

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

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**The Whistling Schoolboy**

Twenty five years ago, when I had just been initiated into the art of “twitching” (as bird-watching is often referred to) I made my annual visit to Dalhousie, in Himachal Pradesh. I was keenly looking forward to my first Himalayan birding. The very first morning, I was up early at 6 am, still lazing in bed, waiting for the birds to start calling. The very first sound I heard was a pleasant whistle. I recall wondering why someone would be whistling so pleasantly, early in the morning.

The next day, at the same time, I heard the person whistle the same tune again. A boy going to school, I wondered. I kicked myself-its 6 am on a chilly morning at 7300 feet in the Himalayas-it cannot be a boy going to school! Well, then it must be a very cheery bloke. Imagine my plight when I heard exactly the same whistle on the third day. However, this time, the whistle seemed to be coming from the roof of our house! That did it-an intrepid, cheery soul whistling every morning was still understandable. But perched on our roof-that was too much for me to believe!



to screech so. Must be the female screeching out to the male-get me my morning meal!

The Blue Whistling Thrush is an omnivore-feeding both on insects and fruiting berries. It is equally happy on the ground, and up in the trees. In fact, though the bird's preferred habitat is well wooded ravines, today, it can be seen in feeding in flowing water in sewers. Urbanization of the whistling thrush!

In the western Ghats in southern India, the Blue Whistling Thrush is replaced by the Malabar Whistling Thrush (*Myophonus horsfieldii*). This bird is smaller, lacks the white wing spots and yellow bill of the former. Fortunately, it still retains its lovely whistling song. Very appropriately, the Malabar Whistling Thrush is also called the Whistling Schoolboy. In my view, the Blue Whistling Thrush found here in Dehradun, is no less the Whistling Schoolboy, waking up all and sundry, urging the populace to be up and about, cajoling the school kids-time to get up and go to school!

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