006, RAD; 2 ♂♂, 2 ♀♀, 28 v 2010; 4 ♂♂, ♀, 30 v 2010, RAD.
10. Amphicenemis wallaci Selys, 1863 – ♂, 22 i 2006, GTR; 2 ♂♂, 23 i 2006, RAD.
12. Ceriagrion cerinorubellum (Brauer, 1865) – ♀, 28 v 2010, GTR.
13. Mortonagrin new species – Material will be listed elsewhere.
Platycnemididae
14. Coeliccia new species – Material will be listed elsewhere.
15. Copera vittata (Selys, 1863) – 2 ♂♂, 27 x 2009, RAD.
Anisoptera
Aeshnidae
16. Heliaeschna idae (Brauer, 1865) – ♂, 30 v 2010, RAD.
Macromiidae
17. Macromia cineta Rambur, 1842 – ♀, 22 i 2006, GTR.
Libellulidae
18. Brachyogonia osculata (Brauer, 1878) – ♀, 22 i 2006, GTR;
20. Orchithemis pruinae (Selys, 1878) – ♂, 27 x 2009, RAD; ♂, 28 v 2010, GTR.
23. Orthetrum sabina (Drury, 1773) – ♂, 5 vi 2010, RAD.
24. Rupiphlebia dohni (Krüger, 1902) – ♂, 22 i 2006, GTR; ♂, 30 v 2010, GTR; ♂, 30 v 2010, RAD; ♂, 5 vi 2010, RAD.
25. Tholymis tillanga (Fabricius, 1798) – ♂, 27 x 2009, RAD.
26. Tyriobapta laidlawi Ris, 1919 – 2 ♂♂, 28 v 2010, RAD; 3 ♂♂, 30 v 2010, RAD.

Reference