

DH P4 11187

75 bird species vanish from Western Ghats

From Our Staff Correspondent

DHARWAD, Jan. 10. — As many as 75 bird species have disappeared from the Western Ghat region of Uttara Kannada District during the last five decades.

According to a survey conducted by the Department of Zoology, Karnatak University, sponsored by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Wildlife, New Delhi, has revealed that disappearance of bird species was attributed to continuous deforestation, industrialisation, establishment of hydro-electric projects and mining. The report says that this had caused imbalances in the bird habitat and forest eco-system.

Dr. S. Basavalingappa, Reader in Entomology, Department of Zoology, Karnatak University, disclosing this to **Deccan Herald** here on Friday, said that there was a difference between the total number of bird species recorded by Davidson (1898), Koeiz (1942) and the present survey.

Mr. Basavalingappa said extensive monoculture of teak in Uttara Kannada District was an important factor responsible for the depletion of avifauna. Comparative studies had shown that the species of birds in teak plantations were found

much less (22 species per sq. kilometre) than in the mixed forest (30 species per sq. kilometre). Population of birds in the teak plantations was nearly half of that of the mixed forest. depletion of bird fauna in teak plantations was due to the reduction in insect fauna on which the birds depend for their food. The destruction of food plants was another cause.

According to him, the present survey undertaken in Haliyal, Dandeli, Badakshirda, Kulagi, Ambikanagar and Ganeshgudi (Supa) in Uttara Kannada District, had revealed the occurrence of 246 species of birds belonging to 54 families of 18 orders. Investigations had also revealed the occurrence of rare birds such as Great Hornbill, Malabar Pied Hornbill and Malabar Grey Hornbill in the region.

More than 35,000 migratory damoiselle cranes had been observed for the first time at Neerasagar Water Reservoir in Dharwad District and Malaprabha and Hidkal Water Reservoirs in Belgaum District.

Mr. Basavalingappa suggested that unscrupulous and indiscriminate deforestation should be stopped to protect bird fauna and the wildlife in general.

even before the Budget is presented to find a solution to this problem.

R.L. Sreshta.

Bangalore.

Bird species

Sir, — This refers to the report “75 bird species vanish from the Western Ghats” (DH — Jan. 11). Since October 1983, I have been working continuously in Uttara Kannada District studying the diversity of bird species in the different types of vegetation of the district. As much as I have come to understand the existing patterns of bird species diversity over the district, I would confidently say that the conclusions drawn based on the surveys conducted by the Department of Zoology, Karnatak University, (DZ, KU), are not only hasty, but also wrong.

To start with, the total list of birds for Uttara Kannada District as recorded by Davidson (1898), Koelz (1942) and me contains 402 forms (includes a few subspecies). Of these I have till today recorded 311 without doubt as against the 246 hitherto recorded by the Department (DZKU). I have so far surveyed only part of the district, viz., Sirsi, Siddapur, Mundgod, Yellapur, Bhatkal, Honnavar, Kumta, Ankola and Karwar — mostly the forests and the marshes. I hope to come across the remaining 90 forms of birds by the time I survey the entire district and all the habitat types. Thus the statement that 75 species of birds have vanished from the Western Ghats is too drastic and certainly based on inadequate samplings.

That the teak plantations have played an important role in the depletion of the avifauna of this district is also not quite true. My studies have given me about 20 bird species per

hectare in the area, eucalyptus and teak plantations as well as the different types of natural forests, both the well-preserved and degraded of the district. This count is much higher than the reported 22 and 30 species of birds per sq. km. (100 hectares) by DZKU. What actually the transformation of one type of habitat into another has caused in this district is a displacement of the typical bird community of the locality. The species richness, i.e., the number of species, is not affected but the community is reorganised with different species of birds. Also, degraded forests have more species than closed and well-preserved forests. Lastly, we at the centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, have found that there is no correlation whatsoever between the bird species diversity, insect species diversity and plant species diversity in any of the vegetation types we studied in this district.

While I do not disagree with Mr. Basavalingappa's statement that forests are being “unscrupulously and indiscriminately” destroyed, I would still say that it is not very easy to estimate the extent of damage caused by deforestation to the avifauna of this district. Except the great Indian hornbill, the other two, namely the Malabar pied and Malabar grey hornbills, are very common in appropriate habitats. The great Indian hornbill, however, has been a rare bird all through history for little known reasons. Also, rare birds like the Ceylon frogmouth are still alive to be seen in the forests of Uttara Kannada!

R.J. Ranjit Daniels.

Bangalore.

Floodlit (hit) trees

Sir, — This refers to the letter by Dip Ghosh (DH — Feb. 14) about the

DH FEB 18, 1987

DH 7.8.88
my

ANIMAL FILE



The Indian peafowl
(*Pavo cristatus*)

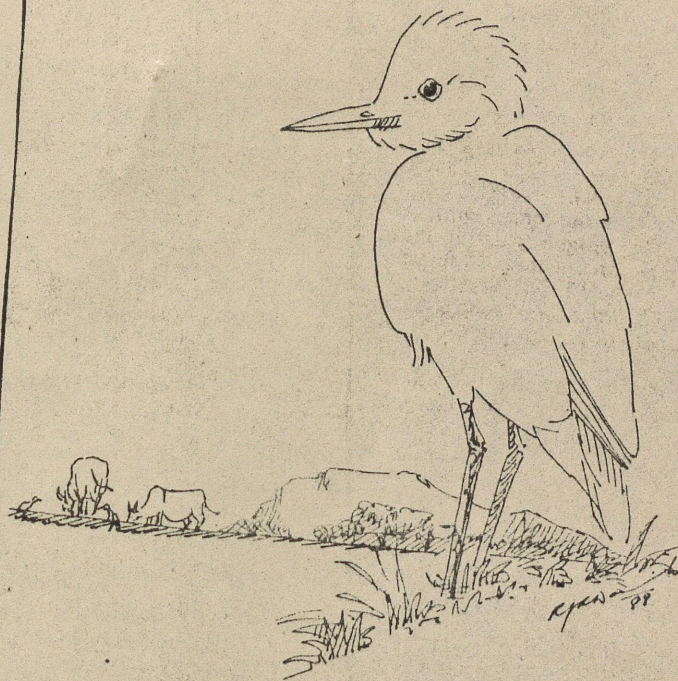
THE national bird of India is also pre-eminent in Hindu mythology. It is found all over the country. Only the males have the beautiful long train of extended feathers growing from the lower back. The feathers serve only the function of attracting females during the breeding season. During the non-breeding season, the males shed the train and at a glance resemble the females. The dance of the peacock is to attract the peahens. Peacocks practise polygyny. There are a lot of fascinating stories about the peacock especially about its courtship and reproduction. However, being a close relative of our domestic chicken, for all practical purposes, it behaves the same way.

— R.J. Ranjit Daniels

September 4, 1988

Sunday Herald

ANIMAL FILE



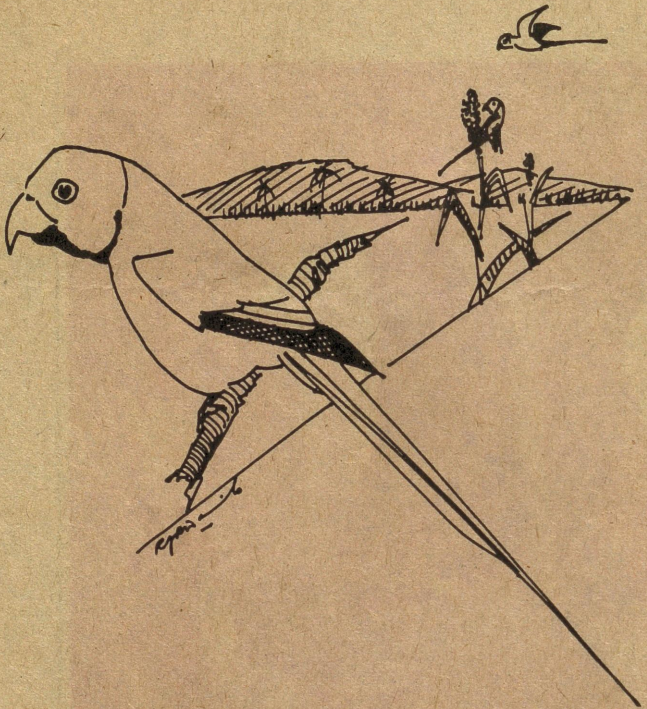
Cattle egret

BIRDS have been extending their geographic ranges over the years. The cattle egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) is an example. This member of the heron family is common and widespread over our country and can be seen all along the countryside throughout the year. From its native continents viz., Eurasia and Africa, the cattle egret has recently successfully reached the New World. Entering South America, the bird has moved northwards, was recorded in Florida in the 1950s and has spread over most of North America. Converting forests into farms, meadows and cattle ranches has probably favoured the spread of this species.

— R.J. Ranjit Daniels

DH
October 2, 1988

ANIMAL FILE



Roseringed parakeet

(*Psittacula krameri*)

THE popular fortune-teller's parakeet, though often referred to as parrot is not truly one. Parakeets are smaller and slendrer than the true parrots. There are no true parrots in India. The male roseringed parakeet has a clear rose-pink and black collar which gives it the name. Swarms of this parakeet can cause considerable damage to agricultural crops. This bird is commonly kept as a pet due to its capacity to learn a few tricks and repeat words when taught. Many of the "tricks" are normally performed by the parakeet while feeding and at courtship. Repeating words is a basic instinct in many birds.

— R.J. Ranjit Daniels.

Lucy H. Holt

October 30, 1988

ANIMAL FILE



Greenish leaf warbler

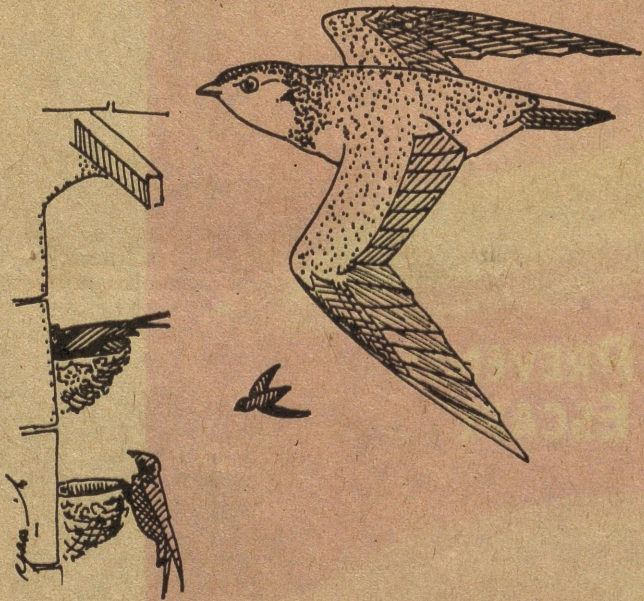
WARBLERS belong to a family of birds with a worldwide distribution. They are usually small birds and many are transequatorial migrants. One of the most common migratory warblers, though never treated as a common bird, is the greenish leaf warbler (*Phylloscopus trochiloides*). This warbler is found practically all over Karnataka between the end of August and early May. It is found in all types of habitats during this season provided there are a few trees. Locally, this warbler can be so abundant that there is at least one bird on every tree. It is a small, dull greenish bird that calls "si-chiwee."

— R.J. Ranjit Daniels.

December 11, 1988

ANIMAL FILE

Swifts



SWIFTS are fast flying insectivorous birds. Their streamlined spindle-shaped body and long slender wings help them carry out most of their vital activities like feeding and mating on the wing. The alpine swift and the brown-throated spinetail swift of India are among the fastest in the world flying at speeds of 250 to 300 km per hour. The legs are weak with all four toes pointing forwards. Therefore, the swifts can only cling and not perch. Tree swifts are however exceptions. Swifts breed in colonies. The nests are made of saliva and feathers. Nests belonging to some swifts are collected and eaten by man.

— R.J. Ranjit Daniels

January 8, 1989.

ANIMAL FILE



Vultures

VULTURES are large carnivorous birds. They are ravenous feeders, especially on carcasses. Most vultures have bare heads and necks. This is an adaptation against soiling their feathers with blood and other sticky substances while feeding. Vultures flocked around a carcass is an ugly sight. They often over-eat and are unable to fly. However, once on their wings they are elegant fliers. They have long wings that help them soar for hours. Vultures make use of the rising air currents and soar effortlessly. Hence the circling above on sunny days. Vultures can fly at heights of 3,500 metres and cover more than 100 km in search of food.

— R.J. Ranjit Daniels.

February 5, 1989

ANIMAL FILE



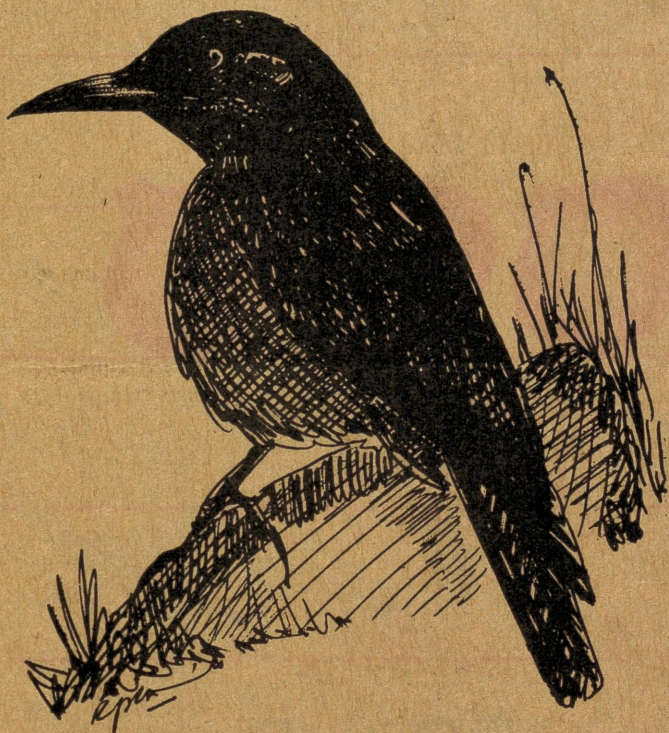
Sunbirds

SUNBIRDS are among the smallest of Indian birds. They are also some of the most brilliantly-coloured birds. Though they are functionally similar to the hummingbirds of the New World, they are totally unrelated. Sunbirds feed on nectar mostly and help in pollination. They do eat small insects too. Our common sunbirds are the purple sunbird, the glossy black species and purple-rumped sunbird, the yellow and maroon species. The females of both species are very similar in coloration. The iridescent colours of the sunbirds are produced by their feathers which are structurally modified bearing platelets. These platelets reflect the different bands of colours at different angles of incident light.

— R.J. Ranjit Daniels.

March 5, 1989

ANIMAL FILE



Crows

THERE are 65 species of birds in the crow family spread all over the world. The raven, rook, jackdaw and our common crows viz., the house crow and jungle crow are closely related. Besides these, there are the jays, treepies, magpies and others. Most crows are black in colour. However, the magpies and treepies are amongst the most colourful of birds. Crows are a very versatile species of birds, omnivorous in diet and tolerant of a wide range of environmental conditions. The yellowbilled chough, a cousin of our crows, is the only bird known to survive at over 8600 metres above MSL in the Himalayas.

— R. J. Ranjit Daniels

April 2, 1989.

Animal File

Goldenbacked woodpecker

(*Dinopium benghalense*)



WOODPECKERS are very familiar birds to us though we seldom come across them in cities like Bangalore. There are eleven species of woodpeckers in south India. All except the goldenbacked woodpecker, are however birds of the more wooded areas and dense forests. The goldenbacked woodpecker is the commonest Indian woodpecker seen in and around villages. Woodpeckers feed mostly on the insects hiding under the barks of trees and living in dead and decaying wood. Their specially modified long tongues, chisel-like beaks and powerful neck muscles help them obtain the kind of food which no other birds can reach.

—R.J. Ranjit Daniels

April 30, 1989

ANIMAL FILE



Grey drongo

leucophneus
(*Dicrurus adsimilis*)

THE Indian subcontinent has an avifauna of 2100 forms of birds. Of these, about 350 visit us, from the colder parts of Eurasia, only during winter. The grey drongo, which breeds in the Himalayas, migrates over the rest of our country in large numbers in winter. It can be identified easily by its dull black colour, slim build with a long tail and its tendency to perch under cover of leaves on tall trees. Like the other drongos, the grey drongo is a very aggressive and noisy bird, a good mimic of other bird calls and fond of feeding on nectar. Eucalyptus and silk cotton trees in bloom are favourite haunts of this drongo.

— R.J. Ranjit Daniels

ANIMAL FILE



The Coucal

The Coucal, otherwise known as the Crow pheasant, is a non-parasitic cuckoo. Non-parasitic cuckoos build their own nests and raise their young just as the other nest-building birds do. Of the 130 species of cuckoos in the world, 80 are non-parasitic. Indian species of the family, such as the Coucals, Malkohas and Sirkeer cuckoo, are non-parasitic. These birds are basically ground birds with poor capacities to fly.

The Coucal feeds on ground insects and smaller vertebrates. It builds a big globular nest within a dense clump such as that of a bamboo or in a thorny bush close to ground level. This common red and black crow-sized bird is popularly called the Kembootha. There are many myths about this bird. One of them is the belief that its nest contains a small bit of root which is an omnipotent curative for all diseases.

— R.J. Ranjit Daniels

ANIMAL FILE



The Koel

THE Koel is one of the commonest and most fabled Indian birds. It is popularly known as Kokila or Kuyil. The Koel belongs to the family of cuckoos. It is brood-parasitic on crows. The males are black while the females are grey spotted with white. Among all Indian species of cuckoos, the Koel has the most musical call, and hence its popularity.

Koels feed on fruits, insects and small vertebrates such as lizards, and even frogs. A big banyan tree in fruit attracts large numbers of Koels. Its eggs resemble crow eggs so closely that the smart crow fails to recognise them among its own clutch of eggs. Once hatched, the Koel chicks push out the crow eggs and chicks from the nest or out-eat them to starvation. Thus, what come out of parasitized crow nests are Koels. Seldom both.

— R.J. Ranjit Daniels.

CHECKLIST OF BIRDS

Seen at the Indian Institute of Science

THOSE WHICH BREED ON THE CAMPUS OR ARE REGULARLY SEEN

Babbler, Whiteheaded
Barbet, Small Green
Bee-eater, Small Green
Bulbul, Redvented
Bushchat, Pied
Coppersmith
Coucal
Crow, House
Crow, Jungle
Dove, Spotted
Drongo, Black
Egret, Cattle
Egret, Little
Flowerpecker, Tickell's
Heron, Night
Heron, Pond
Hoopoe
Kingfisher, Pied
Kingfisher, Small Blue
Kingfisher, Whitebreasted
Kite, Brahminy
Kite, Pariah
Koel
Lapwing, Redwattled
Lapwing, Yellowwattled
Lark, Ashy Crowned Finch
Lark, Red-winged Bush
Lark, Small, Sky
Merlin Redheaded
Minivet, Small
Munia, Red
Munia, Spotted
Munia, Whitethroated
Myna, Brahminy
Myna, Greyheaded
Myna, Indian
Myna, Junale

Owl, Barn
Owl, Collared Scops
Owlet, Spotted
Parakeet, Roseringed
Pigeon, Blue Rock
Robin, Indian
Robin, Magpie
Shikra
Sparrow, House
Sunbird, Purple
Sunbird, Purple-rumped
Swift, House
Tailorbird
Tit, Grey
Vulture, White Scavenger

WINTER VISITOR (Regular/sporadic)

Bulbul, Red-whiskered
Buzzard, Long-legged
Dove, Rufous Turtle
Drongo, Grey
Flycatcher, Blacknaped Blue
Flycatcher, Brown
Flycatcher, Paradise
Flycatcher, Redbreasted
Flycatcher, Tickell's Blue
Harrier, Pale
Hawk, Asiatic Sparrow
Kestrel
Martin, Collared Sand
Oriole, Golden
Redstart, Black
Sandpiper, Common
Sandpiper, Green
Shrike, Baybacked
Shrike, Blackheaded Cuckoo
Shrike, Brown
Snipe, Common
Swallow, Common
Thrust, Blueheaded Rock
Wootail, Grey

UNCERTAIN STATUS (Occasional/stragglers)

Bee-eater, Bluetailed
Bluechat, Indian
Bulbul, Whitebrowed
Buzzard, Crested Honey
Cuckoo, Plaintive
Dove, Red Turtle
Drongo, Whitebellied
Egret, Median
Kite, Blackwinged
Martin, Dusky Crag
Munia, Blackheaded
Nightjar, Small Indian
Owl, Mottled Wood
Parakeet, Blossomheaded
Partridge, Grey
Pipit, Indian
Pipit, Indian Tree
Pitta, Indian
Quail, Yellow-legged Button
Roller, Indian
Shrike, Large Indian Cuckoo
Snipe, Painted
Swallow, Red rumped
Swallow, Wiretailed
Swift, Alpine
Teal, Lesser Whistling
Thrust, White-throated Ground
Vulture, Whitebacked
Weaverbird, Indian

NO RECENT RECORDS (Residents possibly extinct)

Dove, Little Brown
Iora
Treepie, Indian

(Prepared by R.J. RANJIT DANIELS)



A kingfisher with its prey