

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

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Watch the scorpions glow!

As a young boy, a lot of my early experiences with nature were in the hill station of Dalhousie in Himachal Pradesh, where I used to visit my grandparents during the summer vacations. The house we lived was old, with wooden floors and a tin roof. Lying in bed at night, the pitter-patter of small feet on the roof and the sinister creaks of the floorboards allowed an active imagination to fester-what could that animal be? My curiosity was piqued by the funny sounds the house made at night!

One of the creatures that caught my attention in our old house was a scorpion. The cracks in the wooden floors provided these arachnids adequate crevices to reside in. Being nocturnal, they were rarely seen during the day. However, a visit to the bathroom at night often revealed a small blackish-brown scorpion curled up in a corner. Even at that early age, I remember being curious, but not scared, unlike my sister, who was petrified! I recall, too, my parents telling me-shake out your shoes in the morning to ensure that that there are no scorpions in them!

Recently, a night walk near the FRI campus revealed a dark brown four inch long scorpion sitting contentedly on a brick wall. A close look at the scorpion reveals that it has four pairs of legs and a pair of large claw-like appendages. Scorpions are arachnids, like spiders, but with a different body structure. At its posterior end, the scorpion has a jointed tail, that ends in a sting.



Many people, mistakenly believe that a scorpion's bite is fatal to man. The sting of the scorpion has venom, but its purpose to paralyze small creatures that it hunts for food. Scorpion are gentle creatures and will not bite till provoked or threatened. So if you do step on one, and it stings you, don't blame the scorpion! In India, only a couple of scorpions have sufficient poison to kill a human (and none of these are found in Uttarakhand!). A bite by a scorpion will hurt and cause a bit of swelling (and its best to show it to a doctor for treatment), but it will not kill you.

The lives of scorpions have many interesting facets. To begin with, before a male and female scorpion mate, they clasp each other and do a bit of a dance! Though the dance is entertaining, it may turn out to be the last waltz for the male, as on occasion, the cannibalistic female might just devour the male after mating! Scorpions are viviparous, which means that the young develop within the mother's body and emerge as young scorpions. Once the young are borne, the female carries them on her back, until they are able to fend for themselves.

So if you ever want to search for scorpions-here is a good tip. Take a night walk, use a handheld UV light and watch the scorpions glow! Fluorescent chemicals that scorpion have cause them to glow at night. Go-watch the scorpions glow!

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

Making a difference: A passion for nature comes naturally at a young age. A young boy from Pune by the name of Amod Zambre (now in his early twenties) made the study of scorpions his passion. He has an interesting blog (indianscorpions.blogspot.com) and has even described new species of scorpions. If he can do it-why can't you?

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