

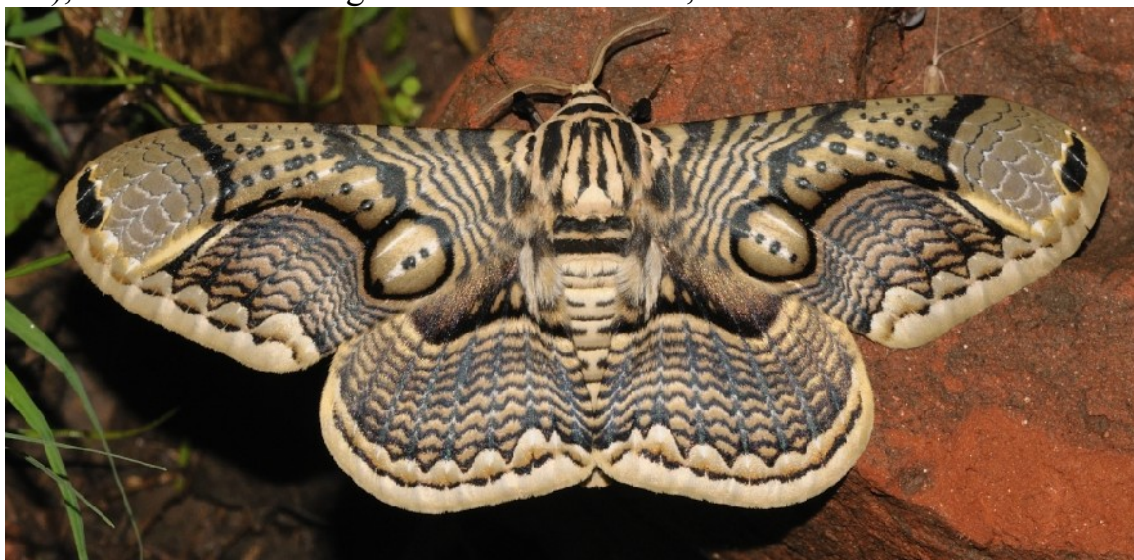
Doon Watch Nature Series for Dehradun Live Hindustan Times by Sanjay Sondhi

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The Brahmid Moth

One of the joys of nature watching is that surprises get thrown at you when you least expect it! My son, Yash, has initiated a science project which involves studying the moths in Dehradun. I accompany him often on his nocturnal sojourns. On one such occasion, a few days ago, the night's activity began slowly, and we were left wondering whether a dull evening beckoned. It had rained earlier in the evening, and the remanent cloud cover meant that conditions for "mothing" were perfect or so we thought. After an hour of rather pitiful activity, we were stifling our yawns, when suddenly, a large moth flitted around us, waking us up immediately! Both of us attempted to follow it in flight, trying to figure out what the moth was, craning our necks this way and that, as it flew all around us.

Fortunately for us, the moth settled down on the ground, allowing us to get a good a look. Wow! The moth was a stunner-more than 12 cm across, the moth had the most amazing patterns of black and brown on its wings. The Brahmid Moth (*Brahmaea hearseyi*) had turned up in Dehradun! I have seen this moth in north east India, and while there have been a few records from the western Himalayas (Shimla, Manali and Bhimtal), it was still thrilling to see it in Dehradun, so close to habitation!



As always, there are interesting stories about nature. The Brahmid moth, also called the Chinese Owl Moth, is considered sacred. Hence it is sometimes also called the Brahmin moth. In Taiwan, this moth is believed to visit the statue of Suan-tian-shang-di at the Shou-zhen temple on the 3 rd of March of the Chinese lunar calendar. This day is the birthday of the deity, Suan-tian-shang-di, Hence people call it the "sacred butterfly" in the local language!

The caterpillar of this moth, which I have yet to see, is supposed to be spectacular; more than 150 cm long! In one of its stages, the caterpillar is supposed to have long horn like appendages, giving it the look of a dragon! While I do not know what food plant its caterpillar feeds on locally, elsewhere, the caterpillars of this moth feed on different species of Oleaceae (Olive). So we now have our next science project defined! We are gonna try to find the local food plant of this moth with some dragon-like caterpillars on it! Wanna join us?

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

Making a difference: Science projects for children are terrific way to get the young involved and aware. If children reading this article would like to get involved in my son, Yash's science project on moths or would like to help search for the caterpillar of the Brahmid moth, write into me at the email above. Get your children interested in nature at a young age; and let the young scientist in them blossom!

Photograph caption: The Brahmid Moth

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