

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

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### The Small Niltava-Taking Away Your Blues!

The month of November has greeted us with some terrific weather. An early morning chill has meant that my morning walks in shorts are gonna be pretty short-lived! Despite the chill, as soon as the sun rises, the days are pleasant, and its a terrific feeling to soak in the sun's rays in my garden. The winter chill brings other delights. Amongst the most obvious is the migration of birds from the higher altitudes to Dehradun. For the past month, I have heard the Himalayan Whistling Thrush screeching in the morning. The Grey Bushchat, another altitudinal migrant, has already descended to Dehradun.

A few days ago, I heard a really sweet whistling call from the undergrowth, and immediately recognised the bird. It was the male Small Niltava *Niltava macgrigoriae*! This gorgeous bird, a flycatcher, is a glossy blue colour, which glistens whenever the bird is in the sunlight. In shade, the bird almost seems black. The niltava has a gorgeous bright blue on its forehead, rump and a small band on its breast. In flight, this blue colour flashes forth, revealing the bird's presence. The female niltava is a lot duller-largely brown with a blue band on the breast, similar to the male.

As I watched the niltava, it emerged from the undergrowth, sat on a perch for a few moments, and then quickly disappeared into the foliage. A few minutes later, the flycatcher popped out of the undergrowth again, in a different location, only to melt away again, into the foliage. On each occasion, its flashed its blue colours at me, as though saying, "Watch my blue colours!". This is typical niltava behaviour-surreptitious, wary, allowing you only fleeting glances of its beauty! A sure-shot recipe for taking away your blues,



should you have them!

The niltava moved away from me, but for quite a while, I could still hear its sweet whistling call in the distance, as though the bird was tantalizingly letting me know that it was still around!

The Small Niltava, an altitudinal migrant, is a winter visitor to Dehradun, but not necessarily easy to see. This flycatcher prefers forest habitat, and can be seen at forest edges, in the lower canopy or amongst the bushes. The Dehradun-Mussoorie area is the westernmost limit of this bird, which is also seen in Nepal and north east India. The sighting of beautiful birds like the niltava are a subtle reminder to us-the remaining green areas of Dehradun continue to house nature's alluring creatures-the key question is how much longer we will continue to see them?

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Making a difference: Of late late, my wife, Anchal, has been humming the attractive Vodafone jingle "The Little Things You Do" repeatedly, such that it has got into my head too! The jingle is really apt for a conservation message! How often do you wear your clothes for only a few hours in the winter, and put them in for a wash? Couldn't you wear your clothes one more time-thereby saving water, and reducing detergent use? Imagine, if everyone were to do this-the impact would be huge. The Little Things You Do.....

Photograph caption: The Small Niltava

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