

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

Published on 22 July 2011

Toad in the tree

During a recent night walk, I was admiring a large banyan tree. Banyan trees, with their long roots and broad trunks are not only a favourite with fruit-eating birds during the day, they are also an excellent roost for creepy-crawlies at night. The crevices in the tree's trunk and its twirling roots, are great hiding places for insects, geckos and sometimes even snakes. So with my torch I diligently searched the tree. Imagine to my surprise, when about a foot above my head, I noticed a large Common Indian toad (*Duttaphrynus melanostictus*) sitting on the tree's branches.



Toads are terrestrial amphibians, and do not climb trees. There is a species of toad in the western Ghats called the Malabar Tree Toad (*Pedostobes malabaricus*) which does climb up into trees, but that is an exception. Intrigued, I looked at the tree and realised that the toad would have had to climb 6 feet vertically up the tree trunk, and then about 10 feet horizontally along the branch to get to where it was sitting! What on earth was the toad doing on a tree!

Standing on my toes, I looked closely at the toad. Hey, toadie, I said, what are you doing up in the tree. The toad returned a baleful look. Toadie, are you aware that toads are not supposed to climb trees. Another baleful look! Tooaadie, did you climb up the tree following an insect? Or did you think that tree restaurant existed up here, which would serve you some delicacies? Toadie-did some predator chase you up here? Toadie-are you a distant relative of the Malabar Tree Toad? More baleful looks! Not moving at all, sitting comfortably on the branch, the toad's expression was clear.

Leave me alone, or else more baleful looks will come your way!

Stepping back, I watched the toad for the next five minutes. Its expression did not change-what a grouchy toad! Toads cannot climb up trees, and even if this one did, I could not envisage how it was going to make its way down to the ground. I decided to make a final attempt. Toadie-how are you going to climb off the tree? Do you need my help? Another baleful look made it clear to me that the toad did not appreciate my offer! Deciding to let nature take its course, I waved goodbye to the toad in tree, and received my final baleful look!

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

Making a difference: We have constructed a small pond in our house. With the torrential rains, our unkempt, "jungle garden" has all kinds of interesting visitors. The latest addition to an already burgeoning list of garden fauna is a frog. Every night, the toad calls loudly, obviously hoping to entice a female to mate. Unfortunately, it seems to be alone, and its calls seem to be getting louder and more desperate every night! Home gardens are a great place to watch nature. Get your children to observe nature at work in gardens and encourage them to write about it- this is a great way to get them to be aware of the natural world around us.

Photograph caption: Toad in a tree

© Sanjay Sondhi