

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

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Leiothrix is the prettiest bird!

Mirror, mirror, on the wall, am I the prettiest of them all? Hello folks-no, this is not a writer gone berserk! Nor do I stand in front of the mirror with any such notions. I am at an age when thoughts of being TDH (tall, dark and handsome!) are long gone. However, I do often wonder whether our feathered friends have the same level of vanity as the human race? Do they stand and peer longingly at their reflection in a still pool of water, wondering whether they are the fairest of 'em all?

If there is one bird in Dehradun that might actually be entitled to do this, it is the Red-billed Leiothrix (*Leiothrix lutea*). Belonging to the babbler family, this pretty bird does not only have an exotic name, but is gorgeous to look at. The bird appears a drab brown colour when you give it a cursory look, but a closer scrutiny reveals its true colours. A bright red bill, a stunning golden-yellow throat and wings-it seems dressed to enthrall. A yellowish-white eye-patch rounds up the bird's pretty look.

During a recent trip to Robber's Cave, we took a stroll to the scrub forest just behind the caves. The leiothrix hopped in and out of the bushes. In turn, we hopped as well, trying to get a good look. All my attempts to get a really good picture were



unsuccessful, though I did manage to get one that I can share with you.

The leiothrix is a fairly common bird around Dehradun, though not so easy to spot. It lives amidst the shrubbery, preferring bushes, occasionally venturing to climb to the lower branches of trees as well. You get only fleeting glimpses of the bird, flitting from one branch to another, but one look is enough to get you captivated. If you are not a bird watcher yet, come out with me, see the leiothrix, and I am sure that you will get hooked to birding!

Fairest of them of all or not, the leiothrix remains one of my favourite birds in Dehradun. Yet, when I look with despair at the destruction being wrought on Dehradun, I wonder whether we will still see this bird a few years from now. Can we still save Dehradun's greens? Yes-if all us sign up to make a difference. Do your bit-it counts.

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

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Making a difference: Are you a concerned Dehradun citizen? Do you feel that you should do something about it, rather than just complain? Why don't you join one the numerous "green groups" and support the effort to keep Dehradun green? To cite one of these groups, visit the website of "Citizens for Green Doon" and sign up to do your bit.