

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

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A tiger on the prowl

A few nights ago, I heard Tiger, our pet cat, making some hissing noises out in the garden. Tiger, named so because of her tiger-like stripes, has travelled with us all the way from Pune, from where our family relocated 2 years ago. Tiger's name is an error of judgement, because she is a female, but we had named her before we realised her gender, and so the name has stuck! Not that it matters, because very much in the mode of my favourite cartoon character, Garfield, as long as Tiger is fed, can sleep, and be petted, she couldn't be bothered with what she is called!



Tiger's encounters with the natural world in our garden have kept us busy over the last few years. Tiger's hisses was on account of a toad in the garden. Each time Tiger pawed the toad, it hopped, and so did Tiger! It was hilarious to watch both the creatures eye each other warily, and jump with fright whenever Tiger raised the courage to touch the toad. Fortunately, I knew that the toad secretes toxins which are foul tasting, and hence there was no way that our cat could ever eat it.

To our dismay, not only does Tiger hunt birds, but she also brings them into the house, as an offering to us! On one instance, we were watching a small bird called the Ashy Prinia in our garden. This tiny bird forages amidst the bushes and on the ground, but is very wary, and is difficult to approach. Watching the prinia, I casually mentioned "There is no way Tiger can catch a prinia. In any case, there is hardly any flesh on this tiny bird, so there is no reason for her to hunt it!" Believe it or not, the next morning, Tiger came into the house and dropped a dead prinia at our feet! Her expression said it all "So you think I cannot catch this bird? Here you are!" Tragically, she did not even eat the bird, and we were left telling ourselves that the next time, we were going to be cautious that we did not end up issuing challenges to Tiger, even if unknowingly!

In the latest episode of Tiger tales, we watched as she desperately tried to hunt for fish, in the small pond that we have created in our house. Sitting at the edge of the pond, every now and then Tiger would stick her paw into the water, and then hurriedly withdraw it (she detests water!) and watch despairingly as the fish swam away from her!

Despite a tiger on the prowl, with the onset of spring, our garden is teeming with bird, insect and animal life. Look forward to some more tiger tale's in the months to come!

Making a difference: Today, 22 April 2011, is Earth Day. In an inter school event held yesterday to celebrate Earth Day, we held an essay writing competition with the title "What I will do to make Dehradun free of plastic bags?" Reading the passionate views of young children on what they would do to make a difference brought a tear to my eye. Can we, the adults (and the major polluters), do likewise? Stop using plastic bags and use cloth bags instead.

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

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