

PRESENTED BY MR. P. N. MATHEW.

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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BIRDWATCHING AT NARKANDA (SIMLA)

By

Bro. A. Navarro, S.J. and Mr. A. Dubash

For our birdwatching excursion last October, we marked Simla as the venue from where we could most conveniently make detours to the surrounding countryside. Mr. Daniel of the B.N.H.S. had informed the Chief "Wild Life" Warden (Himachal Pradesh), Mr. K.L. Mehta, beforehand of our projects, and so on our arrival at the Forest Dept. Simla, we were pleasantly surprised to find that we were not altogether strangers to the staff officers. In fact Mr. Mehta had carefully outlined for us several programmes so that we could utilise to the utmost the short period of our stay and see as much as possible of the best fauna of that locality.

Thanks to the spontaneous and enthusiastic co-operation of Mr. Mehta our trip proved to be a success. Mr. Mehta was not only aware of the need for the up-to-date upkeep and maintenance of the status of the present fauna but determined to go further and try to improve it. By his own unstinted efforts Mr. Mehta has brought about the remarkable achievement of simultaneously building up a combined zoo and pheasantry.

Narkanda was the spot selected as the headquarters for our birdwatching as it happens to have a nice and comfortable P.W.D. bungalow ideally situated on the mountain ranges and in which we rented two rooms for our stay. Before our departure for Narkanda, Mr. Mehta invited us to pay a visit to his Pheasantry and he accompanied us round the magnificent zoo and pheasantry which he is trying to build up on quite a big scale.

Situated on the outskirts of Simla town, the zoo cum pheasantry stands in the recess of a valley. The locale of this zoo is unusual; in fact it does not resemble at all the ordinary types of zoos, as most of the animals like Sambhar, the Chital (Spotted Deer), and some birds were kept in their natural surroundings - that is, a wire netting fence served to enclose a part of the forest area so that the animals could roam about freely. Some of the rare animals in the zoo were the Musk Deer, a She-Yak, with her young one and the cubs of both the black and the brown Himalayan Bears. The Musk Deer was more timid and shy than the other animals.

Mr. Mehta has succeeded in maintaining a beautiful pheasantry, perhaps the only one of its kind in India where he breeds various Indian and foreign pheasants. Amongst the pheasants that he was breeding were the common Kalij pheasant, the Koklas, the Monal pheasant with its brilliant plumage, the

the Chinese Silver Pheasant and the Japanese Golden Pheasant.

The Indian pheasants were breeding very well. All the birds were looked after very well by a devoted staff of workers. Although the birds were in captivity, a striking point was that their plumage was in an excellent condition and they seemed to be at home in the scenic surroundings of the Himalayas.

There was a small artificial pond at the entrance of the zoo where they had kept a pair of Bar-headed Geese, White-eyed Pochards, Red-headed Pochards, a pair of Swans, white in colour, which, we were told, were imported from Russia. They are very well fed and looked healthy. In a separate pond enclosed by a wire netting were a pair of black Swans. As soon as we went near the netting to have a closer look at the birds, the male black swan rushed towards us and started pecking aggressively at the wire netting, so much so that we thought it would break its red beak. There were also a tame kite and a young eagle which we could not identify. In another mixed aviary there were different varieties of *Mynias* and a pair of green Finches.

Undoubtedly, along the Himalayan region extending from Kashmir to Darjeeling right up to and around Bhutan and Assam, we find the best and the most colourful avian fauna of India. Part of the Himalayan ranges belong to the Palearctic region and part to the Indo-Chinese region. In spite of this division it is very curious to observe that there is a certain uniformity of fauna along the Himalayan range with the difference that within this uniformity the eastern and the western sides have produced their own forms. That is why often in the English nomenclature we come across definite terms by which we distinguish the eastern and western positions of the species, for example, when they say: the Eastern Spotted Forktail and Western Spotted Forktail. However we found that with a keen sense of observation we would be able to discover certain isolated spots with their own typical and selective fauna that naturally will be based on several factors, such as topography, altitude, flora, temperature, dampness, water and exposure to strong currents and draughts. In particular the last factor may occasionally be responsible for scarcity of bird-life in areas where there should be found a larger and more variety of birds.

Gathering the results of our findings and analysing our observations at the end of the third day, we found that in certain areas we could scarcely see any birds except for the Jungle Crows, Mynahs, Nutcrackers and a few Thrushes but in other areas there was plenty of bird-life. Later we realised the fact that the side hills facing the open view of the snow peaks of the Himalayas were less frequented by birds. The main reason for this could not be other than the open exposure to the strong, cold and freezing winds coming from that side.

Narkanda is 40 miles from Simla, its altitude being about 9,500 ft. The hill ranges opposite to Narkanda are 10,000 ft. high and the highest, Hattu Peak is 10,500 ft. At this (Hattu Peak) altitude we saw the Himalayan Mouse-Hare, a tail-less creature which is typical of the Himalayan ranges. On the same place we saw the Accentor or Hedge Sparrow. This is a bird that very rarely can be seen below on altitude of 9,000 ft. Nearby on several occasions we saw large and small parties of Hodgson's Mountain Finch. Both these are birds found at a very high altitude and during the summer season they return to their usual habitat which is about 17,000 ft. The little brown Wren was seen hopping amongst the desolate ruins of the Hattu Peak temple.

From the very first day we observed that the most common birds were the Himalayan Crow and the Himalayan Spotted Nutcracker. Here and there at different altitudes we came across the Red-billed Blue Magpie and infrequently we had a glimpse of the Himalayan Jay.

We unexpectedly came across not less than five varieties of Tits, viz. the Indian Grey Tit, the Simla Coal Tit, the Brown-Crested Tit, the Red-headed Tit, and the Yellow-Cheeked Tit. In their company we noticed the Simla Warbler and some other warblers which we could not identify. These small birds could be seen flying in mixed parties, and they are found everywhere except in the open country.

The forest was mainly built up of three varieties of trees, namely, Pine, Rhododendron and Fir. These little creatures, the Tits and the Warblers, apparently preferred the Rhododendron for their roosting resorts. Certain it is that this is the tree that offers them more protection from the weather and safety from their enemies.

We never came across a great number of Thrushes; nevertheless we had a chance to see seven varieties. But the White-Throated Laughing Thrush was seen only once. At the outskirts of the forest we often came across parties of Gilgit Laughing Thrushes. Once we saw a small party of Small-Billed Mountain Thrush. The Simla Plane-Backed Thrush could be seen everywhere on any altitude but always in pairs. On a few occasions we observed parties of Red-Headed Thrushes on the ground. Once we saw the Blue-Headed Rock Thrush, and the Himalayan Whistling Thrush could be found along the main roads and footpaths through the forest.

Now and then with Tits and Warblers we found two varieties of Nuthatches, the White-Tailed Nuthatch being the most common and the White-Cheeked Nuthatch. The latter is a pretty bird and looks more like a tail-less Wagtail but it is a pity that it has such a melancholy call. Twice we observed the Rusty-Cheeked Scimitar Babbler.

Another common bird in the forest was the Himalayan Tree Creeper, and on a few occasions we saw the Hodgson's Tree Creeper. This Tree Creeper is smaller and the breast and abdomen are lighter than the Himalayan Tree Creeper.

At Simla we saw very often the Black-Headed Sibia, Cinnamon Tree Sparrow and the Red Vented Bulbul. The White Cheeked Bulbul was not very common at Narkanda but we had the chance to observe a few pairs. The Blue-Fronted Redstart was occasionally seen around an altitude of 10,000 ft. but the White-Caped Redstart was found only at the foot of the hill along the nullahs and rivulets. Several times we came across small parties of Blue-Headed Robins and with them we noticed the presence of a few of Red-Flanked Bush Robins.

The black and yellow Grossbeaks could be seen in small parties but always in the forest; at times we observed them on the ground searching for food, but when not on the ground they could be seen perching on the tops of the highest trees. They are rather sociable and noisy birds in their behaviour and we observed that most of them were in a heavy moult. In their group once we saw the Pink Browed Rose-Finch.

Coming out of the forest on a large open part of ground about 9,000 ft. high, with some undergrowth, we found a pair of Rock Buntings. This is another bird which has a preference for high altitudes. On the same spot we saw the Fire-Breasted Flower Pecker.

The Sind Pied Woodpecker could be noticed everywhere. On a few occasions we found the Western Rufous Woodpecker but only once had we the pleasure of admiring at a high altitude of 10,000 ft. the beautiful "Broadbill Roller" that was perched on a high Fir tree in the interior of the forest. On the same grounds nearby we found small parties of the Great Himalayan Barbets. In the late evenings, by their calls we could identify the Collared Pigmy Owllet and Himalayan Scops Owl.

As for large Birds, we noticed the Indian Griffon Vulture and the White Scavenger Vulture. On more than one occasion we had a chance to admire the majestic flight at a rather low altitude of the Himalayan Bearded Vulture. The Indian Black Eagle and the Indian Serpent Eagle were also seen several times.

The only dove we came across frequently was the Rufus Turtle Dove. A few of these birds were found right into the forest.

We found three varieties of pheasants. The White-Crested Kalij was to be found often on the lower part of the hills. The Koklas pheasants, the most common of all three, were seen at a much higher altitude but the Impeyan pheasant or the Monal was always found on the topmost part of the hill very well around 10,200 ft. Both the Koklas and the Monal gave us the impression that they liked heavy forest and precipitous hill-sides so steep and difficult to manouver that at times it was not possible to follow their trail. The Chukor Partridge was noticed on the outskirts of the forests mostly around cultivations.

With reference to my previous remark - 'isolated spots with its own typical and selective fauna' - I would definitely consider the Narkanda range to be an example of a locality with its own selective fauna. At the end of our birdwatching excursion we found in our list a total absence of Flycatchers, Babblers, Pigeons, Sunbirds and in general a very scanty population of Passerine birds. Nevertheless we are quite aware that our list cannot be considered as a complete survey of the Fauna of Narkanda range having in view that the bird population in regions where the four seasons of the year are well defined changes every season.

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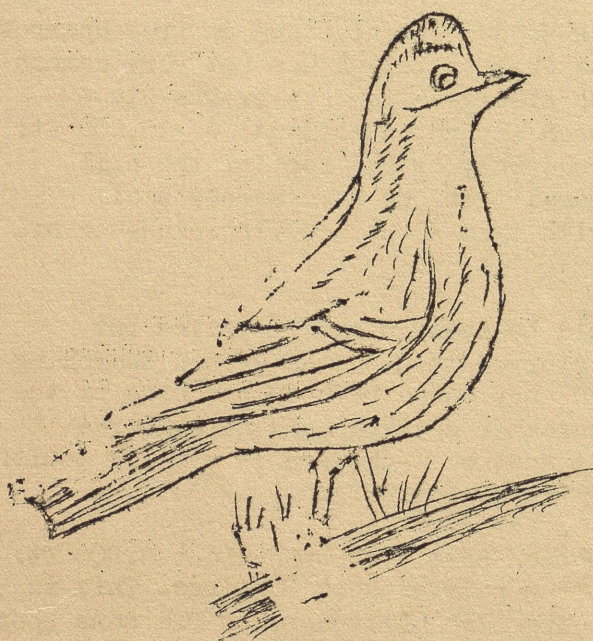
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LARKS

By

Mrs. Jamal Ara



Larks, the most terrestrial of Passerine birds belonging to the Alaudidae family, are familiar little birds forming a well defined small group of their own. They have large pointed wings to sustain them in their hovering flight, the longest primaries being much longer than the secondaries. The tail is always shorter than the wings and slightly forked. The shape of the bill varies according to the food habits of the particular bird and ranges from short and thick, conoid to long, slender and slightly curved. They have a well marked crest, formed by the elongation of the feathers of the crown, which

is "eared" in the Horned Larks. Their feet are well suited to running on the ground by taking alternate steps instead of hopping like most small birds. Their shanks have separate scales up to the back as well as the front. The hind toe bearing a straight claw, is much longer and sometimes more elongated while the claws of the forward toes are slightly curved, and generally short. This distinguishes them from other families of similar habits. Their plumage is usually brown below; while some are nearly plain or black. This colouring is very well adapted for concealing themselves by merging with the background of their habitat. The variations in the plumage of individual species is linked up with their habitat: Thus species living in the desert are very pale under the influence of a dry atmosphere, while

those which prefer humid areas have a darker livery. The larks love to roll and shuffle in the dust instead of washing themselves. Most of them feed on grass seeds and grains after harvest; but also consume a large number of insects. They constantly remain on the ground, seldom perching during the day but never at night. They naturally nest on the ground - collecting grass in a hollow. Their eggs are greenish with speckles and blotches.

They make up for their lack of brilliance in plumage by a gift of melody, some being good singers. They are gregarious assembling in large flocks specially during winter. Most of them are resident but some, such as the Sky larks of Europe (*Alauda arvensis*) which also inhabits the Himalayas, migrate long distances.

I will deal here only with those larks with whom I have spent many a happy hour both in the field as well as in hand - an old Mirshikar used to bring them for me to fondle first before selling. The place was Gidhaur in Monghyr district. Gidhaur is 300 ft. above sea level, a fairly large village situated between two small rivers, with no forests within range but large amounts of cultivation of all kinds. Large patches of sugarcane, sandy beds, grassy and rocky tracts and fallow fields were the ideal dwelling places for the larks.

The first lark which comes to my mind is the Ashycrowned Finch Lark or "Gotowli". Many a time it has allowed me to approach it very closely, but all the time keeping a very careful watch with its pair of black smiling eyes; but whenever it realised that I was crossing my limit it would fly off playfully a few yards and settle down again closeby. It is fully aware of its protective colouring and remains crouched, thus escaping notice.

The "Gotowli" is the most amusing and playful of all larks. It delights in springing suddenly in the air to a height of 30 to 35 ft., and then descending with closed wings, till it almost touches the ground; then up again it goes thus repeating the performance 8-10 times. This merry game goes on until a rival attempts to join the fun, then it darts off after the intruder and chases it away some distance. This is most common during courtship.

Apart from this, the "Gotowli" is easily recognised by its colouring. The male is dark grey with white cheeks and sides of breast; a broad black band down the middle with a black streak running through the eyes. Eha correctly points out, the black on the throat forms a Cross. The female is lighter wherever the male is black.

During the breeding season the males are tireless singers, singing both on the ground as well as in the air. While singing in the air the flight comprises a series of steep rises and falls. The song is a sweet trill like 'Trrreeeëtrr' without variations.

The most famous, and at the same time the most familiar songster of the group is the Sky Lark or "Bhurut". The Sky Lark bears the name "Alauda", believed to be from a Celtic word meaning "great or high songsters", and in Italian it is, "Allodola", "the one who gives priase", no name could be more fitting. During the chilly winter the bird is more or less silent, but bursts into song as soon as spring re-awakens the slumbering fires of day. The sky lark sings with the break of dawn, soaring as if to look for the sun still far below the horizon; and ends with the shadows of night closing in. No doubt the song, as in other birds, is the main factor of success during the critical time of courtship. During this period, the singing and soaring of the males increase. They spring up from the ground and rise to a great height in the air until they are invisible, "and rainlike music scatters from on high". The birds rise almost vertically, with their heads against the wind, on fluttering wings, veering now to the right, now to the left. The soaring differs from that of a bird of prey, as it is accomplished by the continuous effort and action of the wings. Then the descent begins - the birds

come down after having reached the desirable height, with their wings outstretched, without any beats, the tune changing as well. Finally as they draw nearer the earth, the song ceases and they drop like a stone till they are within a few feet of the ground.

Each bird has its domain over a certain area of ground which he guards jealously against all rivals; and from there all trespassers of his own sex are firmly and promptly driven out. In the occupied breeding area, several males can be seen chasing a female with great rapidity through the air, and every now and then breaking out into the sweetest of song. Sometimes, a male will hover above a female who crouches down amongst the grass, and in various ways the male seeks to display his charms.

After the courtship is over, a cup-shaped nest of grass and roots is placed on the ground amidst longer grass. The actual construction of the nest is done chiefly by the female, with the male collecting the materials. But in the incubation and the feeding of the young, the male bears his share of the burden.

A closer inspection reveals that the sky lark is somewhat larger than a sparrow, with wings long for its size, and a thin feeble bill. The plain, streaky brown plumage is the same in both sexes. There is white in the outer tail feathers while the chin, throat and breast have numerous black streaks. The hind claws are very long and straight.

The Ganges sand lark or "Retal" is differentiated from the sky lark by its small size, dull white under plumage with some brown streaks on the breast, and a more slender bill. The flight is not very strong and it never SOARS. The "Retal" never wanders far from the river-side into the adjoining fields. When the bird is in love, a pleasant and musical note can be heard throughout the day. These notes can be heard as the bird flits about from one sand-bank to another, or is on wing.

In the month of April a nest was seen in Gidhaur by me in a slight depression in the sand lined with grass while a few soft white feathers were placed in the middle.

The singing bush lark or "Aghin" has the inner web of the outer tail feathers white; a short and stout bill, and a slightly curved hind toe. "Aghin" flies better and higher than the "Retal", but it too, never soars only flutters in the air. The bird frequents open land, grassy, stony, and cultivated tracts. It often perches when disturbed. A sweet song is sung both on the wing or while seated on a bush.

The nest, well hidden among longer grass, is made out of fine grass mixed with soft feathers. I found a nest in June among sugar-cane fields at Gidhaur. Dry cane leaves were used on the outer side of the nest while the inside was lined with softer grass. It contained two eggs tinged with light green and buff on a white back ground.

The crested lark or "Chundool" differs from all the other larks by possessing a long and powerful bill in addition to the head being decorated with a sharp pointed crest, composed of a few long feathers, which project backwards and upwards from the back of the head. The underparts are creamy white with dark streaks strongly marked on the breast. The "Chundool" loves to spend its time in ploughed fields and open plains. Its habits and manners fall halfway between the sky lark and the Bush lark. Similarly, the song as well is somewhere between these two. The "Chundool" soars like the "Bhurut" and sings on wing - the song is sweet "Tee-urr, Tee-urr, Tee", repeated 3-4 times.

In May a shallow cup-shaped nest of grass is made and is placed on the ground in the shelter of a stone or even a clod. The eggs are mostly incubated by the female, but male helps in feeding the young and brings food quicker than the female.

The Rufous-tailed finch lark or "Aqqiya" is a dark-brown bird with red on the lower back and tail. The bill is thick and slightly curved. "Aqqiya" visits all kinds of open country, ploughed fields and stubbles - often in small parties, outside the breeding season. It has a pleasant but weak song of short twirling notes. The bird sings mostly from a hillock. While displaying in spring "Aqqiya" flutters a lot in the air at a height of a few feet and comes down with a soft whistle but stops as soon as it touches the ground.

A saucer-shaped nest is made of fine grass.

* * * * *

AN EVENING AT PASHAN LAKE, POONA

By

Mr. Thomas Gay.

I scanned the lake from end to end. And there they were, scattered over a patch of weedy water swelling here and there into a small mud-flat, away beyond a long stretch of tall reeds. My powerful binoculars showed me Cotton Teal and Common Pochard for certain, and probably other kinds too; about 100 in all, with dozens of Coot paddling and diving busily among them. I walked down to the reeds, leaving my children to start their game of cricket, or get tea ready, as they preferred.

A Bay-backed Shrike flew to the top of a thorn bush. Red Wattled Lapwings, eyeing me warily, moved out of my path on mincing feet. Beside them, a lone Blue Pigeon took off in typical fashion, as though it had just remembered an important engagement. Passing an inlet of the lake, I stood transfixed by the gorgeous colouring of a pair of Purple Moorhens, trampling the edge of a reed-bed in slow motion, and floodlit by the westering sun. A Jungle Crow called harshly from a babhul tree behind me. The ground fell away towards the long reed patch, which I entered to the protests of a Reed Warbler, and now I could no longer see the open water.

I forced my way through the reeds as silently as I could, noting with relief that the muddy water did not come much above my ankles, until the stems thinned sufficiently to show me the blobs of white, black and brown still well ahead. I raised the binoculars, looked through the last row of stems, and began to count the duck. There were 112 of them, and whereas the drakes could be identified with certainty, the females were a little bewildering. It would not be far out, I thought, to say "50 Cotton Teal, 45 Common Pochard, and 14 Common Teal"; about the three magnificent Pintail drakes there could be no doubt at all. Among the duck bobbed a Dabchick or two, as well as large numbers of Coot which there was no purpose in counting. Away up the lake were Egret, but I had eyes only for the duck.

At last I tore myself away, to go on duty as third fielder. Cricket on a tussocky pitch is a lively game, and we were soon hungry enough for tea and sandwiches beneath a gnarled old mango tree on the bank of a dried-up rice-field. Now the air was full of Redrumped Swallows, with an occasional Pariah Kite floating lazily above. Red-vented Bulbuls flitted along a thorny hedge, and a King-crow surveyed his domain as he balanced on the top of a babhul. Ring-doves flew down and picked industriously in the rough grass. Large Grey Babblers shouted "Creaky-creaky" to each other.

Suddenly I became aware of a bird flying from behind me towards a hedge on the further side of our field. I recognized the dipping flight of a woodpecker; but when the bird settled on a thin horizontal spray of a babhul, exactly like a dove, I thought I must be mistaken. But I wasn't; the binoculars showed it to be a Yellow-fronted Pied Woodpecker. And there it sat for several minutes, with a self-conscious look that seemed to say, "I know that woodpeckers are not supposed to sit like this, but I'm going to do it, all the same."

There was still one more treat in store. A flock of some forty Red Amadavats came over the field like wind-blown leaves, and settled beside some Brahminy Mynas among the grass-tufts beyond an earthen bank. I stalked them carefully, and got close enough to be thrilled by the cocks' astounding crimson heads and breasts. And in a few minutes the air grew chill; the sun had gone; and suddenly it was an almost birdless world.

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

We reported in the January issue that the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India, the "owners" of this Newsletter, have decided to become members of the International Council for Bird Preservation. A remittance of £5/= has now been sent, and the President's letter dealing with important matters of conservation, and circulated twice or thrice during the year has been received. National Sections of the I.C.B.P. are operating in 58 countries, and in India the Section is headed by Dr. Salim Ali.

The September '66 President's Letter, mentions among other things the XIV World Conference of the ICBP and says: "The XIV World Conference of the ICBP was held in Cambridge, England from July 11-15, 1966 and was attended by representatives of 31 different countries. A large range of subjects were discussed including the urgent problems of the effect of toxic chemicals on bird life, and also oil pollution of the sea and pollution of rivers and inland waters. That the decrease of birds of prey is a world problem was only too clearly proved. Many species are in a serious plight especially those at the end of a long food chain. Fish-eating species are particularly vulnerable to the effects of toxic chemicals and their loss of fertility seems evident.

The question of the artificial re-introduction of indigenous species to places where they have been extirpated by man brought out varying points of view, but the President emphasized that this is a question with which National Sections must concern themselves, give advice, and if necessary intervene.

A full report on threatened species showed that much data are lacking concerning many of them. It was therefore resolved to enlist the aid of zoological and educational institutions throughout the world to co-operate in surveys and studies on the status and biology of these birds.

The danger of bird ringing by unskilled and unqualified persons and the need to control the use of mist nets were discussed and recommendations adopted.

In dealing with the problems of birds which are a menace to other species, and in particular the Herring Gull, which has been a great problem both in the Netherlands and Germany for the last decade, the Netherlands Section reported that there had been such a dramatic decrease in this species during the last few years that control is no longer necessary.

At a special meeting of the Executive Board of the European Continental Section a Working Committee was set up to study the possibilities of improving the International Convention for the Protection of Birds 1950, with a view to enabling those countries which have been prevented for various reasons from ratifying the Convention to do so.

At the conclusion of the meeting resolutions concerning the main subjects discussed and a number of recommendations on specific problems were adopted. It was also agreed to send letters from the Conference to Governments and other appropriate authorities on 11 different questions concerning individual countries."

A remittance of \$3 has also been sent to the IUCN, so that our club is now a FRIEND of IUCN. The IUCN issues a quarterly Bulletin and extracts will be reproduced in our Newsletter from time to time. The July-September '66 issue contains an interesting yet a sad account of the Keoladeo Ghana Sanctuary, Rajasthan:

"The abundance and variety of birds and mammals, the easy visibility of the wildlife, the accessibility of the sanctuary throughout the year and its proximity to major tourist centers, all combine to make Keoladeo Ghana unique among India's reserves. It is, therefore, distressing to read of a number of serious problems which affect the sanctuary so adversely as to cause grave concern for its future. These include high domestic livestock density and the resultant overgrazing and trampling which has severely damaged the vegetation. In some areas, particularly the eastern and northern parts, the grass cover has been almost completely removed, leaving only bare soil Some of this human activity also adversely affected the vegetation. For example, although the Forest Department has licensed only 36 Wood collectors to remove dead wood from the reserve, as many as 15 illegal loads of wood were seen leaving the sanctuary in one evening. Wood collectors were also observed in 1965 to break down growing trees for firewood; in 1966 many of them used axes to fell living trees. The problems of Keoladeo Ghana confront most other sanctuaries of India to a greater or lesser degree. The task of preserving a remnant of the unique fauna of the country lies with the present generation. It cannot be too often reiterated that the sanctuaries of India with the wealth of wild animals and plants which they contain are irreplaceable and as much a part of the nation's heritage as the Taj Mahal and the ruins of Khajuraho."

CORRESPONDENCE

Crow eating its feather:

At 5-30 p.m. on the 9th of March, a crow perched about 5 feet away from me on the windowsill of the Bird Gallery of the Bombay Natural History Society. While I was thinking what a pleasant change it was to see a live bird so close after a day with dead skins it started behaving in a curious way. With the feet on the sill, the crow would bend down laboriously and get a primary or secondary feather in its bill. It would then move the foot on that side very clumsily and get the middle of the feather under the foot. It would then tear a bit of the wing and eat it. This behaviour was repeated for about five minutes alternating between the two sides. It must have removed considerable parts of its wing feathers this way as was evident from the denuded appearance of the primaries and secondaries. After five minutes of feather-eating the crow tried to fly up but lost balance and fell down on the museum ground. I watched it move about very clumsily for about 2 minutes on ground attempting to fly but not succeeding. It was also pecking at paper, dead leaves and cotton wool from a heap

of refuse when I sat down to write this note. It could not have been on ground for long, as I could not see it anywhere in the compound after finishing this note. Had this bird accidentally swallowed some poisonous chemical which temporarily removed the normal inhibitions necessary to limit preening activities within a required level?

D.N. Mathew
Bombay.

Bird Books:

I am most grateful to Mr. K. Nanu Nair for taking the trouble to comment so kindly, in the last issue of the Newsletter, on my recent article on bird books. Writing such articles is a dreadful swot, but it is worthwhile if someone reads them with pleasure.

In the first paragraph of the article I mentioned, in passing, reproductions of the illustrations of John Gould. In so far as this implies that Gould executed all the plates for which he is famous, it is a misleading statement, and the truth is sufficiently interesting, I think, for a correction to be published. In his introduction to Audubon's American Birds (Batsford, 1949), Mr. Sacheverell Sitwell describes Audubon and Gould as the 'authors, artists, promoters of the two greatest series of illustrated bird books in existence'. However, it is interesting to learn from Mr. Sitwell that unlike Audubon Gould was 'not, except in a very few instances, the artist responsible for his own illustrations'. 'These were drawn by his wife, who died young; by Edward Lear (the nonsense poet), one of the most magnificent of all ornithological draftsmen, who drew, especially, parrots, owls, and cranes; and by William Hart, who helped Gould in the production of his plates for more than forty years.'

R.A. Stewart Melliush
Holloway's Cottage,
19, Casamajor Road, MADRAS 8.

Flamingos at Kapurwadi Tank near Ahmednagar:

In the Newsletter of October 1964, Vol.4 No. 10, I mentioned the presence of Flamingos at Kapurwadi during the month of July. The visit of flamingos to this area in the same period is now confirmed. It seems that Kapurwadi is a favourite place of flamingos during the rainy season and in winter.

This year I have been observing the winter visitors of Kapurwadi tank, though this is a draught year for Ahmednagar, and its surrounding area.

During the last fortnight of December 1966, I observed flamingos in varying numbers. The period for which flamingos remained here in winter is comparatively more than the rainy season and the party was also of good number. This party was of two adults and the varying number of young ones from 4 to 7.

My observations are as:-

<u>Day.</u>	<u>Date.</u>	<u>No. of Young.</u>	<u>Adults.</u>	<u>Total</u>
Thursday	22.12.1966	2	-	2
Monday	26.12.1966(Morn.)	3	-	3
	" (Even.)	4	-	4

<u>Day.</u>	<u>Date.</u>	<u>No. of Young.</u>	<u>Adults.</u>	<u>Total.</u>
Tuesday	27.12.1966	4	2	6
Wednesday	28.12.1966	7	2	9
Saturday	31.12.1966	3	2	5
Sunday	1. 7.1966	3	2	5
Monday	9. 7.1966	3	2	5

The young ones differ from the adults in their size, colouration and in their resting position.

Young Flamingos: These are mostly whitish in colour all over the body with the exception of beak and most of the primaries which are black in colour while the legs are with reddish colouration. They have the height of 20 to 22 inches excluding the neck.

The young ones always move in pairs and also feed side by side in a company in the shallow waters. I never saw these birds in the mid of tank or any spot round about the greater depth of water.

These birds feed invariably in shallow waters and never feed on one spot. These are constantly in search of food and walk in the water so slowly that their reflection gets less disturbed. During feeding, the neck movements are similar with the trunk of elephant. Once, if the bird locates the area of food, then it starts feeding, finish the material from the spot within a minute or two and again move for the next spot. While feeding they have their necks and heads bend down in such a position, that the upper mandibles rest on the ground and then feed.

These young birds get engrossed so deeply in their feeding that I could go as near as 50 feet and observe them and make a rough pencil sketch.

Flamingos can walk easily on the muddy banks. When these birds are not engaged in feeding, they keep the neck close to the body in the form of 'S' shape. I never saw these birds running or swimming. Flying is another mode of locomotion. During flight neck and legs form a straight line and the wings beat at right angles to it. The wing beats are of moderate speed as the distance to cover them was short. While landing these birds are unable to hold themselves immediately on one spot but they are to run the distance of 10-15 feet and then stop.

Adult Flamingos: These differ in general from the young ones in height and colouration. The height is about 30 to 32 inches. The colour is rosy or scarlet at the beak, wing covers and primaries. The tip of the beak and primaries is black. I could not observe the adults during their feeding and walking. These were either at rest or sleeping whenever I went to Kapurwadi tank.

The adult flamingos stand on one leg during their rest or sleep while the neck is bent back and the head is kept under the wing, especially under the right wing. I could sketch this position of the adult too.

Resting position of the young ones is different from the adults and these young birds stand on both the legs even when these are at rest.

It seems that one of the adults also work as a guard for the party, because one of the adults use to look around the area every few minutes. At this time the neck was in an 'S' shape position for this short period. After taking a short survey, it then inserted its

head within the wings as usual.

I could not take the exact date of the departure of these birds but during my next visit to Kapurwadi the 15th January 1967. there was not a single flamingo in the shallow waters of the tank.

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