

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

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Termite Story II

Last week, I had written about termites and their intriguing life history. Today's story is all about how the very termites I wrote about became history! The termites emerged from their holes, immediately after a monsoon shower. Spreading their four wings, with a weak flutter, relishing their new found freedom, the termites took to wing.

Little did the poor termites realise that their new found freedom was short-lived. Danger lurked in the sky, and on the ground. For many creatures, the emergence of the termites during the monsoons is truly party time! The raucous crow is first off the block. He caws to his friends to join him in the feast, as soon as he sees the swarm of termites. Insectivorous birds, such as the swifts, martins and swallows, catch insects while flying. For them, its literally a "flying" party!

As the termite swarm flew close to a tree, a flock of Spangled



Drongoes went berserk with the flying food on offer. These black birds with a curled, forked tail, demonstrated their agility by gracefully swooping on the flying insects. As I watched, a Brown-headed Barbet, which is a dumpy, green bird, clumsily entered the fray. Despite being largely frugivorous (a fruit eater), the barbets attempted to get their share of "flying nutrition". A gatecrasher to the party was a Grey Hornbill. This large grey-brown bird has a long, thick beak, suited for swallowing fruit whole. Yet, it did not want to miss out on the treat. The bird attempted clumsily to catch the termites fluttering near the ground. Managing to catch a few insects, the hornbill preened and gloated to the rest of the bird community-see I can catch them too!

As the termites fluttered near the light bulb, geckoes licked their lips in anticipation, and joined in the revelry. One of the geckoes greedily grabbed a termite. As the gecko struggled to devour the unfortunate insect, its four wings protruded out of the gecko's mouth, giving it a out-of-world look.

A few weeks ago, on a field trip, I watched a spider hunt termites. The spider had constructed its sheet web above a termite hole, and when the termites emerged, the spider sat back and feasted, as they entangled themselves in its web!

Different creatures. Different techniques of hunting. The termites provided them all the same thing-easy pickings for a meal! Fortunately, the termite strategy for survival is simple-they emerge in such large numbers, that not all of them can be eaten. Hence, a significant number of termites always escape its predators. That's nature's way-each creature evolves its own survival strategy. I wonder what's gonna be *Homo sapiens* survival strategy for the next millennium!

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: One of the survival strategies for mankind has gotta be to reduce, re-use and re-cycle. Are you doing your bit?

Photograph caption: Gecko devouring a termite