

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

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**Eagles in the sky**

During a recent visit to the campus of the Wildlife Institute of India, Chandrabani, I spotted a large bird sitting on the ground. Parking my vehicle to the side of the road, I approached the bird silently. As I got closer, I realised that the bird was a raptor (or bird of prey). Creeping up slowly, I got close enough to the bird to recognize it- a Crested Serpent Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*)!



My stealth was not really called for, as the bird was busy and had no time for me. I was now close enough to figure why the bird was ignoring my presence-it had caught itself something to eat. Snared in its talons was a large field mouse, still struggling, but clearly well on the way to becoming a tasty meal for the eagle. Once I got really close, the eagle gave me a yellow-eyed stare. It flew up to the lower branch of a nearby tree. Here it proceeded to gorge on its meal, as though telling me-its tasty, but I am not going to share anything with you! "Fair enough, bird" I muttered to myself. "You caught it, you eat it!" I have no specific fondness for field mice, but the eagle did not know that!

The bird's scientific name, "*cheela*", means kite in Hindi. The Crested Serpent Eagle gets its common name because its favourite food is snakes, though other reptiles and rodents do form a part of its diet as well. On occasion, you can see the bird sitting on a branch with a dead snake hanging out of its beak. The bird is easy to identify in flight; brown wings outlined by broad white and black bands are easily visible to the naked eye. It is not often that you will see the bird sitting on the ground. If you do, you can see a black crest on its head, spotted with white. The eagle is largely a forest bird, but can often be seen on the outskirts of the city, near garbage dumps. Watching a pair of them glide gracefully, catching the thermals, gets my heartbeat up! The bird sails overhead, often dipping down to the nimbly glide over the tree tops, watching out for prey with its eagle-eyes.

The other way to find the eagle is by means of its call-it shrill, wailing "wheeyu" call, uttered in flight, carries a long distance. Hearing the bird's call means that it is busy, doing its job in nature's food chain-that of controlling the population of reptiles and rodents.

Making a difference: Recently, I had the opportunity to meet a group of young students at IIT-Roorkee. The students had formed a group called "Greenagers" focussed on creating awareness on the need for a more eco-friendly and sustainable lifestyle. No only awareness, they are also involved in "green action" and are taking numerous eco-friendly steps on their campus. Meeting these young students left me enthralled-here was a group of young lads, dreaming and envisioning a greener world. If only we had more people, both young and old, thinking along the same lines, doing things that make a difference, on a daily basis!

Photograph caption: Pair of eagle's in flight

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