

## Ensure that the feathered creatures live

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It is necessary to grow Indian trees in your garden as these would help birds to nest in them.



**CALL OF THE KOEL: It may soon become a thing of the past. Photo: Mohammed Yousuf**

Have you woken up to the cheerful banter of parakeets or listened to the plaintive call of the koel on a hot summer afternoon? If scientists are to be believed, soon these charming everyday sounds may become things of the past. Birds are slowly disappearing from our planet. In India, the Himalayan quail and the pink-headed duck have already become extinct and innumerable others are endangered.

Birds are a symbol of all that is beautiful, mystical and royal. The crown of the king of Nepal is adorned with the splendid tail feathers of the Bird of Paradise. The vehicle of the Hindu god Karthikeyan is the majestic peacock and the flight of the dove is universally recognised as a symbol of peace.

Birds are also useful. Barn owls live off rats and mice that would otherwise cause great damage. Sunbirds help in pollination. Many forest trees would disappear if pigeons and hornbills did not feed on their fruit and helped their seeds to disperse.

### Loss of habitat

Birds are lost to us when their forest and wetland habitats are converted in to houses, malls, roads and fields. Peacocks fall prey to pesticides when they stray into agricultural land. Vultures die because of the widespread use of a drug to treat cattle, whose carcasses are eaten by these scavengers. Birds like parakeets are popular with the pet trade.

Many cities have fortunately saved a lot of their bird life by protecting large numbers of pavement trees, patches of urban forest and creating parks. Delhi has over 300 types of birds, mainly because of the trees planted along the roadside in the early 20th Century and its numerous green areas. Sanjay Gandhi National Park and the Mahim Creek of Mumbai and Guindy National Park in Chennai, also represent the remains of tropical forest that contribute to the survival of bird life.

**What you can do:**

Tall, old trees are under threat from concrete tiling of pavements, cutting and lopping. Join in the struggle of your neighbourhood to defend them.

Grow only Indian trees and shrubs in your garden as exotic ones are of least benefit to Indian birds. Grow mango, mulberry and drumstick rather than oleander, gulmohar and jacaranda.

Stop the use of pesticides. Instead, practise composting.

Become a member of societies such as the World Wildlife Fund, the Madras Naturalists' Society and the Bombay Natural History.

*In collaboration with Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group Society.*