

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?



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.



By Sanjay Sondhi, a Dehradun-based naturalist (sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com).