

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

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The Common Grass Yellow

These days, our daytime meals are outside in our garden. I enjoy these mealtimes, not only for the warmth of the sun, and the soothing view of the Mussoorie hills in the background, but also for all the activity in the natural world around us.

The most visible sign of activity, despite the arrival of winter, are these yellow butterflies that flit about about the garden in large numbers. The butterflies are Common Grass Yellows (*Eurema hecabe*) and are a common sight in everyone's gardens.



The butterflies have a gentle, hopping flight, and fly gracefully all around the garden. The contrast in their activity between meals, too, is interesting. At breakfast, it is still cold, and these cold blooded creatures need the warmth of the sun to get going. Hence most of the grass yellows are inactive, and are sitting below leaves, well camouflaged. Interestingly, the sedentary butterflies normally pick the the aging yellow leaves of the mustard planted in the garden. These yellow leaves, provide the yellow insects terrific camouflage. In fact, the only way you can make out that the butterflies, are , indeed, amongst the mustard, is for me to walk amongst the plants

(amidst yells from my wife, Anchal, not to trample her vegetable garden!). Then, suddenly, five or six grass yellows suddenly take to wing, lighting up my day. They soon settle back, as it is still too cold for them to fly about.

At lunchtime, the grass yellows present a completely different picture. The sun now shines through brightly and the grass yellows revel in the warmth on offer. At any given moment, at least a dozen butterflies are on the wing in the garden. They flit to the flowers that are still blooming, to feed on nectar, drop onto moist soil to get their share of moisture and minerals and occasionally, just flit about for fun!

The Common Grass Yellow is one of the few butterflies that is active throughout the year in Dehradun, flying during the winter as well. It is very common; one of the reasons for this is the abundance of food for its caterpillars-numerous species of Cassia, the most common being *Cassia tora*. In fact, last year, I observed a Common Grass Yellow emerging from its chrysalis in our garden (see pic).

Even as we watched the dainty butterflies, one of the grass yellows got entangled into a spider web, and struggled in vain to escape. In front of our eyes, another story unfolded. A pretty insect now became a meal for the stealthy spider. A grim, yet timely reminder, that the web of life goes on.....

Feedback on this column is welcome at sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com

Making a difference: In the winter, especially in a cold place like Dehradun, where I do not sweat much, I don't necessarily put my clothes for wash each time I wear them. On many occasions, I wear my clothes at least a second time, before washing them. A simple action-yet I save on energy, water and detergent use! (And the next time, I meet someone who is holding his nose in front of me, I will know why!)

Photograph caption: Common Grass Yellow

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