

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

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Sweet Sips of Spring

The onset of spring is hazardous for my daily morning walks! The presence of flowering trees in our society has meant that my early morning strolls happens in fits and starts. The main culprit for my lack of regular exercise is a flowering Indian Coral Tree (*Erythrina* species). Its gorgeous red flowers are a walk-stopper anyway, but the birds that its attracts make it even more irresistible.

On most days, I begin my walk without my camera, determined not to be swayed by the Coral Tree. The first round that I walk in the society typically results in my noting that the Himalayan and Red-vented Bulbuls are enjoying feeding on the flower's nectar. The bulbuls are normally in large flocks of 8 to 10 birds, and are the birds that are least concerned by my presence. I normally get a dismissive "oh, he's the society birdwatcher" look from the bulbuls! In turn, I dismiss them, too. "They are only bulbuls; no need to photograph them."

On my second round, the bulbuls are joined by the Spangled Drongo. This bird has a curled tail, and a crest of hair on its head. Mostly black, in the sunlight, its feathers glint with a lovely metallic blue. These days, the Spangled Drongo is a loner, and it visits only to partake the Coral Tree flower's nectar. The drongo is quite shy, and unlike the bulbuls, is wary of me. The drongo is a more tempting photography target. I have unsuccessfully tried to photograph the drongo, but as it is a newcomer, unlike



the bulbuls, it does not recognize me as the “friendly neighborhood birdwatcher”. So once, again, I resist the temptation to bring out the walk-disrupting camera.

On the third round, invariably, a gorgeous male Crimson Sunbird, in breeding plumage is on the Coral Tree. How can I resist the gorgeous crimson coloration of the bird, matching perfectly with the red flowers of the Coral Tree? The colours of the bird and the flower are so similar that, if the bird does not move, you might miss it altogether. Now the going gets tough. Get the camera, I tell myself! A quick scramble home, out comes the camera and long lens, and the walk is forgotten! The Crimson Sunbird loves flower nectar, and is relatively easy to photograph. It is almost as though the bird gets lost in the sweet sips of spring flowers. Lucky me!

Feedback on this column is welcome at sanjay.sondhi@gmail.com

Making a difference: Planting native flowering trees in your home or society garden is a terrific way to observe nature. In this season, flowers like Flame of the Forest, Coral and Red Silk Cotton attract a host of birds and smaller mammals, which love to feed on the flower’s soft petals and its nectar. Why don’t you plant some of these trees in your garden?

Photograph caption: Crimson Sunbird on Indian Coral Tree flowers

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