

IT'S SUCH A BEAUTIFUL DAY!

Stay connected. There are lots of simple ways to explore the natural world. It's incredibly fulfilling

By Meenakshi Kapoor

Holding an umbrella in one hand and wiping sweat off my forehead with the other, I was cursing the hot summer of Delhi, while walking from the Metro station to my office. Though it was 9 am on an ear-

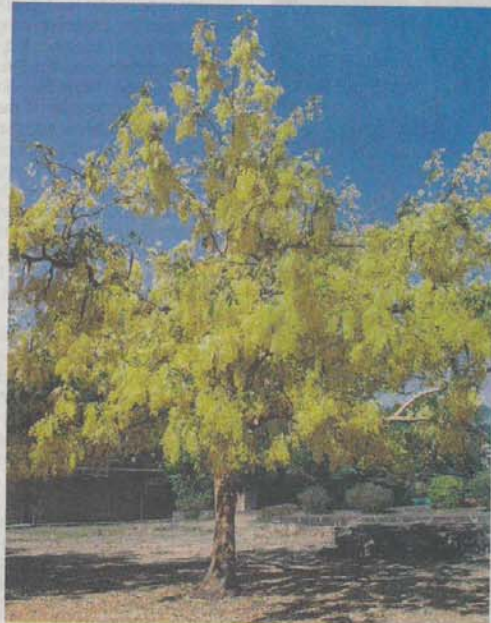
ly summer morning, the sun was already blazing in full force and the five-minute walk to the office seemed never-ending. Suddenly, my umbrella was upturned by a strong gust of dry wind; I looked up in further annoyance and saw blooms of *Cassia fistula* peeping through. The clusters of



yellow beauties hanging from the branches of the amaltas tree was such a marvelous sight that I could not remain annoyed anymore. If this splendour of gleaming gold can exist in such heat, the least could do is to bear it with a smile!

Summer blooms

Thereafter, I started walking again and every now and then I used to tilt my umbrella a bit to take a peek at the summer blooms all around me. The next were the pinkish-purple flowers of the kachnar (*Bauhinia*) tree. Compared to the low-hanging bunches of the amaltas flowers, these flowers stood by themselves in all vanity. Since then the small walks to and from my office have become appealing to me. The trees along the path seem to await my arrival as keenly as I look forward to noticing the change of colour of their leaves, admiring the eye-catching hues of their flowers and picking their fallen fruits from the ground (and occasionally tasting them).



The *Cassia fistula* in full bloom. Photo: Saili Palande-Datar.

“Keep a bird-bath in your balcony or terrace... you will be greeted every morning by visitors like sparrows, crows, mynahs, kites and pigeons

Metropolitan cities like Delhi, on a quick glance, look cemented and devoid of any life forms beyond human beings but if you look around closely, you can see life in all its glory. Trees like the palash, jamun, amaltas and kachnar are found in gardens and on the roadsides of cities. Besides presenting a lovely sight in their flowering season, they offer an abode to several living creatures around the year. Many birds, bats, squirrels, bees, bugs and butterflies find refuge in these trees.

Koel's call

Many of us have heard a koel singing in the hot summer months on a mango tree. I remember my mother telling me when I was small that the koel was singing as it was thirsty and asking for water. I believed her and only much later did I learn that this was just Punjabi folklore, and that the male koel was calling to attract females!

Green bee-eaters prefer neem trees which provide them shelter and camouflage. Squirrels relish the caterpillar-like fruits of shahtoot (mulberry) trees in summer. Arjun trees are particularly liked by bats and while passing through Janpath Road in Delhi one can see them hang-



Kachnar flowers. PHOTO: SUJATHA PADMANABHAN.

ing upside down from its branches. Parakeets, the other patrons of the arjun, like to take shelter in its foliage.

Watch a potted plant

You don't have to go out to witness life – look at the potted plants or small flower beds in your balconies, terraces or gardens. You'll see butterflies flitting around your pansies, marigolds, roses and hibiscus and beetles roaming about the soil. When the rain comes, the same soil is frequented by the friends-of-the-plants earthworms too.

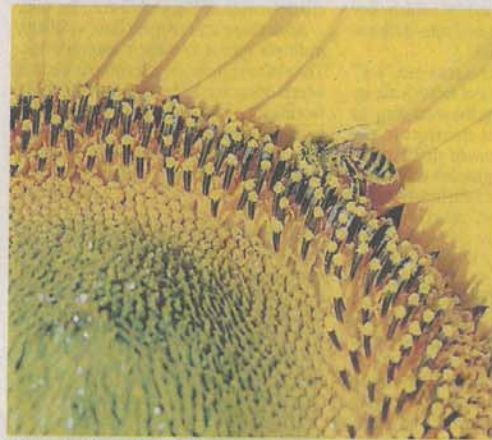
Grasshoppers, dragonflies, fireflies and moths are commonly seen around that time and the croaking of frogs and chirping of crickets can be

heard at night.

Try keeping a bird-bath in your balcony or terrace and surprises will follow. Every morning visitors like sparrows, crows, mynahs, kites and pigeons will greet you.

It doesn't end here. You can appreciate different life forms within your house too. Moths fluttering around the light bulbs and caterpillars in pea pods (I once took care of one till it became a moth and flew off) are two such examples. All you need is a keen eye, open ears and a welcoming attitude. You will hear and see these creatures all around you.

(The writer is a member of Kalpavriksh which coordinates this series.)



The beginning of honey.