

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

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The "Butter's" Story

Ever since I wrote the "Cat's" story last week about the survival strategies of caterpillars, I have received innumerable complaints from adult butterflies! What have we done to be ignored by Doon Watch-why can't you write about how we survive the big, bad world of nature! Just kidding, folks, but I do think that a story on how butterflies survive, once they have they have metamorphosed from caterpillars to adult butterflies is appropriate.

A commonly seen butterfly around Dehradun is the Sorrel Sapphire (*Heliophorus sena*). This butterfly belongs to the family Lycaenidae or the Blues. Many butterflies belonging to this family have tails on their hind wings. Often, when seated, the butterflies rub their hind wings together, causing their tails to move. In addition, the hind wings often have large black or orange spots. This pattern on the wing and their hind wing movements are an attempt to deceive their predators. While the spots on the wings appear to be like the butterfly's eyes, the moving tails make them appear like their antennae. Hence, often, their predators snap at the hind wings of the butterfly believing it to be the butterfly's head. They might lose their tails, but they keep their heads, and survive to tell their story!



Many butterflies that belong to the subfamily Satyrinae, commonly called the Browns, make use of a seasonal change in colour pattern to assist in camouflage. These butterflies, often have large eye-spots on their undersides. During their breeding season, these eye-spots are prominent, in order to attract the female, and this is called the wet season form of the butterfly. After the breeding season is over, the butterflies lose these eye spots and become inconspicuous. This form, the dry season form, allows the butterfly to camouflage themselves better, thereby reducing the chances of predation.

Butterflies belonging to the Danaid family (sometimes also called Milkweed butterflies) adopt an entirely different strategy. The caterpillars of these butterflies gorge on the milkweed plant. While doing so, they absorb chemicals which makes the caterpillar, and the adult butterfly, distasteful to predators. The most common example of this is the Plain Tiger butterfly (*Danaus chrysippus*), seen commonly in gardens in Dehradun.

Many other butterflies, which are not distasteful, mimic ones that are! Hence, the female of the Common Palmfly butterfly (*Elymnias hypermnestra*), which, again is seen quite commonly in Dehradun, mimics the Striped Tiger butterfly (*Danaus*

genutia)! Not only does the Common Palmfly copy the markings of the Striped Tiger, but it also mimics its flight. This kind of mimicry is called Batesian mimicry.

I could go on about the "butter's" stories, but I do hope that tales of this kind pique your curiosity and lead the amateur naturalist in you to wake up!

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