

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

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Bank on these mynas to bathe!

Last Sunday, we were returning from a good day's bird watching at Asan Barrage. On the way back, we crossed the town of Herbertpur. As we stopped at the busiest crossing of Herbertpur, I was amazed to see a whole bunch of mynas, just outside the shops in the main market. The mynas were on the ground in the midst of the bustling market place which was teeming with people, cycle rickshaws and roadside vendors! Quickly pulling over, I hopped out of the car with my camera.

The birds, Bank Mynas (*Acridotheres ginginianus*), were at a small dirty pool of water just outside a busy shop. The mynas seemed unconcerned about the melee of people around them, who were only a few feet away. Despite the hustle and bustle of the market place with scores of people walking by, the mynas were busy doing their



own thing. Even as I watched, the birds quarreled amongst themselves, trying to decide who was going to have the first dip. Unlike us, bathing out in the open is a done deal for these feathered friends. One of the birds dipped itself in the water, only to be chased out by another. A third bird took advantage of the squabble between the first two, and jumped into the al fresco pool! A fourth bird joined the fun, and dipped its beak to drink some of the bath water! Yech!

As they bathed, people walked over them, into them, by them, and the mynas were not at all bothered! When a passerby, who was in a tearing hurry (who isn't nowadays!), actually bumped into one of the birds, all it let out was a squawk, before resuming its bath. A house crow joined the fun and muscled its way into the water, sending the mynas scrabbling for cover. One of mynas jumped into a rickshaw,

another sat on my foot, while a third attempted to shoo the crow away!

I was now desperately attempting to take a photograph of the mynas. My problem was that I was too close to the birds-an unusual quandary! Sitting in the middle of the road, I found myself surrounded by mynas and people. By now, the comments from the people around me had started; "*arey, hamari bhi picture le lo, chidiyon ki peche kyo pade ho!*" (take our photographs instead, why are you after the birds!).

Despite the jeers and snide remarks, I lay down on the ground and managed to squeeze off a few decent photographs of the mynas. After twenty minutes of observation and photography, I left the bathing mynas, still locking horns (or perhaps feathers) over who was going to get the next dip!

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

Making a difference: A very happy new year to you. So what's gonna be your new year resolution? How about adding at least one environment friendly action to your NYR for 2011? And then ensuring you execute it through the year-isn't that a lot easier than some of the other NYR you usually make! Do so-and make a difference.

Photograph caption: This is one wet Bank Myna!

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