

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

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Tricks of the Trinket

At the outset, a very Happy Diwali to all my readers. I hope you celebrated a safe Diwali, with limited sound and lots of eco-friendly lights! Watching our pet cat, Tiger, quiver in fright with all the crackers, I often wonder how the wild animals take this human intrusion into their lives-light, sound and fire couldn't make for a very pleasing Diwali for our wild friends!

Talking about wild friends, last week, I ventured out to Sahastradhara for a morning of butterfly watching. I had stopped alongside a wet patch on the main road to watch some butterflies, when I noticed a movement at the edge of the road. Wondering what it was, I moved closer. At first, I thought it was a lizard, but as I got closer, I realised it was a snake! That got me excited! The snake was small; a juvenile Common Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus helena*). Knowing that the snake was not venomous, I moved even closer to observe it. Little did I realise that the snake had a small frog in its mouth, that it was attempting to eat. When I got too close, it had to release the frog, and it slithered away. I ended up berating myself, for having deprived the snake of a tasty meal; if I had not approached it, the snake would surely have devoured the frog.



The snake slithered into a hole amidst the rocky wall beside the road and was gone. The Common Trinket Snake is quite a common snake and is found at the edges of forest in semi-urban and rural areas. The snake can grow up to 3 feet in length. Brown coloured, it has black bands on the body, mottled with white,

Though not venomous, the snake is aggressive, if threatened. If you happen to aggravate the snake, it will coil its body into a S shape, flatten its neck, open its mouth, and aggressively protect itself. It may even bite, but not being venomous, its bite hurts a bit, but causes no harm. Now that does not mean that you trouble the snake, and stick your arm out to just verify what I am saying!

Snakes remain one of the most misunderstood creatures. Snakes perform a crucial role in nature, eating rodents, and thereby helping reduce their population. An increasing rodent population effectively means a greater damage to our stored grains. The next time you see a snake; do not panic-allow it to slither away unharmed. And if by any chance it gets into your house; don't kill it. There are "friends of snakes" in every city, who will help rescue a snake in your house.

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

Making a difference: Gotta snake in your house! Don't panic; call call Dr. Abhishek Singh (9719440099) whose organisation, EFFECT , will help rescue the poor reptile from your home.

Photograph caption: Common Trinket Snake

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