

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

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The Tale of Seven Sisters

I stood by the roadside watching a sheet of white plastic, which seemed to have a life of its own. Every now and then, the plastic sheet would jump, and quiver, and then subside. I was intrigued-live plastic! As I edged closer a brown bird popped out from under the plastic, saw me and with a series of squawks flew up to a tree nearby. The bird, the Jungle Babbler *Turdoides striatus*, is a dumpy brown colored bird, larger than a myna, with a broad tail. Jungle Babblers normally forage in flocks of 5 to 10 birds and are commonly called the Seven Sisters. They can be found on the ground, in bushes and even up in the trees. They primarily eat insects, but might also eat seeds. The birds are often heard turning over leaves, and scrabbling amidst the undergrowth. The babblers often frequent garbage dumps. I have often observed Jungle Babblers and Three-striped Palm Squirrels rummage together at the garbage dump behind our house.



Jungle Babblers are very noisy birds with a constant squawks and chattering emanating from the flock. Jungle Babblers are called *Satbhai* in Hindi whose

literal translation should be Seven Brothers but the birds are actually called the Seven Sisters in English. While the reason for this distortion in translation is unknown to me, it's my belief that if you actually put seven sisters in a room, and hear them noisily chatter away, possibly all together at a time, it's not so different from the noisy Jungle Babblers! (Okay, so I'm gonna have loads of sisters chasing me after this one!)

Jungle Babblers are communal birds, not only hunting together in flocks, but also roosting together. It is a common sight to see a row of babblers, with fluffed up feathers, cutely huddled together on a wire or a branch of a tree. The babblers nest in the summer and monsoon months. Their nests consist of an assortment of twigs and grass, built a few feet above the ground in bushes or the lower reaches of trees.

Jungle Babblers are commonly seen in urban areas-in gardens, roadside bushes and parks throughout India. The birds are normally fearless and inquisitive, and will not hesitate to come close to humans. However, as is true with most birds, as soon as I decided that I would try to photograph them for this article, they suddenly turned wary. Or as happens with coy brides, they refused to give me a decent picture, always turning away as I depressed the shutter! I spent an entire morning trying to photograph the birds, but without success!

The Jungle Babbler I was observed, foraging under littered plastic, has happily made the adjustment to living in urban India. But should we continue to pollute and "plasticize" our cities, we shall soon be faced with clogged sewage drains and littered rivers-and Dehradun is not exception to this clutter. We owe it to ourselves to clean up our city. Let us start making a difference.....

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Making a difference: Reduce use of plastic bags. Not only do plastic bags clog and clutter, but they pollute for up to a million years, as they are non bio-degradable.