

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

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Flying in Love

Summer is over. The monsoons have touched Dehradun fleetingly. For many bird species, their nesting season is over, and they are busy rearing their fledglings to face the big, bad world. The other day I watched as a young, tailless drongo looked inquisitively at me, even as its parent seemed to be gesticulating to the young bird to get away from “those crazy two legged creatures that cannot even fly but instead intrude our privacy by leering at us through binoculars!”

For most birds, love is a distant memory, with the day-to-day chores of feeding the young, teaching them to fly and other tricks of the avian trade taking over. Fortunately, one bird that has still has time for love, is the Himalayan Bulbul.

The Himalayan Bulbul (*Pycnonotus leucogenys*) is petite brown bird endowed with a pretty white cheek patch, an attractive crest that sits like a toupee on its head, and finally a yellow vent under its tail, of which you can only catch glimpses when the impertinent bird shows you its backside.

Seen commonly in many gardens in Dehradun, the Himalayan Bulbul is a a treat to watch. A few days ago, I watched as a pair of birds feed together, chasing down insects on a tree. Even as I watched, one of the birds (and I imagine it was the male), tried to catch insects in the air, very much like a flycatcher, attempting to impress its mate. Having succeeded in capturing just one insect after many attempts, the bird sat haughtily, preening itself on a branch. The other bulbul (presumably the female) watched its mate with some pride. It seemed to approve of its mate's attempt to behave like a flycatcher. Soon, the birds flew and sat cuddled together on a branch-a pose in which the birds are seen very often. Looking very much in love.



Another bird (possibly another male) committed the cardinal error on intruding on the lovebirds, and was chased away by the pair of bulbuls with a flurry of excitement and a great deal of noise. The pair of bulbuls went back to “coochee-cooing” in each other's ears, while the left-out male sat on an electric pole in the distance and sulked!

Found through out the Himalayan foothills, the Himalayan Bulbul is a resident bird that can be seen throughout the year. It feeds primarily on fruits and trees, and can be often seen sitting on bushes of Lantana or Ber, gorging on its berries. Occasionally, it does eat insects as well. It is not shy and will often enter homes to steal food.

As I watched the lovebirds gaze into each others eyes, there was clearly a message that we humans could take from them. These birds obviously make an attempt to keep love going through their married life, notwithstanding the

“chores” that they had to do, and I thought its an apt lesson for us “much married couples” as well!

Sanjay Sondhi is a Dehradun based naturalist. Feedback on this column is welcome at [doonwatch@gmail.com](mailto:doonwatch@gmail.com)

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Making a difference: Get your entire household (and your neighbours!) to make paper bags from old newspapers and donate them to your nearest shopkeeper.

Photograph caption: Himalayan Bulbuls glaring an an intruder!