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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDPWATCHERS

Volume 5-1965 March

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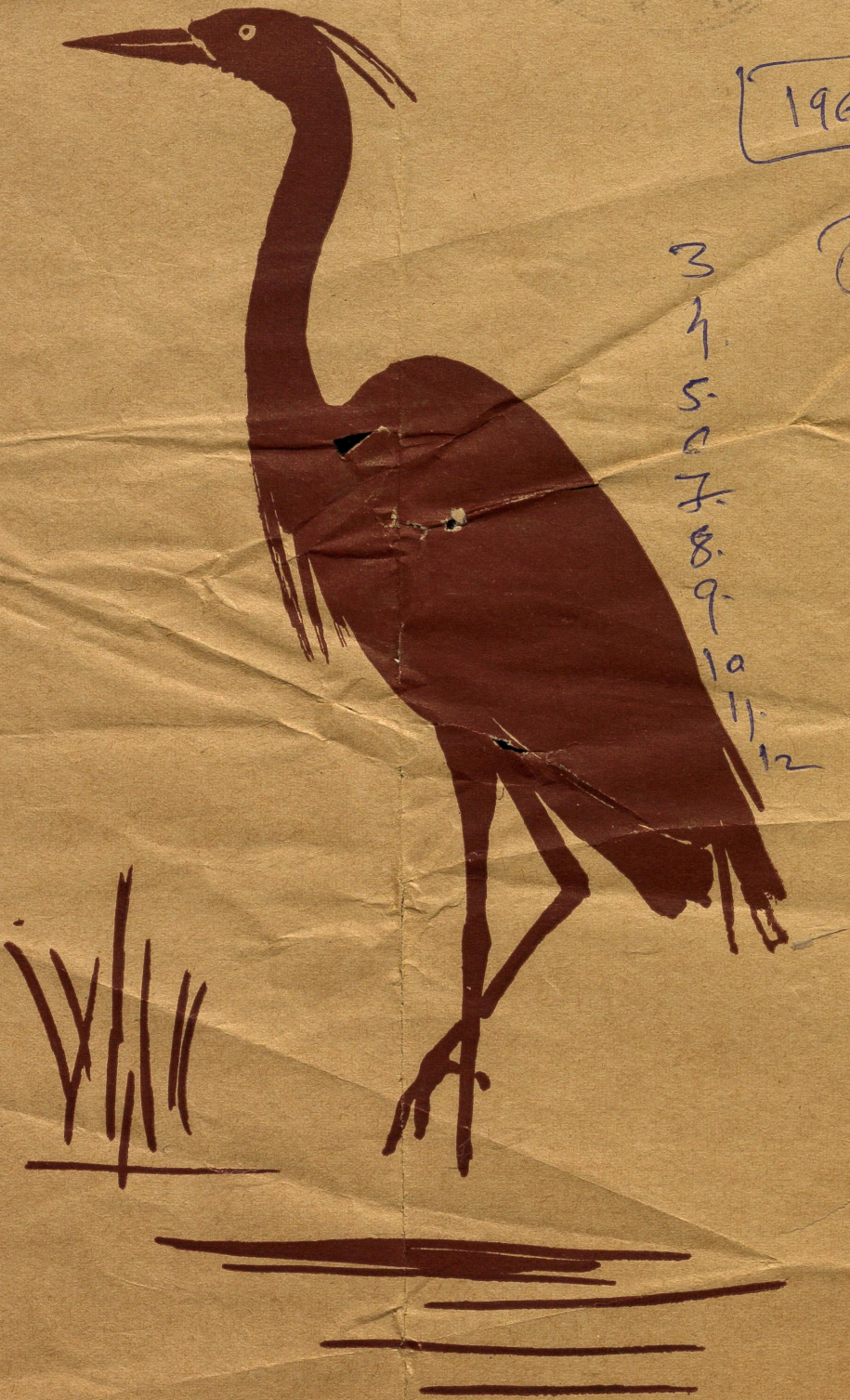
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NEWSLETTER
FOR
BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 5, No. 3

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NOTES FROM MADRAS

By

R.A. Stewart Melluish

Hardly anything has been published recently about the bird life or population of the south-eastern littoral of India, and except for one or two noteworthy occasions the Newsletter has grown to respectable maturity with rarely a nod in our direction. This isn't the fault of the Newsletter, or of its tireless editor*: it is the fault of people like me. For the impression this silence gives, that there are either no birds here, or no birdwatchers, is far from true, and I hope this note will do something to put the place on the map for readers of this bulletin.

No birdwatcher who visits the city of Madras for a few days in winter need (yet) deliberately avoid a trip out to the sanctuary at Vedanthangal. But he should arrange to stay long enough to go further afield, and not rest content with what is little more than armchair watching: for, though the birds there are entirely free, and there is probably nowhere else locally where the larger waterbirds like spoonbill and ibis can be seen at their nests so conveniently, the celebrated Vedanthangal is not unlike a zoo and if any more municipal cannas and carpark notices are planted

*Should read 'tired editor'. - Ed.

and garden seats and observation towers erected many birdwatchers will be driven away. There are plenty of other interesting places to visit, and the reactionary like me who really much prefers birdwatching when it involves some physical discomfort and effort, can exercise himself well. The mudflats to the west of Point Calimere, for example -- mile upon mile of glutinous ooze -- are a severe challenge to any enthusiast's stamina.

Calimere is, ornithologically, of the first quality. It was described briefly by Dr. Salim Ali in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society (Vol. 60, No.2) after a visit there in November 1962 to find out whether it would make a suitable site for a shore-birds sanctuary for the Madras government to run. Nothing has yet come of this proposal, evidently, for only a few weeks ago the local Mail newspaper carried an article by the State Wild Life Officer, who is understandably devoted to **the place, pleading for a wider recognition of its merits and the establishment of a sanctuary there. It is clear that commercial interest in the making of salt on the tidal flats would have to be overcome before a truly undisturbed wild-life reserve would be practicable -- at least, one of any size -- and it is the salt industry that is the greatest threat, at present, to the remoteness and secluded beauty of the marsh: for to make salt nowadays you need electricity to drive pumps, roads for tractors, and a mass of labourers, all enemies of reactionary birdwatchers, if not of birds.**

Point Calimere is in Tanjore district, where the Coromandel Coast stops running due south and turns abruptly west to form the northern fringe of the Palk Strait between India and Ceylon. My map omits trivial details like a scale (I had to draw it myself, because of those blasted Chinamen), but it would seem that from about three miles to twenty miles west of the point the shore is merely a thin strip of sand, occasionally broken by the mouths of creeks, dividing the strait from a huge zone of mud, expanses of shallow, brackish water, and islets. If you go by motor, as I did on my first visit, you drive to Vedaranniyam from the nearest town in the hinterland, which is Tiruturaipoondi, and thence across the eastern edge of the flats to Kodikkarai on the coast. Kodikkarai is one of those melancholy, silent ends of the world where Man gives up and sea and sky take over. The road peters out with a notice announcing, with laconic finality, 'End'. The South Indian Railway built a line from Tiruturaipoondi to Kodikkarai, however, so if you like trains you can travel overnight from Egmore in Madras and arrive in time to breakfast on the shore. The last stage of the journey, in the dawning light, when you sense the nearness of the sea, is immensely refreshing and stimulating.

The moment you leave Vedaranniyam you are amongst the birds. In winter, at least, and according to the foresters all the year round, the western horizon over what they call the swamp is fringed with a pink line of flamingoes. This is not one of the world's great flamingo feeding-grounds: the numbers are relatively few -- from all accounts, not more than five thousand roseus in winter -- but it is probably the best the south of India can offer. The numbers at Pulicat have not, as far as I know, recently exceeded one thousand. If there are any larger concentrations of these birds regularly in south India known to any reader of the Newsletter I hope he will publish the fact, because the seasonal movements and habits of this species away from their known breeding grounds in India seem to have been little documented, in spite of its conspicuous and interesting appearance.

If you are new to flamingoes, you set off after them, no doubt, and begin your day-long plot through the mud and water. Flamingoes' feet are a better shape than yours, though, for mud, and they can walk faster than you can, so once they realise you are anxious to watch them or photograph them, and not simply catch shrimps like a local fisherman, they wander nonchalantly away. They seem to prefer to taunt you in this way rather than take to their wings, and so, perhaps, give you the opportunity you may be seeking to photograph them, or just admire them, in flight. But the effort of tramping through the mud, slow though the progress is, and however foolish the flamingoes make you feel, is well worth while; indeed, it is essential if you are to see much else, because although you can engage a local boat it will hinder as much as help you, and anyway it must stick to where there's water.

If you do wade out, and there is mud and water in the right quantities and the time of year is satisfactory, you will see a great deal. Dr. Salim Ali, in 1962, undertook a trial catch of waders with a local fowler's device consisting of a row of nooses, 'strung out at random along the mudflats', and so in a very short time collected, of the Charadriidae, lesser sand plover, redshank, marsh sandpiper, wood sandpiper, little stint, Kentish plover, ruff, and a single rednecked phalarope. Of these, only the last can be regarded as unusual: and though I have seen ruff on one of my three visits to Calimere I would not call it a common winter visitor to these coasts. The other species caught are to be seen in abundance at any suitable spot in Madras at the right time of year, but doubtless in larger numbers at Calimere than elsewhere. If the visitor there is lucky in his timing, he will find the mud on the landward side of the shore one scurrying, fidgeting, chittering, fluttering mass of small waders, frenziedly poking about in the slime in their hunt for food. He will see terek sandpipers in sizeable flocks of fifty or more, quantities of little ringed plover and greenshank; also stilt, curlew-sandpiper, large sand plover and turnstone. He may even spot, among the stints, a group of larger chubbier birds with downcurved beaks which, when flushed, do not show the tell-tale white upper tail coverts of the curlew-sandpiper: these are probably dunlin. I saw four of these birds at Calimere on 12 January 1964, but I have not been able to get the record confirmed in any way: they are not, evidently, one of the common wintering birds that reach the south regularly. And who knows how many Temminck's, broadbilled and longtoed stints, sanderlings and other such tiny snippets pass the field observer by unnoticed in the mass of confused movement and hasty flight?

The larger, more sedate birds are there too: rows of plump golden plover stand in the shallows, all facing the wind; a bartailed godwit probes about in the banks of a creek; whimbrels hasten overhead whistling their seven whistles; a party of grey and white plover, squatarola, beat upwind with a neat and precise motion of their wings, their black axillaries rhythmically flashing; a curlew calls, and a number rise languidly from their feeding, disturbed, perhaps, by the impetuous flighting of nervous stints and plover zigzagging between them. These, together with the usual egrets, herons and storks, and the terns, which fill the air with their squawks and buoyant flight (mostly Caspian, whiskered, gullbilled and lesser crest-ed) make up the bulk of the great, seemingly limitless, concentration of birds which, in winter, dominate the mud.

Engrossed in all this, the birdwatcher may well neglect the shore itself. For if he turns away from the mud and all the activity, and looks towards the strait, the world is immediately empty -- except for some dauntless butterfly fluttering

off towards Ceylon an inch or two above the waves, or a brown-headed gull. The transformation is astonishing. The sea, for all its fidgeting waves and the shimmering facets of its surface, is relatively lifeless, and its shore vacant. It is curious how dull tropical shores can be, and how fruitless a watch on one so often proves. If one sits on a cliff at the edge of the Baltic, or spends an afternoon on a headland in Norfolk, and scans the waves, something or other is sure to turn up. Geese will fly purposefully along the coast, a fulmar will wheel over the crests of distant waves, a raft of scoter or merganser will appear, or some diver-like blob will attract one's attention a mile or more out to sea, unidentifiable, baffling, but hypnotic and fascinating for hours. This just doesn't seem to happen on the southern coasts of India; at least, all my shore watches on the Madras coast have been most disappointing.

To dismiss the shore, though, is a mistake. There is little doubt that the Palk Strait off Calimere offers a lot of excitement in the months when the migrations are on; for Ceylon entertains many visitors from the centre of Asia, and many if not the majority of these must cross the strait. An expedition to Calimere in September or October ought to be most rewarding, and give a new dimension to one's view of the sea and its shores. And the birdwatcher who goes there after the main movements are over, as I have done, should remember that apart from the conspicuous oyster-catcher there is at least one remarkable shore-dwelling bird which is unlikely to be noticed at all unless one deliberately and diligently examines the tideline: the improbable crab plover. This extraordinary bird -- so odd that it is classified in a family of its own, Dromadidae, all by itself -- is thoroughly at home on the remote undisturbed beaches west of the point, and there would seem to be little reason why it should not burrow its quaint tunnels in the sand there, and breed its solitary young. Ripley says it breeds off Ceylon at Adam's Bridge, but does not mention its nesting in India. If any reader of the Newsletter knows anything about its movements and possible or actual breeding localities, I should be very glad if they got in touch with me. For this bird has excited a deep curiosity in me, since I spent one afternoon last November watching a party of seven at Calimere. They didn't do anything much, these birds, except wash and preen themselves, and then prospect a little along the water's edge. But their heavy bills and pied plumage and generally singular appearance enthralled me, and I sat on the sand and watched them through a telescope for the best part of two hours, and was only roused from my reverie by what seemed to me an abrupt and ill-considered decision of the tide to rise and smother me. No other birds seem so completely in tune as these with the atmosphere of remote, unpeopled seclusion which prevails over faraway and almost inaccessible shores, and the sight of them justifies any number of barren days spent on empty coasts.

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FUNDAMENTAL RESEARCH IN ORNITHOLOGY

By

Jamal Ara

I often feel that there are many ornithological problems for which a solution in the field cannot be found. Let me make it clear straightaway that I am NOT making a plea for the collection of more dead ornithological material. On that point I hold the view very strongly that collection of skins for identifications or Museums must cease now. What I am pleading for is more fundamental research in the laboratory, by using body fluids and similar materials from living birds.

Let us consider, for example, the sexual diversifications in the same Order and even in the same Family. There appears to be no apparent cause behind the sparrows having the sexes dissimilar and the Drongos having them alike. But suppose the chromosome structure of both the species was studied. This will involve no discomfort to the bird, nor will it be necessary to kill. All that is needed is to catch one, extract a few drops of blood with a fine needle and hypodermic syringe, and then set the bird free.

The best time to observe chromosome structure and numbers is at the moment of cell division; in the higher animals it is generally meiosis. For this, the blood and particularly the white corpuscles will have to be cultured, and killed as soon as cell division starts. I am not aware of the chromosomes of birds having been studied anywhere so far, but I am certain that by careful selection specimens can be studied under a high magnification optical microscope.

It may well be that such a study gives us a clue as to why some birds are sexually dissimilar and others not. Perhaps the chromosomes of the sparrow may show something like the X and Y pairs of the human chromosome, and those of the Drongo none at all. Or the structures may be something unknown to Biological Science so far.

The possibilities of this line of research are practically limitless. Take the problem of migration. All theories so far have been empirical. It has been assumed that birds migrate when the breeding instinct either reaches a certain point of development or decays down to a particular level. Arising out of this, it has been suggested that the length of daylight and average temperatures may have an important role to play. But there is one aspect which is even more fundamental -- what determines that a certain species shall be migratory and another not; or that the instinct in some other species shall only cause a local movement. Granted that search for adequate food generated an instinct that strengthened through the centuries until it perfected itself into the mass movements we witness today. But more basic than all this is the question: is there anything in the structure of the bird itself that has undergone modification under the stress of this migratory instinct? Again an analysis of the chromosome structure of both migratory and non-migratory birds may provide the answer. It is quite possible that there is some particular development which is either present or absent in migratory species, and a partial presence or absence leads to local migration.

There is one possibility here which is positively fascinating.

Take the case of the migratory and non-migratory teals. Can it be that say, the migratory one is the normal diploid, i.e. having the normal number of chromosomes, and the non-migratory one is a polyploid, i.e. it has three times or four times the normal number. If this speculation -- fantastic though it sounds -- turns out to be correct, it will be possible to create a non-migratory variety of the migratory species by inducing polyploidy artificially. I know that this sounds very much like science fiction, but is not outside the realms of possibility. It is well known that polyploidy in plants gives rise to fantastic changes.

A further refinement of this line of research is, of course, much more difficult and calls for very expensive equipment, but it has limitless vistas, and may help to solve problems in other branches of Natural History. So far the Mendelian theory is only a statistical approach to the problems of heredity. Through an Electron Microscope, however, it is possible to study the characters of genes, those tiny bodies inside a chromosome which determine what parental characteristics will be inherited by the offspring. Now, the inherited characters of birds are so fixed, being much more stable than in the case of plants, that a study of the genes here can be of immense help in making the Laws of Mendel more precise. Again, the environment in which birds breed can be controlled easily, since many birds will breed freely in captivity, and in this way the extent to which environment influences heredity, determined once and for all. Lysenko has been deposed, but there are aspects of his theory which deserve fuller and more impartial investigation.

To conclude, it is time attention is focussed on studying the chromosome number and structure of birds. This needs neither very expensive equipment nor any elaborate expedition to collect skins. A start can be made with the homely sparrow, the thieving crow (why is it a thief?) and the common myna.

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THE NESTING OF THE HEARTSPOTTED WOODPECKER

By

K.K. Neelakantan

On the 29th of December 1964, I spent a few hours birdwatching, at Kulathupuzha, some 38 miles north of Trivandrum. As I was the guest, for the day, of Sri A.S. Monie, Divisional Forest Officer, Trivandrum, I spent most of the time in the extensive timber-yard of the Forest Department. It was quite an extensive place, being on the bank of a river and close to the extensive forest.

Unfortunately, the most interesting thing turned up late in the day, just thirty minutes before our departure. It was a male Heartspotted Woodpecker (Hemicircus canente) attending to young in the nest. Earlier I had had a few glimpses of a Heartspotted Woodpecker as it flew about uttering tchlik-tchlik notes, but I had failed to keep track of its movements. At 3.30 p.m. as I was watching a Grey Tit, a male Heartspotted Woodpecker came and alighted on a tree close by. As soon as it had alighted, it commenced bowing and calling. Perched across a slender twig, the bird stiffly lowered its head and simultaneously uttered a thin, plaintive su-sie, exactly like the tu-tee note of the Plaintive Cuckoo, but very much lower. After repeating this

antic ten or twelve times, the bird flew to a Terminalia paniculata tree some 20 feet away. Perched on a slender branch, it again bowed and su-sie-ed a number of times. Now and then it looked upwards and all around as though it expected its mate or young to come for the food it was carrying conspicuously in the bill. This was something white or cream-coloured, filling the whole bill and preventing the bird from closing the bill properly. From this branch which was some 20 feet above the ground, the bird flew down to a stump 8 feet lower down. It alighted on the stump and swiftly slid and sidled down to the underside. At the tip of the dead stump was a depression and here the bird had tunnelled its nest. Clinging to the nest-entrance, the bird thrust its head in four or five times, and then shot off, uttering the tchlik-tchlik notes. The time was 3.35. At 3.40 it was back. After bowing and su-sie-ing a number of times, it went to the nest. But at 3.42 it flew off without feeding the young. At 3.43 it returned, bowed and su-sie-ed, but again flew off without even going near the nest. Though I suspected that the bird had seen me and was feeling annoyed, I was more than 25 feet away and kept fairly still. Moreover, the nest was almost above a path regularly used by local people.

At 3.47 the bird came again, went through the usual preliminaries, and entered the nest. A minute later it flew off. At 4.5 it was back on a tree 25 feet away, bowing and su-sie-ing. From there it flew to the nest, put its head in a number of times, entered the nest, and, turning round, looked out. At that time there was some white stuff hanging from its bill, but it didn't look like a faecal sack. The bird then retracted its head, and its bill was open and empty when it looked out a few seconds later. Before the bird left its nest I had to return to my host's office. We left a few minutes later.

During the 30 minutes for which I had the nest under observation, there was no sign of the female woodpecker. In fact the only Heartspotted Woodpecker I saw was this single bird -- a male as the black forehead showed. Though the bird was constantly uttering one note or the other, there was no answering call throughout the period. Where could the female have gone?

There seem to be only three earlier reports of the nesting of this woodpecker from Travancore: C. Primrose took single eggs on November 26th and December 15th (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 35:207) and Bourdillon (Stray Feathers 4:389) found it excavating in February. Mr. Stewart found it breeding from January to March (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 37:296). Therefore the details of the nest seen by me may be worth recording. The nest was just 12 feet above the ground in a small tree. There were numerous huge trees with plenty of dead stumps at all heights from 6 ft. to 50 or 60 feet. The thick forest was also but a few furlongs away. The bird, however, had chosen the slender stump which stood close to a frequented path in a rather noisy locality.

Again Betts (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 37:201) and Salim Ali (BIRDS OF TRAVANCORE AND COCHIN:207-8) say that the call of this woodpecker is 'a pleasant trill consisting of a quick-repeated twec-twec-twec -- sharp but not loud -- up to 7 or 8 times.' On the 29th of December I never heard the bird uttering this note. When it flew about, it constantly produced a sharp, double note tchlik-tchlik. When it had alighted and while it bowed, it uttered the plaintive su-sie note.

Betts in his excellent article on South Indian Woodpeckers (referred to above) remarks that the only Woodpecker seen with

food in its bill when visiting the nest is the Pigmy Woodpecker. We should certainly enlarge the list to include the Heartspotted species also.

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THE DANGER OF THE AIR-GUN

By

Phyllis Barclay-Smith, M.B.E., M.B.O.U.

Central Secretary, International Council for Bird Preservation

The increase in accidents caused by air-guns and the numbers of birds killed and wounded by these weapons has given rise to considerable concern in the United Kingdom and other European countries.

At the Meeting of the European Continental Section of the International Council for Bird Preservation held in Norway in 1961 the delegates from several countries reported on the danger of these guns and it was agreed to recommend that no-one under the age of 16 years should be allowed to use such guns and representatives of some countries were of the opinion that air-guns should not be allowed to be used by anyone under 18 years of age.

In 1961 a law was passed in the Netherlands restricting the use of air-guns and in 1962 a law was passed in the United Kingdom forbidding children under 14 to have air-guns except under the supervision of some one over 21, and also establishing certain controls concerning young persons of a higher age.

The destruction of birds and number of accidents to farm animals and even humans caused by irresponsible shooters, however, became so much worse in the United Kingdom that the leading association of farmers -- the National Farmers' Union -- in 1963 organised a Conference of representatives of landowners, sportsmen and conservation organizations to discuss further legislation to deal with this problem.

A large number of reports were received from all over the country not only of destruction and maiming of birds but of shooting at farm animals. In one case the calf of a cow, which had been hit by pellets, was born dead and in another a mare in-foal was found in a bad state with blood dripping from a shoulder wound caused by an air-gun pellet. Another farmer was himself hit by an air-gun pellet fired by a boy. Some hand-reared tame Mallard on a pond near a house, which were very tame, were shot down on the water -- some were dead but the majority horribly maimed.

There is at present (1965) a Bill before the British Parliament for the stricter control of shooting.

There is no doubt that many youths carrying air-guns will shoot at any bird they see or indeed at anything that moves, and can be dangerous for both farm animals and humans. The air-gun can no longer be regarded as a harmless toy and it is important that it should not be allowed to be used by irresponsible youths. The bird life of India will greatly suffer and there will be much trouble if precautions are not taken to control air-guns as the experiences of other countries have shown.

REVIEWS

BIRDS OF THE WORLD. By Hans Hwass, in colour, translated by Gwynne Vevvers, illustrated by Wilhelm Eigener. New York. E. P. Dutton and Co. Inc.

This excellent book consists of fully coloured illustrations of 1100 species of birds, accompanied by short accounts of them. There are summaries of each family including the numbers of species it includes, its distribution, a general description, the more interesting habits of the family, the habitats they frequent and other facts about them. This is followed by the Latin and English common names of the species illustrated, with its size, distribution and some of its particular habits.

The species selected are fairly representative over the world. The illustrations are on the whole extremely good. Many, perhaps most, of them are probably copied from a previous illustration, and in some cases previous mistakes are carried over. It is natural that in such short descriptions of species (anything from under 10 words to over 100) not many details can be given, but it is unfortunate that sexual dimorphism and seasonal variations are often not even mentioned.

There is an index of common names. The book is invaluable as a reference book to have with one when one is reading books about birds in different countries. It has certainly made reading Gerald Durrell's books much more interesting.

The book has a hard cover and for Rs26.00, it is indeed a wonderful bargain.

(S.D. Jayakar)

NOTES AND COMMENTS

We are glad to announce that Mr. R.A. Stewart Melliush whose article appears in this issue has agreed to act as our Regional Editor from Madras.

We can now look forward to increased activity in South India.

CORRESPONDENCE

Food washing by the Water Rail

Reading Mr. Uday Shanker Rao's note in the February issue regarding the strange feeding behaviour of the Little Green Bitern, I was reminded of an incident in the feeding behaviour of the Water Rail (Rallus aquaticus) which struck me at the time as being singularly odd.

Ten years or so ago, I had a Water Rail under observation at a large pond at Leatherhead in Surrey, at a site locally known as Fetcham Crossbeds. The bird was in a tree and bush-studded island in the pond about 5 yards from the water's edge. After a few moments, I saw the bird pick up a worm in its bill, run quickly to the water's edge and wash the worm in the water by rapidly moving its bill from side to side. It then ran 2 or 3 yards back on to the island and swallowed the worm.

Foodwashing is, I believe, a habit practised, if not regularly, at least occasionally, by other species of birds, mainly the Scolopacidae (waders).

Have any other of our readers ever witnessed this? If they have, it would be most interesting to hear of their experiences.

S.K. Reeves

Gt. Bookham, Surrey, England

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A note on the Indian Ring Dove (Streptopelia decaocto)

At the end of the very interesting 'Extracts from letters to friends in India', written by Dr. N.W. Cusa and published in the February issue of the Newsletter, he asks, inter alia, whether the Indian Ring Dove, variously called Streptopelia decaocto and risoria, is the same bird which we know in Europe as the Collared Dove or whether they are two separate species.

The answer to his question is that they are, in fact, one and the same species, more than that, they both belong to the typical race, namely Streptopelia decaocto decaocto.

Streptopelia risoria is an older name by which the bird used to be known.

There is a subspecies (S. d. xanthocykla) known as the Burmese Ring Dove, which occurs throughout Burma and extends from there into south and central China and the Indo-Chinese countries. The Burmese race is distinguished from the Indian by the broad, yellow, bare rings round the eye, deeper and brighter coloration and a more developed collar. The typical race (S. d. decaocto) extends eastwards, through Burma and China to Japan.

The spread of the typical race of the Collared Dove, sometimes by leaps of several hundred miles, from the Balkans in 1900, across Europe to reach Britain in the early 1950s, has been remarkable. It was first seen in Norfolk, where it established its first colony. Since then it has bred in many countries widely-spread over Great Britain and has occurred in many more. I, personally, have had the pleasure of seeing the bird and hearing its soft cooing call, so redolent of the hot, sunny, dusty plains of Gujarat, in Norfolk, Surrey, Gloucester and Cornwall. On the way home across France last May, at Soissons, I quite unexpectedly heard one calling one hot, drowsy afternoon in the tree-lined street in which our hotel was located, and for one brief, exciting moment I thought I was back in India. Later on, I discovered three or four more in the environs of the hotel.

In this country, the bird is often to be found near poultry runs, especially those which have evergreen trees and prominent perches, such as overhead wires, television aerials, high roofs, etc., in their vicinity. The doves, needless to say, share the grain put down for the chickens.

S.K. Reeves

Gt. Bookham, Surrey, England

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Plumage of the Paradise Flycatcher

The February issue of the Newsletter has just come. In Dr. Mani's interesting article on birds at Thekkady she says, '....the young male Paradise Flycatcher with its chestnut streamers....'

Salim Ali's THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS 1941 edition says concerning the same bird: 'Female and young male chestnut above, greyish white below . . The young male has chestnut streamers in the tail . . .'

Whistler's POPULAR HANDBOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS 1935 edition states that 'The plumages of the male are not fully understood . . A phase in which the long streamers and the upper parts are chestnut instead of white may be dimorphic to the fully white adult.'

During last year's cool season a short-tailed Paradise Flycatcher became interested in the human population of this mission compound. It (we assumed it was one individual) would perch in the trees near our houses, would flit above and beside me as I walked under the trees, and as the weather grew hot would come into my second storey bedroom during the day whether I was there or not. In March it grew a white feather on each shoulder, so we knew it was a male, and we knew it was one individual. We saw, from time to time, others that had a white feather here or there in their chestnut plumage, or none at all, but always the 'tame' one had the two symmetrically placed on his shoulders.

One thing I noticed about him during his juvenile plumage was that his white feathers were a clear bright white, not ashy grey like that of the 'females'. When he left on April 15th, we were anxious to have him come back to us in whatever his new plumage was, and to resume his 'Peoplewatching'.

Early in October there were Paradise Flycatchers in the compound in various phases of plumage, but all were shy of humans, until in the last week of the month a beautiful male in white, black, and grey, with a tail about 8 inches long, began visiting the trees near our houses. Often when I went into the garden it would fly from a distant tree to one nearby. It gradually resumed its habits of the previous year, making regular visits to the verandah trellises, perching outside the windows of the school and hospital. During the worst fury of the cyclone on December 23rd, he flew in to the verandah trellis at noon, as is his custom, and there rested in shelter for a while before flying out again into the storm.

He is still here, and every once in a while I measure his tail by observing him on a perch. A week ago I calculated that it was thirteen inches. It will be interesting to see how long it is by the time he migrates.

All of us who have watched the birds of this compound believe this to be the same individual that we knew last year, although it was not ringed. If we are correct, the description of his plumage may throw some light on that of the species in general.

Miriam D. Brown

Singaratope, Ramnad, Madras State

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A Jungle Crow conceals food

On 14 May 1964 at about 0630 hrs. I observed a jungle crow alight in the field near my house with a dead lizard in its beak. It put the lizard on the ground, gave it one or two jabs with its beak and decided for some reason to postpone the feast. It thrust the lizard into a small depression in the ground and covered it with a stump ~~xxxxxx~~ of grass and roots almost completely and flew away. On going near I could see only the tail of the lizard which by evening had disappeared. Is the action of the crow in hiding food instinct or intelligence?

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Birdwatching in America

The following passage may be of interest to the readers of the Newsletter. It is from the article 'If you dont mind my saying so . . .', by Joseph Wood Krutch in The American Scholar, quarterly, Autumn 1964.

"Americans have rediscovered Nature. Books about animals, plants, mountains and oceans pour in an unprecedented stream from the presses because they are being bought in unprecedented numbers. No doubt this is partly because we can no longer take nature for granted; because a beautiful world is disappearing under the impact of an exploding population and the 'progress' it makes necessary. Birdwatchers, once eccentric figures of fun, are now too numerous to be laughed at. The Audubon Society estimates that there are some ten million of them in the United States. The head of one of our largest corporations has published a splendid book about hummingbirds and it has even been suggested that on a fine weekend there are more people out with binoculars than in the football or baseball stadia."

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