

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

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The Goldfinch Surprise

“Soondhiii” called my wife, Anchal, from the garden below. “I can see a bird with a red face in the garden.” Ensnared comfortably in the balcony of our house, reading some junky pulp fiction, I muttered back to her-”must be Red munia's”. Red munia's are fairly common, small sized, seed eating birds with red coloured males. “Soondhii-the birds have a golden-yellow colour on their wings-they are not munias”, Anchal hollered out again. “Look again, they must be munias. What else can be in our garden?” I yelled back.

A few minutes later, Anchal called out yet again. “Soondhii, they are not munias for sure.” Grumbling at having to get up from my comfortable chair, I stretched slothfully, and peered down into our garden below. I spotted 3 birds sitting on the marigold flowers in the our garden. “Must be munias” I muttered to myself again. At this moment, one of the birds fluttered into the air, and I, too, saw the golden-yellow colour on the bird's wings. Yeah-maybe they aren't munias, I told myself. I listlessly sauntered down the stairs.



Venturing into the garden, I picked up binoculars on the way out. One look at the birds and all my slothfulness vanished! The sparrow-sized birds were gorgeous-they had bright gold coloured on the wings, and a blood red-coloured face. Awesome-I was watching European Goldfinches in my garden!

Turning back into the house I thoughtlessly grabbed the camera and lens from my son, who had pulled out the equipment to take some pictures himself. Ducking from a scathing “I told you so” look from Anchal, I proceeded to photograph the birds.

Three goldfinches were merrily feeding on a marigold bush. The marigold flowers were just

beginning to wither, and the goldfinches were gorging on the flower's seeds. As I approached them, armed with the camera, alarmed by my presence, the birds flew onto the wire fence around our house. However, greed got the better of them and they were soon back on the marigold bush, in only a few minutes, permitting me to squeeze off a few pictures.

A Lifer! My first sighting ever of the European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)-right here in my garden in Dehradun. Awesome! European Goldfinches are seed eating birds that are found throughout Europe, North Africa and parts of Asia. In India, they are seen in the western Himalayas, normally higher up in the hills. However, as winter progresses, and their food supply diminishes in the hills, they occasionally descend to the plains.

Its been just under two years that we have been in Dehradun, and Mother nature continues to pelt us with surprises along the way! Beautiful birds, dainty dragonflies, intrepid insects, slimy snakes...we've been accosted by all of these and some more! Perhaps its nature's way of telling us-look at all the marvelous creatures I have saved for you in Dehradun....don't take them away. Save them, save Dehradun's greens.

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