

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

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Nature's "*Darzee*"!

The boundary wall of our housing colony is bordered by a dry nala. The nala is overgrown with dense foliage and hence largely inaccessible. Given that it is not easy to get to, numerous birds have selected the ravine as a neat place to nest.

Just this morning, I was attracted to loud calls emanating from the nala. "whit, whit, whit, whit...." called the bird incessantly, for minutes without a pause. I recognized the call to be that of the dapper Common Tailorbird. Positioning myself near the wall, I searched for the bird. Despite the calls coming from very close to me, the bird stayed invisible. Five minutes of observation, taunting calls of the bird, and I was beginning to doubt my abilities as a bird watcher. I've got a new pair of spectacles, so that must be the reason, I told myself!

Just to rub salt into my wounds, from exactly the same location that was I looking at, first one and then a second tailorbird hopped out. They sat on a branch no more than a few feet from me, jauntily cocked their tails, and with a series of whiplash "whit"s, they berated me for disturbing them.



The Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius*, is a common garden bird found throughout India. No more than 4 inches long, it is olive green above, dirty white below with a bright red cap. During the breeding season, the male has thin, needle-like tail feathers. Black patches on the throat, which stand out when the bird calls, complete the attire of this nattily dressed bird.

The bird's scientific name is interesting. "*Orthotomus*" means straight-cutting, while "*sutorius*" means cobbler (and not tailor!). Hence nature's skillful tailor has been converted to a straight cutting cobbler instead!

The tailorbird gets its name from its nest-building habit. It is an expert tailor-the bird's unique nest consist of two or more leaves, which are painstakingly sutured together by the female bird. I will quote a paragraph from Hugh Whistler's Popular Handbook of Indian Birds (a classical book written in 1949), which describes the tailorbird's nest building brilliantly. "The sewing is done with threads of cobweb, silk from cocoons, wool or cottons ; the bird pierces a hole in the leaf with its sharp beak and draws the thread through, contriving in some manner to make a knot on the outside sufficient to prevent the thread slipping back ; except that each stitch is made separately it would pass well for the work of human hands."

The bird's nest is so beautifully made, that I often wonder whether I could request them to stitch some clothes for me, too! Besides offering competition to Reid and Tailor and the Big B, what could be better for me that to get Nature's "darzee" to stitch for me!

Making a difference: What do you do with your old clothes? Throw them away? Why don't you make cloth bags out of them, and shun the use of plastic bags?

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

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