

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

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Find these beauties!

Dehradun's has many nooks and corners that are just waiting to be explored. A few week's ago, we visited Chauki Dhaulas, which is a reserved forest, about 13 kilometers off Chakrata road, beyond the shooting range. The forest here is sublime. A small forest stream winds its way through some lovely sal forest. There are no people around, and the sound calls of birds, the buzz of insects, and the occasional bark of the muntjac punctuate the clean, fresh-smelling air.

We spent the better part of the morning exploring the area, primarily looking for butterflies. The day started with hordes of Pioneers. The Pioneer is a common whitish butterfly which belongs to the family of whites and yellows (called Pierids). As we walked along the track, the Pioneers could be seen feeding on nectar of lantana flowers. A black hockey stick shaped mark on its upper side distinguishes this butterfly.

At the stream itself, a bright azure blue butterfly flitted by. For the first few minutes, the butterfly attempted to give me a sprained neck, zipping around me even as I attempted to keep track of it. It sat only for a moment, giving my whirling head a brief respite, before attempting to make me dizzy again! Finally, the butterfly sat for a moment—a Royal! Royals are butterflies that belong to the family of Blues (called Lycaenids). I had not seen a Royal in Dehradun before, and because there are many different species of Royals, I spent the better part of an hour searching for it, without



any luck. I had to be satisfied with the sighting of the pretty butterfly, without actually being able to identify it to the species level.

A little while later, another large butterfly winged its way close to me. A Gaudy Baron (*Euthalia lubentina*)! This gorgeous butterfly often basks in the sun with its wings open. At first glance it looks quite nondescript, but a closer look at it reveals a spectacular greenish colour on the upper side, spotted with red. It was the Gaudy Baron's turn to make my head spin. Darting here and there, allowing me to get close before quickly taking to wing, I spent some time trying to photograph it. The Gaudy Baron, though not an uncommon butterfly, is normally seen at moist forest patches, so the habitat we were in was just perfect for it.

The butterfly is often seen sitting on tree tops. One of the reason's for this behaviour is that butterfly's larval food plant (the plant that it lays its eggs on, and its caterpillars feed on) is the parasite Loranthus, which is found on tree tops.

A day spent looking for these bewitching butterflies, unfortunately has not satiated my appetite, so even as I write this, I head for the alluring Arunachal Pradesh, to search for some more of these beauties!

Feedback on this column is welcome at [sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com](mailto:sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com)

Making a difference: Want to see butterflies in your home; well plant some larval food plants and you sure to see them at home. Here are some plants that you could use to attract butterflies to your garden. Cassia species (Emigrants, Grass Yellows), Passion Flower (Tawny Costor), Castor Plant (Common Castor), Lime (Swallowtails butterflies).

Photograph caption: Gaudy Baron

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