

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

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A Glimpse of the Leafbird

A few days ago I had a conversation with an old Doonite (Isn't that what old timers in Dehradun are called? If not, I just made it up!). The person came up to me stating that she had been reading the Doon Watch series in Hindustan Times for a while and she felt that I made Dehradun look "better than it actually was"! Of course, I objected to this vehemently, because the sights and sounds of nature in Dehradun have allowed me continue to write this column for more than three years! And all the wonderful natural history sightings in Doon have not been a figment of my imagination-they have actually happened!

As if to reinforce this point, on a recent nature walk to the Tons river, we sighted a really pretty, though uncommon bird (in Dehradun), the Orange-bellied Leafbird *Chloropsis hardwickii*. The leafbird is called so, because of its leaf green coloration, which camouflages it really well in the tree canopy, where it is mostly seen. Three species of leafbirds are found in India, with the Orange-bellied Leafbird, being arguably the prettiest.



The male bird has a bright orange belly, green back and wings, and a bright blue moustachial streak. The leafbird gave us a brief glimpse, while it perched on a clump of bamboo. In a jiffy, the bird flew to another cluster of leaves, and then disappeared from sight. Despite, looking long and hard through our binoculars, we could not see the bird again(I know I wear specs, but still not that old, folks!).

The Orange-bellied Leafbird is a terrific songster. It has a series of musical notes, and loves to mimic other birds such as bulbuls and drongos. Along with its terrific green leaf-like camouflage, its mimicry has confused many birdwatchers; until of course, the birder gets to actually see it through binoculars, when it is unmistakable!

The Orange-bellied Leafbird is a bird of the hills. Though it migrates down to about 600 m in the winter season (hence Dehradun is about the lowest it would descend to in the winter season), it breeds up in the Himalayas up to an altitude of 2,200 m.

Sightings such as that of the leafbird provide a great deal of pleasure and are a reminder of the terrific flora and fauna that Dehradun is still home to. Yet, it is also a grim reminder of all that we stand to lose if unabated (and unsustainable) development continues in this city. The only hope for us, is that everyone, especially you and I, put our hands up to save what remains.....

Feedback on this column is welcome at sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com

Making a difference: In this year ending piece, how about a funky New Year resolution? Would you like to go out on monthly Doon Watch nature walks along with other interested folks in Dehradun? If you can resolve to do so, write in to me at sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com and we can get a monthly Doon Watch nature walk going, and perhaps take tiny steps in appreciating Dehradun's vanishing natural heritage. Happy New Year!

Photograph caption: Orange-bellied Leafbird

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