

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

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### *The Gobi Titli*

In many of the nature conservation training programs that I conduct for members of local communities living near forests, a constant issue is the absence of names in the local language for creatures that they see on a daily basis. While larger creatures such as mammals and birds still do have local names, smaller creatures like butterflies and moths seldom have vernacular names associated with them.

For example, in Hindi, is called a “*titli*” while a moth is called “*patanga*”, but that is as far as names for these creatures go. Sitting in our garden this morning, I was pondering about this issue when a small white butterfly flitted about me. The butterfly is the first to regularly appear in our garden as the winter recedes and warmer weather beckons.

The butterfly, the Indian Cabbage White (*Pieris canidia*), is a common butterfly seen in our gardens. It is white above and below, and has a small yellow streak at its wing base. Above, males have a single black spot on the forewing, while females have two black spots, so it is easy to tell them apart. The Indian Cabbage White belongs to a family of butterflies which are called Whites and Yellows (or Pieridae). Obviously, the family name comes from the fact that many butterflies in this group are either white or yellow. Science isn't always made complicated by the scientists!

The Indian Cabbage White has a slow, fluttering flight. In our garden, the butterfly loves to visit the yellow flowers of mustard. They can be seen all day, flitting from one flower to the next, sipping the nectar, and at the same time assisting the flowers in pollination. The Indian Cabbage White is found throughout India, and is actually common high up in the Himalaya, where it flies up to 3,600 m.

The butterfly gets its name, cabbage white, because its caterpillar lay eggs on the cabbage plant which belongs to the Genus Brassicaceae. One of the reasons that the Indian Cabbage White visits our garden, in addition to the flowers, is that my wife, Anchal, has planted cabbage in our vegetable garden! Hence, we often see female cabbage whites flitting about the cabbage, looking to lay its eggs.

Watching the butterfly daintily flit about in the garden, I wondered whether I could assign a Hindi name to the butterfly. In this case, the name came easily. This butterfly could easily be called the “*Gobi Titli*”. So the next time you sit out in your garden, and see a small white butterfly fluttering about, its probably the “*Gobi Titli*” saying “hello” to you!



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

Making a difference: Cost of food going up? Grow your own vegetables! In my wife's vegetable garden, this winter, we have fed on cabbage, lettuce, mustard, tomatoes, garlic, spring onions, broccoli and lots more. What more can one ask for?

Photograph caption: Indian Cabbage White

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