

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

Published on 5 February 2009

### Rikki-Tikki-Tavi in My Backyard

In the last year and a half that we have lived in Dehradun, a pair of Common Indian Grey Mongooses (*Herpestes edwardsii*) have been very frequent visitors to our backyard. The mongooses, familiar to many of us as Kipling's adorable Rikki Tikki Tavi, make their way through the tall wild grass, disappearing for a moment in the undergrowth, before suddenly re-appearing at a different location. Every now and then, the captivating animals will rise on their haunches, poke their pink noses out of the grass, and check out their surroundings for impending danger, before resuming their feeding.

Sitting up in the balcony of my first floor bedroom allows me to watch these creatures without scaring them. Their favourite foraging point is the vermiculture pit in our backyard. The mongoose come to the pit to scavenge on the offal as well as the insects that gather at the pit. Their long pink tongues snake out of their pointed snouts as they scoop up the insects from under the gunny bag placed on the vermiculture pit.



Photograph caption: Mongoose licking its lips at the vermiculture pit!

Despite having great fun watching the mongoose, I never could manage to get a good photograph. On many occasions, I tried to sneak up to them, but they were always alert, and sensed my presence, denying me a picture. The stealth and guile of the mongoose has always got the better of me. The compound wall behind our house is a cul-de-sac, and on many occasions I have seen the mongoose make

their way towards the end of the wall only to disappear! I have searched, unsuccessfully, for a suitable hole or a burrow.

For the last 3 months or so, the mongooses were not seen in our backyard. I missed them and wondered whether they had moved to another, more attractive feeding location. I got my answer a few weeks ago. The two mongooses arrived at our vermiculture pit with two young ones in tow! The mongoose pair had obviously been rearing their young, and hence had been more elusive than normal.

It was interesting to watch the family forage. The inexperienced young ones were clearly less wary, while the parents were ever on the alert, watching their kids and guarding against any threat. On getting to the vermiculture pit, the juveniles at once got to feeding, but the parents kept away, guarding the young ones. On this occasion, I managed to squeeze off one photograph, but the noise of the shutter alerted the parents, who scurried away. The young ones were confused, and one of them still wanted to feed at the pit, but the parents called it away in a hurry. Once again, the family moved towards the cul-de-sac and disappeared! And I was left pondering their Houdini act.

Sanjay Sondhi is a Dehradun based naturalist. Feedback on this column is welcome at [sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com](mailto:sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com)

© Sanjay Sondhi

Making a difference: Managing solid waste in your home is easy. Simply segregate the biodegradable part and put this in a vermiculture pit. Even in a simple covered pit in your backyard will eventually decompose your waste. Dispose off the non-biodegradable part responsibly. Don't throw it over the wall! How clean your home is on the outside, is a reflection of how you live inside your own home.