

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

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The Villainous Jungle Crow

In many years of relishing the sights and sounds served up by nature, there are innumerable, delightful creatures that remain a pleasing memory. At the same time, there are some unfortunate creatures that have ended up being relegated to the bottom of my “like” list! The Jungle Crow is one amongst the few living beings for which I have a “healthy” dislike.



The Jungle Crow *Macrorhynchos corvus* is actually an attractive bird in its own right, with a glistening metallic blue-black sheen on its entire body, which shimmers in the sunlight. Unfortunately, in my personal view, the bird's beauty is more than compensated for by the need for significant character improvement! For starters, the Jungle Crow looks down disdainfully, on its more drab looking cousin, the House Crow, which has a grey head on a dull black body. The Jungle Crow knows it is better looking and does not hesitate to flaunt its relative “handsomeness”. Whenever I see it strutting around proudly I feel like telling the crow-look around you, Mr. Vain Guy, there are many more alluring birds around. Not that my saying so will make any difference to the tall, dark and handsome bird!

Amongst the other things that I do not like about the bird is that it is an aggressive bully-it will harry birds, big and small. I have seen the Jungle Crow chase the large Himalayan Griffon Vulture, which is twice its size. Unafraid of humans, it glares balefully (see the picture for proof!) at any humans that might endeavour to come close by. As a child, I was at the receiving end of the bird's aggression. Unknowingly, I happened to venture close to its nest, and without warning, one of the parents dive-bombed at me and raked my head with its claws, leaving my head bleeding.

Even the bird's feeding habits leave a lot to be desired. It has no table manners, and will gleefully snatch food from your plate, if you happen to be picnicking outdoors. Humans are not the only target for the thieving Jungle Crow-it will happily seize food from other birds, some even larger than itself. Even worse, the bird is a scavenger, and can be seen gorging on offal at garbage dumps. On one occasion, I saw the Jungle Crow sifting through cow dung, and feeding on the grubs within. Yuck! Dirty bird with even dirtier habits!

Mother nature has its own checks and balances. That's possibly the reason that one of the birds that nature has handpicked to teach a lesson to, is the Jungle Crow. The Koel, belonging to the cuckoo family, exhibits parasitic nesting behaviour, using other bird's nests for laying its eggs. The Koel will locate a Jungle Crow's nest, push out the crow's eggs and lay its own eggs in the crow's nest. Being blinded by its love for its own, the Jungle Crow ends up nurturing the Koel's eggs till they hatch. It even raises the Koel's fledglings to maturity, instead of its own. And becomes the laughing stock of the rest of the bird community!

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Making a difference: The earth's becoming a huge garbage dump! Segregate your wet and dry waste, and compost the wet waste in your own home.

Photograph caption: Jungle Crow glaring balefully