Old World species of *Mythicomyia* Coquillett (Diptera: Mythicomyiidae): examples of a relict genus?

*Neal L. Evenhuis*
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Cover photo: *Mythicomyia irwini* Evenhuis, n. sp., holotype female from South Africa.

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BERNICE PAUAHI BISHOP MUSEUM
The State Museum of Natural and Cultural History
1525 Bernice Street
Honolulu, Hawai’i 96817-2704, USA
Old World species of *Mythicomyia* (Diptera: Mythicomyiidae): examples of a relict genus?

**NEAL L. EVENHUIS**
Pacific Biological Survey, Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, 1525 Bernice Street, Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96817-2704, USA; email: NealE@bishopmuseum.org

**Abstract:** Four new species of *Mythicomyia* Coquillett, 1893 are described from the Old World: *Mythicomyia africana* Evenhuis, *n*. *sp*. (South Africa); *M. irwini* Evenhuis, *n*. *sp*. (India); *M. tokotaai* Evenhuis, *n*. *sp*. (Fiji); and *M. vinaka* Evenhuis, *n*. *sp*. (Fiji). Also, *Mythenteles asiatica* (Evenhuis) from China and *M. rigirostris* (Evenhuis) from Bangladesh are re-examined and transferred back to *Mythicomyia*. The biogeographical and evolutionary implications of these findings are discussed. A key to the Old World representatives of *Mythicomyia* is given.

**Key words:** biogeography, taxonomy, microbombyliid, Miocene, disjunct, China, Bangladesh, South Africa, Fiji, India

**INTRODUCTION**

The genus *Mythicomyia* was originally proposed by Coquillett (1893) for the single species *Mythicomyia rileyi* from California. Since then, more than 180 species have been described in the genus from both North and South America (and hundreds more undescribed species await publication), making it the most speciose genus of microbombyliids (cf. Evenhuis 2002a). It was thought for many years that all species were found in just North and South America until Evenhuis (1981) described two new species from China and Bangladesh. When Hall & Evenhuis (1986, 1987) revised the Nearctic species of *Mythicomyia*, they placed some species that lacked the typical keel-shaped anal lobe of the wing in the new *Mythicomyia* subgenus *Mythenteles* Hall & Evenhuis. Evenhuis (1991) noted the difference in antennal and female genitalic characters too and raised *Mythenteles* to a full genus. When compiling the world catalog of Mythicomyiidae, Evenhuis (2002a) re-read his notes and descriptions of his 1981 Asian species and, along with *Empidideicus indicus* Brunetti from India, placed them all in *Mythenteles*, which resulted once again in *Mythicomyia* being restricted to the New World.

However, recently examined specimens of *Mythicomyia* collected from three widely disjunct Old World localities (Fiji, India, and South Africa) forced a re-thinking of the actual range of the genus and a re-examination of the 1981 type material. Results of this study show that the 1981 species placed in *Mythenteles* by Evenhuis (2003): *M. asiatica* and *rigirostris*, had been correctly described in *Mythicomyia* and are here transferred back to that genus. The resulting disjunct distribution of *Mythicomyia* (very speciose in North and South America) and disparate collections of singletons or a few specimens in the Old World—South Africa, China, India, Bangladesh, and Fiji—lends support to the possibil-

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1 Contribution 2022-001 to the Pacific Biological Survey.
ity that the genus was once more widespread but has become extinct in many areas of the Old World, while successfully speciating in the western part of the New World.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Specimens in this study derive from or are deposited in the following institutions and collections: BPBM = Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Hawai‘i; CAS = California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco, California; ZSI = Zoological Survey of India, Kolakat, India. Morphological terminology follows Evenhuis (2003).

TAXONOMY

Genus Mythicomyia Coquillett


Subgenus Heterhybos Brêthes

*Heterhybos* Brêthes, 1919: 40 (as genus). Type species: *Heterhybos hyalipennis* Brêthes, 1919, by original designation.


Figure 1. *Mythicomyia africana* Evenhuis, n. sp. 1, Habitus in transmitted light to show wing veins. Note: scutellum is brown, but appears paler here due to transmitted lighting. 1A, Detail of antenna.
Mythicomyia (Heterhybos) tokotaai Evenhuis, n. sp. (Fig. 3)

lsid:zoobank.org:act:868AF39E-49C2-444F-9E93-C89029392560

Type material. Holotype male (BPBMENT0000081232) (FBA 14496) and paratype male (BPBM- MENT0000081233) (FBA 14497) from: FIJI: Taveuni I: Cakaudrove District, 3.2 km NW Lavenga Village, Mt Koronibuabua, 16.855°S, 179.89°W, 217 m, 26 Mar–9 Apr 2004, Malaise 3, E.I. Schlinger, M. Tokota’a (FBA 14496) Holotype and paratype (both preserved in fluid) [paratype damaged with head separated from body] in BPBM.

Diagnosis. Using the key to Nearctic species of Mythicomyia in Hall & Evenhuis (1987), this species runs to M. agilis Melander from California, but can be separated from it by the long proboscis (slightly longer than head height in M. agilis), the lack of a contrasting notopleural line from the humeral callus to the pleural suture (this area yellow in M. agilis), and the broadly open anal cell at the margin (narrowly open in M. agilis). Using

Figure 2. Mythicomyia irwini Evenhuis, n. sp., habitus.
the key in Hall (1976), this new species runs to \textit{M. macra} Hall and is most similar to it based on the extremely long proboscis in both species, but differs from it by the all dark brown postalar callus (partially yellow in \textit{M. macra}) and the brilliant white halter knob (yellow in \textit{M. macra}).

**Description.** Male (Fig. 3). Length: 1.70 mm. **Head.** Vertex, occiput, and mentum black; eyes holoptic; front and face white, tip of oral margin black; antennae (Fig. 3A) black; scape minute; pedicel cylindrical, slightly wider than long; first flagellomere linear-lanceolate, length about 3.5 times greatest width; second flagellomere about equal in length to first flagellomere, with subbasal sensillum; proboscis dark brown, long, extending about 2.5 times head height [apical 2/3 of proboscis broke off during examination and is kept with the type in the same vial]; palpus not evident.

**Thorax.** Mesonotum and scutellum dark brown, with sparse short white hairs, densest anteriorly; humeral callus white; pleura dark brown, katepisternum with thin yellowish border dorsally.

**Legs.** Coxae and femora dark brown except apices yellow; all of tibiae and tarsi lighter brown than coxae and femora; halter stem yellow, knob brilliant white.

**Wing.** Hyaline; veins yellowish brown; costa ends slightly less than halfway between end of R$_{4+5}$ and M$_1$; vein Sc incomplete; Rs evanescent at connection with R$_1$; R$_{2+3}$ arising at midpoint of Rs, slightly sinuous to junction with R$_1$; R$_{4+5}$ straight to wing margin, not curved; vein M$_1$ slightly curved toward wing margin; M$_2$ fairly straight to wing margin; A$_1$ evanescent, fairly straight to wing margin, not curved or sinuous; fringe of hair on posterior margin of wing rather sparse.

**Abdomen.** Dorsum brown, with scattered white hairs; tergites II–VII with thin white fascia posteriorly, yellowish laterally; venter yellow. Genitalia not dissected.

**Etymology.** Names for one of the collectors, Moala Tokota’a who provided useful assistance and great camaraderie in the field during our Fiji Terrestrial Arthropods survey.

\textit{Mythicomyia (Heterhybos) vinaka} Evenhuis, \textit{n. sp.}

(Fig. 4)

**Type material.** Holotype male (BPBM:MENT0000081234) (FBA 156163) from: FIJI: Taveuni: 5.3 km SE Tavuki Village, Mt. Devo, 1064 m, 16.8741°S 179.968°W, 2–10 Oct 2002, Malaise 3, E.I. Schlinger, M. Tokota’a. Holotype (preserved in fluid) in BPBM.

**Diagnosis.** Using the key to Nearctic species of \textit{Mythicomyia} in Hall & Evenhuis (1987), this species runs to \textit{M. discreta} Hall & Evenhuis from California, but can be separated from it by the yellow postalar callus (postalar callus black in \textit{M. discreta}) and the yellowish tibiae and tarsi (legs all black in \textit{M. discreta}). Using the key in Hall (1976), this species runs to \textit{M. orthis} Hall, but can be distinguished from it by the yellowish tibiae and tarsi (legs all black in \textit{M. orthis}).

**Description.** Male (Fig. 4). Length: 1.20 mm. **Head.** Vertex, occiput, and mentum black; eyes holoptic; front and face black, tip of oral margin black; antennae brown; scape minute; pedicel cylindrical, slightly wider than long; first flagellomere linear-lanceolate, length about 3.5 times greatest width; second flagellomere broken off and missing; proboscis brown, short, length about 3/4 head height; palpus not evident.
Thorax. Mesonotum and scutellum dark brown, with evenly spaced short white hairs; humeral callus, post humeral area, supra-alar area, and postalar callus yellow; pleura dark brown, yellow only in membranous areas.

Legs. Baal 1/3 of coxae and basal 2/3 of femora dark brown; apical 2/3 of coxae, apical 1/3 of femora, all of tibiae, and tarsi yellowish to yellowish white; halter yellow, knob brilliant white.

Wing. Hyaline; veins yellowish white; costa ends slightly less than halfway between end of R4+5 and M1; vein Sc incomplete; Rs evanescent at connection with R1; R2+3 arising at apical 1/3 of Rs, slightly sinuous to junction with R1; R4+5 straight to wing margin, not curved; vein M1 slightly curved toward wing margin; M2 fairly straight to wing margin; A1 evanescent, slightly straight to wing margin, not curved or sinuous; fringe of hair on posterior margin of wing rather sparse.

Abdomen. Dorsum brown, with scattered white hairs; yellowish white posteriorly on tergites II–VII; venter yellow. Genitalia not dissected.

Etymology. The specific epithet derives from the Fijian “vinaka” = “thank you”; in thanks to all who worked with or assisted us in our Fiji Terrestrial Arthropods study. The name is treated as a noun in apposition.

Remarks. During photography of the holotype, the head became detached from the body. It is stored with the holotype in the same vial.

Unplaced to Subgenus of Mythicomyia Coquillett

Mythicomyia africana Evenhuis, n. sp.

(Fig. 1)

lsid:zoobank.org:act:2428E0DD-C662-4866-A23B-F4D3E032AA74

Type material. Holotype female from: SOUTH AFRICA: Western Cape: 43 km N. Matjiesfontein, 3–24 Oct 2004, 970 m, 32°51′35″S, 20°33′37″E, ME Irwin, F Parker, M Hauser. Holotype (preserved in fluid) in CAS.

Diagnosis. Using the key to females of Nearctic Mythicomyia in Hall & Evenhuis (1987), this species runs to couplet 14 where it is stymied between arizonica Hall & Evenhuis and armata Cresson. It does not key to either because it lacks yellow fasciae on the abdominal tergites (arizonica and armata both possess yellow fasciae). Using the key to species in Hall (1976) it runs to diasema Hall but differs in having a short proboscis (the proboscis in diasema is as long as the head) and the hind femur coloration (brown on basal half, yellow in apical half in africana, all yellow with apex brown in diasema).

Description. Female (Fig. 1). Length: 1.30 mm. Head. Vertex, occiput, and mentum black; eyes dichoptic, separated at vertex by 1.5 times distance between lateral ocelli; front and face dark brown, paler just above antennae, tip of oral margin brown; antennae (Fig. 1A) brown; scape minute; pedicel cylindrical, slightly wider than long; first flagellomere linear-lanceolate, length about 3.5 times greatest width; second flagellomere about 3/4 length of first flagellomere, with subapical sensillum; proboscis yellowish white, short, extending slightly beyond oral margin; palpus not evident.

Thorax. Mesonotum brown, scutellum brown; humeral callus, post humeral area, supra-alar area, and postalar callus yellowish white; notopleural band from humeral cal-
lus to postalar callus yellow, interrupted in supraalar area; anepisternum, katepisternum and anepimeron yellow above, dark brown below; other plura brown; halter stem and knob yellow.

**Legs.** Foreleg yellowish white; mid leg with coxa and basal third of femur brown, apical two-thirds yellow; hind leg with coxa and basal half of femur brown, apical half yellow; mid tibia all yellow, hind tibia yellow, brown on apical one-third; mid and hind basitarsi yellow, tarsal segments 2–5 and claws [broken off during examination] brown.

**Wing.** Hyaline; veins white; costa ends slightly less than halfway between end of R₄₊₅ and M₁; vein Sc complete; Rs evanescent at connection with R₁; R₂₊₃ arising at apical 1/3 of Rs, slightly sinuous to junction with R₁; R₄₊₅ and M₁ slightly curved toward wing margin; M₂ fairly straight to wing margin; A₁ fairly straight to wing margin, not curved or sinuous; fringe of hair on posterior margin of wing rather sparse.

**Abdomen.** Dorsum all brown, with scattered white hairs; sternites yellow. Genitalia not dissected.

**Remarks.** Other mythicomyiids collected with the holotype include the genera *Doliopteryx*, *Empidideicus*, *Glabellula*, *Cephalodromia*, and *Pieza* (the last a new record of the genus for the Old World).

**Mythicomyia irwini** Evenhuis, n. sp.  
(Fig. 2)  
lsid:zoobank.org:act:8FC7E8D2-2899-421D-BBDB-07044822C610

**Type material.** Holotype female from: **INDIA:** Rajasthan: Jaisalmer District: 15 km SW Jaisalmer, 280 m, 26°48′41″N, 70°50′27″E, 2 Mar 2008, M.E. Irwin, D.R. Priyadarsanan, hand netted in riverbed dunes. Holotype (preserved in fluid) in ZSI.

**Diagnosis.** Using the key to Nearctic species of *Mythicomyia* in Hall & Evenhuis (1987), this species runs to *M. desertorum* Hall & Evenhuis from California based on the abdominal pattern. *Mythicomyia irwini* n. sp. can be separated from it by the front being black above, white below (yellow with a black triangle in *M. desertorum*) and tergite I being brown (tergite I yellow in *M. desertorum*). Using the key in Hall (1967), it runs to *M. trepta* Hall, but differs by having the front black above and broadly white below (all black except yellow restricted to a small triangle in *M. trepta*) and the black and yellow abdomen (all black in *trepta*).

**Description.** Female (Fig. 2). Length: 1.70 mm. **Head.** Vertex, occiput, ocellar tubercle, and mentum black; eyes dichoptic, separated at vertex by 1.5 times distance between lateral ocelli; front black above, white below, face white, tip of oral margin black; antennae brown; scape minute; pedicel cylindrical, slightly wider than long; first flagellomere linear-lanceolate, length about 4 times greatest width; second flagellomere about 2/3 length of first flagellomere, with subbasal sensillum; proboscis brown, short, extending slightly beyond oral margin; palpus not evident.

**Thorax.** Mesonotum black, scutellum yellow, with evenly spaced short white hairs; uninterrupted broad band of white laterally from humeral callus to supraalar area, postalar callus white; pleural sclerites white above, dark brown below; halter stem and knob white.

**Legs.** Coxae with small basal spot, otherwise legs yellowish white, except tarsi 2–5 brown; claws pale brown.
Wing. Hyaline; veins yellowish white; costa ends slightly beyond end of R_{4+5}; vein Sc incomplete; Rs evanescent at connection with R_{1}; R_{2+3} arising at apical 1/3 of Rs, slightly sinuous to junction with R_{1}; R_{4+5} straight to wing margin, not curved; vein M_{1} slightly bowed toward wing margin; M_{2} fairly straight to wing margin; A_{1} evanescent, fairly straight to wing margin, not curved or sinuous; fringe of hair on posterior margin of wing rather sparse.

Abdomen. Tergites with anterior half brown, posterior half yellowish white, with scattered white hairs; posterior margins of brown on tergites wavy, not straight; venter yellow. Genitalia not dissected.

Etymology. Names after one of the collectors, Michael E. Irwin, who kindly provided much mythicomyiid material over the years for study.

*Mythicomyia asiatica* Evenhuis

(Figs. 5–6)


Diagnosis. This species is closest to *M. irwini* by both having a short proboscis and a yellow scutellum, but it is easily separated from it by having brown basally on the femora (femora all yellow in *M. irwini*) and the open anal cell in the wing margin (anal cell closed at the wing margin in *M. irwini*).
Remarks. The holotype female (Figs. 5–6) of *Mythicomyia asiatica* was re-examined during this study and found to be a true *Mythicomyia*, so it is transferred back to that genus here. The antennae are broken off beyond the scape, so it is impossible to use this character. In revising the genus *Mythenteles* Evenhuis (2003) re-examined and concluded it belonged in *Mythenteles*. During this study, the holotype was once again examined, and it was found that the vein R<sub>1</sub> is sinuous (a character state possessed by *Mythicomyia* and a few *Mythenteles*) but the base of M was evanescent. This vein is well sclerotized in *Mythenteles*, but evanescent in *Mythicomyia*. Thus, *M. asiatica* it is here transferred back to *Mythicomyia*.

The type locality of Wanxian [now Wanzhou] was located in Sichuan Province when the type was collected, and was listed as such in Yao *et al.* (2018), but the eastern part of Sichuan became the separate provincial-level municipality of Chonqing in 1997.

*Mythicomyia rigirostris* Evenhuis

(Through 7–8)


Material Examined. Holotype female from: “E. Pakistan” [= Bangladesh], Harbang Forest, 6 mi [9.7 km] N. Chirringa [21°52'05.9"N 92°02'35.0"E], 50 ft [15.25 m], 18 Sep 1961, E.S. Ross & D.Q. Cavagnaro. Holotype in CAS.

Diagnosis. This species is easily separated from its congeners in the Old World by the long proboscis (other females of *Mythicomyia* in the Old World have a proboscis shorter than the head height) and the yellow and black scutellum (other species have uniformly colored scutellum—either all yellow or all brown).
Remarks. The holotype female (Figs. 7–8) of Mythicomyia rigirostris was re-examined during this study and found to be a true Mythicomyia, so it is transferred back to that genus here. The antennae are broken off beyond the scape, so it is impossible to use this character; however, the wing shape (possessing a well developed [= keel-shaped] anal lobe) is unique to Mythicomyia. In revising the genus Mythenteles Evenhuis (2003) re-examined the holotype and re-humidified it in order to better ascertain the shape of the wing. It was concluded at that time that the anal lobe was reduced in shape and not keel-like and thus its treatment at that time in Mythenteles. During this study, the holotype was once again examined with special reference to the anal region. It is clear now, that what appeared to be a reduced anal lobe was mistaken because of the lobe was torn and not all of it could be seen. Better magnification used here concludes that is indeed keel-shaped. Additionally, the long tubular proboscis is not found in any species of Mythenteles. All Mythenteles have a proboscis shorter than the head and with the labellae one-third to one-half the length of the proboscis. The labellae of M. rigirostris are small and 1/10 the length of the proboscis.

**Key to Species of Old World Mythicomyia**

1. Male ....................................................................................................................... 2
   –. Female ................................................................................................................ 3

2. Proboscis much longer than head height (Fig. 3); postalar callus brown (Fiji) ...........
   ............................................................................................................. M. tokotaai Evenhuis, n. sp.
   –. Proboscis shorter than head height (4); postalar callus yellow (Fiji) ......................
   ............................................................................................................. M. vinaka Evenhuis, n. sp.

3. Scutellum brown with yellow laterally (Fig. 8); proboscis much longer than head height (Fig. 7); (Bangladesh) ......................................................... M. rigirostris Evenhuis
   –. Scutellum uniformly colored brown or yellow but not mixtures of two; proboscis shorter than head height (Figs. 1, 2, 5)......................................................... 4

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**Figure 9.** Map of Mythicomyia distribution in the Old World.
4. Scutellum all yellow (Figs. 2, 5); notopleural band complete from humeral callus to postalar callus (Asia) ................................................................. 5
   –. Scutellum all brown (Fig. 1), concolorous with mesonotum; notopleural band not complete, interrupted above wing base (South Africa) ..... _M. africana_ Evenhuis, **n. sp.**

5. Femora all yellow (Fig. 2); anepisternum black below broad whitish notopleural band; anal cell closed at wing margin by short stalk (India) ... _M. irwini_ Evenhuis, **n. sp.**
   –. Femora brown basally, yellow apically (Fig. 5); anepisternum white below broad whitish notopleural band; anal cell open at wing margin (China) ............................................. _M. asiatica_ Evenhuis

**DISCUSSION**

The collection of disparate and rare Old World representatives of an otherwise speciose New World genus is an interesting biogeographic puzzle (see Fig. 9). _Mythicomyia_ are a common element in Malaise and yellow pan trap collecting in arid western North and South America (with 160+ described species and an additional 100+ new species awaiting description) but are extremely rare in the Old World. Species shown here from these widely separated Old World localities could be a result of ancient relictual populations. This assumption is confounded, however, by the age of _Mythicomyia_.

The oldest known fossil representative of _Mythicomyia_ is from c. 20 Ma Miocene Dominican amber (Evenhuis, 2002b), which is ca. 110 million years after the separation of the African and South American continents. Mythicomyiidae are an old lineage with the oldest known fossil deriving from the Middle Jurassic (ca. 180 Ma). However, those fossils that are contemporary or older than the breakup of South America+Africa (varying estimates from 140 to 180 Ma; Schettino & Scotese 2005, Seton _et al._ 2012) all belong to the subfamilies Platypyginae or Psiloderoidinae, not Mythicomyiinae. All Old World fossil representatives of the subfamily Mythicomyiinae are genera other than _Mythicomyia_ (Evenhuis 2002a, 2003, 2013), with the oldest being _Mythenteles_ Evenhuis, 2002 from Eocene Baltic amber and _Riga_ Evenhuis, 2013 from Eocene Rovno amber. The findings here seem to point to the possibility that _Mythicomyia_ may represent a much older lineage than current analyses show. The species of _Mythicomyia_ used in the molecular analyses of Trautwein _et al._ (2010, 2011) derived from western North America and may be a young offshoot of a much older Old World ancestor.

Another factor to consider is that there are two subgenera of _Mythicomyia_ currently recognized: _Mythicomyia_ Coquillett and _Heterhybos_ Brèthes. The nominate subgenus is separated from _Heterhybos_ by the presence of a modified hind basitarsus in the male; unfortunately, no external characters have yet been found to separate females (dissection of female genitalia is required). _Mythicomyia_ (_Mythicomyia_) is restricted to the Neartic whereas the subgenus _Heterhybos_ is found in the New World and Fiji (the species from India, Bangladesh, and Africa are females, and it is not possible without dissection to determine subgeneric status, but it is believed they will turn out to also belong to _Heterhybos_). The _Mythicomyia_ species used in the Trautwein _et al._ (2010, 2011) DNA analyses and its sequence deposited in GenBank is of an undetermined species. In fact, all DNA analyses except one have used undetermined species of _Mythicomyia_ (e.g., Moulton & Wiegmann 2007, Wang _et al._ 2021, Wiegmann _et al._ 2011, etc.); Whiting _et al._ (1997) used
Mythicomyia atra Cresson, which is a member of the subgenus Heterhybos. However, only 18S and 28S ribosomal DNA was used by Whiting et al. (1997) in comparison with much higher level taxa of different orders, so this analysis does not give any useful information regarding the relationships within the genus, family, or other related Asiloidea. It could be very well that these undetermined species in the Trautwein (2010, 2011) study and other analyses are all members of the nominate subgenus, which is hypothesized here to be a modern descendant of a much older Heterhybos lineage. Analyses of representatives of the subgenus Heterhybos from different parts of the world should be conducted in future analyses to better ascertain the relationships of members of this genus.

Molecular analysis of representatives from both subgenera could help with determining not only relationships among taxa but also the ages of these Old World species. Unfortunately, material of species studied in this paper are too rare (only one has a paratype and it is damaged) to subject them to destructive sampling for DNA analysis (even removal of a leg would be detrimental to accurate identification and, due to their small size, one leg would not be enough to recover enough DNA for analysis) and are in too poor a condition to subject them to tissue dissolving to DNA. Until more material of these species becomes available for molecular analysis, the biogeographic history of Mythicomyia unfortunately cannot be determined with absolute confidence.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
My special thanks to the late Evert Schlinger for his sorting the mythicomyiid specimens from Taveuni that included two of the new species of Mythicomyia described herein. I enjoyed our many conversations regarding Pacific biogeography and disjunct distributions of acrocerids. His hunch that missing links of acrocerids would be found in Fiji will have to wait another discovery, but his finding of Mythicomyiidae in what I consider a most unusual habitat for them was most enlightening and are due in full part to his collecting and sorting efforts. I am sorry he did not live to see the results of his finding those tiny but not insignificant flies making it to publication. Many thanks to Mike Irwin for the opportunity to study the mythicomyiid material from the Western Ghats that led to the discovery of the Indian Mythicomyia specimen and for his help in collecting the South African specimen. The Indian government is thanked for giving permission to collect under Permit WL12-7683/05. Michelle Trautwein (CAS) is thanked for making available for study the holotypes of Mythicomyia asiatica and M. rigirostris under her care. Babak Gharali and Carlos Lamas kindly reviewed the manuscript and their corrections and suggestions helped improve it.

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