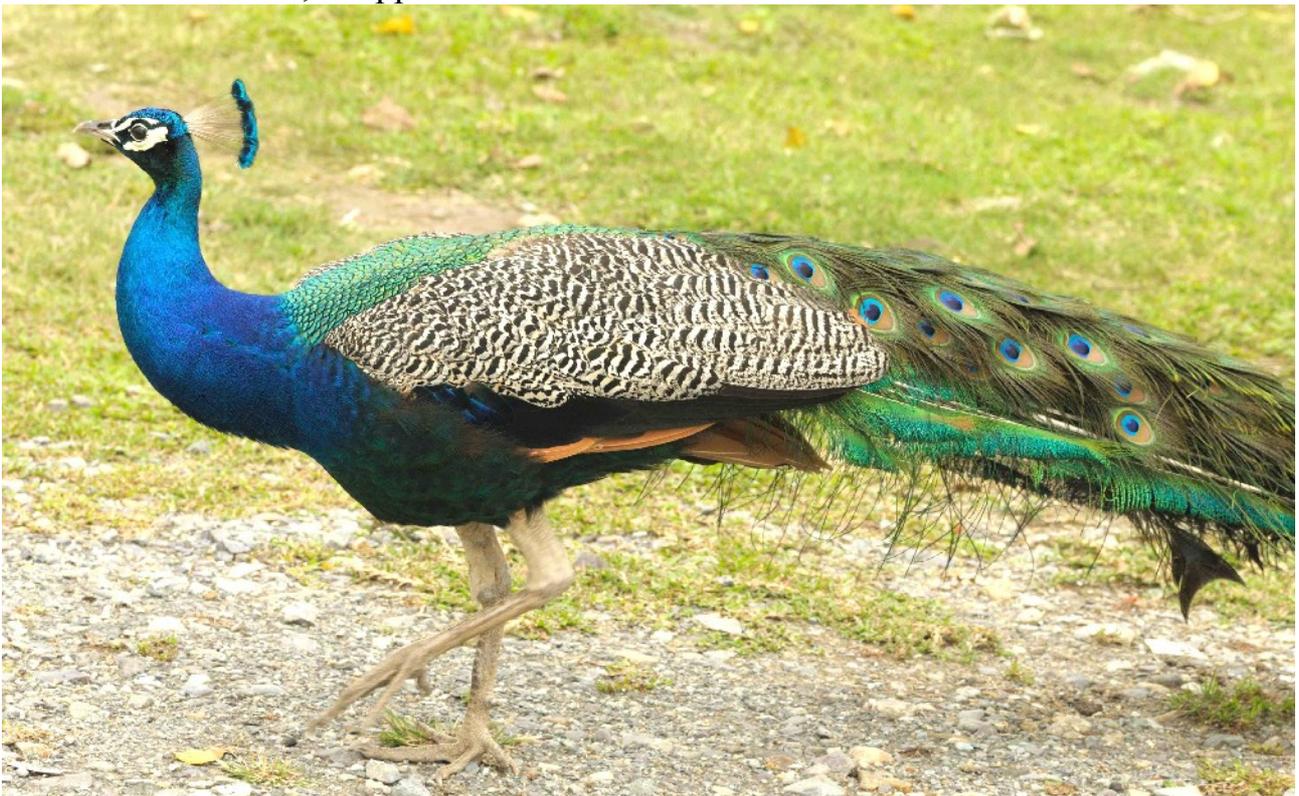


## Doon Watch Nature Series for Dehradun Live Hindustan Times by Sanjay Sondhi

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### The Call of the Peacocks

The loud call reverberated through the forest. We peered through the trees to spot the caller, but could only catch a glimpse of movement between the foliage. The call beckoned us again—a loud trumpeting “*payooon*” that wafted its way through the air around us. Stealthily we worked our way towards the sound, when suddenly, with a burst of energy and a flutter of its large wings, a male peacock rose from the ground, and flew down the hill slope. Its brown wings spread open and its long, glorious tail feathers trailing behind it, the peacock sailed before our very eyes. Gliding effortlessly for such a large and otherwise clumsy bird, the peacock settled down in a distant field, well away from us. Anchal and I stood mesmerized by the sight we had just witnessed. There is something about the peacock in breeding plumage, that, despite having seen it so many times, still makes my heart beat faster! That is why it is our National Bird, I suppose! *Dhek ke dil dhak-dhak karta hai!*



Anchal and I were visiting the forest patch near the Shiv Mandir behind Danda Lokhand, no more than a few kilometers from our home near the IT Park. This area has a fairly large peacock population and on one occasion, Anchal had counted 31 birds. On this morning, as we walked through the forest, we counted only 11 birds, 3 males and the rest females. Male birds are called peacocks, while females are called peahens, while peafowl refers to the generic name for the bird.

Quite a few of the birds were roosting up in the trees, and on seeing us, some of them flew from their perches onto the ground. Despite their size, peafowls are very graceful and can fly long distances. As we walked the forest trail, we came across one male that had its tail feathers cocked and spread. What a beautiful sight the peacock presents when it dances with its tail feathers spread, decorated with splendid markings and colours!

The peacock dances mainly during the breeding season. The male bird's dance is its courtship display, in an attempt to attract a suitable mate. On many occasions, you can see juvenile birds dancing. You can tell that these birds are not as adroit and skillful as the mature males, but they need to practice to get better, so they dance anyway! Perhaps, they copy the mature males' dancing steps, in order to improve! How well they dance has a bearing on whether they can attract a suitable mate, so practice they must! As we continued our walk through the forest, the peacocks continued to call. It was as though the bird's calls beckoned us "*Aake hamara dance dekho!*"

Feedback on this column is welcome at [sanjay.sondhi@gmail.com](mailto:sanjay.sondhi@gmail.com)

Making a difference: I have been writing small tips on how you can make a difference. How about spreading the message this week? Take any one of the tips that I have given in the many issues of this column, and get one of your friends, relatives or neighbours to adopt it, for life! You, too, can make a difference!

Photograph caption: Peacock with its lovely tail feathers

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