NE monsoon: Blue Tiger, Dark Blue Tiger and Crow butterflies migrate from Eastern to Western Ghats

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News

With the onset of the North-East monsoon, lakhs of milkweed butterflies – Blue Tiger, Dark Blue Tiger, Common Crow and Double-branded Crow – are migrating from the Eastern Ghats across the Tamil Nadu plains towards the Western Ghats (reported 22 Oct 2026). Intense movement was seen on 17–18 Oct in Salem, Namakkal, Erode, Tiruppur and Coimbatore districts; counts in Coimbatore district ranged from 5 to 135 butterflies a minute, with 120 a minute on Kalapatty Main Road on 18 Oct. Hundreds are killed by road traffic.

Key facts

Direction	Eastern Ghats → Western Ghats (NE monsoon, Oct–Dec); return in Apr–May (before the SW monsoon)
Species	Blue Tiger (Tirumala limniace), Dark Blue Tiger (T. septentrionis), Common Crow (Euploea core), Double-branded Crow (E. sylvester)
Group	Danainae – milkweed butterflies; family Nymphalidae
Starting hills	Yercaud (Shevaroys), Pachamalai, Kolli and Kalvarayan hills
Monitoring	The Nature and Butterfly Society (TNBS) – since 2013

Background

- Migration cycle: in Apr–May they move from the Western Ghats to the Eastern Ghats and Coromandel coast; in Oct–Dec, with the NE monsoon, they return west and congregate in the Western Ghats for 3–4 months. Six of South India's 10 danaine species migrate; first scientific record – E.H. Aitken (1897).
- Science: they store alkaloids from milkweed-family (Asclepiadaceae) host plants, making them toxic to predators; males use them to make courtship pheromones. Harmless species copying their look is 'Batesian mimicry'.
- Geography: the Western Ghats – UNESCO World Heritage Site (2012) and a global biodiversity hotspot. The Eastern Ghats are discontinuous, lower hills. Weak rains mean weaker migration (as in 2023).

Tamil Nadu link: Tamil Nadu's State butterfly is the 'Tamil Maravan' (Tamil Yeoman, Cirrochroa thais), declared in 2019 – the 5th State to name a State butterfly; it is endemic to the Western Ghats. In Tamil Nadu the migration mainly starts from the Eastern Ghats hills of Yercaud, Pachamalai, Kolli and Kalvarayan.

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