

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

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The Brahminy Myna gets "evicted"!

The torrential rain during the last few months in Dehradun have reduced my morning walks to a trickle. (It is a different matter that, Anchal, my wife, of course, says an umbrella will do me a world to good to shelve my excuses and get some exercise instead!) One of the outcomes of reduced morning walks is that I have missed watching birds.

Recently, we have got the terrace in our house covered by a tin roof. Along with keeping the rain out, the roof has started getting the birds in! Whenever it rains, I regularly see birds hopping onto the terrace, perching on one of the protruding pipes, and settling down, waiting for the rain to stop. I like to make-believe, that the birds come there because they are missing me on my morning walks!



Birds like the shelter the roof provides from the rain. A few days ago, I noticed that a Brahminy Myna (*Sturnus pagodarum*) had decided to take refuge from the torrential rain. This myna, sometimes also called the Brahminy Starling, is a petite chestnut coloured bird with a black crest. It has a bright yellow beak, with a blackish-blue colour at the base. Sitting on a protruding iron bar, the myna was just a little wet. It shook itself, attempting to brush off the water from its feathers. As it did so, its loose black crest jauntily moved this way and that. The myna's common name, Brahminy myna, comes from this feature. The bird's crest is reminiscent of the "*choti*" or lock of hair that brahmins have on their heads.

The Brahminy myna is a common bird throughout India. It inhabits both urban and rural areas. It is often found in villages, agricultural fields, city home gardens and near temples. In fact, its scientific name "*pagodarum*" possibly refers to the pagodas, the south Indian temples that it is often seen at.

The Brahminy myna is an omnivore i.e. it eats seeds, fruits and insects with equal ease. It is normally found in flocks, often mixing with other myna species. In villages, it is a common sight to see the myna perched on the back of cattle, feeding on the insects on them.

Even as the rains continue, my Brahminy myna watching has come to an abrupt halt. The myna has been displaced! A flock of Jungle babblers decided that the tin roof shelter that the myna had discovered was really nice. Using their larger size and aggressive nature, they have "evicted" the myna! More on this story in the weeks to come!

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

Making a difference: Reducing consumption is a great way to go "green". I am sure you get a lot of junk paper in your mail. Do you throw these away? What I do is check whether these papers have a blank side at the back. If they do, I use them to make notes, even write formal letters. No one has ever complained as to why I am using old wasteful paper again!

Photograph caption: Brahminy Myna

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