

Biodiversity in the National New Year

Explore BIODIVERSITY – with Puncha & Panchie

By Malaka Rodrigo

Puncha and Panchie had visited their village to see Achchie and Seeya for Avurudu. They got a chance to see nature's Avurudu messengers...

The visit to the village to see Seeya and Achchie is the favourite Avurudu trip for both Puncha and Panchie. After getting the blessings from the elders, the siblings ran to the garden to use the Avurudu onchillawa (swing) tied to a large kadju tree.

Panchie sat on the swing and asked Aiya to give a push. While enjoying the swing, she heard a bird singing a lovely song.

"Khuu.. Khuu... " Panchie wondered what bird sang so beautifully.

"Aiyo Panchie, don't you know even that..? It is a koha – the cuckoo bird which sings to welcome Avurudu. Can't you remember a pair of them visiting our garden too..?"



Male Asian Koel

"Hmm is it..??" Panchie was still doubtful. Puncha ran to their car to bring his binocular. It had taken a few minutes for him to spot the bird singing behind a kadju branch.

"There it is..!!" Puncha managed to show the singing koha to Nangi. It was a glossy black bird. "Hmm.. But why are they singing only during the Avurudu season Aiya..?" Panchie asked. Even Puncha was not sure.. Whether the koha is a migratory bird that visits Sri Lanka only during a certain period of time from a different country had puzzled Puncha too.

But luckily Seeya came to his rescue... "The Koha is a native bird in Sri Lanka, but this is one of its breeding seasons. The male koha (Asian Koel) sings to its mate during this Avurudu period to express his care," explained Seeya.

"But where is his partner..?" Pancha tried to spot the female Koel. Adjusting the specs, Seeya looked over the kadju tree. "There is the female Koel." Seeya showed the bird to his grandchildren. The female had spots all over her body which looked different to the male. "Show me their nest.. Show me.. Seeya," Panchie was curious.

"Ha..ha.. Panchie, the koha doesn't build a nest. Instead they lay eggs in the nest of a crow. While the male koha distracts the parent crows, mother koha secretly lays an egg in the crow's nest. Crow parents feed this stranger, thinking it is their young until it grows big," Seeya explained. "This is called Brood Parasitism"...

"Hmm.. Brood ... what..?" Panchie found it difficult to pronounce. "Look, the female koha is eating something," Pancha was the first, to spot something reddish in Koha's beak. "Ahh... ha.. Koha is eating a cashew fruit," looking through the bino, Pancha said. The fruit looked so tasty.

"Do you also want a fruit ?" asked Seeya while plucking a low-hanging cashew apple. Avurudu period also is the Kadju puhulan season.

Panchi wanted the first bite. "Be careful, it is so juicy and can spoil your clothes," Seeya warned. "The seed of all the other fruits are inside, but why is Kadju different..?" The strange look of the Kadju puhulam puzzled Pancha.



"Infact the kidney-shaped nut is the real seed of the Kadju puhulam. The cashew apple is just a false fruit which is a modified fruit stalk," showing a tender fruit, Seeya said.

He had taken out a small pen knife and cut the cashew apple into a few pieces. Achchie brought a plate of salt and they start eating the pieces of cashew apple, applying salt.

"Hmm... it is really tasty Seeya," Panchie wanted another piece. "Do you know it has lots of Vitamin C in it – as much as five times more than in an orange..? When we were young kids, there were lots of Kadju trees". Seeya told them that eating Kadju was one of their favourite pastimes during the Avurudu season.

Kadju puhulam

"Seeya.. Seeya..

I want to see an Erabadu flower," Panchie also remembered another messenger of Avurudu. "Come.. This way..." Seeya had taken both Aiya and Nangi towards the edge of the garden. "Here, this is Erabadu," said Seeya showing a large tree with a thorny skin. The tree had bright red flowers similar to Tiger's Claw.

"Erabadu is the real messenger of the Sinhala and Tamil New Year as the flower blooms in this period of time," Seeya said. "Though it looks a useless tree, Erabadu flowers have nectar that birds like to feed on. Its tender leaves are also made as a curry in the villages."

"Seeya, why can't these nature symbols of Avurudu be seen in our area now..?" Panchie was sad she couldn't get Erabadu or Kadju puhulam in her area.

"Hmm... yeah, Panchie – most of these trees were cut. But Kadju and Erabadu are Nature's New Year messengers together with the Asian Koel, so you need to keep in mind that these should be protected..." Taking the hands of Pancha and Panchie, Seeya started walking back to the house.