

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

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Stream Jewel-The Dainty Damselfly

Last Sunday, we decided to take a drive to Mussoorie. Bad idea! As it turned out, everyone else had the same design and we encountered a steady flow of traffic on the road to Mussoorie. Amidst the honks and the smoke-spouting vehicles, we stopped at a small, roadside stream just beyond Kohlu Khet. The stream was filthy, with garbage lining its edges, and human faeces adding a new dimension to “fragrance”! My son, Yash, rightly so, turned up his nose, and with an exasperated groan, protested “Dad, why are we stopping here? There's nothing to see, only garbage and excrement!” The older you get, the more stubborn you get, so I ignored him and proceeded to check out the stream.

I had only walked a few feet when I espied a flash of green upstream. Alert, and now proceeding with caution and stealth, I slowly walked up the stream. The flash of green greeted me again, and I spotted the creature. A damselfly!



The insect, part of a family of damselflies called Stream Jewels, had black wings with an exquisitely, coloured green band. With large bulbous eyes, the damselfly beckoned, as though saying “Come and watch me!”.

Calling to my family to join me, for the next half hour or so, we delightedly watched the antics of the damselfly. When sitting on the upper surface of a leaf, the damselfly was well camouflaged, and difficult to spot. When the damselfly flew, the green bands shimmered in the sunlight, like glittering jewels, immediately attracting one's attention. Peculiarly, when sitting, every now and then, the Stream Jewel flicked its wings open and closed. I had never observed damselflies do this before. I think the Stream Jewel was showing off. If women can adorn themselves with jewelry only to show off, why cannot the damselfly do the same. The only problem I have with this premise, is the damselfly we were seeing was a male! The female damselfly is dull brown coloured and lacks the green colours of the male. For once, the male is better looking than the female.

Damselflies, are aquatic insects, belonging to the order Odonata, which includes dragonflies and damselflies. Dragonflies (which I had written about a few weeks ago) have heavier bodies, unequal fore and hind wings which are held open above the insects body when seated, and are fast fliers. The dainty damselflies have thinner bodies, equal-sized fore and hind wings which are folded together above the body, and are weak fliers.

Watching the elegant insect at the dirty stream set me thinking about nature's ability to adapt and change. Despite the filth we spread around, the damselflies were able to adapt and thrive at this roadside stream. How much longer would the damselflies, which have been on earth for more than 250 million years, continue to manage the human assault on their eco-system? Lets give them a hand-pollute less by reducing, re-using and re-cycling our waste.

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Photograph caption: Stream Jewel Damselfly