

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

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### **The Art of Twitching**

Last week, the Delhi Bird Group organised the Big Bird Day. Basically, this was a fun outing, with many teams of bird watchers from Delhi and other parts of the country (some even overseas) spent the entire day bird watching. At the end of the day, bird lists were compiled, ending with an evening get together in Delhi. I was really amazed with the response of hundreds of people, who ventured out to bird watch.

During my younger days, bird watchers were a rare commodity. You had to actually search more carefully for bird watchers, than the birds themselves! How times have changed; now, there are hordes of bird watchers, while birds are more difficult to find, given their reducing population and diversity.

My introduction to bird-watching or "twitching" as the more sophisticated like to call it, was more than a quarter of a century ago. I was student in IIT, Kanpur, and I approached the head of the college Nature Club, with a request to join on a proposed wildlife tour to Annamalai WLS in Tamil Nadu. As I came to know much, much later, my request was greeted with consternation and trepidation! My reputation in college amongst some people was a complete lack of sobriety, most of the time (untrue, I must add; I was only partaking some juices, some of the time!). The folks in the nature club discussed my request in hushed tones, wondering what I would end up doing to the wildlife in Tamil Nadu. Fortunately for me (and possibly them), they agreed to let me join.

Since my first introduction to proper bird-watching, my interest in nature has grown by leaps and bounds, up to a point that I actually gave up engineering to focus on wildlife conservation.

Bird-watching, regrettably, too has moved on. From the early days, when bird watching meant a pair of basic binoculars, a bird guide, a note book and loads of enthusiasm, today, spotting scopes, powerful binoculars, call recorders, cameras with long lenses and a host of bird guides have proliferated. In addition to the equipment, attitudes have changed too. A few decades ago, birding meant that one or two of us spent the day identifying birds and observing them in the field. Today, birders move in "flocks", with groups as large as twenty people go out to search for that elusive "lifer".

Lifer-what's that, you may query? For those of you who are intending to start bird watching, here's a sample of interesting bird watching jargon, that you should

memorize before you go out into the field.

twitching: bird watchers, a word possibly of British origin

lifer: a bird seen by you for the first time

tripper: a bird seen by you for the first time on a birding trip

photo-lifer: a bird photographed for the first time

calendar shot: a terrific photograph, worthy of being put up on a calendar!

jizz of a bird: derived from GISS (meaning "general impression of shape and size" of a bird)

stringer: a birdwatcher that "strings" together dubious bird lists!

I could go on, but I hope the above has whetted your appetite! I look forward to welcoming you to the "twitching" community, soon!

Sanjay Sondhi is a Dehradun based naturalist. Feedback on this column is welcome at [sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com](mailto:sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com)

Making a difference: Learn to appreciate nature. Start "twitching"! Anyone wanting to go birding watching on a weekend should drop me an email, and we could go together.

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