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Systematics, phylogeny and biology of a new genus of Lithocolletinae (Lepidoptera: Gracillariidae) associated with Cistaceae

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Abstract

The gracillariid genus *Triberta* gen. nov. (Lepidoptera: Gracillariidae: Lithocolletinae Stainton, 1854) is described to accommodate two species formerly assigned to the genus *Phyllonorycter* Hübner, 1822: *Triberta helianthemella* (Herrich-Schäffer, 1861) comb. nov. and *T. cistifoliella* (Groschke, 1944) comb. nov. *Triberta cistifoliella bona* sp. is restored from synonymy based on morphological characters. The new genus is biologically associated with the plant family Cistaceae of the order Malvales and is endemic to the Palaearctics. Our molecular analysis of eleven nuclear genes failed to unambiguously place *Triberta* in the lithocolletine phylogeny, but revealed that this genus is distinct from either clade *Phyllonorycter* + *Cremastobombycia* and *Cameraria*. The distinctiveness of *Triberta* is also supported by inferred traits in wing venation, micro morphology of the last instar larva, pupa, genital morphology of the adult and life history. A key to the species of *Triberta* is provided. The interspecific homogeneity in external morphology, coupled with minor differences in genital traits, an apparent narrow specialization on Cistaceae host plants, restricted geographical range and molecular evidence based on multi-nuclear genes jointly suggest that the generic diversification of *Triberta* is a relatively old phenomenon and driven strongly by host selection.

Key words: evolution, host specificity, leaf mining, morphology, taxonomy

Introduction

This contribution presents another step towards understanding the systematics and evolutionary history of the subfamily Lithocolletinae Stainton, 1854 following the publication of the taxonomic-revisionary study about the Afrotropical Lithocolletinae (De Prins & Kawahara 2012). These tiny, attractive, distinctively ornate moths represent a highly successful lineage of Gracillariidae (Kawahara *et al.* 2011) and are placed phylogenetically among the ditrysian moths within the complex clade of the superfamilies Yponomeutoidea + Gracillarioidea (Mutanen *et al.* 2010; Sohn *et al.* 2013; Regier *et al.* 2013). The great majority of taxa within this complex possess diverse plant mining life histories (Grimaldi & Engel 2005; Sohn *et al.* 2013). Currently the monophyletic group Lithocolletinae comprises 552 species of leaf miners, with the Afrotropical *loxozena* species group as an exception in possessing a gall-forming life history. The presently known Lithocolletinae species are grouped into 10 genera (De Prins & Kawahara 2012; De Prins & De Prins 2013); nevertheless, many additional undescribed taxa can still be found in tropical regions, and many of these are already present in various research collections.

Species of Lithocolletinae have an intimate and often highly specialized feeding and reproductive interaction with a great variety of plants: no less than 771 plant species belonging to 38 families are recorded as host plants of these leaf miners (Lopez-Vaamonde *et al.* 2003, 2006; De Prins & Kawahara 2012; De Prins & De Prins 2005, 2013). However, the successful ecological colonization of congeneric lithocolletine moths which utilize the diverse variety of plant families occurred rather seldom during evolution. Six lithocolletine genera out of ten, including *Chrysaster* Kumata, 1961, *Hyloconis* Kumata, 1963, *Macrosaccus* Davis & De Prins, 2011, *Neolithocolletis*,

Remarks. This paper echoes the findings of V. T. Chambers (1877, 1878) published in the second volume of *Psyche, a journal of Entomology*, in which Chambers, based on his detailed study of larval morphology of the then known American lithocolletine species, for the first time suggested the possible division of the lithocolletine genus *Phyllonorycter*. V. T. Chambers, unfortunately, did not officially formulate his findings according to the rules of the ICBN, and therefore, following the Principle of Priority (Art. 23) the lithocolletine genus *Cameraria*, which in fact was discovered and studied by Chambers, was attributed officially to Chapman (1902). One hundred and thirty six years later, in the present publication, we delineate one more lithocolletine genus *Triberta* and remove both of its constituent species from the genus *Phyllonorycter*.

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