

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

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Dark Clouded Yellow visits

Last Sunday, we had planned to drive up to Mussoorie with friends to watch butterflies. Waking up in the morning, we were greeted by dull, gloomy clouds, shattering our hopes for a sunny butterflying session. A quick change in plans, and we decided to take a stroll in the reserved forest of Jhajra. To get to Jhajra, you drive for approximately 12 km along Chakrata road from the Clock tower, and then take a right turn into the forest area.

On getting there, the clouds greeted us with a slight drizzle. The Jhajra forests consists of large sal trees. The forest path was covered by burnt leaves, and we soaked in the lovely aroma of rain on ash. The leaves on the forest tracks had probably been burnt by the forest department to create a natural fire-line, to prevent forest fires spread from one side of the road to the other.

With the Red Junglefowl crowing, barbets honking, and the occasional parakeet shrieking, we reveled in the sounds of the forest. Despite the slight drizzle, an occasional butterfly flitted by. An hour into our walk, and my son and his friend, Shaurya shouted to me-there's a butterfly here that looks like the Clouded Yellow. Intrigued, I rushed to the spot that the young boys were. Indeed, they had spotted an



orange-yellow butterfly called the Dark Clouded Yellow (*Colias fieldii*).

The Dark Clouded Yellow is a petite, graceful butterfly which is bright yellow below, but a startling orange above, visible whenever it flies. What was this butterfly doing here? The Dark Clouded Yellow is generally a butterfly of the Himalayas. A visit to the grasslands or alpine meadows in

western Himalayas above 1000 m in the summer and you are sure to see this butterfly. But neither is Jhajra a grassland, nor an alpine meadow-its a sal forest!

What in the world was the butterfly doing here? While this butterfly does migrate down to lower altitudes in winter, this was the first sighting that I have had of this butterfly in Dehradun. Reading up about this confirmed my initial view-the Dark Clouded Yellow had probably lost its way! Or maybe, because it wanted to meet us, and we gave Mussoorie a miss, it flew down to Jhajra to say hello!

As though to confirm our views, the butterfly seemed to like the blue wind-cheater that Shaurya, Yash's friend was carrying, and flitted around it for a while, as though greeting us! Settling on dried sal leaves on the forest floor, the Dark Clouded Yellow gave us ample opportunities to photograph it, before it wafted away into the distance. Another one of nature's unexplained mysteries left us intrigued, yet happy.

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

Making a difference: 22 April 2011 is Earth Day. On this day, we are conducting a campaign with school children to stop the use of plastic bags, and encourage the use of paper and cloth bags. You can join the campaign, too! Pledge to stop using plastic bags-carry cloths bags for shopping in your vehicle, and refuse the plastic bags the shopkeepers offer you.

Photograph caption: Dark Clouded Yellow

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