



Photo by Nharong Theppibhatsathit

Dead Leaf Butterfly (*Kallima inachus siamensis*)

Kallima are among butterfly species that could imitate dead leaves for protection and could even settle with the dried leaves to make the disguise more effective. They could assume the shape of a leaf, midrib, fungi spots, leaf stalk and varying decaying colours and markings on the under-wings. They even perfectly appear to be leaves attached to the branch. As Alfred R. Wallace in his article *Protective Colours of Animals* described: "The creature seems to have an instinct which leads it to prefer to rest among dead or decaying leaves, which are often very persistent on bushes in the tropical forests; and this combination of form, colour, marking, habit, and instinct, produces a degree of concealment which is perfectly startling. You see this gay butterfly careering along a forest path, and suddenly rest upon a shrub not three yards from you. Approaching carefully, you look for it in vain, and you may often have to touch the branches before it will dart out from under your very eyes."

However, *Kallima* species do not always look dead at all times. They are brilliantly marked and fly with power in a zigzag manner.

K. inachus siamensis, a subspecies of *K. inachus* Doyere 1840 (known as Indian Leaf Butterfly), appears in pale blue colour during the dry season and violet blue during wet seasons, with broad orange band across the wings. This is where the name *Kallima* was derived – from the Greek word, which means beautiful. Other subspecies are *K. limborgii limborgii* Moore 1879 and *K. knyvetii de Niceville* 1886.



K. inachus siamensis Fruhstorfer 1912 is also well-known as Orange Oakleaf. It has a wingspan of 8.5 to 11.0 cm distributed in regions of heavy rainfall, thickly forested mountains and hills in Thailand, excluding the Peninsular Region. It can rarely be seen in open areas and never flies far. The larvae feed possibly on *Strobilanthes callosus* and *Pseuderanthemum malabaricum*.

The *Kallima* species are found in South Asia, New Guinea, India, Ceylon, Madagascar, the Gold Coast and Ashanti.

Like other species of butterflies, the *Kallima* are traded at a price close to US\$10.00. However, there is no indication yet of the species being endangered.

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