

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

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The Injured Owl

"There's an injured owl in the school! What can we do to help?" Dr. Raka Singh, a friend, called me up a few days ago. From the description she provided me, it seemed that the bird was the Collared Scops Owl *Otus lettia*.

A little while later, I was at the school to look at the owl. The bird, indeed, was the Collared Scops Owl, a small 25 cm owl, with short ears or tufts on its head. It emerged that one of the helpers at the school had found the bird in the chemistry lab. Fortunately, she immediately caught the bird and put it in a bin.



One look at the sad bird, and my heart went out to it. Tragically, the bird's wing was broken and it was clearly in pain. When I tried to gently catch the bird to put it in a box to take it away, it scurried across the floor, petrified. When I did eventually catch the owl, it gripped my finger tightly with its talons. Ouch-that hurt! Talons are the

long, deadly claws that owls have to catch their prey-rodents, reptiles and other small vertebrates. What could have happened to the poor bird? It did not seem have any other injuries, so it seemed unlikely that another predator could have attacked it. Possibly, it could have injured itself on a wire or a similar sharp object, while hunting. The cause of its injury remains a mystery.

The Collared Scops Owl is found in lightly wooded areas, and Dehradun still has enough of these for the bird to be seen in the city. Being nocturnal, it is heard rather than seen. It has a soft, interrogative "*wuk, wuk*" call note which is repeatedly uttered.

Rescued wild animals have always posed a challenge. During a recent trip to Meghalaya, the NGO that I was assisting rescued an injured Leopard Cat, which had been caught in a poacher's trap. Despite their efforts to save it, its injuries were very severe and it died. On the same trip, they rescued a Green Cat Snake-a really pretty 4 foot long green snake. We were able to release it into the wild, and hopefully, it survived.

A flurry of phone calls ensued as we struggled to figure out what we could do to assist the bird. Our efforts to find out what to do with the injured bird finally lead us to the Malsi Deer Park, where the forest department does attempt to rescue injured or captured wild animals and birds. The forest officials graciously accepted the injured owl and said they would do their best to save it. Will the poor bird survive? Only time will tell.

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: If you find an injured animal, don't just stand by. Make an effort to save it. In Dehradun, an NGO, People for Animals (0135 2788245, 9897284048) has an animal rescue center, which caters to primarily domestic animals. For wild animals and birds, contact the forest depart. Help save the animal-and make a difference.

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