

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

Published on 9 August 2013

Alien Invasion

A couple of weeks ago, we took a small group of students from the Nature Club of Welham Girls School for a nature walk at Danda Lokhand, just off the Sahastradhara Road in Dehradun. Even as began the walk, I made the girls pause and look around. I asked them to point out the most common plants that they could see. The girls picked out some of the common plants growing around us. These plants represented more than 70% of the green cover in the area that we stood in.

Take a guess on what was common between all these plants? All of them were invasive exotic plants! Invasive exotics plants are those that are not native to the area that they are growing in and have an adverse effect on the environment and habitat. In the area that we stood in, Lantana (*Lantana camara*), Congress Grass (*Parthenium hysterophorus*) and the Floss flower (*Eupatorium* species) were all-pervasive and dominated the landscape. All of these species have been introduced into India from some other country, but are now rampant everywhere.



Photograph caption: Ageratum growing in our garden

The spread of invasive exotic plants is a massive problem throughout India. Whether

urban or rural, aquatic or terrestrial, inside and outside-protected areas, these plant species have taken over many different habitats. So what's the problem here? Why are we so bothered by the spread of these plant species? Every habitat and ecosystem has only limited space and resources. When invasive species come to dominate an eco-system, they are doing so at the expense of native species. And in every eco-system, a web of life ensures that all forms of plant and animal life are closely interwoven. So if an invasive plant pushes out a particular plant species into oblivion from a landscape, it could effect numerous other species. The native plant which is disappearing could be the larval food plant for an insect, or could be the one of the species that an ungulate prefers. The disappearance of a particular species from an area could set off a chain reaction that we, today, are not capable of predicting.

As I peek out into our garden, even here, invasives are making their presence felt - I can't seem to get away from them! The Goat Weed (*Ageratum* spp.) is spreading in our garden, and Congress Grass is attempting to make a come-back, despite my wife, Anchal, having uprooted most these plants a while ago. Time to stomp them out again-the battle against the invasive aliens continues unabated.....

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

Making a difference: What can you do? In your home, attempt to eradicate these invasive exotics and to grow native plants. It is necessary that you pull out these invasive plants from their roots, so its hard work to get rid of them. Replacing exotics with native species may require you to do a little bit of research, depending on what you want to replace them with, but a visit to your local nursery could be useful, too. Do your bit to stop the "alien invasion"!

© Sanjay Sondhi