

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

Published on 16 September 2011

The Yellow Underwing

Last week, I had described how the caterpillar of the Yellow Underwing (*Ophiusa coronata*) moth had colonized the Rangoon creeper in our home. The same caterpillar had appeared on the bush during the last monsoon, too. Unfortunately, my attempts to rear the caterpillar to an adult moth, failed. This year, too, I caught one of the caterpillars, and put it in a jar, with leaves of the Rangoon creeper, in the hope that I could actually observe the caterpillar complete its metamorphosis from caterpillar to moth.



After numerous failures, I was wondering whether I would ever succeed in rearing the caterpillar. The caterpillar itself is huge-growing up to 8 cm in length. Once it has grown this large, the caterpillar spins a brown shaped cocoon, which is normally hidden amidst the leaf litter or under the ground. Persistence pays, they say, and finally, one of my attempts paid off, and I was able to observe the entire life cycle of the moth.

The moth, itself, is really pretty! About 5 cm in size, when it is sitting with its wings closed, it is a dull brown coloured, with black spots. However, when the moth spreads its wings, it reveals bright yellow and black on its hindwing (or underwing). This yellow coloration gives the moth its common name (that I have cooked up!)-the Yellow Underwing.

The Yellow Underwing is commonly distributed throughout S E Asia including India. It is a fruit piercing moth and loves to feed on rotting fruit. The surest way to attract this moth is to keep rotting fruit like bananas out in your garden. Leave the banana

out for a few nights, and then check it out between 8 and 10 p.m. There is a good chance that you will attract some fruit piercing moth. The moths are wary, so approach your bait with care.

Another nifty technique to attract the moth is to use sugar coated wine ropes. Take the best bottle of wine you have. Mix a little sugar in it, and dip a thick natural rope into the solution. If you hang this out in your garden, you are likely attract at least a few moths that love to feed on this syrup. Be prepared, of course, to deal with the wrath of wine drinkers in your home for wasting perfectly good wine! Anchal, my wife, is the only wine drinker in our home, and she could not fathom how I could waste perfectly good wine to attract a few moths!

Making a difference: Recycling old items is good way to reduce consumption. Not yours but someone else's! A few years ago, I took out all my old camera equipment, which had been lying in a cupboard for many years and sold it. Not only did I get some useful pocket money, but I also ensured that someone else would get a chance to use the equipment. Emboldened by my success, I have now decided to do the same with a clutch of old mobiles in the house! Why don't you do the same; pick a bunch of old items that you do not use (and probably never will!) and dispose it off, so someone else can use it.

Photograph caption: The Yellow Underwing

© Sanjay Sondhi