

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

Published on 2 January 2009

Photographing the Jackal

For our family, Diwali breaks have always meant a foray into the wild, for as long as I can remember. This Diwali was no different, and we decided to spend a week in the Chakrata and Kanasar area, north of Dehradun. We stayed at the Forest Rest House in Kanasar which has amongst the finest Deodar forest in Asia.

Just below the Forest Rest House at Kanasar, was a small temple, bordered by a meadow. On the first night of our stay, as we drove past the meadow, we spotted three Jackals.

The Jackal *Canus aureus* is a member of the Canid family. Jackals are usually hunters but also scavenge. They are usually seen and more frequently, heard howling, in urban, semi urban and forested areas and are quite common in Dehradun.



My 14-year old son, Yash, is an avid nature lover, and the highlight of the trip, for him was photographing the jackal. I leave it to Yash to describe his experience.

Yash: When I first saw the jackals, I thought they were dogs. They were the size of Alsatians but thinner, and their bodies were grayish brown peppered with black with tail tipped with blacks. We observed them for almost fifteen minutes and though they noticed us, they did not flee. They sat unconcerned, grooming themselves. As the jackals were only 20 feet away from us, I regretted not having a camera with us to photograph them.

The next evening I was determined to photograph the jackals. Despite my Dad's reluctance, I convinced him to take out his Nikon D300 digital camera with the 80-200mm Nikon lens. I attached a 1.5x multiplier to the lens, in order to get closer to the jackals. As I was going to attempt to photograph the jackals at night with insufficient light, I attached the Nikon SB 800 flash to the camera. Now, I was fully equipped to photograph the jackals.

Just as we were leaving the rest house for dinner, we saw the jackals near the gate of the forest rest house, but on seeing us, they fled, leaving me disappointed. This only bolstered my determination to photograph the jackals.

While returning to the FRH after dinner, I got the camera out, and around 100 metres before the rest house we stopped the car and I walked up to the rest house.

At that time, those hundred metres seemed like a kilometre. I walked as silently as possible with my heart in my mouth in the hope the jackals were still there. I nearly reached the rest house, and not seeing the jackals, I assumed they had gone. I was mistaken; just 5 metres before the rest house both the jackals climbed up the khud and stood there. It took me a moment to realize what I was actually seeing. As soon as it sunk in, I focused the lens and clicked. As soon as the jackals heard the noise of the shutter, they ran backed into the khud.

I was exuberant. Not only had I seen the jackals really close-up and also got a photograph. This was the perfect Diwali present for me. My first attempt at mammal photography was a success. I am glad that my parents gifted me with the most valuable thing they possess, that is love for nature; because that is the main reason I PHOTOGRAPHED THE JACKALS.

Yash's words moved me; he believes that the most valuable thing that his parents possess is love for nature and a desire to make our planet a better place to live in. Cannot we all instill the love of nature in our children? Should not we start them young and allow them to make the choices for our planet?

Sanjay Sondhi is a Dehradun based naturalist. Feedback on this column is welcome at sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com

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Making a difference: Every one of us can make a difference. Encourage your children to join a nature organization such as the WWF or form an Eco-Club in their schools. Start them young!