

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

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### Buzzy Bees

Sitting in my garden, reading the newspaper is a daily chore. These days, barring the cloudburst earlier in this week, we've been blessed with bright sunshine. Accompanying the sunshine, busy "buzzy" bees brighten my morning. The bees love the *lal mulli's* white flowers in my wife's vegetable garden. Hovering on some of the flowers for less than a second, I counted that the honey bees visit up to 10 flowers in less than a minute. See, busy bees!

Now these busy bees were also buzzy bees. Have you ever wondered how and why bees buzz? The traditional explanation was that the buzzing sound of bees was on account of their wingbeats. However, a lot of bees buzz when they are sitting. It is now believed that bee's thorax (the middle part of the bee to which the wings are attached) moves in and out at a high speed, causing a buzzing noise! This is known as the bee's "click mechanism" and assists them in their amazingly agile flight.

As I watched the bees, I noticed that the buzzing sound of the bees actually increased when they visited a flower. It turns out that the bees use the buzzing vibration to shake off pollen from the flowers! I also noticed that many of the bees had large blobs of pollen on their rear legs. These are their "pollen baskets". While bees feed on nectar in flowers and convert it to honey, they also feed on the pollen for proteins.



A few days ago, I watched honey bees whizzing past me headed for a small tree hollow. Squatting by the hollow, I watched the “bee traffic”. A steady stream of incoming bees entered the hollow. An equally steady outbound traffic of bees exited. And these two bee streams were completely oblivious of each other, often colliding, sometimes even dropping to the ground. Oh-these were special Dehradun bees! They have adopted to our traffic rules-put your head down and drive and everyone else on the road doesn't really count!

Other than providing us honey, bees do mankind a great service by being terrific pollinators. Remember the The Bee Movie-a cartoon movie that released in 2007 which showed how the world's food production ground to a halt as the bees went on strike!

Unfortunately, the cartoon's story might just be coming true. World over, there is a significant decline in the bee population. The decline is on account of a mysterious ailment called the Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD). While the reasons for CCD are not clearly understood, man's agricultural practices seem to play a role. The gloomy story does not end here. In Kerala, a scientist claims that his studies show that the electro-magnetic waves from mobile towers seem to disorient bees, and they cannot find their way back to their hives.

As we “develop” as a nation, as our per capita income climbs, as India positions itself to be a global economic power, are we forgetting the little things that make our world go round? What's the right balance between development and nature? Is there a more sustainable way to grow. Do we always need to cut down trees for road, forests for mines? Tough calls-I only hope mankind gets it right.

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Making a difference: Tough calls to make-even as individuals. Walk-don't drive. Re-use-don't discard. The list is endless. And the choice is yours.....