

## Doon Watch Nature Series in Dehradun Live Hindustan Times

Nature watch or nature disrupt

By Sanjay Sondhi

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Through the conifers, I watched as the golden sun slowly descended. Around me, bird calls rang through the air. In the distance, the “*payou, payou*” calls of the Great barbet echoed. Close by, the screeches and chuckles of the Yellow-billed blue magpie entertained me. Ensuring that it was not left out, the Blue whistling thrush, a common winter visitor to Dehradun, alternately sang, and screeched, making me wonder why its calls varied between sublime songs and unbearable screeches!

I was sitting on a fallen log in the Kalatope-Khajjiar Wildlife Sanctuary in the scenic hill station of Dalhousie in Himachal Pradesh. As dusk drifted in, I basked in the setting sun at the Alah Waterworks, one of Dalhousie's water sources, originating within the sanctuary. Conifers towered above me, and a gushing stream of pure Himalayan water made its way beside me.

The tranquil scene was shattered as I heard a screeching Blue whistling thrush. In a split second, before I could realise what was happening, the thrush frantically flew by me, and behind it swooped a large greyish-brown bird of prey. In midair, the bird of prey snatched at the poor thrush, and the two birds fell smack into an open water tank. I could hear the birds thrashing in the water.

I stayed rock still-should I move? Had the bird of prey caught the thrush, or had it got away? My curiosity got the better of me. I got up slowly, and edged closer to the water tank. I was at least thirty feet away, and as I moved to get a better angle, the bird of prey suddenly rose and flew to a tree. Had I disturbed it? Or had the thrush got away?

As the raptor flew by, I identified it to be the Mountain Hawk Eagle. The thrush had still not flown away, so I made my way to the tank. In it was the poor thrush, apparently injured. As I approached, it tried to hide in a hole in the tank. I was dismayed! Had I disturbed the raptor causing it to release its prey? And how badly injured was the thrush? Should I now try to rescue it?

With a sinking heart, I sat and considered my options. Should I interfere with nature and attempt to rescue the bird? Hadn't I already interfered by disturbing the Hawk Eagle? Or had the thrush got away by itself? Could it be that the raptor would come back if I moved away? Very quickly, I decided that

nature should take its course. I squeezed off a few pictures of the unfortunate thrush and moved away. I sat for a while, but the raptor did not return.



A thoughtful naturalist made his way home. Had I disrupted nature while trying to observe it? Do I always disrupt nature when I watch it? A large part of nature watching is to share the experience the less fortunate, who cannot see it for themselves, I justified to myself. Isn't outreach and awareness enough of a reason for me to continue do what I do best-observe nature and write about it.

Looking at the picture of the struggling, frightened and possibly injured thrush left me with no clear answers.....

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