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Lestes Paloti: A New Damselfly from the Western Ghats

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Lestes Paloti: A New Damselfly from the Western Ghats

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✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

*Scientists have described , a new species of spreadwing damselfly, from **Kerala's Western Ghats**. It is the first new **Lestes** species recorded from the Western Ghats since **Lestes malabaricus in 1929**, closing a gap of roughly **96 years**, and the first new **Lestes** from India since **Lestes garoensis in 1987**. The discovery was published in the **International Journal of Odonatology**.*

A DISCOVERY NEARLY A CENTURY IN THE MAKING

The Western Ghats is one of the most intensively surveyed biodiversity landscapes in the world, which makes the description of a **new Lestes species** here a notable event. The genus **Lestes** belongs to the family **Lestidae**, commonly called **spreadwings**, and the last time a member of this genus was named from the Western Ghats was **Lestes malabaricus in 1929**. For India as a whole, the previous new **Lestes** was **Lestes garoensis in 1987** from the northeast. **Lestes paloti** therefore fills a taxonomic gap that stretched across generations of naturalists.

The species was named in honour of **Dr Muhamed Jafer Palot** of the **Zoological Survey of India (ZSI)**, recognising his contributions to the study of the region's fauna. Naming new species after living scientists (a patronym) is a common taxonomic practice that credits sustained field and museum work.

Where It Was Found

Lestes paloti was recorded across **six districts of Kerala**, indicating a reasonably wide but still region-specific distribution within the state.

ATTRIBUTE	DETAIL
Scientific name	Lestes paloti
Genus / Family	Lestes / Lestidae (spreadwings)
Named after	Dr Muhamed Jafer Palot , ZSI
Region	Western Ghats , Kerala
Districts recorded	Kannur, Kozhikode, Wayanad, Malappuram, Palakkad, Ernakulam
Habitat	Scrub and laterite hillocks , away from open water
Special trait	Seasonal colour change (brown in dry season, bluish in monsoon)
Published in	International Journal of Odonatology

WHY THE SPECIES STANDS OUT

Two features make *Lestes paloti* biologically interesting. First, it shows **seasonal colour change**: individuals appear **brown during the dry season** and turn **bluish during the monsoon**. Such seasonal polyphenism can help an insect regulate temperature and camouflage as the surrounding vegetation shifts through the year.

Second, unlike many damselflies that stay close to ponds and streams, this species inhabits **scrub and laterite hillocks away from open water**. This unusual habitat preference suggests the Western Ghats still hides species adapted to microhabitats that routine surveys near water bodies can miss.

Damselflies vs Dragonflies

Damselflies and dragonflies together form the insect order **Odonata**. A quick way to tell them apart at rest:

- **Damselflies fold their wings over the body when perched**, and have slender bodies with widely separated eyes.
- Dragonflies hold their wings out flat and horizontal at rest, and are typically stouter with touching eyes.

Odonates are prized as **freshwater bio-indicators**: because their larvae develop in water and adults hunt near it, their presence and diversity signal the health of wetlands, streams and the wider **catchment**.

THE WESTERN GHATS AND THE ROLE OF THE ZSI

The **Western Ghats** is a **UNESCO natural World Heritage site** and one of **India's four biodiversity hotspots** (alongside the Himalaya, the Indo-Burma region and the Sundaland or Nicobar group). Its high **endemism**, meaning species found nowhere else, is exactly what makes discoveries like *Lestes paloti* possible

even in the twenty-first century.

The **Zoological Survey of India (ZSI)**, established in **1916** and headquartered in **Kolkata**, is the nodal organisation for **faunal survey and documentation** in the country. Discoveries of this kind, often supported by field naturalists and **citizen science** networks of odonate watchers, feed directly into national biodiversity records and conservation planning.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 3: Conservation, biodiversity and environment; science and technology (taxonomy, bio-indicators).

Prelims pointers:

- **Lestes paloti** belongs to genus **Lestes**, family **Lestidae** (spreadwings), order **Odonata**.
- Named after **Dr Muhamed Jafer Palot** of the **Zoological Survey of India (ZSI)**.
- **ZSI**: established **1916**, headquartered in **Kolkata**; nodal body for faunal survey.
- **Western Ghats**: **UNESCO World Heritage** site and one of **India's four biodiversity hotspots**.
- **Damselflies fold wings over the body at rest**; dragonflies keep them spread flat.
- Odonates are **freshwater bio-indicators**.

★ FACTS CORNER, KNOWLEDGE PEDIA

Lestes paloti is the first new *Lestes* from the Western Ghats since *Lestes malabaricus* (1929) and the first from India since *Lestes garoensis* (1987).

Recorded in six Kerala districts: Kannur, Kozhikode, Wayanad, Malappuram, Palakkad and Ernakulam.

Lives in scrub and laterite hillocks away from open water, unusual for a damselfly.

Shows seasonal colour change: brown in the dry season, bluish in the monsoon.

India's four biodiversity hotspots: the Himalaya, the Western Ghats, the Indo-Burma region and Sundaland (Nicobar).

Order Odonata = dragonflies + damselflies; larvae are aquatic, making them sensitive indicators of freshwater health.

Sources: The Hindu on Lestes paloti, Zoological Survey of India, International Journal of Odonatology

Source: *Lestes Paloti: A New Damselfly from the Western Ghats* — Ujiyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs

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