

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

Published on 13 December 2013

Let Animals Live.....

In the past week or so, there has been much online discussion on an article written by a well-known journalist on the issue of tigers that were possibly man-eaters. The journalist's view was that we should kill maneaters rather than capture them and send them to captivity in zoos. This caused much heartburn and debate with an equal number of people writing in favour of and against this.

During a recent nature walk to Shikhar Falls, in the outskirts of Dehradun to search for butterflies, an incident prompted me to ponder about this issue as well. The activity of insects reduces in the the colder months (being cold-blooded with relatively short lives) and this December was no exception. We saw fewer butterflies when compared to a previous visit. In addition, many of the butterflies we spotted were worn, and reaching the end of their lives.

My attention was attracted to a butterfly called the Chocolate Pansy. The individual that I spotted was clearly reaching the end of its life. Most butterflies have lives of only a few weeks to a few months. During this period, they mate, females lay eggs, and then the insect's useful life with respect to the survival of their species is at an end. The butterflies, do, of course, continue to play a role in the web of life by assisting in pollination, but they do make no more contribution to the life cycle of their young.



Photograph caption: A worn Chocolate Pansy

The Chocolate Pansy that I was observing was in a terrible state. Its wings had frayed, the trailing edges were in tatters, and I was quite certain that the butterfly would hardly be able to fly. Boy , was I wrong! As I approached the butterfly, it swiftly took to the wing and sped away, settling high up on a bush. From here, it made a few more sorties just to let me know that it could fly quite well. And to my eyes, it flew as well as any other freshly emerged butterfly that I had seen. A dragonfly eyed the butterfly “A tatsy meal beckons, eh!” said the dragonfly to itself. “Not yet” responded the butterfly as it adroitly escaped from the dragonfly’s attempts to capture it!

The butterfly’s zest for life, even as it was approaching the end of its adult life held a lesson for me. Lets not interfere with nature. The butterfly was gonna die, but let it die naturally. The same goes for tigers. Lets not play God by deciding which tiger is a man-eater or not. Lets not play God by killing tigers that we believe might be a threat. Let them die a natural death, whether in the forest or in captivity, is another question up for debate for another day!

Feedback on this column is welcome at [sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com](mailto:sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com)

Making a difference: The human-wild animal conflict is a serious issue throughout Uttarakhand (and India). Leopard, rhesus macaque, elephants-all of these and other wild animals clash with man often, mostly over food and habitat. As an ordinary citizen, what can you do? Simple actions, such as not feeding monkeys and avoiding night travel in areas where there might be wild animals are actions that we can easily take.

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