

Haldu and the Woodpecker

What made the haldu tree realise that woodpeckers are not a nuisance but very helpful birds? Here's the story...



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"Trr trr trr". "Trr trr trr".
"Oh, it's that annoying sound again," said the haldu tree in an irritated voice. It knew that the white-rumped shama sang sweetly and that flocks of plum-headed parakeets that descended on it in the evening whistled raucously. It also knew of the cicada that buzzed in the summer afternoons. And of the wind that whistled through its boughs. But it did not know who drummed.

One day, the mystery was solved when the haldu heard a whirr of wings and saw a splash of red as a bird flew and sat on its trunk. The bird was unlike other birds the haldu had seen before. It had brown wings, a dark head with white spots, a red crown and a strong, sharp beak.

The bird sat differently from other birds; it sat horizontally on the trunk holding on tight with its feet and using its tail to balance itself. And then, it tapped at many places on the trunk. And then, it drilled deep into the Haldu's trunk!

"Oye! who are you? And what are you doing to my trunk! Don't you be making any holes in my lovely, smooth trunk," said the Haldu to the bird.

"Hi, I am your friendly neighbourhood woodpecker, dear Haldu," said the black-rumped woodpecker. "I don't care," said the haldu rudely, continuing, "go away, you are disturbing the peace and destroying private property." The haldu shook its branches to scare away the woodpecker. The woodpecker flew away, the drumming stopped and



RIDDING THE TREE OF PESTS A Black-rumped Flameback Woodpecker at work PHOTO: AFP

finally, the haldu felt at peace.

A few days later, the haldu started experiencing a peculiar feeling in its trunk. Something creeping inside it, something scratching from within, someone mining its wood! Sometimes it tickled, sometimes it itched, and sometimes it crawled, deep inside its trunk. The haldu was troubled. What could it be, eating its hard wood? It asked the birds that sang sweetly but they could not tell. It asked its tree friends and they said, "Dear Haldu, you are infested

with beetle grubs. Beetles have laid eggs in your trunk and now the grubs have hatched. They have bored inside your trunk and are eating your wood. Soon the whole trunk will be infested and it can be dangerous for you."

"Oh, what can I do? Can you help me get rid of these grubs?" asked the haldu in alarm. "Only the woodpecker with the red crown can help you," said the trees. "Please friends, carry my message to the woodpecker, ask him to come and save me," implored

the haldu. "You must also ask the birds and the wind to add their voice to ours," the trees said. So the haldu spoke to every bird that visited its flowers. It spoke to the wind that shook its boughs.

Soon the forest was filled with the sound of the wind whistling through the trees passing on the haldu's message, asking the woodpecker to help it. The birds also passed on the message and the forest was filled with an opera of bird song.

Many days passed but the woodpecker did not come. The haldu was losing hope, it could feel the grubs boring deeper and deeper. It asked the birds to fly everywhere in the forest and find the woodpecker. It asked the butterflies and bees to look for it too.

Then, one day, very early in the morning, the haldu heard the unmistakable sound of drumming. But this was not the sound of one woodpecker, it was the sound of a 100 woodpeckers. The black-rumped flameback took so long to arrive because as soon as he heard the message of the haldu, he had flown all over the forest to gather his woodpecker friends.

The woodpeckers arrived in a big flock and descended on the haldu trunk in the early hours of dawn. The woodpeckers went "Trr trr trr" at the haldu's trunk. This drumming helped them find the hollow where the beetle grub had bored and made a hole. Now they pecked at the trunk, removing dead wood to open up the hole. With their tongue acting like a finger, they grabbed the grubs, pulled them out and ate them. Soon the woodpeckers had rid the haldu of the beetle grub infestation.

The haldu apologised to the black-rumped flameback for his rude behaviour. He profusely thanked all the woodpeckers and invited them to visit him any time they liked. Now, the haldu loves hearing the whirr of wings and the sound of drumming as much as any birdsong.

ACTIVITIES

Read the story carefully a couple of times before you attempt these activities

Activity 1

Draw and colour a black-rumped flameback woodpecker on a sheet of white paper, with this reference photograph.



Activity 2

Write a different ending for the story in your own words

Activity 3

Find the following words in the below given word search

Haldu, Woodpecker, Drumming, Beetle, Grub, Trunk, Hollow, Crown, Beak, Cicada, Eggs, Drilling, Wood, Tree, Wings

Word Search

T E G G S B W S S X M A
R M T I U D G E E R T S
U A F D R I L L I N G G
N I L G Q E L T E E B Z
K A E J G N I M M U R D
H J Q C I C A D A T T Y
W O L L O H U N W O R C
H W O O D P E C K E R W
P J G O J G W A C Q I S
P U O O R K D S W N U O
A W R U Z N P P G N D H
A L B O N Y Z S L O E I

Activity 4

Find out how felling of old trees and high use of pesticides is affecting woodpecker populations. Make a poster and put it up in your society or school bulletin board.