

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

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The “Did-you-do-it” bird

The melodious calls of the Magpie Robin wafted through the trees. The fluty calls of the Koel pierced the air. The sharp staccato “*tzip tzip*” calls of the Purple Sunbird punctuated the symphony. Nature's rock band was at work, and that could only mean one thing-the breeding season is here!

Birds breeding season is an interesting time for birdwatchers. In an effort to ensure successful breeding, birds adopt various nesting strategies, bringing to the fore innovation often mired with queer behaviour!



Walking along the Rispana river bed, I watched a pair of Red-wattled lapwing *Vanellus indicus* take to wing. Whenever I hear its accusatory “Did-you-do-it” call, I feel guilty, wondering what I have done wrong! It does not help that the bird goes on and on, its accusations getting louder and more persistent with time. I now know what it feels like to be interviewed by Karan Thapar on television!

My thoughts went back to an interesting encounter I had with the lapwing. I had been trudging through fields when I noticed a Red-wattled lapwing in the distance. Even as I watched the bird, it suddenly dropped out of sight. I was surprised, because the Red-wattled Lapwing is a large conspicuous bird. I rubbed my eyes, and looked again, but no luck ; the bird seemed to have been swallowed up by the earth!

Deciding to investigate the earth swallowing incident I walked closer to the point I had last seen the bird. I scanned the area with my binoculars and sure enough, the bird was sitting amidst some rocks, really well camouflaged. Giving me a really dirty look, the bird continued to crouch down amidst the rocks. Even as I watched it, the bird got up, and slowly walked away with one of its wings hanging down, seemingly broken. The bird slowly trudged away, appearing to be in great pain, with its broken wing. After walking in this fashion for a distance, the bird suddenly flew up, its broken wings had healed! The “broken wing” technique of the Red-wattled lapwing is its quirky survival strategy to protect its nest from predators. By pretending to be injured, it lures its potential predators away from its nest.



Sure enough, when I searched the area with my binoculars, I found the lapwing's nest with four pretty eggs deposited on merely a scrape in the

ground. The lapwing's nest and eggs are very cryptically colored making them difficult to spot, thereby protecting it from humans and predators. I took some photographs and moved away quickly, knowing fully well that if I stayed too long, the bird might abandon its nest and eggs. As I watched the lapwing return to its nest from a distance, I wished it luck, hoping it would be successful in raising its brood and keep nature wheels turning.

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Making a difference: This is the breeding season for many birds and animals. If you happen to find them nesting, ensure you don't disturb them in any way.