

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

Published on 29 May 2009

Croaks of the Toad

My 15-year old son, Yash and I were on a night walk at a stream near Sahastradhara. In torchlight, we peered at a mass of twigs and leaves, less than a foot away. From the mass of vegetation near the stream, a croaking sound, “*krooo, krooo*”, wafted towards us. Both Yash and I knew it was a frog or a toad calling, but the more we looked, the louder the calls became, and there was still no sight of the amphibian! We spent 15 infuriating minutes looking for the well camouflaged animal, but without any luck. Yash proposed that we switch off our torches, move away from the stream and wait for the animal to show itself. We moved back about ten feet, switched off our torches, and sat on a rock in complete darkness. Sure enough, after a brief wait, the calls started again. “*krooo krooo*” called the invisible animal. This time, we shone our torches again and there it was!

A large Common Indian Toad *Duttaphrynus melanostictus*, now sat on the clump of leaves, glaring at us. With a baleful expression, the toad looked at us, as though saying-”Why are you guys bothering me! Don't you know its breeding season, and I am looking for a mate. If you keep trudging all over the stream, how can I look for my partner?!” With that rant, the toad croaked again, puffing up its dark throat, hoping to attract its better half.





Yes, indeed, the first few showers in Dehradun mean that the frogs and toads have emerged from their hibernation, and are ready to commence their breeding. The Common Indian Toad is possibly the city's most common amphibian, readily entering gardens, and even homes. The toad is normally brown in colour, with a series of black warts down its back, but it could also be reddish-brown, or some hue of yellow.

Once the male toad's croaks find fancy with a suitable partner, the male and female mate in a position called amplexus (see picture). The smaller toad, on top, is the male. After mating, the female lays hundreds of eggs in suitable aquatic habitat. From these eggs, emerge, tiny black tadpoles. The tadpoles feed voraciously on vegetable matter, and eventually grow into small toads with legs. These small toads shed their legs and gills (which is the breathing organ of the tadpoles), and become tiny toads. During the monsoons, you can see hundreds of these small toads everywhere. Many of these small toads are devoured by predators, but the sheer number of eggs laid, ensures that a significant population of toads reach adulthood and maturity.

Toads are harmless creatures that benefit man by feeding on insects. Adopt a few toads, keep them in your home, and watch your mosquito population dwindle!

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

© Sanjay Sondhi

Making a difference: Water is the lifeline for man, and amphibians. Don't waste water in your home. Start brushing your teeth with a glass of water, instead of using running water.