

Birds in our Garden

Last week we discovered that a Teetar or a Grey Partridge has made a nest on the ground, nestled among brown leaves, between our hedge and the wire fence, in front of our house, and is preoccupied with incubating 7 eggs. Ganesh noticed it first, as he watered the hedge.

Since then it has become a major preoccupation for me and my wife. Especially when the hen goes off the nest, we stand guard, sitting on a bench 6 feet away from the nest. Since the hedge intervenes between the bench and the nest, she does not seem to mind our presence.

The eggs are the size of a hen's egg and are light brown.

The teetar sits so still that other than her eyes and beak, all else blends into the fallen leaves. It is the eggs that announce her absence.

The teetar menagerie have been around the house for a year at least. We have seen a pack of ten in the backyard in the evenings, with 5-6 chicks. But they are a reclusive sort. Even when sighted 100 feet away, they dash into the under growth.

The house we live in, Jivan Kutir, is set in an undisturbed 6 acre plot, where as Kipling would say, the jungle has taken over. Maybe in a 100 acres around us there are 100 inhabitants, for it is set amongst educational institutions.

It is at least 80 years old, sprawling, with 7 rooms and an inner courtyard and 14 doors that open to the outside, was the residence of Jamnalal Bajaj's daughter. In the room from which I write, Gandhiji had stayed thrice in the 1940s, so the daughter-in-law of the house told me. A photograph of Gandhiji at the steps of the house, which I found on the net, adorns our living room.

This is why almost 20 varieties of birds frequent us. An added attraction is the water pool in the garden. Birds come to drink water and bathe. The king fisher is a regular for the afternoon dip in the pool. A heron is another regular.

100 ft. from the house, in a tree in the drive way, lives an owl family. our immediate neighbours. They were a pair a year ago. Now the family has grown to 5 and more seem to be on the way. Judging from the constant vigil being kept on the nook in the tree, which serves as their nest.

The owls grudgingly accept our presence. They have long stopped flying helter-skelter on sighting us. Now, they do not fly off even if we stop to stare. They return the stare or at times bob their head and bodies, which is very cute. Unnerving is when looking the other way they almost rotate their heads to look at one.

A variety of sun birds, pigeon, dove, bulbul, drango, lovely parakeets with tails as long as their bodies, are regulars. In recent times Hariyali, the state bird of Maharashtra, a green pigeon, has become a frequent visitor. Even as I write I can hear their distinctive coos from maybe 200 ft away. At any point of time one can hear 5 different birds chirp.

Once in a while one sees a hawk or a woodpecker with a red kalgi. One would rather not see the raucous seven sisters.

The entrance gate to the garden is a white one. The pool is close to it. So, many birds, perch on it. Provides a good location for a photo shoot. Keeping out of sight, with a zoom attachment, we photograph the bird on our mobile.

We have been lucky enough, almost all our lives, to get up to the sound of birds, be it in Pune or Nagpur or Goa or Delhi. But Wardha has been the ultimate experience in bird listening and watching.

After 22 days 7 chicks emerged. We could photograph only one of them .

A month later only 1 of the 7 chicks has survived and scurries behind its parents. Such is life. So much struggle. So much devotion. Ever present tragedy. But the important thing is that 1 has survived. And life will go on.

