

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

Published on 17 December 2010

Have you seen this snake?

For all the people who have lived in Dehradun for decades, the decline in green cover is all too apparent. Fruit orchards have been converted residential housing. Surrounding forests have conceded ground to new construction. Trees within the city have succumbed to road widening, bridge construction and other similar projects conceived by man. The depleting green cover affects us in many ways-poorer air quality, increased temperatures, increased soil erosion; most of these changes are felt by us on a day to day basis. However, along with these visible changes, there many other impacts that are neither visible nor measurable.

One of the obvious impacts of reducing green cover is the decline in the areas bio-diversity. With less to eat, and a depletion in the appropriate habitat to live in, Dehradun's wildlife, too, has declined, at the expense of a burgeoning human population.

Recently, I was involved in writing a book on the amphibians and reptiles on Uttarakhand. During the course of this endeavour, we came across some interesting findings. One of the snake species, called the Green Vine Snake *Ahaetula nasuta*, is a common snake in most of peninsular India. This is especially common in the forested areas of the western Ghats. The Green Vine Snake, as its name suggests, is a slender, green, vine-like snake. Up to to 3 feet in length, the snake has a pointed snout. It is found in the bushes and trees at forest edges and occupies diverse habitats. It feeds on small invertebrates like lizards and frogs, and is not averse to catching a bird or two



(the bird permitting!).

Well, the interesting thing about this snake is that there have been no confirmed sightings of this snake in the Dehradun area in recent years. However, during the course of book writing, we accessed the old snake collection at the FRI Museum and found that there were four specimens of this very snake in their collection. In fact, some of the snakes had been collected at the FRI itself!

Is the Green Vine Snake an example of Dehradun's vanishing bio-diversity? Its hard to be certain, but certainly looks like it. It would be very interesting if readers keep their eyes and ears open (every rustle in the bushes is a potential vine snake!) for this snake and write into me if they do see it, preferably with a photograph (even photographs taken with your mobile are fine!). Keeping a watch on Dehradun's bio-diversity is an easy way to make a difference!

Sanjay Sondhi is a Dehradun based naturalist. Feedback on this column is welcome at sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com

Visit the Popular Writing section on the website www.titlitrust.com to view the entire collection of Doon Watch articles online.

Making a difference: Citizen science involves the participation of the general public in studying and monitoring bio-diversity. In many cities in India, people are involved on a voluntary basis to assist in science endeavours. You can do the same-watch out for the Green Vine Snake. Report other interesting sightings of wild creatures in the city-its the very least you can do to make a difference.

Photograph caption: Green Vine Snake

© Sanjay Sondhi