

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

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A different Hawk eye!

Being an ardent cricket fan, the performance of the Indian cricket team in England has left me despondent. What with everyone blaming injuries and Hawkeye, I had to take solace in a different kind of hawk-eye to get over our poor performance in the field! On a morning walk with, Anchal, my wife in our housing society, I observed that the white boundary wall of one of neighbours was adorned with droppings. Looking more closely, the droppings on the white surface were really large, half a centimeter in size. Moreover, the droppings looked like miniature hand grenades!



At once, I realized that the caterpillar must be that of a hawkmoth. Hawk-moths belong to a moth family called Sphingids, and their caterpillars are large and distinct. Most of them are brilliantly coloured, and have a short tail at the end of the body. The plant we were looking at was Chandni, which has pretty white flowers. Searching the plant carefully, we located the caterpillar. Wow-the caterpillar was three and a half inches long, with a body as thick as my finger. The caterpillar had a short yellow tail at the end of its green body, and a white stripe. I realised that it was a caterpillar of a moth called the Oleander Hawk-Moth (*Daphnis nerii*).

The Oleander Hawk Moth is a large greenish-white moth with a bulky body. It gets its common name because one of the food plants of its caterpillar is the Yellow Oleander plant.

As I moved closer, I noted that the caterpillar was busy feeding, and that it had gobbled up many leaves on the Chandni plant. A little closer, and the caterpillar

detected my presence. It stopped feeding, and curled its body upwards and froze. In this position, without any motion, the caterpillar looked very much like the plant's green stem. After a few minutes, as I continued to stand close to it, the caterpillar gathered that its strategy had not worked.

Unlike our cricketers, who did not seem to have another strategy to fall back on after losing each Test, the caterpillar was better prepared! It curled its body up (see pic), such that its head was looped forward. On doing this, it also revealed two large blue "eyes", which were otherwise hidden in the folds of the caterpillar's thick body. The blue hawk eyes, when looked at from the front, were menacing, and were definitely intended to scare predators away. Watching its hawk-eyes, I moved away, letting the caterpillar believe that I was scared! This hawk eye's strategy worked!

Photograph caption: Oleander Hawk-moth caterpillar

Making a difference: Little actions make a difference! Do you cover the pan in which you boil water? Doing so reduces your energy consumption. When you use your computer, do you leave it on standby? Put the computer off instead, and you will consume less energy.

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