

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

Published on 31 July 2009

### The Tortoise Beetles

Bruised, bitten, scratched and unsuccessful! If you've been through all of this, you have a sympathiser-namely me! Last week, my wife, Anchal, mentioned to me that she had seen really pretty beetles beside the road, very close to our house. She said that they were easy to catch, came onto the hand quite easily and offered to show them to me.

Camera in hand, I set off, lead by Anchal. We spotted the insects without difficulty. The half-inch sized insects were Tortoise Beetles, a beautiful, golden-yellow above, with a yellow transparent plate all around the body. The beetles were sitting on the leaves of a broad-leaved creeper, alongside the road. With my equipment in readiness, I proceeded to attempt to photograph them. As I was wearing shorts, I had to wade through thorny bushes, and ended up with thoroughly scratched legs. Then, the mosquitoes, proceeded to feed on my scratched, but apparently attractive legs! As though this were enough, the beetles refused to let me take a good photograph. Each time I got close, the Tortoise Beetle raised its wings above the body slowly, and then opening its golden wings, flew tantalizingly out of reach. Otherwise, they just dropped off the leaves into the impenetrable undergrowth, leaving me scrabbling for them amidst the thorns. In addition, my attempts to climb the hill slope on which the beetles were, led to an ungainly fall leaving me with an aching backside!



As if being bruised, bitten, scratched and unsuccessful were not enough, I had to endure Anchal standing on the road, having a good laugh at my futile attempts at photography. To rub salt into my wounds, the next morning, the Tortoise Beetle showed up in our vegetable garden, allowing me to take its photograph. I think the beetles were mocking me-this particular one must have followed us home, and taken pity on me!

Tortoise Beetles, belong to the Hispinae sub-family of leaf beetles. The beetles get their name from the extended shell-like formation, which superficially resembles the carapace of tortoises. The adults hibernate through winter, appearing just before the monsoons. Their presence can be determined the manner in which they feed on leaves. The beetles feed on fresh leaves, eating, not at the edge, but in the middle, leaving tiny holes in the leaf. In addition, the beetles inhabit only a few plant species, and hence are easy to locate. Funnily enough, the beetles lay their eggs on a different plant. Hence, a short distance away, we found the Tortoise Beetle larva on the Ber plant (*Zizyphus jejube*). The larva look like the Tortoise beetles, but are dark brown with many spines on the body.

India is home to many species of Tortoise beetles. We, in Dehradun, are fortunate to be able to see them within the city limits, in our green city. Lets ensure we keep it green.

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Making a difference: The monsoon is a great time to plant trees. Participate in tree plantation activities to green Dehradun.

Photograph caption:

Picture # 1: Tortoise beetle adult

Picture # 2: Tortoise beetle larva

Note: If there is insufficient space, use only the first picture.