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Shrishtee Bajpai

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Bird watching can be fascinating...for, the beauty that catches your attention will hold you enthralled. Watch a little bird as it flits from branch to branch, chirping away...



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What am I supposed to do, I wondered? Just stare? How do you “watch” a bird? Don't they all look more or less the same?

As these doubts were making circles in my head, a colleague whispered, “Verditer Flycatcher, half way up, forked branch at 12'0 clock”. I took a few seconds to figure out the directions that were being belted out. Giving up, I adjusted my binoculars in the general direction that my colleagues had aimed theirs. Success! Suddenly, a small gorgeous blue-coloured bird came into focus. It sat there, flicking its tail, waiting for its prey. I was utterly delighted to experience such beauty that had never caught my attention before. With that sighting, I was bitten by the bug!

Questions

A recent trip to a bird festival acquainted me with the right questions that should be asked about a bird when it is in front of you: How large is it? What is its tail, wings, beak, eyes, like? What is the colour of its plumage? Does it have a crest? Oh yes, and sometimes, does it have an eyebrow! Well it's really called a 'supercilium', and a stripe that runs above the eyes. It does not end there: Where is it perched? What is it doing? How was it calling? I slowly figured out that the questions one needs answers for are many.

It all went well till I came across the warbler family....small birds that were greenish or brownish and mostly dull. One had to notice if the warbler in question had one or two (and even one and a half!) wingbars, small lines or bars on the wings. Easy you may think, but when the warbler almost always flits about constantly in the tree or bush, it could be a deeply exhausting experience. I soon discovered that the only way to beat warblers was to attach my eyes to the binoculars and patiently follow them as they appeared and disappeared before one's eyes.

I have a long way to go to be able to figure out the minute differences between a dozen of warblers, spend 11 hours of a day just birding, strictly maintain a list or memorise different names with correct spellings and of course to be festooned with decent binoculars and a camera. However, most of these days whenever I am on a trip, I am thrilled about the possibility of getting even a trite glimpse of the strangest, showiest, and beautiful birds that will give me needed peace and tranquillity which very few things offer.



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