

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

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### The Indian Moon Moth

The doorbell rang “ting tong”. Peeking out through the window, I spotted Sushmit, a young boy, at the front gate. Sushmit is a keen nature lover, and is always looking for interesting creatures in the society. For me, being nominated the resident “naturalist” in the society is an advantage. Everyone comes to me if they see something interesting be it a bird, insect, snake or animal-so I get a free supply of things to write about! It is another matter that I hear rumblings about “the crazy guy who works for National Geographic”, both of which, I assure you, are incorrect!

Back to Sushmit. Walking to the front gate, I met a breathless Sushmit. “Uncle, there is a large moth which we have found!” I accompanied Sushmit to a neighbour’s house, and his younger brother, Arith along with his friend Joshua, excitedly showed me a large greenish-white moth. Someone had found the moth lying on the road and had picked it up show to the boys. The moth, I informed the excited boys, was the Indian Moon Moth (*Actias selene*). The Indian Moon Moth is a pretty moth, belonging to the moth family of Saturniidae, also called the emperor or silk moths. The moth has a lovely greenish colour and two long tails. On each wing of the moth are small eye-like markings. I asked Joshua and Arith “Why does the moth have these markings?” They thought about it, and replied quickly “To fool animals that might come to eat it!”. And they were correct-the eye-like markings are used to fool predators, who end up thinking that the moth is a large creature with eyes.



I showed the boys the moth's antennae, and told them that female moths let off a chemical which the male moth can sense from kilometers away. Sushmit wanted to photograph the moth's mouth. I showed them that the moth has virtually no mouth parts. It does not feed as an adult, living off the food stored in the body at the caterpillar stage. This also means that the moth has a very short life, possibly of only a few weeks.

Joshua and Arith were really excited about the moth-it was like a pet to them! I gently explained to the boys that the moth is nocturnal, and if allowed to fly during the day, it was likely to be caught and eaten by a bird. I told them the best thing for them to do was to ensure that the moth sat in a safe location, where no person would step on it by mistake, and yet it would be safe from birds. And when it grew dark, they could let the moth fly away. And that is exactly what the boys did...allow the Moon Moth to fly, fly away, to lead its life. Kudos to the youngsters for doing the right thing!

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

Making a difference: It is so important to guide young children to do the right thing, when it comes to wild creatures that they come across. Arith, Joshua and Sushmit did the right thing by protecting the Moon Moth, and yet allowing it to fly away at night.

Photograph caption: The Indian Moon Moth

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