

**Doon Watch Nature Series for Dehradun Live Hindustan Times
by Sanjay Sondhi**

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The Elusive Water Hairstreak

Any city has nooks and corners, just waiting to be explored. The twin cities of Dehradun and Mussoorie have loads of quiet hideouts that are just waiting to be unearthed. A few weeks ago, our friends, Arun Pratap Singh and Raka Singh took us to a quiet stream bordering the Woodstock School in Mussoorie. A little known spot (and possibly best kept that way!), we trudged along a trickle of water, that eventually widened into a bustling brook.

Surrounded by oak trees, loads of birds and butterflies greeted us. Amongst the prettiest butterflies to surface was the Water Hairstreak (*Euaspia milionia*). Belonging to the Lycaenidae family, these butterflies belong to a group aptly called Blues. A majority of the butterflies belonging to this group have various hues of blue on the upper surface of their wings. Underneath, when its wings are closed, the Water Hairstreak is a dull brown, with a slash of white across its fore and hind wings. But



when it opens its wings, it reveals a brilliant flash of blue and white!

Those of you who thought that butterflies open their wings only to show us their colours, I am sorry to report that you are mistaken! Butterflies, like other insects, and many other creatures are cold blooded. Unlike man, they cannot regulate their body temperature and are dependent on the heat of the sun to warm themselves. Hence, when the sun emerges, butterflies bask, spreading their wings to absorb as much of the sun's ray as they can.

We had a lesson in the vagaries of the weather and butterfly behaviour just a few days ago. After our first visit to this lovely spot, my son, Yash and I were greedy for more. So a few days ago, after the rains had stopped, we decided to re-visit the stream. To our dismay, while it was bright and sunny in Dehradun, Mussoorie was an entirely different story. Clouds appeared magically, and played hide-and-seek with the sun for the entire morning. In the few hours we spent there, we saw precisely five, yes only five butterflies! The lack of sunlight meant that the butterflies did not emerge, and left a very despondent father and son. It took a third visit, a few days later, (with frequent examination of the sky overhead to ensure that both Dehradun and Mussoorie would be sunny!), for us to be satisfied with the butterflies on view!

An elegant butterfly, the Water Hairstreak lives in shadowy ravines with vegetation, hidden amidst the foliage. It has a weak, fluttering flight, and takes to wing reluctantly. Often, the butterfly flies and settles underneath a leaf and then disappears, completely camouflaged. Hence, despite its beautiful colours, it remains unseen, hidden from peering human eyes (and of course, its predators). So typical of nature; beautiful, alluring, yet hidden. Unless you are willing to ferret out its mysteries-are you up to the challenge?

Sanjay Sondhi is a Dehradun based naturalist. Feedback on this column is welcome at sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com

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