

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

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Rearing Butterflies In Your Home

Amongst the many wonders of nature is the life cycle of the butterfly. As a child, I often reared my own butterflies, and the fascination of watching the metamorphosis of a tiny caterpillar into a beautiful, dainty winged fairy, remains unchanged to this day. Possibly the best way to expose your child to the marvelous world of nature is to get them to rear their own butterflies.

The most common butterfly that you can raise is that of the Common Emigrant *Catopsilia pomona*. The caterpillars of butterflies feed on very specific plants, hence butterflies lay their eggs on these very plants. The food plant for the Common Emigrant is the Indian Laburnum or *Amaltas Cassia fistula*, which is easily recognised by its pretty yellow flowers. The butterfly normally lays white or yellow eggs in clusters on the leaves of *Amaltas*. Look for the eggs, else check out whether you can find tiny greenish caterpillars.

Rearing caterpillars to become butterflies is not easy, and requires great care and patience. Place the leaves with eggs or caterpillars a large, clean glass jar. Don't touch the eggs or caterpillars with your hand, as they very susceptible to infection. The caterpillars required a humid atmosphere, so place a small container with water in the glass jar. When the caterpillars emerge, they will feed voraciously, and you need to feed them fresh leaves of the *Amaltas* on a daily basis. Keep the leaf stems dipped in water to keep the leaves fresh. Cover the glass jar with a wire netting or cloth, so that the fresh air can enter to allow the “cats” to breathe. The caterpillars will dirty your jar, because of the amount of food they eat-so clean the jar daily.





Photograph no 1: Emigrant cocoon

Photograph no 2: Emigrant emerging from cocoon

Over a period of two weeks, you will watch the caterpillars grow, and moult many times. At each moult, the caterpillar's colour changes! And the hungry “cats” actually eat their moulted skin as well! Once the caterpillar has grown to maturity, it will begin to spin itself a cocoon or pupa. To allow it to do so, ensure that you keep a stick in the glass jar. During the course of the next ten days, you can actually see the butterfly develop within the green coloured cocoon. And imagine your child's delight, when the pretty Emigrant butterfly emerges from the cocoon! The fresh butterfly needs a few hours to allow its wings to dry. Once it does so, release the butterfly and watch it pirouette gracefully to through the sky.

For all those budding naturalists in Dehradun, rear your own butterfly this summer, and watch nature's marvels unravel in front of your own eyes.

Note: Rearing butterflies in your home is not easy and requires great care. I would be more than happy to guide children who want to rear their own butterflies. You can contact me at the email ID below for any assistance that you need.

Sanjay Sondhi is a Dehradun based naturalist. Feedback on this column is welcome at sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com

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Making a difference: Help your child rear butterflies in your home, to help them experience nature first hand.