

What's in a Name

In my many years of blissful nature watching, one thing that has always amused me is the common names given to several species. When it comes to birds, there are many onomatopoeic names (names associated with the sound made by the bird), such as the cuckoo or the hoopoe, so there seems to be some method in the madness. However, when it comes to butterflies, it seems clear that the people who named these butterflies seemed to have allowed their imagination to run amuck! Read on to find out more...

Plane Bindahara phocides **Photographed: Garo Hills, Meghalaya**

An old joke—it is a bird, no, it is a plane...yes, it is a Plane—a butterfly!

It does not need sophisticated avionics to ensure that it does not bump into stuff at the canopy level, where it often flies exceedingly fast. Glossy black above, its underside is whitish, with brown bands.



Constable Dichorhagia nesimachus **Photographed: Pakke, Arunachal**

An absolute stunner! Often seen mud-puddling and feeding on minerals on damp soil, its spectacular colour changes with the angle of sunlight falling on its wings!

It patrols its territory—is that why it is a Constable?



Wizard Rhinopalpa polynice **Photographed: Pakke, Assam**

It seems magical—that is the only reason why this butterfly could be called the Wizard! With a peculiar shape to its wings and a bright and rich tawny orange on the upperside, the butterfly is aggressive and chases away other butterflies. At a damp spot, I watched as the butterfly chased away other larger species, so that it could feed by itself! No wizardry here; just brute force!

Witch Aroates lapithes **Photographed: Nameri, Assam**

Picture this!

Me: "Look at that stunning butterfly!"

Colleague: "What is it?"

Me: "Witch!"

Colleague: "Which?"

Me: "Yes, Witch!"

Colleague: "Which butterfly, man?"

Me: "Witch".

P.S: This is a real conversation!



Joker Byblia ilithyia **Photographed: Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu**

The joke is on you, mister! This butterfly is not funny; but the guy who named it must have had a weird sense of humour! Seen commonly in peninsular India, the Joker has a weak, fluttering flight, close to the ground. It prefers dry, open areas.

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