



Pine white • Shreetha RU



Common Tiger • Sharath Ahuja

Butterflies rise from dust of war

IISc's nursery traces its history back to the World Wars, now it is a haven for naturalists

Express Features

The Indian Institute of Science campus, on CV Raman Road, is a haven for butterfly spotters. Researcher Nitin R has spotted 118 different species here, over the last four years. "During monsoon, you can see 60 to 70 different species in 3 to 4 hours," he says. He has even had rare sightings of the Joker, silver-streaked blue and the Tamil bushbrown. He credits it all to the green cover the institute has maintained.

At the heart of the campus sits its quiet little nursery, which gives little away of its history. The first trees here were planted as camouflage, says B Sridhar, the horticulturist in charge.

"There was a Chatterjee who used to work on ham radios around the time of the World Wars, in 1920s, and he planted tall trees such as cypress and tabebuia to hide his work," says Sridhar. "There is no written record of this but I have met him when he came visiting in the eighties. He was reserved and would spend his time at the library and

the garden, and I had just joined as the horticulturist here after completing my masters."

Chatterjee was one of Sridhar's inspirations, the other is the former director of IISc CNR Rao. "We used to talk 15 to 20 minutes every day," says Sridhar.

"He is an avid naturalist and never allowed any of the trees to be cut. Once he didn't give permission to build a complex because it would have meant the cutting down of tamarind trees. Then the architects offered to shift it nearly a 100 feet away and he gave them permission."

With such enthusiasts around, the nursery has now grown with over 200 species of trees and plants. "There are many old trees, the oldest could be the banyan which maybe around 100 or 150 years old," says Sridhar. "We have unique trees too like Erythrina and have sent its seedlings to different parts of the country." With their bright, flame coloured flowers this tree attracts many birds. "The best time to visit is February end for about 15 days," says the proud keeper of this garden, who once turned down a job as the national horticulturist for ISRO and stayed on.



Common Sailor • Sharath Ahuja



Brown King Crow • Sharath Ahuja



Common Leopard • Sharath Ahuja



Inside the nursery there are over 200 plant varieties • Shreetha RU



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