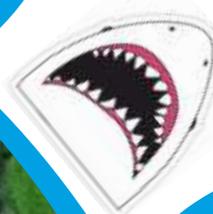


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Common hawk-cuckoo
with a squirrel kill
July 2022.. PU Chandigarh

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**One and all are invited to be on team
to propagate the initiative further
in any capacity and way**

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Profile of the Month

A citizen's initiative to document Rich Flora of India!

ई फ्लोरा ऑफ इंडिया

eFloraofIndia (संक्षेप में eFi और विस्तारित रूप में भारत का eFlora), जो कि नेट पर भारतीय संयंत्रों पर उपलब्ध सर्वोत्तम संसाधन है, जून 22 में 15 साल पूरे होने का जश्न मना रहा है। एक किताब 'एक भिक्षु जिसने अपनी फेरारी बेच दी' (आखिरकार यह मायने रखता है कि आप अपने और अपने परिवार के बजाय दूसरों के लिए क्या करते हैं) को पढ़ने से प्रेरित होकर, उनके सदस्यों में से एक दूसरों की मदद करना चाहता था, पौधों की पहचान में हम चारों ओर देखते हैं हम स्वयं इसलिए उन्होंने पेड़ों की पहचान करने के लिए एक नया त्रिशद्वय समूह 'इंडियनट्रीपिक्स' शुरू किया (बाद में सभी प्रकार के पौधों को कवर करने के लिए इसका नाम बदलकर eFloraofIndia कर दिया गया)। उनके पास 14,000 से अधिक प्रजातियों (भारत में पाई जाने वाली लगभग 18,000 प्रजातियों में से) की 4,00,000 से अधिक images का संग्रह है और 1,00,000 से अधिक observations है, जिनमें से अधिकांश उनकी वेबसाइट



eFloraofIndia (<https://efloraofindia.com/>)। उनके लिए डेटा हमारे दुर्लभ और लुप्तप्राय पौधों के संरक्षण में सबसे महत्वपूर्ण कदम है।

उनके लिए eFloraofIndia में, यह एक या दो साल के लिए एक परियोजना नहीं है, बल्कि एक सतत जीवन भर की गतिविधि है। उनके कुछ सदस्यों ने फोटोग्राफी, व्युत्पत्ति विज्ञान, स्थानीय भाषाओं में नामों का संकलन, समन्वय, साइट निर्माण आदि जैसे विभिन्न क्षेत्रों में इसके निर्माण और

सुधार के लिए अपना पूरा जीवन समर्पित कर दिया है।

सभी को आश्चर्य होगा कि इस सबसे बड़े नागरिक विज्ञान प्रयास के निर्माण में पिछले 15 वर्षों में किसी से एक पैसा भी एकत्र नहीं किया गया है। और एक भी बैठक कभी आयोजित नहीं की गई, यहां तक कि ऑनलाइन भी। यह न केवल भारत में, बल्कि दुनिया में भी अपनी तरह का सबसे बड़ा नागरिक विज्ञान प्रयासों में से एक है, जहां शायद ही कोई पैसा शामिल है। यह भारत जैसे विकासशील देश में और भी महत्वपूर्ण हो जाता है, जहाँ या तो भारतीय वनस्पतियों की सुंदरता को भारत के नागरिकों तक पहुँचाने के लिए पर्याप्त प्रयास नहीं किए गए हैं या उन्होंने बहुत फलदायी परिणाम नहीं दिए हैं। यदि कभी इसका मूल्यांकन किया जाता है, तो इसके सदस्यों और राष्ट्रीय और अंतर्राष्ट्रीय विशेषज्ञों द्वारा लगाए गए जोशीले प्रयासों, समय और ऊर्जा में, हजारों करोड़ रुपये का मूल्य होगा। यह भारत में सबसे महान नागरिक विज्ञान प्रयासों में से एक की एक अच्छी कहानी है, जो प्रबंधन के स्कूलों में पढ़ाए जाने योग्य है।

To begin with, Mr Garg had inhibitions about his initiative. Will people join? Will they participate? Will they share their images and knowledge? While dwelling on these questions, he was deeply inspired by Robin Sharma's *The Monk Who Sold his Ferrari*. The book taught him to believe in himself, value focus, have passion while having intense desire to excel and aim to help others.

Profile of the Month

A citizen's initiative to document Rich Flora of India!



eFloraofIndia
Completing 15 years!

>3200 Members
>14000 Species
>350000 Images
...Still Growing!

The journey began in June 2007. Mr Garg started writing to various people and other e-groups explaining the need to have a group dedicated to the Flora of India. At the end of the month, about 50 persons expressed their willingness to be part of the initiative. To begin with the Group was called "Indiantreepix" but later looking at the response and the increasing interest, it was renamed as eFloraofIndia.

Initially in the first few years of formation, there were many difficulties and challenges to be met. The group works on voluntary participation model, and it evolved as the moderators and the pillars put in their best efforts to overcome initial hiccups and not only the membership base increased manifold, but the resource material started pouring in. Mr Garg modestly says that the success of the venture is because of the collective efforts put in by the members. His personal belief is that "the best things in life are free", all that is required is time, effort, and passion.

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A citizen's initiative to document Rich Flora of India!

How to Join

Uncategorized / How to Join

April 4, 2018 admin_jmgarg 8 Comments

eFloraofIndia e-group (initially Indiantreepix) is the largest Google e-group in the world in this field & largest nature related in India (and the most constructive, with more than 3000 members & more than 3,00,000 messages on 23/8/18) devoted to creating awareness, helping in identification (e-gurukul) etc. along with discussion & documentation of Indian Flora. It has already completed a 12 years of service on 17.6.19.

One can visit & join 'eFloraofIndia' e-group by clicking at [eFloraofIndia google e-group](#) & then clicking on 'Sign in' & then 'Sign up' on next page. In this way, one may choose from one of the four options given below:

'All Email': send each message as it arrives' option (around 100 messages per day)

'No email': web-only participation' option,

'Abridged Email': one summary email of new activity per day' option or

'Digest Email': up to 25 full new messages in a single email '

One will be able to visit, send replies & post by visiting 'eFloraofIndia' e-group in any of the above modes without having to bother about emails flooding the inboxes.

Or one may send an e-mail request to itpmods@googlegroups.com to our moderators to become a member of 'eFloraofIndia' e-group. However, one should also mention his/ her full name, occupation (optionally: qualification, professional attachments etc.) and place & why he/ she wants to become a member in the e-mail, otherwise membership request will not be accepted.

Initially the focus was on documenting and identifying tree species. However, as the group gained experience and the greater involvement of the members, it was agreed that other plants also needed to be included. Now shrubs, herbs, grasses, sedges, crops, flowers, mosses, liverworts, fungi etc. are also covered along with the trees. Today eFloraofIndia is the largest database on the internet on Indian Flora with

details of more than 14000 species and with more than 4,00,000 pictures. A species' database has been created here, both family wise and genus wise. The intent of having this database is compilation of all the posts so that it's useful to all concerned as all the data about a particular species will be available at a single species' page and easily searchable. The data base is updated on daily basis. Mr Garg aims to add at least 1000 species every year.

According to Mr Jagmohan Garg, eFloraofIndia **is unique and different**. The way data is presented is totally different from anything one sees anywhere. The whole process of identification on site is not only for members, but also for anyone to access and understand. The text colours are used to give easy access to the desired data on a page. It has moved on to 'Photographic keys' from earlier followed 'Textual keys' in the form

Profile of the Month

A citizen's initiative to document Rich Flora of India!

of comparative images of genera (e.g. Delphinium) and family pages (e.g. Ranunculaceae) making the process of identification simpler not only for laymen, but also for experts.

eFloraofIndia has indirectly contributed to conservation of environment. Mr Garg says, *"Online learning through eFloraofIndia has inculcated a feeling of attachment among the members toward the Indian flora. They care more about it because of increased knowledge and awareness about it. The group has played a vital role in creating awareness, inculcating a scientific attitude, helping in identification, spreading knowledge, and bringing it within reach of a layman, and helping in the documentation of Indian Flora."*

Mr Garg concludes, **"For us at eFloraofIndia, it is a continuous lifetime activity.** Some of our members have dedicated their whole life for its building and improvement in different areas like photography, etymology, compiling names in local languages, coordination, site building etc. Results of which always show up on our site."

This group is there not only to learn about plant life, but also about various aspects of



J.M. Garg

Writer of 'A Photoguide to the Birds of Kolkata & Common Birds of India', he is a passionate Amateur Photographer, focussing mainly on Bird Photography. His aim is to create awareness about our bird life in particular & wildlife in general, with a view to involve our citizens to conserve it. A senior Railway Officer, he feels it is the duty of every individual to create awareness & love for nature in anyway possible. This will go a long way in serving our country. This exhibition has also been done with the aim of showcasing the beauty & colours of our winged friends, lot of whom come to India from far off places like Siberia, Central Asia, Europe, Africa etc. It will make one long for ones' roots & in complete unison with nature. Let us feel the silence of Nature!

Profile of the Month

A citizen's initiative to document Rich Flora of India!



ई फ्लोरा ऑफ इंडिया

eFloraofIndia (संक्षेप में eFl और विस्तारित रूप में भारत का eFlora), जो कि नेट पर भारतीय संयंत्रों पर उपलब्ध सर्वोत्तम संसाधन है, जून 22 में 15 साल पूरे होने का जश्न मना रहा है। एक किताब एक भिक्षु जिसने अपनी फेरारी बेच दी (आखिरकार यह मायने रखता है कि आप अपने और अपने परिवार के बजाय दूसरों के लिए क्या करते हैं) को पढ़ने से प्रेरित होकर, उनके सदस्यों में से एक दूसरों की मदद करना चाहता था, पौधों की पहचान में हम चारों ओर देखते हैं हम स्वयं इसलिए उन्होंने पेड़ों की पहचान करने के लिए एक नया Google समूह



भर की गतिविधि है। उनके कुछ सदस्यों ने फोटोग्राफी, व्युत्पत्ति विज्ञान, स्थानीय भाषाओं में नामों का संकलन, समन्वय, साइट निर्माण आदि जैसे विभिन्न क्षेत्रों में इसके निर्माण और सुधार के लिए अपना पूरा जीवन समर्पित कर दिया है।

सभी को आश्चर्य होगा कि इस सबसे बड़े नागरिक विज्ञान प्रयास के निर्माण में पिछले 15 वर्षों में किसी से एक पैसा भी एकत्र नहीं किया गया है। और एक भी बैठक कभी आयोजित नहीं की गई, यहां तक कि ऑनलाइन भी। यह न केवल भारत में, बल्कि दुनिया में भी अपनी तरह का सबसे बड़ा नागरिक विज्ञान प्रयासों में से एक है, जहां शायद ही कोई पैसा शामिल है। यह भारत जैसे विकासशील देश में और भी महत्वपूर्ण हो जाता है, जहाँ या तो भारतीय वनस्पतियों की सुंदरता को भारत के नागरिकों तक पहुँचाने के लिए पर्याप्त प्रयास नहीं किए गए हैं या उन्होंने बहुत फलदायी परिणाम नहीं दिए हैं।

यदि कभी इसका मूल्यांकन किया जाता है, तो इसके सदस्यों और राष्ट्रीय और अंतरराष्ट्रीय विशेषज्ञों द्वारा लगाए गए जोशीले प्रयासों, समय और ऊर्जा में, हजारों करोड़ रुपये का मूल्य होगा। यह भारत में सबसे महान नागरिक विज्ञान प्रयासों में से एक की एक अच्ची कहानी है, जो प्रबंधन के स्कूलों में पढ़ाए जाने योग्य है।

life, whether personal or professional. This group is actually a family of people, many of which have never met in real life, yet know each other. It is neither merely a website, nor a platform; it is a way of living and meaning of life for many selfless servants of Indian Botany."

What amazes everyone is that not a single penny has been collected from anybody in the last 15 years, in building this biggest citizen science effort. And not a single meeting was ever held, even online. It is one of the biggest citizen science efforts of its kind not only in India, but also in the world, where hardly any money is involved. It becomes

more important in a developing country like India, where either enough effort have not been made to bring the beauty of Indian Flora to the citizens of India or to project it on the world stage or they have not resulted into very fruitful results. However, eFloraofIndia has filled that gap very well and that too in a non-commercial manner.

Jatinder Vijh

Discovery of the Month

Re-discovery of Evan's snow flat *Tagiades cohaerens cynthia*

Gajinder Verma 1, Garlani Lovish 2

1 Village & P.O: Sahoo, Tehsil & District: Chamba, Himachal Pradesh 176314

2 Village & P.O: Garli, Tehsil: Rakkar, District: Kangra, Himachal Pradesh 177108

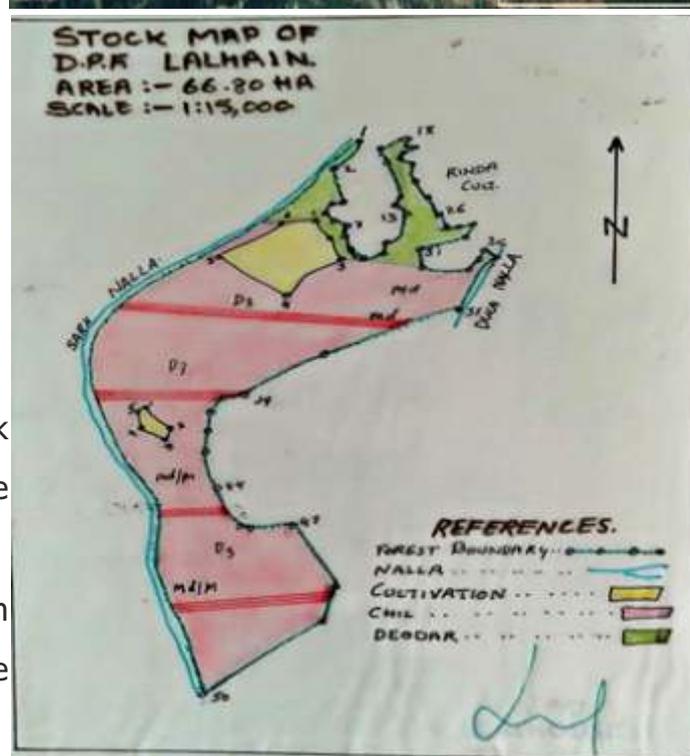
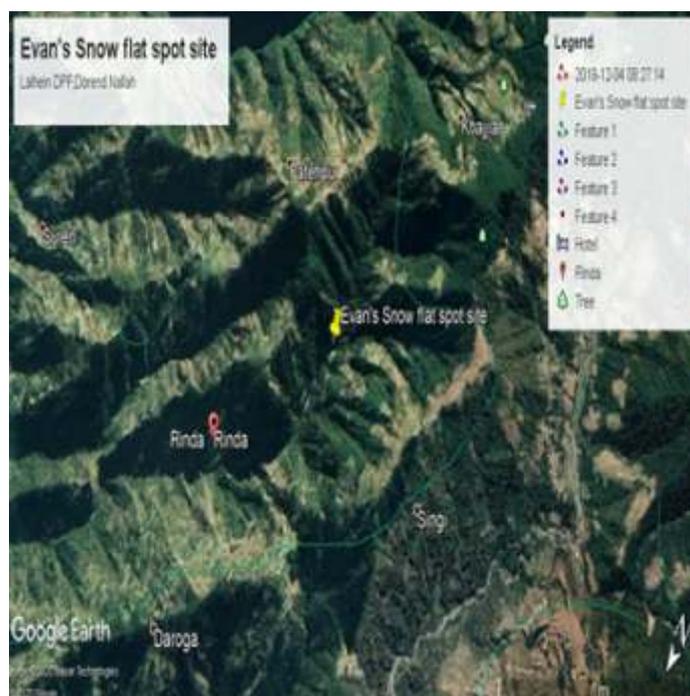
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Abstract

In July 2020, *Tagiades cohaerens cynthia* Evans, [1934] was recorded from the Dalhousie forest division in Udaipur forest beat of Chamba forest circle, Himachal Pradesh. During a field patrolling in Lalhein demarcated protected forest (dpf) area, a single specimen of Evan's snow flat *Tagiades cohaerens cynthia* was seen basking on flowers of *Cirsium wallich* (Wallich thistle, locally called Senthra). It was photographed and later identified as Evan's snow flat *Tagiades cohaerens cynthia* Evans, [1934]. A number of photographs were taken from different angles for proper identification of the species and it is the first photographic record and re-discovery of *Tagiades*

Fig1. Map of the Chaned forest block (Udaipur beat), Lalhein dpf. ©2019Google image and Maxar technologies.

Fig 2. Map of Lalhein DPF from Compartment history file ©Dalhousie Forest Division.



Discovery of the Month

Re-discovery of Evan's snow flat *Tagiades cohaerens cynthia*



Fig.3: Upper side of Evan's snow flat *Tagiades cohaerens cynthia* Evans, [1934] Dalhousie forest division, Himachal Pradesh, India.

Photo Credits: ©Gajinder Verma

cohaerens cynthia after 70 years from Himachal Pradesh.

Introduction

Chamba district is situated in the bosom of the Himalaya mountains, and it shares boundaries with Kashmir on the northwest and on its east with Lahul & Spiti district of Himachal. Chamba district hosts a significant proportion of Indian butterfly diversity; some of them are very rare and endemic. Butterflies of Himachal have been studied well in the past. Various publications on butterflies of Himachal from mid to late 19th century was included by Evans (1932) and Tablot (1939, 1947). Mani (1986) reported 377

Discovery of the Month

Re-discovery of Evan's snow flat *Tagiades cohaerens cynthia*

species of butterflies from Himalayas except HesperIIDae family. De Rhe-Philipe (1931) was the first person to publish a list of 246 butterflies of Shimla hills of Himachal Pradesh (Arora 2009).

Evan's Snow flat *Tagiades cohaerens cynthia* Evans, [1934] is a skipper of HesperIIDae family which can be seen in the hill forests between May and October. It is about 4 mm in size and its outer half of the abdomen is prominently white-striped from above which helps in its identification and makes it different from the Spotted Snow Flat *Tagiades menaka* (Moore 1866).

Observation and Sighting:

On July 12, 2020 Evan's Snow flat *Tagiades cohaerens cynthia* Evans, [1934] was re-discovered when it was basking on *Cirsium wallich* plant. It was photographed near Lalhein forest area (N32'34'.12.8", E076'04.03.7 , 1324m) in Dalhousie forest division, District Chamba. This area comes under Udaipur forest beat and the adjacent area shares its boundary with Singi forest beat. The whole area is rich in floral as well as faunal diversity. The Google map image and Compartment history file data of Lalhein forest area where Evan's snow flat was recorded is shown in Fig 1 and Fig 2.

The *cynthia* subspecies of Evan's Snow flat *Tagiades cohaerens* was first recorded from northwest Himalayas by Evans (1949). It was also reported from Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary, Arunachal Pradesh (Sondhi & Kunte 2016). In 2019 this skipper was recorded at Skimmer Biodiversity Reserve Vasant Vihar, Uttarakhand (Kumar et al. 2019). But there is no published record of this species from Himachal Pradesh. Publications specifically focused on Himachal Pradesh (Moore 1882; de Rhe-Philipe 1931; Talbot 1939, 1947; Wynter-Blyth 1940–1946) do not list this species from the state. Recent publications (Mehta et al. 2002; Thakur et al. 2002; Singh 2008; Arora et al. 2009; Saini et al. 2009; Singh & Banyal 2013; Chandel et al. 2014; Sharma et al. 2015) also do not reveal any record of this species from Himachal Pradesh.

Hence the record of Evan's Snow Flat (**Fig 3 on previous page**) *Tagiades cohaerens*

Discovery of the Month

Re-discovery of Evan's snow flat *Tagiades cohaerens cynthia*

cynthia from Dalhousie forest division of district Chamba is the first record from Himachal Pradesh after 70 years and it indicates the immediate need to undertake detailed field survey for understanding the field ecology of this species and many other butterflies which have no recent record in Himachal Pradesh.

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Bird of the Month

Thinking of Crows: Some Interesting Facts

Swaraj Raj

House Crow



Swaraj

It was late evening on 7th February, 1916. I was in village Reeth Khedi in Patiala. My friend Prof. Baljeet Singh Virk had invited me to witness a memorable scene of hundreds of house crows (*Corvus splendens*) congregating on top of the eucalyptus trees in a grove. We were about 400 meters away from the field and waiting for the crows to descend on the trees. Around 6.15, we didn't know from where hundreds of crows arrived and settled in the upper branches of the trees. Such cluster-flocking I had never witnessed earlier. I took many photographs. Prof. Virk had only a cell phone to record the scene. Since it was already getting dark, when he took a picture with his cell phone camera, the flash fired by default and suddenly all the crows sprang up from their perches as if stung by something and after circling on the trees, they settled there

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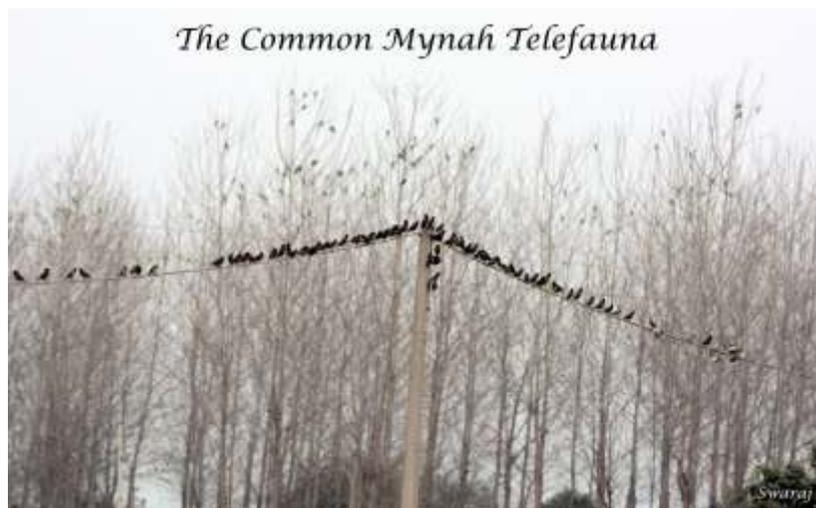
Thinking of Crows: Some Interesting Facts

Swaraj Raj

once again. We were intrigued by this strange behaviour. I told Prof. Virk to take another picture. The result was the same. Both the times, the silence of the dusk echoed with the cawing of the crows. Their sudden darting up, circling mid-air and then touchdown lacked the unison and rhythms we associate with the murmurations of starlings. But there was some collective logic in their cluster-flocking that spoke of group solidarity and collective fears.

Contrary to the behaviour of the crows was that of the Common Mynahs who were sitting on the telephone lines before returning to their homes in the trees. The Mynah telefauna did not respond to the flash fired in their direction.

If we compare the behaviour of the crows and the Mynahs to the firing of a flashgun, one thing that emerges loud and clear is that the crows observe human behaviour very keenly and respond to it in a way that we may not be able to understand fully. Another behaviour that revealed that they



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Thinking of Crows: Some Interesting Facts

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Alpine Choughs picking up Bread Crumbs in Leh



Eurasian Magpie in Leh



observe the humans also came to my notice during my frequent visits to the same village for observing and photographing birds. I noticed that whenever a bird felt threatened by my bringing my camera viewfinder to my eye level, that bird often moved away without making much fuss. However, if it were a crow, it would not only fly away but make so much noise that it would alert the other crows also about the presence of danger making them take to the wing in no time. Their cawing would in turn make the other birds also follow suit. However, if we just moved straight without looking up into the trees, the same crows would never sound their sirens to alert their kin. This proved that it was their experience with the humans that had taught them to think of cameras as guns. And this behaviour, hard wired in their brains has become their second nature.

These incidents made me curious to know more about these rogue birds. I started observing them at their chores wherever I spotted them, singly or in groups. Otherwise, since they are so common, we tend to ignore them though they figure prominently in our folklore. They are present in the tales of Panchatantra and Aesop's fables. A famous yesteryear Hindi film "Bobby" which celebrated youthful love, and was a heartthrob of many young Indians, in the same way in which the heroine of the film Bobby (Dimple Kapadia) was the heartthrob of the hero (Rishi Kapoor) in the movie,

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Thinking of Crows: Some Interesting Facts

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had a song in it:

Jhooth bole kauua kate / Kale kauuay se kahiyo ... (A crow will bite you if you tell a lie/ tell the black crow ...)

This song became very popular but still nobody thought whether there was any truth in the statement that a black crow really bites a liar! In fact, we didn't even think about it. Nobody can ever live without telling lies every day. If a crow were to bite us for lying, then each one of us would be bitten many times each day!

Our folklore expresses the faith (or call it superstition) that a crow cawing from the parapet of our house signals the arrival of a guest. I often heard from my mother that whenever a crow cawed on our roof, we could expect a guest that day. Two beautiful old Hindi film songs also express this sentiment. One is from 1950 film "Aankhen" and it has been sung by Meena Kapoor:

Moree atariya pe kaaga bole / Mora jiya dole, koi aa raha hai ... (A crow is cawing on my attic / Someone is coming, and my heart is prancing with joy ...)

And then we have this very tuneful song sung by Lata Mangeshkar from the 1969 film "Chirag"

Bhor hotay kaaga pukare kaahe Ram / Kaun pardesi ayega mere gaon (Why are you cawing O Crow since the crack of the dawn / Which stranger will come to my village?)

Thus, crows figure prominently in our folklore as harbingers of visitors. But they have also been considered as bad omens in folklore, literature and mythological tales in different parts of the world. Actually, crows are generally black, they are very shrewd, they are often found foraging at rubbish dumps, they are ultimate thieves when it comes to stealing, and they eat carrion – especially the ravens. Hence, there are many stories that paint crows as sacred as well as profane. In Indian mythology, crow is the vehicle of Shani Dev, the god of justice; therefore, it is portrayed as a sacred bird. It is

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Thinking of Crows: Some Interesting Facts

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Large-billed Crow cracking a Groundnut Shell



believed that when some ceremonies are performed after someone passes away, our ancestors visit us in the form of crows for food offerings and for blessing us. The ritual of offering food to them is performed to propitiate and honour our ancestors. In Greek and Roman mythology, the crow is sacred to the sun god Apollo. But the Roman poet Ovid in his poem "Fasti" has a different story about Apollo's crow. The poem tells us that the hoarse voice of the crow (a raven in the poem) was a result of Apollo's curse on the raven for not bringing water and instead telling lies to him after he had sent the him to collect water from a spring.

One thing about which there is no controversy is that crows are everywhere. They are in rural areas, urban areas, hills and plains. They are so much a part of our

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lives that we hardly ever notice their presence. The family Corvidae (a songbird family of the order Passeriformes) to which the house crow belongs is a large one. It includes ravens, Jackdaws, Choughs, Jays, Rooks, Magpies, Treepies, nutcrackers



and other birds. In fact, there are 120 species of corvids occurring throughout the world.

Crows are gifted with rare intelligence. Corvids, as Boria Sax tells us in his book *Crow* (2003 rpt. 2017) "have the largest brains in relation to their body size of any birds, and corvid brains are tightly packed with neurons" (21). Consequently, they are ranked, along with parrots, as the most intelligent birds. Although we don't have any scale to measure bird intelligence, but still, most experiments with corvids reveal their ability to solve many puzzles, problems involving creative and analytical thinking, power of discrimination and use of tools. In certain tasks, they tend to perform better than chimpanzees.

Crows have a very good vocabulary too. Boria Sax, quoting a study on American crow vocabulary writes: "Researchers consider linguistic facility an important indication of intelligence. According to one study, Twenty three distinct calls of American crows, things such as calls to assembly or warnings of danger, have been deciphered. This is a vocabulary that the great apes might envy. There are dozens of other calls made by crows and ravens that seem meaningful but have yet to be interpreted" (24). Not only

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this, crows are wonderful mimics too. According to Sax, "They copy calls of owls and probably other animals in the wild, and crows in captivity have been taught to use fragments of human language" (25).

House crows are widely distributed throughout the country. They are gregarious and are often found in groups. They are omnivorous and very opportunistic in stealing their food. They thrive on grains, cereals, insects, remains of the discarded rotting food they find on dung heaps, and carrion. In cities they can be

seen feasting on the flesh of dogs, squirrels, small rodents and birds run over by the wheels of fast moving vehicles. It is very rare that a house crow feeding on the flesh of a dead animal or grains spilt in the middle of the road gets killed under the moving wheels of a vehicle. They are very agile unlike the Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*), which belongs to the Cuckoo family and is a clumsy slow creature very much prone to road accidents. The house crows raid the nests of other birds to snatch their babies. They protect their own nests from predators like the Shikra. It is not uncommon to see a Shikra intruding into the crow territory being chased vigorously by the crows.



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Red-billed Blue Magpie



Swaraj

I have observed a crow holding a freshly kidnapped Jungle Babbler baby in its claws being chased by a flock of Babblers. The intense heckling by the Babblers made the thief leave the baby and run for its life. It was a heroic battle won by the Babblers against their enemy much cleverer than them.

But despite all their intelligence and thuggery, the crow finds its nemesis in the Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*). The latter is a brood parasite who does not make a nest of its own but lays its eggs in a crow's nest. The crow incubates the Koel's eggs, goes on feeding the hatchling and realizes that it had been tricked only when the fledglings grow big enough to take care of themselves. Nature has many bitter surprises in store even for the cleverest. It is for this reason that the crows protest the most against the

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presence of a Koel in the vicinity of their nesting site during the breeding season. I've witnessed a female Koel being badly mobbed and injured by a group of crows when they found her hovering near their nest.

Another very interesting thing about the house crows is that they mourn their dead. Whenever a crow dies, a few crows gather around its body. To the onlooker it appears to be a mourning behaviour but scientists believe that such a behaviour tells the surviving crows about the possible dangers lurking in that area which they must avoid. In either case, this behaviour throws light on their intelligence, their ability to learn to secure their survival and pass on this learned behaviour to other members of their community.

The Eurasian Magpies (*Pica pica*) which are residents of North Indian Himalayas like Leh, as Jennifer Ackerman writes in her wonderful book *The Genius of Birds* (2016) "can recognize their own image in a mirror, a grasp of "self" once thought limited to humans, great apes, and dolphins and linked to highly developed social understanding" (4). The Australian Magpies (*Gymnorhina tibicen*) which are notorious for becoming extremely aggressive in the breeding season are known to attack the same person repeatedly, which means that they remember and recognize human faces.

But we will continue discussing Jays, Jackdaws and Magpies in another article in the next issue of *Sanrakshan*.

The house crows may elicit varying responses from us. But it is Matsuo Basho's haiku with its striking image of a single crow on a withered branch in the fall season that brings alive the sights and lonesome silence of the fall and conveys to us the intimate connection of this enigmatic bird with seasons in particular and nature in general; and the connection of all this to the poet, which in turn means with all life on this planet.

On a withered branch
A crow is perched
An autumn evening

Medicinal Plant of the Month

Maidenhair Tree: An Ornamental, Sacred and Medicinal Living Fossil

Anil K. Thakur

Female tree with seeds enclosed by fleshy coat



Maidenhair tree, scientifically known as ***Ginkgo biloba*** (etymology GING-ko bi-LOW-buh), is a medium-sized deciduous tree in the family Ginkgoaceae of Gymnosperms (groups of plants with naked seeds as they do not produce fruits). The botanical name is derived from the Chinese word '*Ginkgo*' meaning silver apricot and '*biloba*' meaning two lobes in the context of leaves. It is the lone surviving member of its family as all others have become extinct during the Pleiocene (5 to 2.58 million years ago) epoch in the geologic time scale due to climatic upheavals. The maidenhair trees are also witness to the existence of dinosaurs in the Jurassic

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Maidenhair Tree: An Ornamental, Sacred and Medicinal Living Fossil

Anil K. Thakur

Period (199 million to 145 million years ago).

The maidenhair tree, considered a relic species, is known by many other common names such as **Bal Kumari** (in Hindi), Sacred Tree of the East, Tree Hair of Venus, Bearer of Hope, **The Living Fossil**, Yin Xing, etc. The name 'Living Fossil' comes from the fact that this tree has not changed much since its origin and evolution in the Permian period nearly 270 million years ago as is evident from the fossil records. The common name 'Bearer of Hope' was given to the plants of this species as they were the only survivors of the nuclear attacks in Japan in 1945. It is a sacred plant to the Buddhists and is cultivated extensively near monasteries in Japan, Korea, and China.

Morphological Characteristics

Maidenhair tree is a medium-sized tree growing up to 40 m tall and having a trunk diameter up to 4 m. The bark of this tree is light grey or greyish brown and longitudinally fissured in old plants. The crown is conical when young and becomes broadly ovoid in old mature trees. Two types of branches, long branches, and short branchlets are



Approximately 150-200 years old tree growing in Shimla



Approximately 150-200 years old tree growing in Shimla

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Maidenhair Tree: An Ornamental, Sacred and Medicinal Living Fossil

Anil K. Thakur



Fan-shaped leaves



Dried leaves of maidenhair tree

visible. Leaves have prominent petioles and pale green leaf blades, turning bright yellow in autumn to give a magnificent look to the trees. The leaf blades on the long branchlets are divided by a deep, apical sinus into 2 lobes (specific name is derived from this characteristic) and each lobe is further dissected. The leaves on short branchlets have undulate margin.

The maidenhair trees are dioecious (individual plants are either male or female) and produce either catkin-like male cones or single-seeded female



Mature seeds enclosed in orange-coloured fleshy sarcotesta
(Photograph: Sh. Om Prakash Vidyarthi ji, Retd. IFS)

cones enclosed by fleshy integument known as sarcotesta. The female plants are wind-pollinated in March-April and are self-fertile. Seeds are elliptic, ovoid, or subglobose, measuring up to 3.5 cm, and are enclosed by a fleshy yellow, or orange-yellow sarcotesta (modified fleshy integument). The fleshy sarcotesta emits a rancid odour when ripe in September or October.

Medicinal Plant of the Month

Maidenhair Tree: An Ornamental, Sacred and Medicinal Living Fossil

Anil K. Thakur

USES

1. For Landscaping:

Maidenhair tree can tolerate a wide range of climatic and edaphic conditions, including pollution, and is cultivated as a landscape tree in many parts of the world. The bright yellow autumn colour of the leaves gives the trees a magnificent look.

Beautiful bright yellow autumn colour of
Maidenhair tree growing in Cheshmashahi
Botanical Garden in Srinagar (J&K)

(Photograph courtesy: Mr. Shayiq Rasool Kar,
Deputy Director, Kashmir Department of
Floriculture, Gardens & Parks, Srinagar)



2. As a Sacred Plant:

Maidenhair tree is sacred to Buddhists as is Peepal to the Hindus. It is frequently planted near Buddhist monasteries in Japan, Korea, China, and other countries.

3. Medicinal Uses:

Maidenhair tree contains a diverse array of phytochemicals such as lactone derivatives (ginkgolides), ginkgo heterosides, bilobalides (terpene lactones) and flavonoids (flavonol and flavone glycosides). Other constituents are 6-hydroxykinuretic acid, catechin, isorhamnetin, kaempferol, protocatechuic acid, quercetin, shikimic acid, sterols and vanillic acid. These phytochemical constituents are responsible for the medicinal properties of the maidenhair tree. It has been



Ginkgo green tea

Medicinal Plant of the Month

Maidenhair Tree: An Ornamental, Sacred and Medicinal Living Fossil

Anil K. Thakur

suggested to use *Ginkgo biloba* in the form of tea, extract or other ready-made products. Some of the medicinal properties are listed below:

i. Memory Improvement: The leaves of maidenhair tree are considered a brain tonic. It is reported to improve age-related memory loss in old people. *Ginkgo biloba* is available as a single herbal formulation or in combination with other constituents. Mostly, mature leaves are used for medicinal purposes.

Ginkgo based herbal medicines
(Available on Tata 1mg)



ii. For Anxiety and Depression: Studies have reported that oral intake of extract of *Ginkgo* leaves gives beneficial results in elderly persons with anxiety related to cognitive decline. Its intake allays the symptoms of depression.

iii. Regulation of Blood Circulation: It is reported to improve blood circulation in the brain due to the presence of high flavonoid content in the yellow autumn harvested leaves.

iv. Relief in Asthma: Intake of *Ginkgo biloba* leaves is beneficial in cough and asthma.

v. Anti-microbial Properties: Plant extract has been reported to be anti-bacterial and anti-fungal.

vi. Anti-Inflammatory Activity: The maidenhair tree is considered one of the best botanicals for reducing inflammation.

vii. For Cholesterol and Hypertension: 3-6 grams of leaves taken daily reduces the serum cholesterol and regulates the high blood pressure.

viii. Cure for Leucorrhoea: Roots of maidenhair tree are recommended as a cure for leucorrhoea.

4. As a Pesticide:

The leaves of the maidenhair tree are also used as a biopesticide.

Medicinal Plant of the Month

Maidenhair Tree: An Ornamental, Sacred and Medicinal Living Fossil

Anil K. Thakur



A branch showing fissured bark

5. As a Nut:

The seeds of the maidenhair tree are roasted and consumed as detoxifier in China. Raw seeds contain toxic constituent ginkgotoxin, which has anti-vitamin B6 activity and inhibits gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) formation required for neurotransmission. The recommended dose per day is less than 15 grams of nuts.

Cultivation

The maidenhair trees can be propagated through seeds or vegetatively through stem cuttings. Plants raised through seeds grow faster than the plants raised through rooting of stem cuttings.

Blog of the Month

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

Lalit Mohan Bansal



With good light and much more time to see birds due to longer days, and your camera in hand, you have a lot of action to capture, that's what Summer Birding is all about. Spend some time with nature, in the early hours of the summer season, you would realize that like Winter, Summer is also a fabulous time to see amazing birds and the bird's behavior.

This summer season was quite different from the earlier ones. Earlier I believed that the hot summer season is not ideal for birding activities and I was less active in summer as compared to winter, but this time it was not so. This summer in May and June, I have uploaded around 30 checklists on my ebird account, most of them from Sukhna Lake and only two or three from Thapli, Motemazra.

Blog of the Month

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

Lalit Mohan Bansal

Like winter, summer has its list of migrant birds. Following are some of the Summer Migrants and other fascinating observations made by me this summer season in May and June, at Chandigarh and nearby areas.

Common Hawk Cuckoo at Lake Reserve Forest, May 2022



Indian Cuckoo at Lake Reserve Forest, June 2022



Lesser Whistling Duck at Sukhna Lake, May 2022

Blog of the Month

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

Lalit Mohan Bansal

The list of summer migrants is incomplete without Indian Pitta. The Indian Pitta is one of the most sought-after birds by birders all over the country because of its beauty and its ability to hide. Its call often gives its presence away during the breeding season in the summer.



Indian Pitta at Thapli near Chandigarh, May 2022



River Tern at Sukhna Lake June 2022



Baya Weaver - Sukhna Lake - June 2022



Temminck's Stint at Mote Mazra May 2022

Birders are also nesting during these months, which can lead to fascinating observations. Summer is the breeding season, so birds look their best.

During their breeding season in monsoon, the male birds started to weave the nests with long strips torn from palm fronds, and paddy leaves and using rough grasses.

Blog of the Month

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

Lalit Mohan Bansal



Mystery Bird - Pheasant-tailed Jacana - A Resident Bird - May 2022 - Motemazra

When the nest is partially built, they begin to display their nests to the female birds. The nest is only completed if a female accepts it.



Great Egret in breeding plumage at Sukhna Lake, Chandigarh - June 2022

In breeding plumage, the central tail feathers grow very long, resembling a pheasant's tail, which is how this bird got its common name.

The Great Egret has his breeding colors and feathers. You can see the 'Green Lore'. The lore is the area at the end of their bills and surrounding their eyes. During the breeding season, a Great Egret has a bright green coloring there. The Great Egret will also display long, elegant plumes trailing from their backs, which are used in courtship displays.

Blog of the Month

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

Lalit Mohan Bansal

These plumes are called "aigrettes". Like a peacock, the feathery plumes will spread out like a fan.



White-throated Kingfisher - Sukhna Lake - May / June 2022

"As part of the courtship display, the presumed male White-throated Kingfisher spreads out the wings repeatedly for 1-3 seconds. This is repeated several times. A second White-throated Kingfisher must be watching from a nearby perch, the presumed female.

As young birds hatch, there are more birds to observe and they can be easier to spot in family groupings.



Red Wattled Lapwing at Sukhna Lake

Blog of the Month

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

Lalit Mohan Bansal

Harbingers of Monsoon - Pied Cuckoo - June 2022

This bird is a summer breeding visitor to northern India. It has been considered a harbinger of the monsoon rains due to the timing of its arrival. The bird was spotted on 24th June 2022 at Sukhna Lake indicating the end of the harsh summer season.



Besides, the summer migrants and other nesting/courtship displays, the resident birds are also there to give some amazing shots.

Striated Heron Indian Roller



Asian Koel Greater Coucal



Blog of the Month

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

Lalit Mohan Bansal



So if you are thinking that the hot summer months are not ideal for outdoor activities, change your thinking and use the early hours to enjoy the amazing nature.

**Extreme Summer is harsh on Birds
Try keeping water bowls on Roof Tops
Birds will chirp thanks**

Glipmses of the Group



Article of the Month

Little Moments=Big Lessons

सुबह-सुबह सूरज की पहली किरण, धरती को स्पर्श करती हुई, बहुत ही शीतल और मन को मोह लेने वाली होती है। प्रातः काल के वक्त ठंडी और सुहानी हवा चलती है। ऐसे में छत पर चाय पीते हुए, आसमान में उड़ते हुए, पक्षियों को देखना बहुत ही रोमांचकारी दृश्य होता है। उन्हें हवा में इधर-उधर झूलते देखकर मन में एक लहर सी दौड़ जाती है। ऐसे ही एक सुबह रविवार का दिन था। मुझे काम से छुट्टी थी। मौसम भी बहुत सुहाना था। सावन का महीना जो आ गया था। सावन का महीना गर्मी की ऋतू के बाद आता है। यह महीना लोगों को गर्मी के प्रकोप से थोड़ी राहत देता है। सावन के महीने में बहुत बरसात होती है जिससे मौसम सुहावना हो जाता है।

आमतौर पर हम सब इस मौसम का आनंद लेते हैं। सो मैंने भी सोचा क्यों न आज छुट्टी का फायदा उठाया जाये और चाय नाश्ता बाहर बरामदे में बैठकर किया जाए। चलो फिर क्या था मैंने चाय और नाश्ता बनाया और ऊपर छत पर चली गयी। मौसम सुहावना होने के कारण कितने प्रकार के छोटे-छोटे पक्षी जैसे बुलबुल, मूनिया, काला भुजंगा आदि इधर - उधर एक पेड़ से दूसरे पेड़ की ओर उछलती कूदती नज़र आ थी। इन छोटे-छोटे पक्षियों को मस्त हवा के साथ उड़ते हुए देख मुझे अपनी बचपन की कविता याद आने लगी। मैं मन ही मन गुनगुनाने लगी:

"चिड़िया मुझे बना दो राम

छोटे पंख लगा दो राम

बागों में मैं जाऊँगी

मीठे फल मैं खाऊँगी

इतना बस कर दो राम

चिड़िया मुझे बना दो राम"

सच में आज इतने सालों बाद भी मन करता है कि मैं पक्षी बन जाऊँ और खुले आसमान में बिना डर और सोच के इधर-उधर उड़ती रहूँ। इतने में मेरा ध्यान स्केली ब्रेस्टीड मूनिया पर गया। मैंने इस पक्षी को पहली

Article of the Month

Little Moments=Big Lessons

बार देखा था सो इसलिए उसने मेरा ध्यान अपनी ओर खींच लिया। मैंने जल्दी ही उसके बारे में इंटरनेट पर खोज की। तब मुझे पता लगा कि यह प्रजाति घास के मैदानों में पायी जाती है।

मैं जल्द ही भाग कर अपना कैमरा लेकर आयी और उसकी तस्वीर खींचने लगी। तस्वीर खींचते -खींचते मेरा ध्यान पड़ा कि मूनिया तो अपना घोंसला बनाने की तैयारी में जुटी हुई है। ये प्रजाति घास के पत्तों से लगभग २० cm का एक गोलाकार घोंसला बनाती है। क्योंकि सौभाग्य से वह घोंसला हमारे घर पर लगे पेड़ पर बन रहा था सो मैं वहां बैठ कर उसे चुपके से देखने लगी। वो नन्ही सी मूनिया एक -एक करके लम्बी -लम्बी घास के तिले लाने लगी। काफी समय हो गया था और घर के काम भी पड़े थे सो मैं नीचे आ गयी। मगर अब तो ये रोज़ की रूटीन हो गयी थी। हर रोज़ सुबह कॉलेज जाने से पहले मैं यह देखती की घोंसला कितना बन गया। उनकी इस लगन और मेहनत को देख कर मैं इस सोच में डूब जाती कि हम इंसान पक्षियों को आसमान में उड़ते देख उन जैसा बनने की चाह तो करते हैं। मगर उस वक़्त हम यह भूल जाते हैं कि हमारी तरह उनके जीवन में भी कितनी तरह की मुसीबतें और परेशानियाँ होती होंगी। परन्तु उन्हें देख कर शायद ही कभी हमें इस बात का एहसास होता होगा। मगर लगता है कि प्रकृति मुझे इस बात का एहसास करवाना चाहती थी।

दिन बीतते गए और घोंसला भी लगभग बनकर तयार हो गया था। अब तो इंतज़ार था कि कब मुझे उसमे से नन्हें -नन्हें बच्चों की आवाज़ें सुनाई देंगी। मगर यह क्या ? अचानक एक दिन मुझे पक्षियों के चीखने और चिलाने की आवाज़ें आने लगी। मैं जल्द ही भागकर बाहर गयी। वहां जाकर क्या देखती हूं कि सात आठ कौए हमारे बरामदे में उस पेड़ के पास जहां घोंसला बना हुआ था वहाँ उड़ रहे थे। मैंने उन्हें भागने की बहुत कोशिश कर रही थी। मगर वो उस पेड़ से दूर जा ही नहीं रहे थे। कुछ ही पल में मुझे समझ में गया कि वो उस घोंसले को तोड़ने की चाह में हैं। मैं उन पर पत्थर मार कर उन्हें भागने की कोशिश करती रही। पर वो टस से मस नहीं हो रहे थे। बल्कि उल्टा उन्होंने मुझ पर भी हमला करना शुरू कर दिया। उस वक़्त तो ऐसा लग रहा था जैसे कोई फिल्म का सीन चल रहा हो। ऐसे लग रहा था जैसे कुछ नामी गुंडे मिलकर

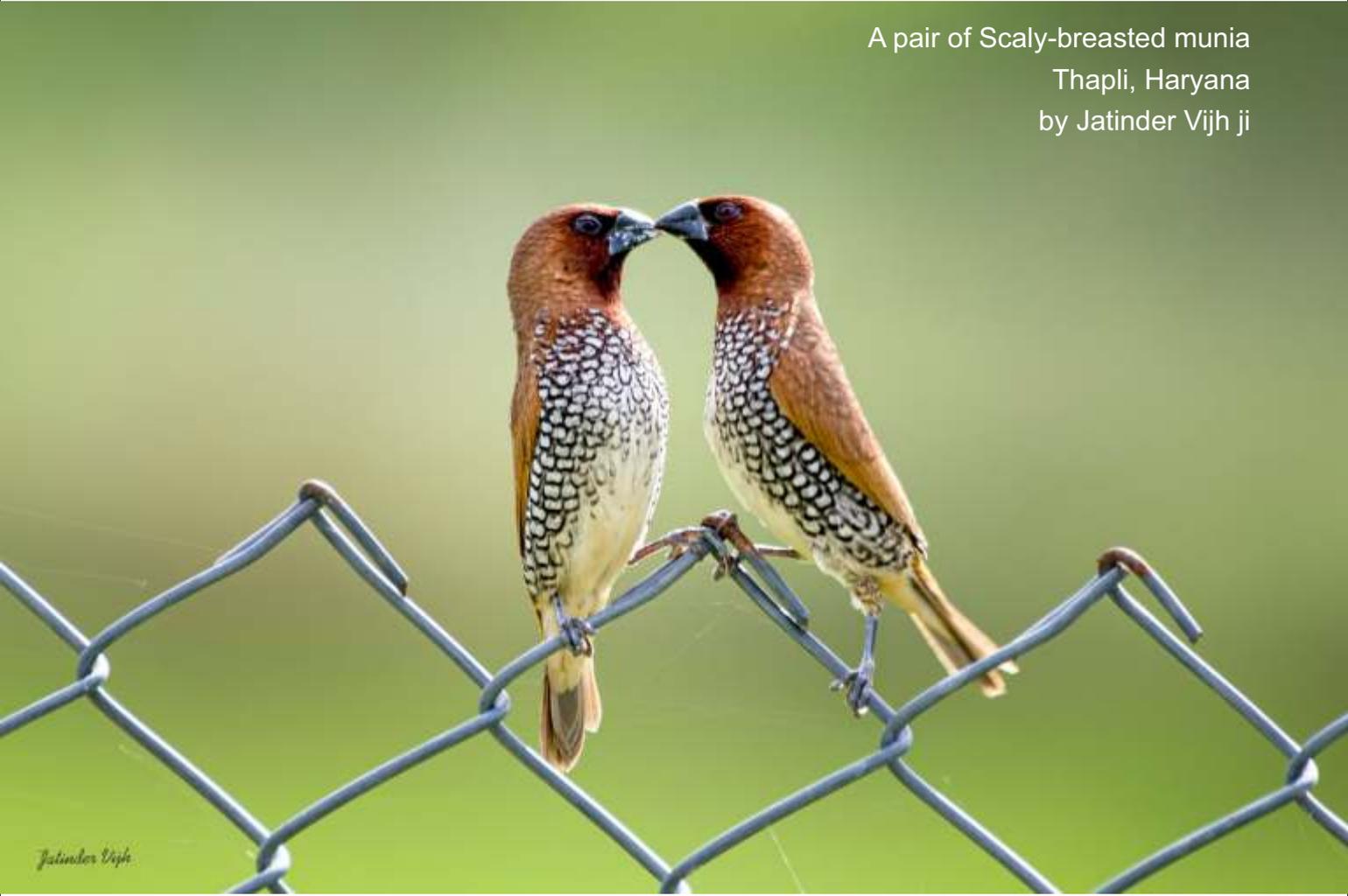
Article of the Month

Little Moments=Big Lessons

A pair of Scaly-breasted munia

Thapli, Haryana

by Jatinder Viji



Jatinder Viji

गरीब और कमज़ोर लोगों की बस्ती उजाड़ने आये हों। दूसरी तरफ वो हैरान परेशान पक्षी उन बस्ती वालों की तरह लग रहे थे जो इधर - उधर रहम की भीख मांग रहे हों। जैसे की शोर मचा - मचा कर कह रहे हों कि कोई तो हीरो आये जो हमारी मदद करे। कोई आये और प्यार से बनाये हुए इस घोंसले को टूटने से बचा ले।

अफ़सोस शायद फिल्म होती तो कोई नायक आ भी जाता मगर यहां असलियत में कोई हीरो या नायक नहीं था जो उन पक्षियों के घोंसले को उजाड़ने से बचा सकता। मैंने भी बहुत कोशिश की पर मैं भी कुछ नहीं कर पाई। बस एक असहाए, कमज़ोर और मजबूर इंसान की तरह उनके घोंसले को टूटते हुए देखती रही। मैं मूक बैठी मन ही मन ये सोचती रही कि इंसानो मैं ही नहीं पशु, पक्षी और यहां तक की हमारी

Article of the Month

Little Moments=Big Lessons

प्रकृति का भी नियम बन गया है कि हर ताकतवर चाहे वो ताकत किसी भी तरह की हो , हर कमज़ोर को कुचल देता है। उन रोते हुए पक्षियों को देखकर मेरा मन विचलित हो गया। बार -बार अपने आप से ये प्रश्न करने लगा कि क्या कमज़ोर का कोई भी सहारा नहीं है। कोई तो सहारा होना चाहिए था। इसी निराशा के साथ मेरा सारा दिन बीत गया।

अगले दिन फिर सूरज निकला। मैं भारी मन से उठी और अपने कॉलेज जाने की तैयारी में लग गयी। पर जब तैयार होकर मैं कॉलेज जाने के लिए बाहर निकली तो क्या देखती हूँ कि दोनों नर और मादा मूनिया पक्षी से हिम्मत बटोरे घोंसला बनाने पर जुटे हुए हैं। मैं बहुत हैरान हुई। पर उस वक़्त कॉलेज जाने की जल्दी में चली गयी। कुछ दिनों बाद मैंने देखा कि उन्होंने फिर से उसी पेड़ पर अपने घोंसला बना दिया। उन्हें उस पेड़ पर बैठा देख ऐसा लग रहा था कि जैसे सब को मुँह तोड़ जवाब दे रहीं हों। जैसे कह रही हों कि हम छोटे पक्षी जरूर हैं पर हमारी हिम्मत बहुत बड़ी है। हमारी हिम्मत के आगे कोई हमारा कुछ भी नहीं बिगाड़ सकता। उनकी इस हिम्मत को देख कर मैं भगवान से फिर पक्षी बनने की कामना करने लगी। मगर इस बार मैं आसमान में उड़ने के लिए नहीं बल्कि जैसी हिम्मत और मनोबल पाने के लिए पक्षी बनना चाहती थी।

इस पुरे वृतांत ने मुझे जीवन की बहुत बड़ी सीख दी। हम मनुष्य कितनी जल्दी अपनी परेशानी से तंग आ जाते हैं और डिप्रेशन में चले जाते हैं। किसी काम में रुकावट आ जाये तो उस काम को ही छोड़ देते हैं। ऊपर से कमाल की बात है, बहुत आसानी से उसे भगवान की मर्ज़ी मानकर भूल जाते हैं। मगर इस छोटी सी मूनिया पक्षी ने मुझे समझाया कि हिम्मत और उम्मीद जिंदगी में बहुत बड़ी जगह रखते हैं। अगर एक रास्ता बंद है तो कहीं न कहीं कोई दूसरा रास्ता हमारा इंतज़ार कर रहा है। बस जब तक मंज़िल न मिल जाये तो हमको चलते रहना चाहिए।

डॉ. चेतना

मुलतानी मल मोदी कॉलेज, पटिआला, पंजाब

Awareness Campaign

Ms. Padmini Rangarajan uses Puppetry to sensitize audience



Poem of the Month

“बरसो मेघ”

रीता आइज़क

मेघ तुम अब ज़रा बरस-बरस जाओ
प्यासी धरा के आँचल को तर कर,
टिप-टिप करती बूंदों के आवाहन से,
मिट्टी की सुगंध से भर कर, जन-जन के
भीतर मुरझाई चेतना को, नवजीवित कर जाओ
धरती के इस उपवन को, कर हरा-भरा
सब वन्य-जीव और विचलित मानव
हृदय की, स्फूर्तिमय झंकार बन जाओ तुम....
अम्बर की ओढ़नी में छुप, ना तुम अब
अपनी झलक दिखलाओ.....
बहुत विलम्ब हुई, अब तुम इस धरती
पर भी तो,
देव-अतिथि बन जाओ....
कुम्हलायी वसुन्धरा के व्याकुल हृदय में
व्याप्त हर शुष्क कण-कण को
पुनर्जीवित कर जाओ
मेघ तुम अब ज़रा बरस-बरस जाओ।

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