

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

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**Gregarious Green Bee-eaters**

A flash of green. A bird with a swirling, graceful flight launched itself from its perch. A few moments later, it was back at the same position-perching jauntily on the branch. A look here, a look there, and it took to the wing again. Sashaying through the air, a loop here, a loop there; its arial forays left me bewitched.

I was watching the Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*). The bee-eater is a green bird, slimmer, but a little larger than a sparrow. Its head and back are tinged with reddish-brown, and its tail extends into a long pin-like point. Often the feathers on its back are ruffled up, to give the bird an appearance of being larger than it actually is!



The Green Bee-eater inhabits urban and rural habitats; it is fairly common in Dehradun. Outside the breeding season, it is seen in small flocks of 5 to 15 birds, gracefully sailing through the air. Often, the birds cutely huddle together on an electric wire, as though numbers offer them safety. Every now and then, an aggressive bee-eater will want to join into the huddle and will attempt to squeeze into

the middle of the "cuddle". The huddled bee-eaters will object and the entire flock's "cuddle" breaks up! A melee ensues where loud accusing "treee-treee-treee" calls of the disturbed bee-eaters will admonish the intruder for being a spoil sport!

As the bird's name suggests, its main food is bees, though it eats other insects as well. Sailing through the air, the bee-eater adroitly catches bees in flight in its long, down-curved beak. Having pouched its prey, it beats the bee to death on a branch or an electric wire, before devouring it.

At dusk, large flock of up to 50 birds will fly about looking for a roost. The birds will find a leafy tree and circle it to check its suitability. One by one, the birds will descend into the tree. Now the birds are invisible, well hidden by the leaves, but they can still be heard chirruping loudly, as they check out their home for the night. After few minutes, suddenly, one of the birds will burst forth from the potential roost-it has found the roost unsuitable! Reluctantly, the rest of the birds will follow, once again beginning their search for a suitable night roost. Often, the bird that left the roost will be coaxed to accept the tree that has been found and the birds will once again descend to the night's selected roost!

Feedback on this column is welcome at [sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com](mailto:sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com)

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Making a difference: An issue that continues to rankle me is the amount of garbage that litters Dehradun city. While there are numerous actions that need to be taken to fix this, surely one of these is a conscious attempt by everyone of us to reduce generation of waste. So do you buy eggs? Instead of using plastic bags, why don't you carry the empty egg cases made of recycled paper, which any shop keeper will gladly provide you. We have tried it, and it works. Remember, every little bit counts....

Photograph caption: Green Bee-eater