

Biodiversity in my Bengaluru Backyard

Title	True Gold in the Goldilocks City
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The rising scarlet sun is greeted by the gradual crescendo of feathered families taking each other's leave before setting out on their daily forages. Mere hours later, the bustle that runs this cosmopolitan city awakens to bid their goodbyes. Afternoons are the sleeping city's cradle. The sun is forgiving, yet an aura of complete calm and silence descends. Sundown signals the homecoming chaos, a maelstrom of honking, screeching brakes and voices; and dusk is finally bade by the joyous squawks and chirps of treetop family dinners.

Bengaluru is a wonderful city to live in; blessed with lovely weather, developed facilities, great people, and fascinating wildlife within the metropolis. From the dense foliage of the *honge* trees or the sprawling canopies of the rain trees that lend lushness to perhaps every road in the city; to the innumerable bulbuls, pigeons, squirrels, koels and parrots adding cheer to the traffic sounds – each and every one makes this city what it is. I believe that extraordinary beauty lies within the most ordinary, and it is with this thought that I present to you this humble compendium of my photographs, documenting a mere page in Bengaluru's biodiversity bible.

The first photo is of a bird we are extremely familiar with – the modest rock pigeon (*Columba livia*). Painted in the greyest of hues, with just a flash of purple and teal iridescence around the neck; yet these birds lend a glimmer of life to their surroundings, especially in rather solitary places like old ruins and historical forts. Their gentle cooing adds an element of elegance to concrete urban rooftops.

Every photograph has a story woven in

itself, and chronicling it lends immense meaning and a personal touch to the photo. One such story accounts for the reasons behind almost every element of my next photo; starring a ubiquitous Indian palm squirrel (*Funambulus palmarum*) on a *Tabebuia rosea* tree.

A cat was teasing the squirrel by repeatedly pretending to climb the tree. It seemed to know that the squirrel was too fast for it, and only wanted to have a little fun with it. But the squirrel didn't know that! It was emitting short, high-pitched distress calls, which explains its open mouth and visible incisors. Often, squirrels twitch their tails while squeaking. This squirrel twitched its furry, mottled tail just as it crossed a small twig on the tree, which is why it was draped on the twig.

The third photo is of a frequent visitor in several urban gardens: the brilliantly camouflaged white-cheeked barbet (*Psilopogon viridis*), that stopped by for a spicy Karnataka lunch. The clever bird was picking only the ripe, red berries of a black pepper vine. Captured here with a berry in its just-closed beak, the species is exclusive to South India and is often heard with its pleasant *kutroo-kutroo* call.

My last photo documents both an intriguing plant and a disappearing species. After a thorough research, I came to know that the crimson flowers in the photo belong to a plant commonly called the cockspur coral tree (*Erythrina crista-galli*). Its vivid blooms are, quite literally, "bursting" with life; and I really like how there are flowers in all stages, from buds to wilting blossoms, in the same frame. Pollinating the flowers is a female rock bee (*Apis dorsata*), whose species is rapidly vanishing in Bengaluru due to human apprehensions. The beehives seen hanging from roofs of buildings often belong to rock bees, which are known for their highly defensive nature. In recent times, however, awareness about the need for bees in our ecosystem is spreading. We are becoming more tolerant towards nature and each of her marvellous creations. If awareness and vigilance among us Bengalureans goes on catching at the rate that it is today, I am positive we will continue to live in harmony with the brilliant biodiversity we all are a part of for aeons to come.



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