

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

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The "Yummy" Yamfly!

Yamfly-what an exotic sounding name! Is it a yam plant that can fly? Or is it a fly that feeds on yam? None of these, it turns out-instead the Yamfly is a gorgeous butterfly. The Yamfly (*Loxura atymnus*) belongs to the family of butterflies called Lycaenids or the Blues. Obviously someone got this horribly wrong, because the Yamfly does not have any blue colour on it at all-it is a magnificent yellow-orange in colour. However, many butterflies belonging to the family called Blues (or Lycaenids) are actually some shade of blue, hence the name. The Yamfly, however, dares to be different!



When the butterfly sits with its wings closed, its underside is a dull yellow, speckled with brown. When the butterfly opens its wings, slowly, almost agonizingly, to bask in the sun, and it reveals the most gorgeous yellow-orange coloration, bordered with black. Its eyes, too, are, a matching yellow. A long tail hangs out jauntily behind the butterfly, adding even more character. Is this butterfly at a fashion show or an Indian wedding-dressed in spectacular fashion! Whatever be the reason for its fashion sense, I just adore its "yummy" looks.

The butterfly gets its name because its larval food plant (the plant on which the

butterfly lays its eggs and the hatched caterpillars feed on) is plant of the Yam family, specifically the plant *Dioscorea pentaphylla*. The caterpillars of this butterfly, like many others in this family, are tended to by red ants. The ants provide the caterpillars protection from predators, while the caterpillars provide the ants a sweet sap or honey for food.

Just over an inch in size, the Yamfly is seen occasionally on the outskirts of Dehradun, at forest edges or near small streams. Preferring to keep to the forest, it occasionally ventures out to open areas. It has a weak flight, and is normally seen close to the lower foliage. Sometimes, the butterfly may sit higher up on a tree on the upper side of a leaf to bask. Every now and then the butterfly sits, and flashes its upper side at you. The sighting of the Yamfly with its wings open, certainly brightens up my day!

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

Making a difference: Of late, I have been stealing peas from my wife's vegetable garden! Stealing, because the pea pods have not yet fully developed, but they are so very sweet, that I pluck and devour them before they can mature fully. The peas are soooooo tasty compared to what we get in the market, that it makes me wonder why we don't all have our own kitchen gardens. Healthier, tastier and sweeter vegetables await you-start your own kitchen garden! And don't forget to plant a few yam plants and hope the Yamfly pays you a visit!

Photograph caption: The Yamfly

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