

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

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The Gorgeous Green Pigeon

Peering through my binoculars, I craned my neck at what I call the "birding angle" (stand below a tall tree, look directly up at the canopy, with your head tilted right back till your neck hurts-that's the "birding angle"!). I was searching for a large green bird that had just flown and settled into the canopy of a tall sal tree, in the Malsi Deer park. Despite looking for it desperately, the bird stayed motionless, and hence hidden. Move a bit, I cajoled it, hoping that it would then give away its position. Ignoring the messages that I received from my brain (your neck isn't meant to be in this position!), finally, my persistence paid off, as the bird shifted ever so slightly, thereby revealing its position.

A green pigeon sat amongst the leaves of the tall sal tree. The bird had an orange-green breast, green upper parts, a bright chestnut patch on its shoulders, topped with a bright blue bill. The gorgeous bird was the male Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon (*Treron sphenura*), called so, because its tail is shaped like a wedge. The female bird lacks the chestnut shoulder patch.



There are six species of green pigeons in India. The most common, the Yellow-legged Green Pigeon, is found throughout India and as its name suggests, has yellow legs.

The Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon has red legs, which immediately differentiates it from its commoner cousin. It is found mainly in the Himalayas from the foothills up to 2500 m.

This pigeon has a sweet song; a series of mellow, warbling human-like whistles that can be heard from a long distance, and are unmistakable. In fact, it's easier to find the bird by listening to its calls, rather than seeing it. The green pigeon is frugivorous (fruit eater) and during the day, it stays hidden in the canopy of trees, feeding. On trees laden with fruit, the bird clambers on branches, sometimes hanging upside down in an attempt to reach out to the juiciest fruits! Green pigeons are local migrants, often moving short distances, governed by the availability of food, mainly fruiting trees. During early mornings and late evenings, it roosts on bare branches of trees in small flocks. This is the best time to see the bird.

Frugivores play an important role in seed dispersal, especially those that ingest the entire fruit with the seed, and expel the seed at some distance from the fruiting tree. Studies have shown that in some cases, seeds which have passed through the guts of fruit-eating vertebrates including birds, show enhanced germination, though its causes are not precisely understood. Needless to say, fruiting trees are the lifeline of frugivorous birds including the green pigeon. Unfortunately, Dehradun's reputation as a city of fruit trees is under threat, and with it are threatened the frugivores.

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Making a difference: Any fruiting trees in your garden? If yes, enjoy their healthy fruits. If not, plant some today!

Photograph caption: Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon

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