

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

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The Birds They Are A-Calling

Bright, sunny mornings these days have led me to have a cheery countenance. I marveled at how the change in weather had transformed my mood. Just a few weeks ago, cold, dull mornings had given me the blues. Still comatose in bed, I heard the shrill screech of the Blue Whistling Thrush. This bird has a beautiful, whistling song, but instead it chose to screech out to the world that it was time to get up. I noted, desultorily, that the whistling thrush, which normally is up precisely at 6:00 am, was only active after at 6:30 am. See, I told myself, even the birds are reluctant to wake up early in this cold weather. I forced myself out of bed, grumpily.



Photograph caption: Rose-ringed Parakeet cheering up the author!

Time for my morning walk, I thought morosely. Haze all around me, the winter chill working its way through my bones-how could I enjoy my morning walk, I fretted. The Mussoorie hills seemed fuzzy even as the sun struggled to shine forth, adding to my despondency. The hills to east were shrouded in brooding darkness, silhouetted as they were by the sun behind. What chance do I have if the sun itself is only a small, dull circle in the sky?

In low spirits, I still decided to go through the humdrum of a morning stroll. As I stepped out, above me a flock of Rose-ringed Parakeets burst forth from the canopy of a nearby tree. One of them settled on a wall near me and called, "*kreeeyou, kreeyou, kreeyou*". Its calls questioned me "*kyu, kyu, kyu*" (why, why, why) "Why was I despondent?" From the canopy of the same tree, a Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher sang to me, a fluty and melodious "*swee, swee, swee, swee*". "Where have you been?", it asked? To see the queen, I muttered to myself, still not allowing my mood to lighten up.

A Grey-hooded Warbler, keeping the flycatcher company, joined into the chorus with its relatively tinnier song, an undulating "*see, see, see, see*" "What should I see?" As though in response, a White-browed Flycatcher responded with its beautifully composed song-a musical masterpiece, if ever I have heard one. Fluty, clear notes rang forth and slowly I felt my black mood dissipating.

A Tailor Bird decided to display its restricted repertoire-a dull, monotonous "*which, which, which...*", forever wanting to know which was the best area for it to feed on insects. Closer to the ground, the Ashy Prinia, opened up with a nasal, cry-baby like "*teeya, teeya, teeya*"; the bird always seems to be complaining and crying!

To cap it all, the Long-billed Crow sat on the tree branches above me, and let forth a series of harsh, deep-throated "*craw, craw, craw*" calls. Harsh, accusatory calls, as though blaming me for all its ills in the world. "You, you, you", it seemed to say. Fortunately for me, my dejection had vanished. Even the harsh, though unjustified, accusatory calls of the crow could not make me feel low-the birds had lifted my despondency, and I felt alive again!

Nature is a balm, a cure, a "set-righter" of all moods! As I have experienced so often, the best way to wake up, get my low spirits up, introspect, think about the world, my life, your life and anything else under the sun, is to get nature to provide the alfresco conference room. Open skies, bird calls, the fresh smell of plants and the vibrancy of life is sufficient to provide an "upper" especially on a cold, dull winter morning in an urban setting!

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Making a difference: Watch nature during your morning walks and get your free "upper"!