

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

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“How Green Are You?”

The Doon Watch series in Hindustan Times is now into its fifth month. The response to the column has been fantastic. I have had children and adults alike come up to me and say that they have enjoyed reading the column. I am grateful to readers for their encouragement and would love to continue to receive feedback on how to make it even better.

Often during the first four months of this column I have wondered whether my “Wodehouse-like” writing about the beautiful things in nature and turning a blind eye to all that's not well, helps. After all, its great to read about all the wondrous sights nature serves to us, but what if nature itself were to disappear in a few decades from now. Is this the legacy we want to leave behind for our kids?

Intriguingly, the discussion with people who have provided feedback on the column has invariably veered to the deterioration in Dehradun’s environs, and what we can do about it. My response to everyone that I have spoken to has been unchanged. Let’s not talk about what others can or cannot do-the politicians, the administration and so on. Let’s do whatever WE, as individuals, can do. Every one of US can “Make a Difference” by adopting small lifestyle changes with little or no impact to our daily lives. We owe it to ourselves and to our children. What with global warming and climate change, urban pollution and God knows how many more issues, time is running out for Mother Earth, and us.

A good way to start is to do a reality check of how conscious you are about conserving the environment. To do this, I have compiled a short “How Green Are You? Quiz”. This is a randomly selected list of some “green” personal habits that you could adopt yourself. Take the quiz and ascertain whether you are making a difference!

The “How Green Are You? Quiz”

1/Reduce plastic use: Do you use cloth or paper bags instead of plastic bags when you shop?

2/Conserve energy: do you make an effort to switch off lights and fans when you walk out of the room? Have you switched to CFL bulbs which consume one fifth the energy of traditional bulbs?

3/Go organic and reduce chemical consumption: Do you consciously use organic food in your home?

4/ Grow and eat “local”: Do you grow some of your vegetables in your own garden?

- 5/Educate your children on the need to protect the environment: Are your children involved in any nature or environment activity?
- 6/Conserve water: do you reduce you water consumption for personal use by using a glass of water to brush instead of tap water? Or use a bucket for bathing instead of a shower?
- 7/ Reduce your dependence on your vehicle: do you attempt to walk or cycle at least a few times a week on routine tasks. It is healthier and less polluting.
- 8/ Reduce your waste: Do you manage you kitchen waste by having your own vermiculture pit at home?
- 9/Reduce paper waste: do you consciously re-use/re-cycle paper? Do you consciously reduce all the “junk mails” you get at home? Get your bank statements, etc on email, instead of paper.
- 10/ Green Dehradun: Have you participated in tree plantation in Dehradun and hence made a contribution to a greener environment.

Your score:

- 1-3: You need help! But the good news is that plenty of scope to make an impact.
- 4-6: You're getting there. Why don't you make a conscious effort to go green?
- 7-9: Terrific. You are really making a difference.
- 10: Wow-we need to meet up!

I hope you've enjoyed assessing whether you are making a difference. Needless to say, this list is drawn up randomly, with no effort to prioritize. If every one of us consciously makes an effort to make marginal changes to our lifestyles, the pressure on earth's precious resources reduces significantly. Little drops do an ocean make. And there are countless other ways of making a difference. The important thing is that you do so.

Did you know that?

- By some estimates, the “tipping point” of CO₂ levels in the earth's atmosphere is 350 ppm. The current level of CO₂ is already 387 ppm, already beyond the tipping point. Reversing the trend of global warming needs action now!
- India's forest cover is estimated at 20%, well below the global average of 27%. And we continue to cut down forests with impunity.
- The estimated tiger population in India has reduced from 4000 to 1400 in the last decade. Even Sachin Tendulkar has woken up!
- Numerous other animals in India are threatened-their small populations in the wild are steadily declining-Asiatic Lion (<350 nos in the wild), Hangul (<150 nos), Asiatic Wild Buffalo (<1500 nos), Brow-antlered Deer (<100 nos)
- Even the lesser known fauna is threatened. Amphibians are a terrific indicator of the extent of water pollution and have been around for over 300 million years. Did you know that over 33% of the world's 8000 amphibian species are threatened? And it is estimated that 168 amphibian species have gone extinct in the last two decades?

- By some estimates, 3-4 animal species go extinct every hour in the world!

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