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Flutter of surprise: 2 rare butterfly species sighted

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It was a pleasant surprise. The few members of the Madras Naturalists' Society (MNS) who sighted two rare species of butterflies in Chennai, a blue banded Pierrot and a dark wanderer, recently, informed MNS president K V Sudhakar who confirmed it was indeed a rare spotting.

Professor Kalpana Jayaraman of Stella Maris College saw a dark wanderer on the institution's campus in March, two months after spotting a Blue Banded Pierrot at Karikili sanctuary near Vedanthangal.

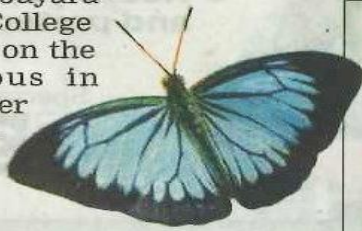
The dark wanderer, common in TN's rural areas, has a lifespan of about a couple of months, while the blue banded Pierrot has a shorter life, said Ramasami S R K, an enthusiast from Saptur in Madurai district.

This is the migratory season for butterflies which are drawn to fresh flowering plants in the Western Ghats that have bloomed during the monsoon, Ramasami said.

The migration of these tiny winged insects lasts days at a stretch, fast on sunny days and slower on cloudy days. On sunny days, it starts early as 7 in the morning and goes on without a break for many hours.

A classic example is the migration of Crimson rose, a large butterfly species whose members travel from Tamil Nadu to Sri Lanka through the Palk Strait, covering several hundred kilometres. By the time they start the return trip, most are exhausted and drop dead. "One can see a large number of such butterflies dead on the Pamban railway bridge," Ramasami said.

There are a few butterfly species that migrate up to Odisha, beginning their journey from the Western Ghats in Kerala. They then fly over Western Ghats in TN, Sirumalai in Dindigul district, Kolli, Tiruvannamalai and Chennai before flying through the Tirupati hills to reach Odisha, he said.



Pics: R Ramesh Shankar, Jeswin Kingsly

ON PATH OF MIGRATION

Nearly a dozen butterfly species, whose lifespan is a little over a year, migrate

Longest flyers are found to migrate from California to Mexico

➤ Migration path of some of them starts from Western Ghats in Kerala to that in TN. From there, to Kolli, Servaroyan hills, Kalroyan hills in the Eastern Ghats to Chennai, then extending to Odisha

➤ Dark blue tiger, stripe tiger, flame tiger, common emigrant, mottled emigrant, albatross, club beaks, lobed beaks, blue, chocolate, lemon, grey and

peacock pansies are the ones which migrate from TN to Odisha

Odisha

Chennai
Tamil Nadu
Kerala
Palk strait
Sri Lanka

Bay of Bengal

Crimson rose is one of the bigger butterflies that travel from TN to Sri Lanka through the Palk Strait

➤ Migration takes place on sunny days. The insects can fly non-stop

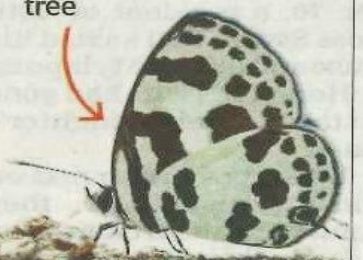
➤ On sunny days, they travel even up to 100km a day, butterfly observer Ramasamy SRK of Saptur

➤ If it is cloudy, these insects take break several times, he says

➤ Banded pierrot and dark wanderer are some of the rare species of butterflies sighted in the city this migration season



Dark wanderer
➤ Host plant for banded pierrot is elandhai tree



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