

# *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*

Vol. 34

No. 5

Sept. - Oct. 1994



## Wetland Habitats and Species : Their Uncertain Future

ANTHONY SEBASTIAN and JON DAVIES, Asian Wetland Bureau

The common perception that most types of wetlands have little value and that they should be converted for more "productive" uses has led to some of these unique habitats becoming critically endangered. Leading on from this, many plant and animal species which depend on wetlands for all or part of their life cycle are now endangered.

Figures for destruction and degradation of wetland habitats speak for themselves. In the Philippines, out of an original total of 450,000ha of mangroves, only 100,000ha remained in the late 1980s. In Indonesia, 40% of mangroves and in Sumatra 38% of swamp forests have been lost up till the late 80s. The figures for other countries in the region show similar trends. The valuable functions of some wetland ecosystems such as mangroves are now being recognised and greater efforts are being made towards their conservation. However, for ecosystems such as freshwater marshes, the intensity of destruction remains the same, as many people are still unaware of their benefits.

Other obviously beneficial wetland habitats such as rivers and lakes are not spared either. Many people do not speak of the degradation of lakes and rivers along the same lines as the degradation of mangroves, swamp forests and marshes where the destructive effects of clear-felling and drainage are obvious. A lake physically remains a lake even after its ecosystem has been completely destroyed either by pollution, eutrophication or by the introduction of exotic species. Similarly, a river remains a flowing body of water even after "developments" such as dam building may totally destroy its rare and valuable habitats such as rapids and associated floodplains. This is why figures for the "loss" of lakes and rivers are never given in the same

way as for marsh and mangrove systems. Yet being lost they are, and this must be realised.

The destruction of such wetland systems leads to a loss in social and economic benefits, a reduction in biodiversity and the endangerment of species which depend upon these habitats. Wetland habitats in Southeast Asia support some of the most elusive and endangered wildlife.

The closing-in effect of the extensive conversion of wetlands has brought many wetland specialists to the brink. Notable examples of such species are the White-winged Wood Duck *Cairina scutulata* and the Greater Adjutant Stork *Leptoptilos dubius*, two special which may have little chance of surviving the next decade due to habitat loss. Moreover, the importance of wetland ecosystems such as freshwater and peat swamp forests for endangered species becomes all the more important as terrestrial systems continue to be destroyed. These areas become, in effect, a refuge for large mammals which move into wetlands as the last vestiges of their major habitat, dryland forest, disappear.

### Endangered Species

For the Asian / Australasian region, fifteen species of mammals, fifty bird, thirty-two reptile, eighty-eight fish and four amphibian species which qualify as wetland species are listed in the 1990 IUCN Red Data Book.

The Baiji or Chinese River Dolphin *Lipotes vexillifer* and the Indus River Dolphin *Platanista minor* are probably the most endangered wetland mammals in Asia. Both are restricted to certain stretches of the Yangtze and the Indus Rivers respectively and both populations are at dangerously low levels. Furthermore, threats to these animals are increasing every year.

The Invisible (or Wallace's) Rail *Rallus wallacii*, endemic to the island of Halmahera, Indonesia has lived up to its name having not been seen since 1983 and the Giant Ibis *Pseudibis gigantea*, endemic to the Indochinese region and thought to be extinct, has been confirmed to survive in Laos in 1993 after twenty-four years, but for how long?

The Chinese Alligator *Alligator sinensis*, with no natural habitat remaining, is losing a struggle to coexist with man in southern China while the Philippine Crocodile *Crocodylus mindorensis* faces a similar plight in the archipelago.

While the larger reptiles and amphibians such as the Vietnamese Salamander *Paramesotriton deloustali* attract attention, the fact remains that the amphibian fauna of this region is insufficiently known. The situation is of even greater concern when considering the plant communities of these wetlands.

### Threatened Species

There are many other species and communities which, whilst not listed as endangered, are under considerable threat. Species potentially most threatened with extinction are those endemic species confined to one site. The loss of the ecosystem of that particular site would mean the extinction of the species. Examples concerning endemic fishes abound. In Lake Lanao in the Philippines, the accidental introduction of the Goby *Glossogobius giurus* has been implicated in the extinction of the majority of fifteen or so endemic cyprinids which once inhabited the lake. The endemic fishes of Inle Lake in Myanmar, consisting of two endemic genera, two endemic species of spiny eels, are also under threat.

Continued on Back Cover

## **AN INVITATION TO JOIN IN SUPPORTING BIRD CONSERVATION PROGRAMMES**

Bird Greeting Cards are being brought out to support the publication of the '*Newsletter for Birdwatchers*' and other Bird Conservation activities.

The '*Newsletter for Birdwatchers*' is stimulating interest in Bird Conservation in India through fostering a network of birdwatchers and catalytic exchange of information over the years.

Your contribution will also help to :-

- ☞ Popularize and provide support to IWRB and AWB co-ordinated Mid-Winter Waterfowl Census being conducted in India since 1987.
- ☞ Establish a local co-ordinated network and prepare a report on the trend indices for endangered resident waterfowl.
- ☞ To develop materials for training in Wetland Management and to promote Wetland Management programmes.
- ☞ Co-ordinate Bird research and conservation programmes.
- ☞ Undertake publications on Birds and other key conservation issues.
- ☞ Support an electronic data base to document and pool knowledge on the dynamics of endangered birds of India.
- ☞ Provide support to the ICBP Biodiversity project, designed to map key areas of endemism in the country.

### **REMEMBER**

***Rs.1.50 goes to Bird conservation  
programmes on each card purchased***

## Order Form

Please fill up the order form and mail to:

### **Newsletter for Birdwatchers**

C/o. Navbharath Enterprises

No.10, Sirur Park, 'B' Street, Seshadripuram

BANGALORE - 560 020.

Yes, I want to support the bird conservation activities.

- I have enclosed Cheque for Rupees..... towards  
.....(Nos.) cards. Please send the cards by post.
- Please send.....(Nos.) cards by V.P.P
- I have sent Money Order for..... (Nos.) cards.  
Please send the cards by post.
- Please rush me the details of special offer.

**My address:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ PIN \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Cheques should be drawn in favour of

**'Newsletter for Birdwatchers'**

Price Per Card Rs.4/- only

For 100 cards Rs. 325/- inclusive of postage.

## **SPECIAL OFFER !**

You are also welcome to promote the sale of  
Greeting Cards in your area and avail  
attractive promotional discounts.

Vol. 34	No. 5	Sept. – Oct. 1994
---------	-------	-------------------

## CONTENTS

### ■ Editorial

- Changes in Nomenclature
- Waterfowl Census in Sri Lanka
- The Future of the O S I
- Nesting of Tailor Birds
- A Bird Atlas for India
- The Asian Waterfowl Census 1987-91



### ■ Articles

- Birding in Periyar, by Vinoj Mathew Philip
- Birdwatching on a Trek in the Himalayas, by Manu Prasanna and Robert Bagchi
- Reproductive Age and Cycle, Sex-ratio and Longevity in the Indian Tailor Bird, by H. Daniel Wesley
- The 1994 Waterfowl Census in Sri Lanka, by Thilo W Hoffmann
- Some Habits of the Common and Lesser Coucals, by Manoj V. Nair
- Birding in Hardy's Country, by Jamil Urfi
- Birds of Southern Rajasthan, by Dr. Satish Kumar Sharma and Raza Tehsin
- An Incident between a Koel and a Golden Oriole, by Aasheesh Pittie and Rajeev Mathew
- A Day at Dholkand, by Dr. J.C. Daniel

### ■ Interesting Sightings

- Black-bellied Tern in Shimoga City, by Gururaja K.V.
- Some interesting bird occurrences in Kutch, by Himatsinhji
- Sighting of Large Green Barbet in Bangalore, by N.R. Swamy, P.A. Ulhas, J. Hemanth and J.N. Prasad
- Sighting of Redcrested Pochard in Kanha Tiger Reserve, by Ravishanker Kanoje
- Occurrence of the Hobby and Observations on Little Grebe in Hyderabad, by Aasheesh Pittie and Rajeev Mathew
- Tickell's Leaf Warbler and Blyth's Pipit in Rajkot, Gujarat, by S. Asad Akhtar and J.K. Tiwari
- Storks Watching at Ratapani, by Manoj K Misra

### ■ Correspondance

- A survey of the Indian Great Black Woodpecker and Comments on Checklist of Birds of Longwood Shola, Kotagiri by V. Santharam,
- Dietary of Black Capped Kingfisher – An addition, by Manoj V. Nair
- Collective noun for a gathering of birds, by Theodore Baskaran

### ■ Interesting Recoveries

- Ring of an Unidentified Wader, by V Guruswamy
- Ring of a White Necked Stork, by Debojit Phukan

## Editorial

### Changes in Nomenclature

Our contributors will have to take the trouble to refer to the latest scientific names in their articles. But I should like the standard English names used by Salim Ali and other writers in India to remain in use for the time being. Changing all names, Latin and English in one shot will make identification and matching with earlier references difficult. In the fascinating article on Periyar, Vinoj Mathew Philip mentions a pair of Southern Rufous Woodpeckers (*Micropternus brachyurus*). I see that in the Birds of Periyar (Andrew Robertson and Michael Jackson), the same bird has been renamed (*Celeus brachyurus*). The Editor would be grateful if readers would inform him about "mistakes" in scientific names. As Andrew Robertson advised us, we must keep pace with the world, otherwise there will be much confusion in the years to come.

### Waterfowl Census in Sri Lanka

In his article Thilo W Hoffman speculates whether the unusual rains in Sri Lanka reduced the normal North-South migration, particularly of Waders. Some participants of the Annual Waterfowl Census in our Southern States might comment on whether there was an excess of birds lined up at the "airports" in India prior to departure for Sri Lanka in January 1994.

### The Future of the Ornithological Society of India

Several members who have paid Rs. 50/- as Membership fees for the OSI, have been enquiring about the status and future of this organisation. I had requested the Secretary General, Mrs. Asha Chandola-Sakhiani, to write about it.

### Nesting of Tailor Birds

Daniel Wesley must be complimented on keeping such a careful watch on the nesting activities of Tailor Birds, from April 1993 to the end of March 1994. It is a pity that the original and one of the successive broods were not ringed, so that conjectures about life span could have been confirmed as scientific facts.

## A Bird Atlas for India

The Birdwatchers Field Club of Bangalore, has done a splendid job in publishing an Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Bangalore. In the introduction Joseph George says that of the 330 species recorded in this Checklist, 220 are regularly found within an area of just 40 km around the centre of the city. Some birds like the Great Indian Bustard and the Lesser Florican have vanished for good (unless they revive like Jerdons Courser in Rollepodu in Andhra Pradesh). But the annotated list gives valuable suggestions for improving certain habitats which may arrest local extinctions. The Little Grebes which used to breed in Ulsoor Lake have gone presumably because of walling in the sides of the water. They may return if a sloping vegetated embankment is recreated between the wall and the lake. During the formal release of this Checklist\* at the R & B Bookshop on 4th September, I suggested such Checklists which are now being produced for various areas of our country could be the forerunners of species atlas for the whole country on the basis of a geographical grid of 100 x 100 square km. Jamil Urfi in his article in this issue refers to the Atlas of Breeding Birds in the British Isles and Ireland. This effort involved 15,000 observers led by a team of 200 competent ornithologists. We have the birds and a growing number of keen birdwatchers well spread in our country. Can the Regional Advisers of the Newsletter submit proposals for their own regions? We can then put them together and think about a National Grid. Let us play our part in listing the biodiversity of our country through the medium of birds.

\*The Checklist is available for Rs. 10/- plus postage, from Naveen O C, Foundation for Nature Exploration and Environmental Conservation, No. 5, Williams Town Extension, 3rd Cross, 3rd Main, Bangalore 560 046.



February through March '94, I found myself spending a fascinating time birding in Periyar Tiger Reserve, Thekkady. PTR lies between 9°16' and 9°40'N Lat. and between 76°55' and 77°25'E Long. and has an area of 777 sq km, situated on the Western Ghats in the Idukki District of Kerala. The altitude ranges from 900 m to 2019 m at the Vellimala peak, with undulating terrain. The lake assumes prime significance attracting tourists in large numbers all year round. Needless to say the sanctuary is a haven for birds and other wildlife.

Among many interesting experiences, I would like to share a few important observations of bird biology during our routine treks and camps in the reserve. The mixed vegetation types of Tropical Evergreens, (TE), Moist Deciduous Forests (MDF), Savanna Grasslands (SGL), and

## The Asian Waterfowl Census 1987-91

I have just received a copy of the Asian Waterfowl Census 1987- 91, published by the Asian Wetland Bureau. It is a pleasure to find that Taej Mundkar and S.A. Hussain (contributors to our Newsletter since its earliest days), are playing a leading role in the AWB in Malaysia. The International Waterfowl Census was started in 1967. From 1989 the Indian Subcontinent was included. At present the AWB and the IWRB cover almost the whole world and the bird population worldwide is being monitored – a remarkable achievement. Its 372 pages, with illustrations of species, distribution maps, FYM's (i.e. Five year mean population between 1987-91), is such a mine of information that it cannot be absorbed in a hurry. "Digesting" such a wealth of facts is slow process; but I hope to report on it in the November/December issue. But let me give one example of the type of Data this publication contains :

### "Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*)

Monotypic. Apparently a sedentary species, endemic to the Indian subcontinent (almost exclusively India and Nepal). Only one population is recognised. South Asia : B (10,000) (AWC 3,510). Trends : Unknown.

This species is under-represented during the census, as it feeds commonly on non-wetland habitats such as dry cultivation.

### Potential sites of International Importance

Two sites in India had a FYM equal to or above 100 (1% level) : Kalale Tank, Karnataka (178, 1 yr.) and Veri Dam, Gujarat (FYM 100, 2 yr.)"



## Birding in Periyar

VINOJ MATHEW PHILIP, Raptor Project, Periyar Tiger Reserve, Thekkady 685 536, Kerala

Plantations (PL) provide an ideal habitat for beautiful and diverse avifauna.

On 16 Feb '94, while awaiting a boat at the Thekkady boat landing, a brahmini kite (*Haliastur indus*) was seen at 9.15 AM, soaring in the blue sky aimlessly. Suddenly, it plunged to a more visible range in altitude and began to chase a butterfly, crimson rose (*Tros hector*), over the green waters of the lake, trying to capture it with its talons. Each time the bird tried to close its talons on the insect, it dodged one way or another and escaped. The bird never gave up initially and tried over and over again but in vain. Later it returned to the hills beyond. The downward force of wind from the raptor's wings favoured the butterfly to escape capture. A pair of jungle crows tried imitating the just departed raptor, with clumsy results before they too thought it

wise to give up. Just then, there appeared from nowhere, a racket-tailed drongo (*Dicrurus paradiseus*) that swooped on the butterfly and caught it with its beak in a split second and flew to a tree to feed with pride. The crows understood the message "I am boss around here", from the drongo and flew off in shame. The whole activity lasted 1 min and 5 secs during which time the raptor's attempted bird strikes and of the crows numbered 7 and 4 each. According to Ali, S. and Ripley, S.D. (Handbook, 1987), only orthopterous insects are preyed upon by the brahminy kite and butterflies especially the crimson rose is not recorded in its dietary. Hence this observation seems to be new and uncommon. On 18 Feb '94 morning, a trek to Cheriyanam revealed a peculiar behaviour of a brahminy kite, attacking a young nilgiri langur (*Presbytis johni*) that had strayed a bit far from its mother. Two lightning fast strikes of the talons on the head and back, followed by frantic calls for help from the baby langur, brought the entire troop numbering 9 to its aid. The bird was forced to flee. It took some time for the noise to subside and the langur mother was found preening the head region of the still wailing baby. The bird strike is noteworthy and its cause is still mysterious in my mind. A survey of the area around revealed no nests, so defence of territory may be ruled out.

Later in the day, three species of raptors namely, the rufousbellied hawk eagle, a pair of black eagles and the osprey were sighted, along with a host of other birds, including the Great Indian Hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*), whose wing beats reverberate in flight, and can be heard from a long way off. Sheer observation of its beauty and flight is truly soul satisfying.

Returning through Kokkara, a pair of Southern Rufous Woodpeckers (*Micropternus brachyurus*) was observed feeding voraciously at a nest of arboreal wasps. They were probably starved and sure made a square meal of even the visually last wasp in the nest. Their rapid pecks, almost non-stop lasted for 7 min 7 secs on our stopwatch and during this time, being unmindful of our approach, allowed us to get as close as 5 ft from their *Terminalia chebula* tree. In the fading twilight we also spotted the rare Small Travancore Flying Squirrel (*Petinomys fuscocapillus*) out foraging. We ended our great day with a much needed cup of fresh nilgiri tea.

Of the two species of storks seen in Periyar, namely, the Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*) and Whitenecked Stork (*Ciconia episcopus*), the latter was found nesting. One nest with fledgelings was sighted very near the information centre at the Thekkady boat landing. A pair of *C. nigra* was seen in flight heading for the reserve, one evening while on our walk to Aanavachal Inspection Bungalow. The clumps of Bamboo trees along the way harbour a good population of the Indian Flying Foxes (*Pteropus giganteus*). We came across a King Vulture (*Torgos calvus*), scavenging on a fresh Smabar Deer kill (*Cervus unicolor*) by wild dogs (*Cuon alpinus*) at Iyappan

Kurruku, on 19 Feb '94 while on our way to a camp in Thannikudi. I have come across a pair of the Yellow Wattled Lapwings feeding near the Periyar Dam site and once in Kokkarapakkam. This appears to be fairly uncommon and a stray case. Both at Kalveri and Ummikuppan, Blackcapped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*), Brown-headed Storkbilled Kingfisher, (*Pelargopsis capensis*) Blue-eared Kingfisher (*Alcedo meninting*) Whitetailed Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), Black Bittern (*Dupetor flavicollis*) and Malabar Whistling Thrush (*Myiophonus horsfieldii*) were recorded.

A mixed fishing 'party', comprising of a large cormorant, 3 lesser cormorants, 7 river terns, a single whitenecked stork, 2 median egrets, a single pond heron and 23 little egrets were seen feeding on aquatic life on the lake on 25 Feb '94. What surprised me was that, along with the alternate 'bobbing' behaviour of the cormorants, the pond hereon was found 'swim feeding' in the water. This 'swim feeding' behaviour of the pond heron is noteworthy as, herons are waders and do not exhibit 'swim feeding'. The bird, in its quest for prey, would have found itself in deep water, I clocked this to 1 min and 35 secs.

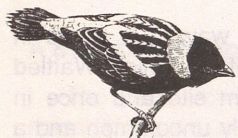
I shall be doing great injustice, to the flora and fauna of the reserve, if I do not mention the perils of Periyar. Illegal overfishing, large scale cutting down of trees (average 2 tonnes per day) for sandalwood, timber and firewood by locals for cooking, heating, etc., shameless poaching of animals, linen and cloth washing in the river by dhobies, stray cattle grazing and the littering of plastic, glass bottles and beer cans, both by locals and with the influx of foreign tourists are all taking their severe toll on the ecosystem of the reserve. One dung analysis of elephants revealed the undigested parts of a man's vest and a piece of polythene in it. Even the behaviour of these beasts is undergoing changes due to human interference. They are known to charge on approach. It would only be wise for the Forest Department to check these pressures effectively, to save what is left of the pristine yet fast degrading natural resource.

I am thankful to Mr. James Zacharia, the Research Range Officer, my colleagues, boat staff and the loyal tribal watchers, whose integrated help has made wildlife study in PTR meaningful and worthwhile. Together we look forward to many more revelations of mother nature in Periyar, in the future.

## References

- Ali, S. and Ripley, S.D. (1987) Compact Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan, Oxford University Press, Delhi
- Blyth, Winter. (1957) Butterflies of the Indian Region, BNHS, Bombay
- Philip, V. (1991) Birdwatching – A Soaring Pastime, The Hindu.





## Birdwatching on a Trek in the Himalayas

MANU PRASANNA, 5, 3rd Cross, Nehru Nagar, Bangalore 560 020  
and ROBERT BAGCHI, 325/1, Inner Circle, Whitefield, Bangalore 560 066

We had the opportunity to trek in the Tons sanctuary of Uttarkashi district in Uttar Pradesh from 26th May to 1st June 1994. Of the glories of the area and its surrounds an excellent account is to be found in Sir John Hewett's book – Jungle Trails in Northern (1938), being extracts from the diary of B.B. Osmaton of the Forest service with whom he had undertaken a march in the area. Our trek took us from Sankri (1500m) through Taluka 1900 M, Seema 2551 M and finally to Harkidun 3557 M.

As the trek on the way up to Harkidun was very tough and tiring, we could not pay much attention to the bird life of the region. Only on our way down did we get an opportunity to do a bit of birdwatching.

Harkidun is a valley surrounded by snow-capped peaks, the highest being Mt. Swarga Rohini which is at an elevation of 6250m. Swarga Rohini has a legendary association with the Pandavas for mythology states that they ascended to heaven from here. In Harkidun the vegetation consists mainly of rhododendron thickets and shrubs. However as the Harkidungad (a tributary of the river Supin) cascades down the valley a few coniferous trees add to the beauty of the landscape.

In Harkidun on 29th a group of 50 Red billed choughs *Pyrhocorax pyrhocorax* and groups of Snow pigeons *Columba leuconota* were seen flying about. We had the opportunity to observe a Brown dipper *Cinclus pallasii* at very close quarters in the rapid flowing Supin river which was close to our campsite. We also got to observe and photograph Himalayan mouse hare, Himalayan jungle crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*, and a River chat *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*.

The route from Harkidun to Seema on 30th took us through steep rocky slopes, coniferous forests consisting of conifers like Pine, Deodar, Spruce, Fir and some mixed forests. The picturesque sceneries highlighted this steep descent of over 1000m.

At 1.30 pm we spotted the carcass of a calf guarded by a scavenging dog. A scattered group of 9 Himalayan bearded vultures *Gypaetus barbatus* along with 30 Himalayan griffons *Gyps himalayensis* were seen sitting on nearby rocks and two pine trees overlooking the carcass. We watched the vultures at close quarters as they allowed us to approach within 30 ft of them. The Himalayan griffons and a few Bearded vultures tried to land on the carcass but were immediately chased away by the dog. The Bearded vultures indulged in aerial courtship display and uttered high pitched 2 note whistles while locking claws and tumbling through the air.

At 2.30 p.m. we encountered a pair of Orange flanked bush robins *Erithacus cyanurus*. We sat down to watch them and soon discovered that they had a nest in a nearby nullah. The nest was built in a small hollow in the ground on a slope inclined at about 50° and was hidden by grass and creepers. There were three fledglings in the nest. During our short stay the male was bolder and made more visits to the nest than

the female. We also saw the nest of a Yellow billed chough *Pyrhocorax graculus* placed precariously on a rock just 1 foot above the rapid torrential Supin river.

Himalayan greenfinch *Carduelis spinoides*, Rock bunting *Emberiza cia*, and Rosefinches were seen in large numbers in the fields we passed through.

We also encountered Rufous Turtle dove *Streptopelia orientalis*, Bar throated Siva *Minla strigula*, River chat, Pied flycatcher shrike *Hemipus picatus* and Brown dipper on our way to Seema.

On 1/6/94 we trekked from Seema to Taluka. This route mainly took us through evergreen forests. Large evergreen trees with buttressed boles were dominant, the undergrowth consisted of rhododendron and bamboo along with nettles and ferns.

Throughout the journey we encountered Himalayan pied woodpeckers *Picoides himalayensis* in twos and threes and Himalayan Tree-creepers *Certhia himalayana* in search of food on lofty evergreen trees. Green Backed Tits *Parus monticolus* and Black Bulbuls *Hypsipetes madagascariensis* were also seen throughout.

We also encountered Rufous bellied Niltava *Muscicapa sundara*, Little Pied Flycatcher *Muscicapa westermanni*, Brown Dipper, Plumbeous Redstart *Rhyacornis fuliginosus*, Himalayan Griffon, Rufous Turtle Dove, Rock bunting and Tree Sparrows *Passer montanus* on our way down to Taluka.

On 2/6/94 the final stretch from Taluka to Sankri took us through Evergreen and Pine forests.

At 10 am a pair of Hobby *Falco subbuteo* was seen chasing away Himalayan Jungle crows. We stopped for a while to watch their high speed aerial display.

A pair of Little Forktail *Enicurus scouleri* was seen feeding at a small waterfall on a forest stream. White throated Laughing Thrushes *Garrulax albogularis* were seen in large groups.

When we entered the pine forests a group of about 100 Red Headed Tits *Aegithalos concinnus* was seen actively hopping about on pine trees. Noisy flocks of Nutcrackers *Nucifraga caryocatactes* and Red Crowned Jays *Garrulus glandarius* were also seen towards the end. Other birds spotted on this last stretch were Himalayan Pied Woodpecker, Rufous Bellied Woodpecker *Hypopicus hyperythrus*, Pied ground Thrush *Zoothera wardii*, Grey Drongo *Dicurus leucophaeus*, Yellow billed Chough, Plumbeous Redstart, Green backed Tit, House Martin *Delichon urbica* and Red billed Blue Magpie *Cissa erythrorhyncha*.

Our trek ended at Sankri on the 2nd of June and we left for Dehra Dun the next day.

### References

- Ali, Salim and Ripley, S.D. (1983) : Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan  
Ali, Salim (1977) : Field guide to the Birds of the Eastern Himalayas.



## Reproductive age & Cycle, Sex-ratio and Longevity in the Indian Tailor Bird

H. DANIEL WESLEY, 126, Ramalinga Nagar South, Tiruchirapalli 620 017

### Introduction

A pair of the Indian Tailor Bird had successfully reared two broods of three fledglings each, and lost the third clutch of three eggs to the gale on the day, 27 July, '93, of its completion (Wesley 1993). The reproductive urge, not diminished, the male of the pair was frantically trying to make a nest in the pinnately partite leaves of a climber of horticultural interest since 7 August '93 till he gave up the attempt on 31 August '93 for the leaf being too soft and tearing at every jab of the bill and the grip of the claws. The pair were moving about in the vicinity of the former nest-tree and called alarm whenever I strayed into the territory. They became silent in the area since.

Breeding activities were evident again in the tailor bird being heard and seen in the former nesting territory from 9 November '93. In the same Terminalia a nest was being started by the male bird on 15 November, '93. The nest completed on the 20th, three eggs were laid, one each day, the clutch initiated on the 24th. The eggs were missing on 26 November, '93. Besides a couple of three striped squirrels, a calotes was moving about in the tree. On 24 December, '93 the female bird entered the nest and remained in it for 48 seconds; the male was close by in the tree. The nest was tatters on 1 January '94. Again, on 19, January, '94, the male bird started making a nest in another leaf in the tree. But the tree shed all the leaves including the green nest-leaf, following the flood in which the tree had stood for a few days. New leaves had sprouted and the male bird chose to make a nest in one on 3, February, '94. Although he had stitched the edges together, though partly, he tried six more leaves only to discard them all one after another and to come back to the first choice. Tightening the edges of the nest-leaf on 14 March '94 and finishing the nest on 24th, the female laid two eggs, one each day, on 27 and 28 March, '94 only to desert them.

### Reproductive Age

The pair young and fresh in appearance and the tailpin of the male not as long as that of the older pair, it is presumed that they were not the ones which had lost the eggs in the gale on 27 July, '93. They may have been of either the first or the second brood of that older pair. The first brood had fledged on 27 April, '93 and the second on 25 June, '93. The pair presumably of the second brood, the number of days that had elapsed since 25 June, '93 till 15 November, '93, both days inclusive, when they were actively engaged in nest building, was 144 which ought to be reckoned as the reproductive age of the species at Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu. On that score, the first brood of fledglings must have attained the reproductive age 59 days earlier and established their territory elsewhere.

If on the other hand these were of the first brood that must have reoccupied the territory by ejecting the parents and the second sister-brood of fledglings, the latter had not attained the age of reproduction, and the reproductive age would be reckoned as 203 days. It would be very unlikely that the pair from the first brood of fledglings had already had a brood elsewhere before venturing into this territory.

### Reproductive Cycle

The eggs were lost to predation on 26 November, '93. After 55 days, on 19 January, '94, the male bird was observed making stich-holes in a leaf in the terminalia tree. This is conformatory to and corroborative of the earlier finding that the interval between any two consecutive clutches of a pair of the Indian Tailor Bird would be 55 - 57 days and adding a minimum of four days for the nest construction, it would be from 59 to 61 days. But they could not have a brood raised for the loss of the nest. Ultimately, however, they established a nest with two eggs after another 67 days, the first egg laid on 27 March, '94. The environmental stress had been severe enough to delay the egg laying, upsetting the normal reproductive cycle by at least 63 days which means a reduction of the normal number of broods by one. Would any pair exhaust the life span without having any brood raised at all? is a moot point.

That the present pair of birds were the ones that had lost the clutch on 26 November, '93 is evident; they were not invaders of the territory. Interestingly, a pair that are established in a territory do not desert it despite calamities to the nest or brood. This site-tenacity must be a behavioural adaptation that has evolved in the species in response to the shortage of suitable environment to breed in. Once occupied, the territory is the rightful property inherited successively by certain of the descendents of the pair.

### Sex Ratio

In the event of the sex-ratio among the fledglings of the different and separate broods not known, it is not un-reasonable to assume that it could be either 2 Males : 1 Female or 1 Male : 2 Females. In either instance the surplus unpaired sex of one brood must inevitably pair with the opposite from the other. Perfectly smooth matching is possible when the overall sex-ratio is 1:1 when the number of broods brought forth by a pair of birds in a season is even.

### Longevity

In case these were not the old parent pair, the fate of them is not known : Had they attained senility and death, or fallen a prey to predators, or entered a neutral area for recuperation? It appears that the longevity of the bird-pair was about a year from hatching which may be characteristic of the species. That the parent-pair may have suspended the breeding activity for 112 days, (27 July '93 to 15 November, '93) seems preposterous for a re-selected organism that the species is.

### Summary

The Indian Tailor Bird at Tiruchirapalli attains reproductive age in 144 days.

A pair of birds have a life-span of about a year reckoning from the days of hatching.

The sex-ratio is expected to be 1:1 in the event of even number of broods produced per pair.

In the breeding female the reproductive cycle is regulated every 55-57 days except under extreme environmental stress when the number of broods may be cut down.

### Reference

Wesley, H.D. 1993. Voltinism in the Indian Tailor Bird. Newsletter for Birdwatchers, Vol. 33 (4) : 75-77.



## The 1994 Waterfowl Census in Sri Lanka

THILO W. HOFFMANN, National Coordinator, Ceylon Bird Club, C/o. P.O. Box 11, Colombo, Sri Lanka

The 11th waterbird count took place during the second half of January 1994. We covered the same areas as last year, and for the first time a part of the east coast centered on Trincomalee. We were lucky to have once again a member in Jaffna during the relevant period, and he was able to cover some of the Peninsular wetlands. Unfortunately, due to the security situation, counting north of Kalpitiya was considered risky and, therefore, omitted. Despite promises to the contrary, we failed this year to obtain any meaningful collaboration from the Department of Wildlife Conservation, although forms and letters of instruction had been sent to all the assigned Officers. As a result of this we have very few or no census figures for the Mahaweli areas (e.g. Villus, Maduru Oya and other reservoirs), as well as the Amparai area, which we had hoped to cover for the first time.

The main sectors were recorded on the basis of consolidated sites and are reported here in the usual geographical divisions (see Table 1). The count was most

disappointing in regard to numbers and species. Never before did we have such low numbers, and with just 76,000 birds (including 9500 in the Trincomalee sector), not much more than half of the disappointing total of the previous year. Heavy rain in the weeks leading up to the count appears to be the main reason for this unsatisfactory result. Up to the end of January Monsoonal precipitations in Sri Lanka were about 4 times higher than normal and it was the wettest North-East Monsoon season in many many years. As a result, all wetlands were brimful with water, a condition quite generally unattractive for waterbirds. Not only the tanks had practically no waterbirds, but also most of the coastal wetlands, such as lagoons, mud and sand-flats, etc. One wonders, of course, where the birds were. Did they not come to Sri Lanka at all, finding suitable conditions along the way? Or did they come and turn back? Or are the numbers migrating to this part of the world generally declining? Or is our own destination at the end of several migration routes becoming less attractive? There is certainly a disturbing

TABLE 1. Totals of Waterbirds and Distribution In Main Areas (since 1987)

Species	No. of Species	Total	Jaffna Area	Mannar Area	Portugal Bay To Chilaw Coastal	Puttalam Chilaw Fresh Water	Chilaw Galle All Wetlands	Galle Yala Coastal	Inland Tanks North	South East Fresh Water
Grebes	1	413			134	63	38	33	145	0
Pelicans	1	722			0	19	13	574	72	44
Cormorants & Darter	4	10,399			579	1789	792	2737	4387	115
Hérons	13	13,551			687	887	1518	3213	6387	859
Storks	6	1,035			75	238	97	510	100	15
Ibises	3	1,149			275	45	46	257	524	2
Flamingos	1	250						250		
Ducks	5	20,669			1564	4638	740	9358	4343	26
Rails, Coots	7	1,785			68	445	363	368	531	10
Jacanas	1	1,342			69	443	59	493	278	
Waders	37	69,066			7780	823	1973	56477	1733	280
Gulls, Terns	12	11,112			3251	663	3849	2079	1130	140
Raptors	7	108			17	17	33	13	28	
Grand Total :	98	131,601			14,499	10,070	9,521	76,362	19,658	1,491



Galle Ranna 1,668  
Hambantota 70,175  
Yala 4,519

Table 2. Totals of Main Sectors Compared with Previous Years

	1994	1993	1992	1991	1990
Jaffna	8,652	0	* 20,913	* 13,929	98,288
Mannar	0	0	* 400	* 1,213	48,730
Trinco	9,433				
Portugal Bay To Chilaw Coast	13,745	14,499	59,847	64,841	10,609
Puttalam - Chilaw Freshwater	5,061	10,070	7,938	22,405	3,746
Chilaw - Galle (all Wetlands)	6,772	9,521	16,357	14,867	5,711
Galle - Yala coast	21,739	76,362	70,295	18,111	73,699
Inland Wetlands (tanks) N	9,323	19,658	14,697	34,340	7,948
Inland Wetlands (tanks) S-E	1,196	1,491	676	5,461	5,097
* Part only.	75,921	131,601	191,123	175,167	253,828

TABLE 3. Totals of Groups of Waterbirds Compared with Previous Years

	1994	1993	1992	1991	1990
Grebes	139	413	561	177	150
Pelicans	756	722	908	3,010	1,323
Cormorants	8,461	10,399	15,543	20,897	7,849
Hérons	13,532	13,551	26,263	18,912	12,405
Storks	576	1,035	1,337	1,510	2,127
Ibises	1,392	1,149	1,038	1,270	1,038
Flamingoes	138	250	1,397	7	2,250
Ducks	18,276	20,669	38,718	42,460	105,250
Rails, Coots	940	1,785	2,249	4,149	2,082
Jacanas	736	1,342	0	0	0
Waders	20,257	69,066	81,261	57,357	89,567
Gulls, Terns	10,561	11,112	21,700	25,299	29,787
Raptors	157	108	152	119	0
	75,921	131,601	191,127	175,167	253,828

trend towards noticeably lower numbers from year to year (see Table 2). The highest number was 303,000 waterbirds in 1989, when the Mannar and Jaffna main areas were also censused.

Later in the season, by about March this year, the situation had changed somewhat and waterbirds were noted in greater numbers, with more species, especially in the Puttalam and Hambantota areas. This might indicate that many kinds of waterbirds would have lingered along the routes in Peninsular India and come over to Sri Lanka in greater numbers only after the heavy NE Monsoon rains.

Of the different geographical areas, the Hambantota area had the greatest deficit of nearly 60,000 birds compared with last year, but there were generally fewer waterbirds in Sri Lanka than in previous years (Table 2).

In regard to families or groups, the greatest reduction was in waders (minus nearly 50,000), down to an all-time low of 20,000 birds (Table 3). Ducks were also less, and so were most resident species, partly because of insufficient coverage (tanks and Mahaweli area).

89 different species were recorded, about 10 less than usual, mainly in the waders (Table 1). Rare birds were the Indian Reef Heron (4), Black-necked Stork (1), Lesser Adjutant (1), Glossy Ibis (37), Avocet (5), Spotted Redshank (1), Terek Sandpiper (7), Green Sandpiper (1), Temminck's Stint (1), Lesser Black-backed Gull (2). Only 138 Flamingoes were noted, 100 of which in Jaffna.

#### Habitats

The destruction and degradation of habitats continues, particularly in the Puttalam-Chilaw area, where aquaculture projects and salterns continue to expand at the expense of valuable wetlands and mangroves; even though there is a permit system, there is factually no control over these industries.

#### Acknowledgements

We thank NORAD for another generous grant of Rs. 42,000/- towards the cost of the 1994 waterfowl census; the total cost to members and the Club is estimated to be in the region of Rs. 1,20,000/-. Member Gunter Lamsfuss of Germany also donated Rs. 2,900/-. As in the past, A Baur & Co. Ltd., lent a vehicle.





## Some Habits of the Common and Lesser Coucals

MANOJ V NAIR, 34, Thoppil Nagar, Kumarapuram, Trivandrum, Kerala

After reading the synopsis of the thesis on the ecology of the Crow pheasant by V. Natarajan in the March-April issue of the NLBW, I went through my field notes and found that I had some observations of interest to share with the readers.

The first one concerns a strange, if not deviant nest building. I've seen only a very limited number (about seven or eight) of Crow pheasant nests and all except one were the usual large globular structures made predominantly of coconut palm leaves with grass blades, thin climber stems and rootlets used to a lesser extent. The aberrant nest was essentially similar in shape and structure to the normal coucal nest, but it was festooned with numerous pieces of small cloth of different colours which the owners of the nest had obviously purloined from some nearby tailor shop. The pieces of cloth were expertly inter woven with the nest lattice and was noticeably profuse around the lateral entrance hole. At first I mistook the raggy and gaudy affair for the nest of some rodent like the field mouse, (*Mus booduga*) but the three dirty white eggs suggested a coucal's ownership. Later I caught sight of the agitated nesting pair some distance away and calling it day I beat a hasty retreat from the scene. Whether coucals habitually make use of cloth pieces in nest building or whether this was a case of idiosyncrasy of the particular pair, remains for me a matter of conjecture.

The next one is with regard to the crow pheasant's habit of sunning. On several occasions I've observed them in the characteristic sun bathing posture, (ie with the tail and wings partially spread out) mostly perched on some low branches or rarely on the ground. But unfortunately no notes were kept of the time, climatic conditions etc and hence I am unable to chalk out a pattern, if any, for this behaviour. Early one January morning (17.1.93) I was lucky to watch a Crow Pheasant indulging in a very curious behaviour of a more or less similar nature. The bird was lying flat, the whole of the underparts pressed close against the sloping side of a haystack with the legs clinging tenaciously to the hay. The wings were fully spread out as was the long broad graduated tail. The coucal stayed in this seemingly blissful position for the next five odd minutes, occasionally shuffling itself,

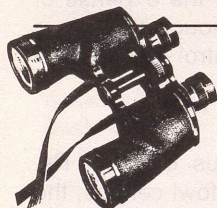
presumably to attain a more comfortable position. Probably the bird was making use of the warmth exuding out of the hay as a natural heater on that cold day.

It seems that the Lesser Coucal (*Centropus toulou*) takes after its larger cousin's affinity for sunning. At the Peppara sanctuary, where I was able to spend a few days, Lesser Coucals were observed sunning on two occasions, both times during which the sky had cleared after a slight drizzle. There was a lot to learn from the two Kani tribals whom I was lucky to have as trackers and whose exhaustive store of jungle lore was not only a treat but scientifically accurate as well. According to them 'Pulluppan' (meaning grass-haunting coucal) could be frequently seen sunning and the birds which are skulkers as a rule were quite easy to approach while doing so.

Although this behaviour is easily observed, as with other feather-maintenance activities there are controversies over its causation and function. It has been suggested by various authors that the bird's eyes absorb the ultra-violet rays; that the secretion of the oil gland when applied to the feathers provide vitamin D when exposed to sunlight; that the behaviour is a direct response to the exposure to heat and that it has simply a thermo regulatory function. In this context it would be very useful if some knowledgeable reader could provide some explanation to this behaviour in Cuculidae in general and genus *Centropus* in particular.

### References

- V. Natarajan (1994) Ph.D. Thesis Synopsis, NLBW Vol. 34, pg. 37- 38
- Niko Tinbergen (1954) Bird life, OUP
- Andrew J Berger (1961) Bird Study, John Wiley & Sons Inc U.S.A.
- A New Dictionary of Birds (1964). Edited by Sir Landsborough Thomson. British Ornithologist's Union
- Ali S and Ripley S.D. (1987) Compact Handbook II Edition. OUP.



## Birding in Hardy's Country : A Letter from England

JAMIL URFI, Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, Furzebrook Road, Wareham, Dorset, BH20 5AS, U.K.  
(Permanent address : A/270, Jamia Nagar, Okhla, New Delhi 110 025)

It has been more than a year since I came to England. My research project is concerned with the behavioral ecology of the Oystercatcher (*Haematopus oestralagus*), overwintering on the Exe estuary in Devon (South England) and, I like to think, this should some day make a neat story.

However, an account of what I am doing now may sound vague and incomplete, so I would like to devote this article to other interesting things and share with the readers of the Newsletter some of my recent birding experiences.

Readers may find the title of this article, 'Birding in Hardy's country' a bit odd. How does the name of one of the greatest English novelists figure in an article, written by an Indian, on British birds? Let me explain. During the last year I have stayed mostly in the counties of Devon and Dorset. These two, and parts of neighboring counties, constitute Thomas Hardy's "Wessex" – a place which Hardy fictionalized and where he lived for most of his life. Since I lived here for most of the time, I also did most of my birding in this part of the country. Interestingly, from a purely natural history point of view, Dorset today is also among the last few strongholds of 'heathland habitat' in Europe (Hardy enthusiasts may recall the vivid description of heathland in his novels). Not surprisingly therefore, my Institute also has a strong research interest in the ecology and conservation of heathlands.

It will not come as a surprise to anyone, I am sure, when I say that Great Britain (or the U.K.) is among the world's most 'birdy' countries. Perhaps, this has more to do with the large number of bird enthusiasts in this country, than to the presence of many extraordinary bird species. Compared with other countries in Europe, you are likely to find here many more people who take up birdwatching seriously as a hobby; The general public awareness about birds, conservation and nature issues is very impressive indeed. But having said that, there are still times when watching birds all the time i.e. professionally can strike as a bit odd. When I settled down to my humble lodgings in Dorset my landlady asked what sort of work I did at the place I worked at. I said that I was some sort of a scientist – an 'environmental scientist', if you please.

"Oh. Yes. I see what you mean. And do you study pollution in rivers and canals"? she enquired.

"No". I told her. I studied birds. A certain type of bird, to be exact. I wanted to go deep into what it ate, how it selected what to eat .... and so forth.

She was quite interested to hear this although, I suspect, slightly, amused. But as some sort of a "bird expert", perhaps I could suggest a solution to her problem ...

"You see", she explained "I have this bird feeding rack in my garden, which you have undoubtedly seen. I put nuts and bird seed in it for the birds to eat. It worked very well, but lately some squirrels have been getting up to it and eating all the food which I have been putting out for the birds. May be, you can suggest something".

Although I was delighted that this question had been put to someone who was thought of as an "expert", I racked my brain and almost wished that she had asked me something more straightforward instead. Something about ducks, Oystercatchers or bird migration (or even something about rajas, maharajas, fakirs and snake charmers, which surprisingly for many English people is all that there is to India). I remembered seeing an advert of a squirrel proof bird feeding rack in a glossy bird magazine in the library – the sort of thing with clever spring devices which clap shut under the squirrel's weight and close the entrance to the bird seed box.

I told her about it and she said that it sounded wonderful and there was no reason to doubt that it would work.

My oystercatcher work was done from bird hides in the middle of the estuary which I reached by boat at high tide. However, on some occasions I also worked on the coast where small numbers of oycs come to feed on mussels attached to rocks. Unfortunately for me the coast was also a very touristy spot and generally there would be plenty of people walking about, sometimes eyeing with curiosity a strange looking person peering through a telescope. I used a large wooden box with shoulder straps as a seat, which I had to carry with me all the time.

Those of you who have visited England might know that "sea watching" is a very popular pastime here (at least it is in this part of the country). People (very often elderly couples) come in their cars, which they park on a road facing the seafront and just sit inside for hours and hours, sipping "tea" (which is actually hot water spiced with tea leaves and with a spot of milk), reading the papers and watching the sea with great sadness in their eyes. Since Britain is an island I wonder, if this could be a manifestation of a certain feeling – a yearning for the life which exists beyond the horizon but which cannot be directly felt or experienced; life beyond the tides, the surf and the haunting calls of gulls.

One murky day, while I was walking across the beach, scanning for my birds – bins dangling from my neck and the wooden box strapped across my chest, a middle aged man came running excitedly towards me and said :

"Excuse me sir. Do you mind if I ask you, but are you a....er....a pigeon fancier?"

I told him that I was not and asked why he had thought that I might be one.

"Oh. I beg your pardon", he replied, "You see, my wife and I were sitting in our car on top of the beach and watching you scan the horizon with your bins. We thought that may be you were a pigeon trainer, looking for your pigeons flying over the sea. And that wooden box (he said, pointing to my seating devise) we thought was meant to keep the pigeons after you had found them."

I immediately realized that more than anything else, it was the wooden box which had given him a confusing signal. A bit embarrassed at first, I told him what I was doing and that I worked at the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology (if there could be such a thing as an "Institute of Terrestrial Ecology" then, by the same logic, is there also any "Institute of Extra-Terrestrial Ecology"; we laughed) on a research project on estuarine birds; that I came from India etc.

"And did you come from all that far just to see our birds"? he enquired.

I don't think that I could ever be wealthy enough to come to England just to see the birds, and if I did save some money for an ornitholiday I should first use it for a long stay in the Himalayas or a trip to Australia or Papua New Guinea.

However, the answer to his question, curiously enough, would have to be a "yes".

I could see that this gentleman was trying hard to understand what I was up to (doing research on estuarine birds. Indeed!) and when I hesitatingly said yes he found a slot where he could put me into. He exclaimed happily, with a gleam in his eye, "You're a twitcher. Aye?"

TWITCHER. That was a new word for me although I could guess what it meant. I have never been a twitcher in my life but hadn't I seen those extremely keen birdwatchers back home – the sort of people who are extremely good at bird identification and the moment they enter the field they can within seconds sniff out some of the most extraordinary birds. These are the people who can steal the show and give you an inferiority complex just when you are trying to impress someone with your species identification knowledge. Bill Oddie, one of Britain's popular natural history writers and also a well known media/comic personality (see, **Bill Oddie's Little Black Bird Book** (Methuen 1980), if you can lay your hands on it) says that most people who are interested in birds can be put, broadly speaking, into one of the following categories : Ornithologist, Bird fancier, birder, Twitcher, Dude ... etc. Leaving aside the Ornithologist, who can also be "the most boring person on earth", it is plain that the dude is a bit dim in matters pertaining to birds and the twitcher most aggressive and competitive.

I think, in England, a lot of what the twitchers do deals with ticking on lists like species seen per hour/per day/per year/per town/per country etc. And very often the emphasis is on rarities. This realization came to me once in a very interesting manner. One sunny morning while I was doing work on the coast, I noticed a large bus stopping closeby. From it emerged an army of birdwatchers with anxious, expectant looks on their faces. One of them, a plump lady with a cheerful expression who obviously mistook me for a fellow twitcher, hurried towards me and wanted to know whether I had already seen "it" and where "it" was. (For twitchers, it appears, who sees "it" first is terribly important). At first I didn't understand what she was referring to but it soon dawned upon me that the news was that a single Avocet had been seen on the Exe estuary and all these lovely people had come to see it. (Avocet's breed in many areas of Europe, particularly France, Holland, Portugal, South Sweden but in England they are generally a 'not so common' winter visitor). According to Bill Oddie, 'news of a rare bird spreads along the grapevine – a sort of jungle telegraph that is as mysterious as it is efficient. But perhaps not so mysterious. In England the twitchers can just pick up the telephone, dial 'bird hotline' and get to know about any rarities in their area. Can't they?

Certain things about Ecology, in the eyes of a person coming from a different part of the world (in my case from India to Europe) really stand out. In a recent issue of the *Newsletter*, V Subramanya for instance, commented on the larger body sizes of the birds he saw in Canada and remarked how true 'Bergman's rule' is. Another thing, in the

Northern Hemisphere is the contrast in daylengths between summer and winter. After having experienced the four seasons you can lie back and think of all those wonderful things you read in your ecology classes — about daylength changes influencing bird migration and say that it makes perfect sense. However, there are other things also which attract attention: The relatively high productivity and low diversity of temperate zone ecosystems compared with ours, patterns of landscape, nature reserves and conservation. In UK most land is privately owned and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), English Nature (the UK governments statutory nature conservation body) and some other bodies step in to purchase or lease those patches deemed to be of conservation significance. Interestingly, the RSPB has the largest public membership of any conservation body in the UK (in excess of one million member) — perhaps a testimony to the popularity of birds as a conservation theme, compared with other fauna and flora.

Having seen vast stretches of forest/natural habitat at home, the considerably smaller size of nature preserves in the UK sometimes appears disappointing. But I think the big difference for an Indian, when he goes to see a nature preserve in the UK is that all around him he has been seeing beautiful, lush green country and the nature preserve turns out to be not too different — only a small plot, usually very carefully and scientifically managed for the benefit of a single or few species. In India, a visit to a national park is something very special — a dramatic change in landscape from a generally drab/brown country to a land of greenery, mystery and jungle creatures.

I must confess that I have not done as much birdwatching as I used to do. However, there are some birds, although not so inconspicuous and hence not challenging enough from a twitchers point of view, which an Indian birdwatcher finds very fascinating. Swans for instance. There is so much about swans in our mythologies but you hardly ever get to see them except as vagrant/rare winter visitors at some high altitude lakes in the Himalayas. In this part of the world, however, Mute Swans (*Cygnus olor*) among others are common residents (although my colleague Humphrey Sitters points out that they may have been introduced to these parts from the European continent, at some point in the past). In Wareham last summer, on my way to the town centre, I used to walk on a public footpath which runs along a river. A pair of swans built a nest near the river and sometime later I saw 6-7 cygnets — all very dull and grey, hardly knowing what a glorious future awaited them. The swan family became the centre of attraction and tourists would bring food for the little ones. Since I left Wareham to live in Devon to do field work I don't know what happened to the family. I imagine some ornithologists got at the cygnets and slipped rings on their feet or strapped radio-transmitters on their backs.

The south coast of England is a very important wintering area for waders and waterfowl. In winter, the Exe estuary has large flocks so Dunlin, Redshank, Barwits and Blackwits (I mean, Bar-tailed Godwits and Black-tailed Godwits, respectively), Sanderling, Grey Plover, Ringed Plover,

Shoveller, Pintail, Mallard, Common Teal etc. This group of birds is very international in character and are seen in India also. However, some waterbirds which I was particularly thrilled to see, because I had not seen them before are: Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*), Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*), Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*) and Brent Goose (*Branta bernicla*) among others.

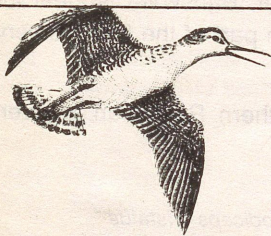
I think I have already said a lot about twitchers and if I continue to say more I could be accused of stretching things a bit too far. However the fact is that amateur, voluntary input, whether by twitchers or just ordinary birdwatchers, is a crucial element in professional British Ornithology. It is amazing how the system works — the fact that it works so successfully is perhaps a testimony to the long standing tradition of natural history in this country, best exemplified not only in the names of such giants as Charles Darwin and Gilbert White but in the works and contributions of countless others. In UK each year thousands of birds are netted and ringed all over the country and this work is carried out mostly by volunteers under the supervision of a small group of scientists principally employed by the *British Trust for Ornithology*, which is currently running several schemes on migratory bird counts, nest counts etc. The data can be made available to anyone — from local conservation management officers to theoretical ecologists (testing theories on population dynamics and chaos!). Personally, some of the most exciting events I participated in last year were canon-netting waders and ringing birds and these events were organised by local bird clubs in Devon.

A very significant happening in the bird world last year was the publication "**The New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland: 1988-1991**" (compiled by DW Gibbons, JB Reid and RA Chapman and sponsored by the British Trust for Ornithology, Scottish Ornithologists Club and the Irish Wildbird Conservancy). With inputs deriving from over 200 amateur birdwatchers working at the level of a tetrad (2 km square) across these countries, this work maps the distribution, abundance and, most importantly, changes in

abundance of most of the breeding British birds. The predecessor of this atlas is the '*1968-72 Atlas of breeding birds in the British Isles and Ireland*' (compiled by JTR Sharrock), which is also the baseline from which changes in abundance in the new atlas have been estimated. There are two unique features to this new atlas: Firstly, an attempt to remove any bias due to the unequal representation of volunteers in any part of the country. Volunteers were instructed to visit a tetrad in their area and record numbers of breeding birds of all species in no more and no less than two hours. Since the objective was to assess how densities varied within species and not between species, it did not matter whether all the species (including the elusive ones) had been seen or not. Secondly, the latest printing technology has been used to show at a glance three things: For each species there is a national map of distribution, abundance and of changes in abundance since 1972. The last map is most impressive because the changes in abundance have been shown by using innovative cartographic techniques, such as using the colours of the thermal spectrum.

One can only imagine what a tremendous amount of information is contained in this atlas and the ways (for research or conservation) in which this information can be utilized. Although bird atlases are being produced in many countries on nearly all continents, we haven't yet taken any steps in this direction in India. Perhaps we should soon, and start with several regional atlases in the first instance. Perhaps this is a task which the Ornithological Society of India can take up in which all of the regional secretaries can coordinate inputs from their respective areas. Till then CHEERS MATE.

Several people read and commented on previous drafts of this article. I wish to particularly thank Humphrey Sitters, Bernd de Bruijn, John Goss-Custard, Jane Goss-Custard, Richard Caldow, Ed Rispin, Rebecca Spurk and Tara Gandhi.



**Birds of Southern Rajasthan**

SATISH KUMAR SHARMA, Range Forest Officer, Aravalli Afforestation Programme, Jhadol (F.),  
Udaipur Dist, Rajasthan 313 702  
and RAZA TEHSIN, 41, Panchwati, Udaipur 313 001

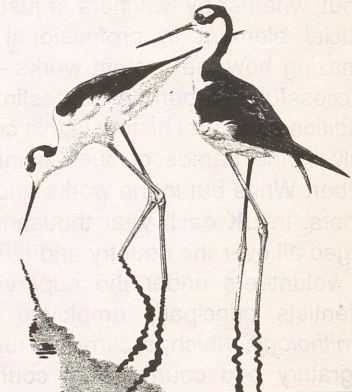
In the present article resident and migratory birds seen in the seven districts viz. 1. Bilwara, 2. Rajsamand, 3. Chittorgarh, 4. Udaipur, 5. Sirohi, 6. Dungarpur and 7. Banswara (Fig.1) in southern Rajasthan have been listed. These districts are confined to the southern portion of the Aravalli Range, which is one of the oldest ranges of the world and the principal mountain range of the State of Rajasthan. It runs diagonally across the State from north-east near Delhi and extends to the south-west up to the plains of Gujarat. Its

south-west end is partly submerged into the Arabian Sea. Structurally Aravalli is composed of rocks belonging originally to the Delhi system, folded in a synclinorium occupying the site of geosyncline, which have been deeply eroded but still with several summits of over 1225 m in height. The average elevation of this range is about 600 metres to 1158 metres. The highest peak 'Gurushikhar' (1727 m) is located in this hill region in the Mount Abu batholith. The highest section of the Aravalli range lies north-west of Udaipur between

Kumbhalgarh (1206 m) and Gogunda (1090 m). The second highest peak 'Jarga' lies in this region and the largest river, Banas of Rajasthan originates from this mountain range.

South Rajasthan is wetter than the rest of the State. The rainfall conditions, type of vegetation and type of climate are tabulated below.

Name of Dist.	Normal annual rain fall (mm)	Type of vegetation	Type of climate	Remarks
Sirohi (Mt. Abu)	1767	Subtropical	Wet or/Humid	Low wet or humid
Sirohi (Plains)	542	Thorn forest and dry deciduous forest	Semi-arid	
Banswara	934	Dry deciduous forest	Sub-humid	
Chittorgary	753	- do -	- do -	
Dungarpur	697	- do -	- do -	
Bhilwara	745	- do -	- do -	
Udaipur	623	Dry deciduous and thorn forest	Semi-arid	
Rajasamand	600	- do -	- do -	



Besides Mt. Abu, the southern Aravallis are clad with dry deciduous type of forest. Mathur (1966) has identified four types of forest in southern Rajasthan. Dry Teak forests located in the Banswara district where teak occurs in pure stands while it is found in a mixture with other trees in parts of Chittorgarh and Udaipur. Mixed Deciduous Forests are distributed in Udaipur and in some parts of Chittorgarh and

Sirohi. *Boswellia serrata* forest occurs in parts of Chittorgarh, Sirohi and Udaipur. Due to high altitude and high rainfall Sub-tropical Evergreen type of forests (52 sq km) are confined to Mt. Abu. Since Mt. Abu possesses a different type of climate and forest type, obviously its avian life is different from the rest of the southern Aravallis. Hence, Mt. Abu has not been included in the present article.

A network of seasonal rivers and nullahs are confined to southern Rajasthan. Mahi, Banas, Mansi-vakal, Som, Sei, Sabarmati, Berach, Ghambhiri etc. are important rivers of the zone. Rajsamand, Dhebar, Pichhola, Fateh Sagar, Gep Sagar, Udaisagar etc. are important lakes. Hundreds of dams of different capacity, anicuts etc. are there in southern Rajasthan. Countless ponds, ditches and other water bodies can be seen full of water from July to March, which attract a great number of waterfowl in winter. Banswara is ideal for waders. Indeed, the entire southern part of the State is very suitable for water birds.

A list of the birds seen in southern Rajasthan is given below.

#### Podicipedidae

001	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
002	Little Grebe	<i>P. ruficollis</i>

#### Pelecanidae

003	White or Rosy Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>
004	Spottedbilled or Grey Pelican	<i>P. philippensis</i>

#### Phalacrocoracidae

005	Large Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
006	Indian Shag	<i>P. fuscicollis</i>
007	Little Cormorant	<i>P. niger</i>
008	Darter or Snake-bird	<i>Anhinga rufa</i>

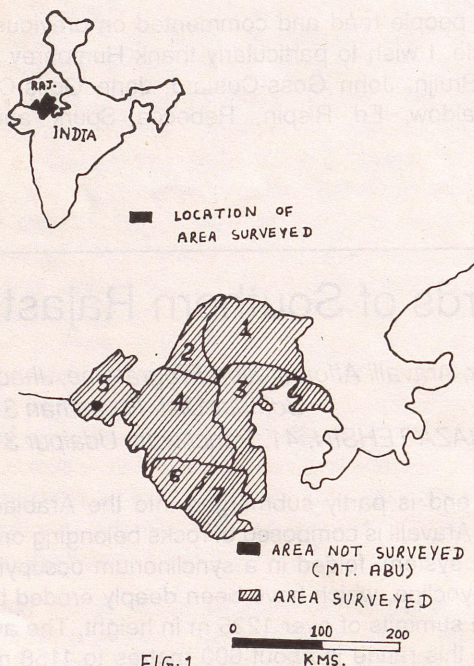


FIG. 1

Surveyed Districts Viz.,

- (1) Bhilwara, (2) Rajsamand, (3) Chittorgarh, (4) Udaipur  
(5) Sirohi, (6) Dungarpur and (7) Banswara.

**Ardeidae**

- 009 Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*  
 010 Purple Heron *A. purpurea*  
 011 Large Egret or Great White Heron *A. alba*  
 012 Pond Heron or Paddybird *Ardeola grayii*  
 013 Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*  
 014 Smaller or medium Egret *Egretta intermedia*  
 015 Little Egret *E. garzetta*  
 016 Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

**Ciconiidae**

- 017 Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala*  
 018 Openbill Stork *Anastomus oscitans*  
 019 Whitenecked Stork *Ciconia episcopus*  
 020 White Stork *C. ciconia*  
 021 Black Stork *C. nigra*  
 022 Blacknecked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*

**Threskiornithidae**

- 023 White Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopica*  
 024 Black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa*  
 025 Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*  
 026 Spoonbill *Platalea leucoroda*

**Anatidae**

- 027 Greyleg Goose *Anser anser*  
 028 Barheaded Goose *Anser indicus*  
 029 Lesser whistling Teal or Tree Duck *Dendrocygna javanica*  
 030 Ruddy shelduck or Brahminy Duck *Tadorna ferruginea*  
 031 Pintail *Anas acuta*  
 032 Common Teal *A. crecca*  
 033 Spotbill Duck *A. poecilorhyncha*  
 034 Mallard *A. platyrhynchos*  
 035 Wigeon *A. penelope*  
 036 Shoveller *A. clypeata*  
 037 Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*  
 038 White-eged Pochard or Ferruginous Duck *A. nyroca*  
 039 Tufted Duck *A. fuligula*  
 040 Cotton Teal or Guacky duck *Nettapus coromandelianus*  
 041 Nukta or Comb Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos*

**Accipitridae**

- 042 Blackwinged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*  
 043 Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*  
 044 Black kite *Milvus migrans migrans (?)*  
 045 Pariah Kite *M. migrans govinda*  
 046 Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*  
 047 Shikra *Accipiter badius*  
 048 Sparrow-hawk *A. nisus*  
 049 Longlegged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*  
 050 White-eyed Buzzard-Eagle *Butastur teesa*  
 051 Crested Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus*  
 052 Twany Eagle *Aquila rapax*  
 053 Black or King Vulture *Sarcogyps calvus*  
 054 Indian longbilled Vulture *Gyps indicus*  
 055 Indian Whitebacked Vulture *G. bengalensis*  
 056 Scavenger Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*  
 057 Pale Harrier *Circus macrourus*

- 058 Montagu's Harrier  
 059 Marsh Harrier  
 060 Short-toed Eagle  
 061 Crested Serpent Eagle

**Falconidae**

- 062 Redheaded Merlin *Falco chicquera*  
 063 Kestrel *E. tinnunculus*

**Phasianidae**

- 064 Painted Partridge *Francolinus pictus*  
 065 Grey Partridge *F. pondiceranus*  
 066 Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*  
 067 Blackbreasted or Rain Quail *C. coromandelica*  
 068 Rock Bush Quail *Perdica argoondah*  
 069 Red Spurfowl *Galloperdix spadicea*  
 070 Grey Junglefowl *Gallus sonneratii*  
 071 Indian Peafowl *Pavo crstatus*

**Gruidae**

- 072 Sarus Crane *Grus antigone*  
 073 Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo*

**Rallidae**

- 074 Ruddy Crake *Porzana fusca*  
 075 Whitebreasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*  
 076 Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*  
 077 Purple Moorhen *Porphyrio porphyrio*  
 078 Coot *Fulica atra*

**Otididae**

- 079 Likh or Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica*

**Jacaniidae**

- 080 Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus*  
 081 Bronzewinged Jacana *Metopidius indicus*

**Charadriidae**

- 082 Redwattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*  
 083 Yellow-wattled Lapwing *V. malabaricus*  
 084 Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*  
 085 Kentish Plover *C. alexandrinus*  
 086 Curlew *Numenius arquata*  
 087 Blacktailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*  
 088 Bartailed Godwit *L. lapponica*  
 089 Spotted or Dusky Redshank *Tringa erythropus*  
 090 Common Redshank *T. totanus*  
 091 Marsh Sandpiper or Little Greenshank *T. stagnatilis*  
 092 Wood or spotted Sandpiper *T. glareola*  
 093 Common Sandpiper *T. hypoleucos*  
 094 Common or Fantail Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*  
 095 Little Stint *Calidris minuta*  
 096 Ruff and Reeve *Philomachus pugnax*

**Rostratulidae**

- 098 Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*

**Recurvirostridae**

- 099 Blackwinged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*  
 100 Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

**Burhinidae**

- 101 Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicephalus*  
 102 Great Stone Plover *Esacus magnirostris*

**Glareolidae**

- 103 Creamcoloured or Desert Courser *Cursorius cursor*  
 104 Indian Courser *C. coromadelicus*  
 105 Small Indian Pratincole or Swallow-plover *Glareola lactea*

**Laridae**

- 106 Brownheaded Gull *Larus brunnicephalus*  
 107 Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*  
 108 River Tern *Sterna aurantia*  
 109 Littel Tern or Ternlet *Sterna albifrons*

**Pteroclididae**

- 110 Large Pintail Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata*  
 111 Indian sandgrouse *P. exustus*  
 112 Painted sandgrouse *P. indicus*

**Columbidae**

- 113 Green Pigeon *Treron phoenicoptera*  
 114 Blue Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*  
 115 Indian Ring Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*  
 116 Red Turtle Dove *S. tranquebarica*  
 117 Spotted Dove *S. chinensis*  
 118 Little Brown or Senegal Dove *S. senegalensis*

**Psittacidae**

- 119 Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria*  
 120 Roseringed Parakeet *P. krameri*  
 121 Blossomheaded Parakeet *P. cyanocephala*

**Cuculidae**

- 122 Pied Crested Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus*  
 123 Common Hawk-Cuckoo or Brainfever Bird *Cuculus varius*  
 124 Cuckoo *C. micropterus*  
 125 Indian Plaintive Cuckoo *Cacomantis passerinus*  
 126 Koel *Eudynamis scolopacea*  
 127 Sirkeer cuckoo *Taccocua leschenaultii*  
 128 Crow-Pheasant or Coucal *Centropus sinensis*

**Strigidae**

- 129 Barn Owl *Tyto alba*  
 130 Scops Owl *Otus scops*  
 131 Collared Scops Owl *O. bakkamoena*  
 132 Great Horned or Eagle-Owl *Bubo bubo*  
 133 Dusky Horned Owl *B. coromandus*  
 134 Brown Fish Owl *B. zeylonensis*  
 135 Jungle Owlet *Glaucidium radiatum*  
 136 Spotted Owlet *Athene brama*  
 137 Forest Spotted Owlet *A. blewitti* (?)

**Caprimulgidae**

- 138 Common Indian Nightjar *Caprimulgus asiaticus*

**Apodidae**

- 139 Alpine Swift *Apus melba*  
 140 House Swift *A. affinis*  
 141 Palm Swift *Cypsiurus parvus*

**Alcedinidae**

- 142 Lesser Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*  
 143 Small Blue Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*  
 144 Whitebreasted Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*

**Meropidae**

- 145 Bluetailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus*  
 146 Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*

**Coraciidae**

- 147 Kashmir Roller *Coracias garrulus*  
 148 Blue Jay or Indian Roller *C. benghalensis*

**Upupidae**

- 149 Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

**Bucerotidae**

- 150 Grey Hornbill *Tockus birostris*

**Capitonidae**

- 151 Large Green Barbet *Megalaima zeylanica*  
 152 Crimsonbreasted Barbet or Coppersmith *M. haemacephala*

**Picidae**

- 153 Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*  
 154 Rufus Woodpecker *Micropternus brachyurus*  
 155 Lesser Goldenbacked Woodpecker *Dinopium benghalensis*  
 156 Yellofronted Pied Woodpecker *Picoides mahrattensis*  
 157 Pygmy Woodpecker *P. nanus*

**Pittidae**

- 158 Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura*

**Alaudidae**

- 159 Redwinged Bush Lark *Mirafra erythroptera*  
 160 Ashycrowned Finch-Lark *Eremopterix grisea*  
 161 Rufoustailed Finch-Lark *Ammomanes phoenicurus*  
 162 Short-toed Lark *Calanderella cinerea*  
 163 Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

**Hirundinidae**

- 164 Dusky Crag Martin *Hirundo concolor*  
 165 Swallow *H. rustica*  
 166 Wiretailed Swallow *H. smithi*  
 167 Striated or Redrumped Swallow *H. daurica*

**Laniidae**

- 168 Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*  
 169 Baybacked Shrike *L. vittatus*  
 170 Rofousbacked Shrike *L. schach*

**Oriolidae**

- 171 Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*  
 172 Blackheaded Oriole *O. xanthornus*

**Dicruridae**

- 173 Black Drongo or King-Crow *Dicrurus adsimilis*  
 174 Whitebellied Drongo *D. caerulescens*

**Artamidae**

- 175 Ashy Swallow-Shrike *Artamus fuscus*

**Sturnidae**

- 176 Blackheaded or Brahminy Myna *Sturnus pagodarum*  
 177 Rosy Starling or Rosy Pastor *S. roseus*  
 178 Pied Myna *S. contra*  
 179 Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*  
 180 Bank Myna *A. ginginianus*

**Corvidae**

181	Indian Tree Pie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>
182	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
183	Jungle Crow	<i>C. macrorhynchus</i>
184	Punjab Raven	<i>C. corax subcorax</i>

**Campephagidae**

185	Common Wood Shrike	<i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i>
186	Large Cuckoo-Shrike	<i>Coracina novaehollandiae</i>
187	Small minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>

**Irenidae**

188	Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
189	Goldmantled Chloropsis	<i>Chloropsis cochinchinensis</i>

**Pycnonotidae**

190	Redvented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
-----	------------------	-------------------------

**Muscicapidae**

191	Spotted Babbler	<i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>
192	Scimitar Babbler	<i>Pomotorhinus schisticeps</i>
193	Whitethroated Babbler	<i>Dumentia hyperythra</i>
194	Yellow-eyed Babbler	<i>Chrysomma sinense</i>
195	Common Babbler	<i>Turdoides caudatus</i>
196	Large Grey Babbler	<i>T. malcolmi</i>
197	Jungle Babbler	<i>T. striatus</i>
198	Redbreasted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa parva</i>
199	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>M. tickelliae</i>
200	Whitebrowed fantail Flycatcher	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>
201	Whitespotted Fantail Flycatcher	<i>R. albicollis</i>
202	Greyheaded Flycatcher	<i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>
203	Indiah Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
204	Streaked Fantail Warbler	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
205	Ashy-grey Wren-Warbler	<i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>
206	Streaked Wren-Warbler	<i>P. gracilis</i>
207	Plain Wren-Warbler	<i>P. subflava</i>
208	Ashy Wren-Warbler	<i>P. socialis</i>
209	Tailor Bird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
210	Indian Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus stentoreus</i>
211	White Throat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>
212	Desert Warbler	<i>S. nana</i>
213	Chiff-Chaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
214	Rubythroat	<i>Erithacus calliope</i>
215	Bluethroat	<i>E. svecicus</i>

216	Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
217	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
218	Brown Rock Chat	<i>Cercomela fusca</i>
219	Collared Bush Chat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>
220	Pied Bush Chat	<i>S. caprata</i>
221	Desert wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>
222	Barne's Chat	<i>O. finschi</i>
223	Indian Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicata</i>
224	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
225	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>

**Paridae**

226	Grey Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
227	Whitewinged Black Tit	<i>P. nuchalis</i>
228	Yellowcheeked Tit	<i>P. xanthogenys</i>

**Sittidae**

229	Spotted Grey Creeper	<i>Salpornis spilonotus</i>
-----	----------------------	-----------------------------

**Motacillidae**

230	Tree pipit	<i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>
231	Paddyfield Pipit	<i>A. novaeseelandiae</i>
232	Tawny Pipit	<i>A. campestris</i>
233	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
234	Yellowheaded Wagtail	<i>M. citreola</i>
235	Grey Wagtail	<i>M. caspica</i>
236	White Wagtail	<i>M. alba</i>
237	Large Pied Wagtail	<i>M. maderaspatensis</i>

**Nectarinidae**

238	Purple Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>
-----	----------------	----------------------------

**Zosteropidae**

239	White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosa</i>
-----	-----------	-----------------------------

**Ploceidae**

240	Indian House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus indicus</i>
241	Yellowthroated Sparrow	<i>Petronia xanthocollis</i>
242	Baya	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>
243	Blackthroated Weaver Bird	<i>P. benghalensis</i>
244	Red Munia or Avadavat	<i>Estrilda amandava</i>
245	Green Munia	<i>E. formosa</i>
246	Whitethroated Munia	<i>Lonchura malabarica</i>
247	Spotted Munia	<i>L. punctulata</i>

**Emberizidae**

248	Greynecked Bunting	<i>Emberiza budianani</i>
249	Crested Bunting	<i>Melophus lathamii</i>

The presence of the Spotted Owlet (*Athene blewitti*) needs to be confirmed in southern Rajasthan. The first author and Mr AS Champawat IFS, Deputy Conservator of Forest had observed one pair (?) of owlets on a big *Madhuca indica* tree at *Phulwari Ki Nal* Wildlife Sanctuary in the summer of 1982. To capture them, a local tribal boy was hired. Unfortunately one escaped in a hollow of the tree, but the other was caught. The captured one was photographed and a few slides were taken before it was released on the same tree. In a personal communication, Mr J.C. Daniel said that its description does not match with the specimens

available with them. In a similar personal communication, Mr S.N. Satheesan opined that it may be *Athene blewitti*. All the slides were also shown to Dr Salim Ali. He suspected it to be a *A. blewitti*.

The Avian fauna of southern Rajasthan is very rich and interesting. The present work is only a preliminary survey. Further studies may result in additions to the present list.

**Reference**

Mathur, C.M. (1966). Forest types in Rajasthan, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur.



## An incident between a Koel and a Golden Oriole

AASHEESH PITTIE, 14-7-370 Begum Bazaar, Hyderabad 500 012  
and RAJEEV MATHEW, 6-3-912/1 Kapadia Lane, Somajiguda, Hyderabad 500 482

On the overcast morning of 19-6-1994 we were birding in the Nehru Zoological Park, Hyderabad. While observing various waterbirds in the small bird sanctuary area called Singosh Bund, within the zoo, the following incident occurred at approx. 12.15 p.m.

A sudden screaming made us look up into the huge rain tree under which we stood. A female Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea* was seen perched upon a nest of the Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*, which was on the extreme periphery of the tree's canopy, facing the water. The koel was screaming and pecking at something inside the nest! The victim was a female golden oriole, incubating her eggs! After a few seconds of this unusual struggle, the koel was warded off by the oriole, and it flew away, still calling. The oriole continued its incubation for another 30 odd minutes, when we left.

Though it parasitizes nests of the House Crow *Corvus splendens* and Jungle Crow *C. macrorhynchos*, there are stray records of koels laying in nests of the golden oriole (D'Abreu, 1927) and the Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* (Inglis, C.M., JBNHS. 18:682). Was this koel attempting brood-parasitism or was it trying to steal the eggs of the oriole, for a quick a meal? It is known to 'filch' eggs of small

birds like orioles and bulbuls. If the former, then this becomes a case of extreme desperation, unlike the usual 'stratagem, cunning and opportunism' employed by brood-parasitic koels. This is the breeding season for this bird and its population within the zoo is quite large. The fact remains that though the population of its usual victim, the house crow, is very large inside the zoo, most of these birds come here to feed on the debris of daily visitors. Very few crow nests are present within the boundary of the c.300 acre zoo. So koels may have to necessarily go out of the zoo campus to brood-parasitise.

If the koel was after food, would it have the gall to actually pounce upon a brooding oriole in an attempt to drive it off its nest and steal the eggs? Have our readers observed something like this?

### References

- Ali, S. & Ripley, S.D. (1987): Compact Handbook of the Birds of Indian and Pakistan, O.U.P.  
D'Abreu, E.A. (1927): Indian Cuckoo notes - Koel *Eudynamys S. scolopaceus* parasitising nest of Indian Oriole *Oriolus o. kundoo*. JBNHS. 31:4:1032-1033.



The Rajaji National Park near Dehra Dun flickers off and on in the flame of environmental controversy. Those NGOs who are with the Gujars, a pastoral community that lives within the National Park, and lop the trees to feed their stock, vigorously and vociferously protect their right to live within and continue to lop the forest and in course of time make themselves and the forest extinct. The opposite lobby would have them move out to the tender mercies of Government promises of a good life outside the forest in an entirely different life style in jerry built government colonies. In a reasonable and practical remedy to this contention lies the future of the Sanctuary. The sanctuary itself lies well protected by a Rau at the site of formal entry. A Rau is a boulder covered stream bed which except for an occasional flash flood during the monsoon remains a dry boulder strewn stream bed impossible for vehicular traffic. The forest department clears a road which lasts till the next flash flood. We crossed several Raus and reached the forest gate which blocks entry to the Dholkand Guest House. The forest department keeps itself a kilometre aloof from the Guest House. Dholkand built in 1883 is craftily situated on a hillock

## A day at Dholkand

DR. J.C. DANIEL

overlooking a Rau and thereby denies itself essential amenities like water. Bold black letters, proclaim that it was renovated in 1958 but it remains as visitor unfriendly as it was in 1883. It does not affect the forest officials though, their visit brings tankers of water, and generators for electricity which activate the built-in fittings for water and electricity for the fleeting moments of their stay. Equally it does not affect the young scientists of the Wildlife Institute who accompanied me. They are happy with its inadequacies as it keeps away visitors from their beloved study site. They however, carted up a barrel of water for our benefit but the VIP suite toilet has a permanently down seat making its use difficult for men and for the women who are intrepid enough to use it, a word of caution—a pair of small brown rats living behind the cistern. These minor irritations apart Dholkand is naturalists country. Summer is the season of song among birds and in late May, the Magpie Robin had already partitioned the sanctuary and each territory had its singing male advertising its ownership, making one wish that people would also settle their differences with song. Along the length of the Rau, Pittas were whistling their challenge and if you

are not familiar with a Pitta, imagine a gaily coloured easter egg with a head and legs fixed on it. For the Pitta has a very short inconspicuous tail, and from the bright colours on its body, it is locally known as Navrang. In spite of its colour it keeps a low profile during the non-breeding season and you are hardly likely to see it among the undergrowth in which it lives. I had not met the Pitta blatantly advertising itself. I had only seen it at Point Calimere Sanctuary in Tamil Nadu where it migrates to over a thousand kilometers from the Himalayas, on its way to Sri Lanka. Many are trapped and eaten by the locals at Pt. Calimere, who relish it. At Dholkand the method to watch birds is to lie flat on your back on the Verandah, away from the searing sun and identify birds by their call. We had five varieties of cuckoos on our list, all frantically advertising themselves. A majestic single tusker seen out at the edge of the Rau broke the general afternoon lull in activities. I was deposited in a watch tower over looking a water hole and the younger naturalists went to have a closer look at the tusker, who, probably anticipating such unwelcome visits, had already crossed the ridge into the next valley. At the pool, mynas were in command, officiously walking up and down at the edge of the water occasionally giving their 'grinding teeth' call. A few jungle fowl skulked around, always within reach of cover. A herd of Chital approached nervously, but fled in panic without drinking. Peace returned to the waterhole. On the Rau a young tusker crossed from one bank to the other and walked rapidly into

the jungle when he heard a car loaded with tourists rattling up to the watch tower. Our day's watching was ended as the car parked by the side of the pool and several people got out and entered into a vigorous noisy discussion of whatever was of immediate importance to them. Our younger group which had moved up the Rau were lucky indeed. They saw a tigress reclining in a pool of water. A sudden movement and the tiger was up and over the steep side of the Rau to be greeted by the alarm calls of peacock and chital. Back at the bungalow, Franklin's Nightjar whistled in the dusk and the Longtailed and Jungle Nightjars clanged steadily in the distance. We went to sleep on the terraced roof, elephants apparently saunter through the verandah at night. The next morning we met Prem Kali, the camp elephant. A mousy rather subdued character who seemed unhappy and bothered by the lack of water to bathe and cool herself. She glumly accepted a pair of biscuits, took us onboard and very carefully stepped down the hill and into the Rau. Elephant rides are exasperatingly slow and leave the impression of travelling eternally without getting anywhere. There was another tusker on the Rau, who fidgeted a bit on seeing us but kept his distance. We moved on. A tiger roared in the distance and there was a chorus of response from chital and peafowl. Prem Kali called it a day and we turned back enjoying along the way, the summer seasons gift in flowers, the Indian Laburnums "dropping-wells of fire".

### Interesting Sightings

#### **BLACK-BELLIED TERN IN SHIMOGA CITY. GURURAJA K.V. S/o. Sri K.V. ACHARYA, 90/8, Jail Road, Shimoga**

On 21st November 1993, I was engaged in Dr. Salim Ali Bird count in the early morning (between 0745 hrs to 1000 hrs) at Channamumbapura tank about 6 1/2 km north of Shimoga (13°56'N, 75°38'E)

As I was counting the waterfowl, a tern flew in from west with its characteristic flight. It had orangish-yellow bill, conspicuous black belly and long forked tail. Rummaging through my field guide, I confirmed it to be Black-bellied tern, *Sterna acuticauda*. It flew round the tank once and landed on a rock in the southern end. It sat quietly for around 20 minutes and then flew towards south.

Next Sunday (28th Nov 93) at the same place and at around 0800 hrs I sighted a pair of Black-bellied terns. Not much activity was observed and no nestings were found.

After that, even though I continued my search for them every Sunday, they were never sighted again.

To my knowledge, this is the first recorded sighting of Black-bellied tern at Shimoga city apart from earlier one at "Gudavi" sanctuary (around 90 km from Shimoga) in 1992.

#### **Acknowledgement :**

I am grateful to my brother, K.V. Chandrakanth and all the members of Shimoga Birdwatching Club.

#### **References :**

Dr. Salim Ali and Ripley S.D. A pictorial guide to birds of Indian Sub-continent.

Ben F King and Edward C Dickson. A field guide to Birds of South east Asia.



#### **SOME INTERESTING BIRD OCCURRENCES IN KUTCH.**

HIMMATH SINHJI, Jubilee Ground, Bhuj, Kutch, 370 001

Some of the older generation of ornithologists used to be (may be some few are in the present times also) dogmatic in their views on bird behaviour and movements. However so far as the birds themselves are concerned, so many factors govern their pattern of life that it would not be proper to hold set views on these issues. As it has been so often seen, this is a matter of on-going research and collection of evidences.

During the last century Dr. Ferdinand Stoliczka collected two specimens of a Bushchat or Whinchat *Saxicola macrorhyncha* a new discovery, which he described from Kutch and the bird was named after him. Today not a trace could be found of this whinchat in some of its old distributional areas including Kutch. To give another example, the Trumpeter Bullfinch *Carpodacus githagineus* a resident species in the northern parts of the subcontinent, was earlier recorded in Kutch, but in later years was not seen. Dr. Salim Ali has remarked in "The Birds of Kutch" thus : "I do not know how far Lester (Captain C.D. Lester who wrote the earlier

'Birds of Kutch', italics mine) is justified in including this species in his Kutch list". This Bullfinch was seen in Kutch in the year 1986 and also in the following year when a flock of 300+ birds was counted.

To give one more example in connection with what I want to convey, though I have mentioned this before, the report in the Journal of the BNHS of my seeing a Haircrested Drongo in Kutch resulted in frowns and expressions of doubt about the correctness of my identification of the bird from an experienced and senior ornithologist. It so happened that I saw *Dicrurus hottentottus* once again near Mandvi (Kutch) and was able to collect a specimen which reached the BNHS a day or two after the ornithologist had expressed his doubts about its occurrence in Kutch!

Who could have predicted, or imagined, that the Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* would not only come regularly to Saurashtra and Kutch, but also breed in big and small waterbodies during years having sufficient rainfall?

And lastly I shall deal with that peculiar, but handsome bird *Hypocolius ampelinus* (Grey Hypocolius or Shrike Bulbul) which has been looked upon with a certain amount of interest since the days of Blanford in the 1870s. Since then down the years to the time of that great naturalist, Dr. Salim Ali, the interest in this species has not waned. More sightings have been reported in the sub-continent in and after the eighties of this century. T.J. Roberts and others have reported sightings of the Grey Hypocolius from Baluchistan and Sind ('The Birds of Pakistan' Roberts). The bird has been seen on this side of the border too (a comprehensive report *in litt.*).

It may be too premature to go into details of the causes of the above-cited examples of occurrences or extension of ranges of the various birds concerned. However they do give rise to the need for regular vigilance and extensive surveys. In the cases of the Great Crested Grebe and the Grey Hypocolius, I would like to emphasize that a time has come for detailed observations by ornithologists and birdwatchers in general in Pakistan and their counterparts in India and for proper liaison between them along with the regular exchange of information. Thereafter the search or research can be extended on a wider scale to include neighbouring countries. In the case of the Shrike Bulbul wherever and whenever possible birds should be caught in mist nets and ringed. This would help collect important data on its movements. It need hardly be mentioned, for it is a known fact, that local or long distance migration or extension of ranges of birds could be caused through population explosions, lack of food supply, climatic changes and so on. Thus it is only through sustained exchange of information and research that final conclusions could be reached about the status and distribution of at least some of the birds which are seen more often at the present time than when the books we have with us for reference were printed.



**SIGHTING OF LARGE GREEN BARBET IN BANGALORE.**  
N.R. SWAMY, P.A. ULHAS, J. HEMANTH AND J.N. PRASAD, C/o Merlin Nature Club, 13, 8th Cross, 30th Main, J.P. Nagar I Phase, Bangalore 560 078

During a Nature trail organised by Merlin Nature Club to Bannerghatta National Park, Bangalore on 26 June 1994, we sighted a solitary Large Green Barbet *Megalaima zeylanica* perched on a Singapore Cherry tree *Muntingia calabura*. The bird was sighted on a cloudy morning with moderate to heavy breeze accompanied by occasional drizzle. The barbet was in the same position for nearly ten minutes offering an excellent opportunity for the entire group to observe its field characters before it flew away.

The HANDBOOK and Dr H.S.A. Yahya details the difference between the two species in his article "Some comments on Indian Barbets" (1991: NLBW: 31 (3+4): 3-4).

*M. zeylanica* has been absent in Bangalore for nearly two decades (George, 1994; Prasad, 1991). Martin (1991) reports the sighting of *M. zeylanica* at Cubbon park, Bangalore on 26 February 1991. However, the description of the species given in his note does not tally with that of *M. zeylanica*, but appears to agree with that of the more common Small Green Barbet *M. viridis*. Hence the present sighting of *M. zeylanica* is noteworthy.

#### References

- George, J. (ed.): An annotated checklist of Birds of Bangalore, Birdwatchers' Field Club of Bangalore, Bangalore.
- Martin, T. (1991): The Brownheaded Barbet, *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*, 31 (3+4), 6-7.
- Prasad, J.N. (1991): On occurrence of large Green Barbet in Bangalore, 31 (3+4): 6-7.



**SIGHTING OF REDCRESTED POCHARD IN KANHA TIGER RESERVE.** RAVISHANKAR KANOJE, Forest Ranger (Project Tiger, Kanha National park), Post Mukki, Via Baihar, Dt Balaghat (MP) 481 111

Kanha Tiger Reserve under Tiger Project is 1945 sq km in area. It comprises of core area 940 sq km as a National Park and Buffer zone 1005 sq km as a Game Reserve. It lies in the Maikal Hills in the Satpura Range in the Narmada basin in the Madhya Pradesh.

Hewetson (1955), Guntert & Homberger (1973), Anderson (1979) and Ranjit Singh (1983) recorded some species of birds in the Kanha National Park. Panwar (n.d.) produced the first check list of birds of the Kanha National park. Newton P.N., Breedan S., Nerman, C.J. (1986) recorded 225 species of birds including previously published observations in the Kanha National Park.

On the 23rd January 1993 I was doing mid-winter waterfowl census with 7 x 50 binocular in the Balagaon Tank

(22° 6'N and 80° 46' E) in the Buffer zone at the southern boundary of the core area. I noticed a group of 8 ducks with reddish head closely similar to the pinkheaded duck. I approached near it and on keen observation found that it had a chestnut head with crimson bill. It was the drake and the duck had dark brown crown with whitish cheeks. In fact it was Redcrested Pochard. This species is often mistaken for the Pinkheaded Duck (Ali, S. 1979). This is the first record of the Redcrested Pochard in the Kanha Tiger Reserve.

I thank Shri R.M. Qurashi and Shri Y.R. Patil for their participation in the census.

#### References

- Ali, S. (1979). The Book of Indian Birds. *Bombay Natural History Society*.
- Anderson, K. (1979). *Jungles Long Ago*, Calcutta. Rupa & Co.
- Guntert M and Homburger, D. (1973). Die Vogel des Kanha National parks am Ende der Monson Regenzeit in Kurt F (1973).
- Newton, P.N., Breeden, S., Norman, G.J. (1986). The Birds of Kanha Tiger Reserve, M.P. India. *Journal Bombay Natural History Society* Vd. 83(3).
- Panwar, H.S. (n.d.) Management Plan for Kanha Tiger Reserve 1973-74 to 1978-79. *M.P. Forest Department*.
- Ranjit Singh, M.K. (1983). Occurrence of lesser florican (*Sypheotides indica*) in Kanha National Parak. *Journal Bombay Natural History Society*, 80(3).



**OCCURRENCE OF THE HOBBY AND OBSERVATIONS ON LITTLE GREBE IN HYDERABAD, ANDHRA PRADESH**  
**AASHEESH PITTIE, 14-7-370 Begum Bazaar, Hyderabad 500 012, and RAJEEV MATHEW, 6-3-912/1 Kapadia Lane, Somajiguda, Hyderabad 500 482**

On 24.7.1994, we were watching birds in the Singosh Bird Sanctuary area of the Nehru Zoological park, Hyderabad. This is a small body of water, mainly created by inflows from the larger Mir Alam Tank close by and natural rainfall. Needless to say, a good variety of waterbirds inhabit it. Our attention was mainly riveted to 4 nests of Little Grebes *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, with a bird on each of them. The water level was rising, as a result of the rain, and at least one of the four pairs was busy adding more material to its partially floating nest. At this particular nest, the closest to us, one bird was sitting on the nest and had two precocious little chicks, perhaps 2 days old, moving about on the nest and every now and then climbing onto the adult's back and disappearing into its' scapulars. The young had black down with thin white stripes and a yellow and cherry beak.

While glassing the sky above the water, one of us (AP) saw a dark medium sized falcon alight in the top most branches of a tall eucalyptus tree, visible on the far side of the Singhosh Tank. As the bird was quite distant, it looked like a Shahin Falcon *Falco peregrinus* through an 8 x 40 pair

of binocs. Then we (RM) looked at it through the scope and realised it was a Hobby (now Eurasian Hobby) *Falco subbuteo* in classic plumage! The bird sat there for a few minutes and then took off. Moments later we saw it swiftly flap its way over the far trees and disappear from our view.

The Eurasian hobby is mainly a winter migrant (September- March/April) to the Indian mainland, coming down south to Mysore (Ali and Ripley, 1987). In recent times, the bird has been observed at Pondicherry (an immature bird by Santharam, 1990) on 10.11.1988 and near Bangalore (Jayant, et al, 1992) on 17.6.1989. The latter record is of relevance here, as it also occurred, like our observation, out of the migration period mentioned in Ali and Ripley. We too think this bird is a straggler, like the Bangalore bird.

#### References

- Ali, S. & Ripley, S.D. (1987): Compact Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan. 2nd edition, O.U.P.
- Jayant, M.S., Aditya, G.S., Hemant, J. (1992): Occurrence of the Hobby in Bangalore. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*, 32(7-8): 14.
- Santharam, V. (1990): A sight record of the Hobby *Falco subbuteo* near Pondicherry. *Blackbuck*, 6(1): 21.



**TICKELL'S LEAF WARBLER AND BLYTH'S PIPIT IN DIST. RAJKOT, GUJARAT.** S. ASAD AKHTAR and J.K. TIWARI, *Bird Migration Project, Bombay Natural History Society*

A specimen of the Tickell's Leaf Warbler, *Phylloscopus affinis* (Tickell) was caught during mist netting on 18.12.1989 in the Hingolghadh Nature Education Sanctuary, Rajkot dist., Gujarat. It's biometrics were as follows:

Wing	-	62 mm
Bill	-	14 mm
Tarsus	-	19.5mm
Tail	-	49 mm
Weight	-	7 gm



Hingolghadh Nature Education Sanctuary, area c. 7 sq km is a scrub forest on the State highway (SH-1) linking Jasdan and Ahmedabad. The bird an adult, was ringed (Ring No.Z-32967) and released. It winters from Himalayan foothills (Nepal eastwards), south through the peninsula to the southernmost hills (Karnataka, Kerala) east through Bangladesh, Assam and Manipur. It is reported to frequent scrub and secondary jungle and well wooded country, in its winter quarters.

The present ringing record indicates a western range extension of the species in Gujarat, from where it is reported for the first time.

#### Blyth's Pipit From Niari Reservoir, Rajkot, Gujarat

An individual of Blyth's Pipit, *Anthus godlewski* (Taczanowski), was caught by a party of Mir Shikars from Bihar on the night of 1st January 1990, on the edge of Niari reservoir, Rajkot, Gujarat.

Its measurements were as follows: Wing (82 mm), Bill (70 mm), Tarsus (25.5 mm), Tail (59 mm), Hind claw (14 mm), Weight (19 gm). It is described as widespread and locally common winter visitor to Assam, Bangladesh and most of the Indian Peninsula west to Fatehgarh (near Agra) and Udaipur (Rajasthan) and south to Nellore, Karnataka and Kerala. It has been described as uncommon in southern India.

The bird has been reported to prefer swampy land during migration. The present bird which was caught along the edge of Niari Lake, is the first record of this species from Gujarat and indicates the western range extension of the species.



**STORKS WATCHING AT RATAPANI.** MANOJ K MISRA, *Indian Institute of Forest Management, Nehru Nagar, Post Box No.357, Bhopal 462 003*

Ratapani, is a wildlife sanctuary (600 sq km) some 40 km from Bhopal on the Bhopal-Hoshangabad National Highway. A typical dry Teak-Terminalias, habitat with all the associated faunal components, it take its name after a 250 ha reservoir within the sanctuary, created by an irrigation dam. Over time the reservoir has turned into a perfect waterfowl habitat attracting large number and variety of birds, each winter. The reservoir lies 22° 57' N.Lat and 77° 43' E. Long.

This January, when I had visited Ratapani in connection with the Asian Midwinter Waterfowl Count exercise, I was pleasantly surprised to sight a pair of Blacknecked stork, foraging on the shores. Later when I reported the same to Sri P.M. Lad, retired C.C.F. and an eminent wildlifer, he expressed his doubts on the veracity of the sighting and hence the very next Sunday, i.e. the 6th of March, 1994 was fixed as a confirmatory sojourn to Ratapani.

We, reached Baruasot, the nearest Forest Rest House to the Ratapani reservoir, around the late evening of 5th March so as to have the next full day for our birding.

6th of March, was a glorious sunrise and we were soon at the reservoir, looking for the Blacknecked storks. A searching view through our binoculars, of the reservoir shore presented a huge flock of River terns, few spoonbills, white ibises, cormorants, couple of pied kingfishers, and a large magar, but the Blacknecked storks wee nowhere to be seen, although what we did see was equally exciting and absorbing. There was a group of about 30 birds, majority of whom were the Whitenecked Storks, along with some 'unidentified storks'. What was amazing was the fact that the entire group was not only foraging as a flock but even taking to the skies and then settling down together. Reference to the literature revealed that the 'unidentified' birds were the Black Storks, and their such mixing with the Whitenecked, is often reported though not yet satisfactorily explained.

Sri Lad who is not only a very keen bird watcher but also a wildlife photographer of long standing took his time in capturing the whole drama on film. Later around noon as we

were making our way back along the shore to the rest house, the elusive pair of the Blacknecked storks too made their appearance at almost the same place where I had first seen them almost one and a half months back, making our visit purposeful and complete. Incidentally Blacknecked storks and Black storks have not been reported earlier from this part of Madhya Pradesh.

### CORRESPONDENCE

**A SURVEY OF THE INDIAN GREAT BLACK WOODPECKER (*Dryocopus javensis*).** V. SANTHARAM, *68, 1 Floor, Santhome High Road, Madras 600 028*

As an extension of my two-year research work on the ecology of woodpeckers of Western Ghats, I plan to survey several sites in Western Ghats for the Indian Great Black Woodpecker. The survey is expected to commence in November 1994 and end by May 1995, and cover sites from Gujarat to Kerala. As this is the largest of our Woodpeckers (in South India) and as little is known about its habitat requirements foraging ecology, nesting requirements and its current status, this survey hopes to investigate these aspects and help in drawing up conservation strategies for this species. This project is supported by the Wildlife Conservation Society (NYZS), New York.

I welcome information from readers, familiar with this bird, on the localities of its occurrence, its status, information on active nests etc. I will be visiting nest-sites if specific details are provided regarding locality, access etc. All help and information received will be duly acknowledged in the ensuing reports and publications.

I also welcome volunteers who can assist me in data collection in the field and survey specific localities. I will reimburse travel, accommodation and food expenses and also provide some honorarium. For more details write to me with a short resume about yourself and your interests and also indicate the dates you can devote for this survey. It would be helpful if you can also indicate the localities you would like to survey.

### COMMENTS ON THE CHECKLIST OF BIRDS OF LONGWOOD SHOLA, KOTAGIRI

Mr Bhoopathy, in his note (NLBW, 34(4): 93) mentions seeing the Scalybellied Green and Little Scalybellied Woodpeckers in the Longwood Shola and its vicinity. The former species is not found in the Southern India as per the distribution worked out by Ali and Ripley (*Handbook*). Perhaps this species has been included by oversight. The pigmy woodpecker seen in the peninsular India is the Brown-crowned (*Picoides nanus* of ALi & Ripley/ *P. molluccensis* of Lester L. Short, "Woodpeckers of the World", 1982) and not the Grey Crowned, reported in the checklist. Unfortunately this species was omitted from the "Pictorial

Guide" that was referred to by Mr Bhoopathy and this has perhaps led to the error.

It would have been more useful if the checklist was re-arranged, systematically, and if additional details such as altitudinal ranges of the species were provided as the list includes sightings from 500 ft to 6511 ft above mean sea level.



**DIETARY OF BLACK CAPPED KINGFISHER — AN ADDITION.** MANOJ V NAIR, 34, Thoppil Nagar, Kumarapuram, Trivandrum 695 011

Ali & Ripley (1987) in the Handbook remark that the food of Black Capped Kingfisher, *Halcyon pileata*, consists chiefly of fish, frogs and crabs; also insects like crickets, grasshoppers, beetles etc. and presumably lizards and small animals.

While watching birds on 20.4.1994 at Kallar (c. 250 m at the foot of the Ponmudi hills, S. Kerala) a Black Capped Kingfisher was observed to capture and devour a flying lizard (*Draco dussumien*). The lizard had just landed on a tree at a height of about 9 m after a rather short glide, when the striking black and yellow of the patagium was quite conspicuous. After landing, the constant 'flicking-open' and closing of the lemon yellow dewlap or gular pouch was also easily noticed in spite of its otherwise cryptic colouration. These movements might have caught the bird's attention. Flying off to the tree, it captured the lizard easily, hovering for a short while near the branch. With the squirming lizard in the beak, it returned to its perch and after bashing it, promptly swallowed it. So flying lizards can be included in the dietary of this species. Also, such an instance of an avian predator of the *Draco* is seemingly rare. Hence this note.



**COLLECTIVE NOUN FOR A GATHERING OF BIRDS.** S. THEODORE BASKARAN, 1, P&T Officers Colony, Nethaji Marg, Ahmedabad 380 006

Keen birdwatchers that they are the English have made sure that the collective noun for a gathering of birds differs from specie to specie. Here is a list I had collected in the alphabetical order. Readers can add to the list.

a brood of chicken  
a chattering of coughts  
a covert of coots  
a loot of cranes  
a flight of doves or swallows  
a badylung of ducks  
a gaggle of geese  
a bazaar of guillemots  
a cast of hawks  
a siege of herons  
a desert of lapwings  
an exaltation of larks  
a watch of nightingales

a muster of peacocks  
anye of pheasants  
a congregation of plovers  
a bevy of quails  
a building of rooks  
a host of sparrows  
a wisp of snipes  
a murmuration of starlings  
a herd of swans  
a spring of teals  
a plump of wildfowl  
a company of wigeons  
a fall of woodcocks

**INTERESTING RECOVERIES**

**RING OF AN UNIDENTIFIED WADER.** V. GURUSAMY, Addisons Paints & Chemicals Ltd, Huzur Gardens, Simpson Estate, Sembium, Madras 600 011

On 16.5.1994, two employees of Shardlow India, a factory in our Estate bought me an aluminium tag attached to a bird's leg. Only bone was left. No feathers could be located. It was all that left after crows and ants have had a go at the bird.

The ring: Light, seamless aluminium ring, cylindrical, height 9 mm, diameter just 9 mm. Engraved in clear letters Numerals

92

C.M.H.S.  
4444

The leg: Tibia 4 cm, Tarsus 5 cm, Toe 1 cm.

I sent the bone and a description of the ring to BNHS for identification. I have retained the ring for the time being.

Can any one get at the source C.M.H.S. and find out what 4444 - 92 (1992?) is?

It could be some wader about the size of a sandpiper from the measurements of the leg. The mostly bony leg had an overall reddish hue. Any information about the identify and origin is welcome.

**RING OF A WHITENECKED STORK.** DEBOJIT PHUKAN, Dhakuakhana, Lakshmipur, Assam 787 055

On 27.12.1993, I recovered a Birdring from a fisherman operating at Brahmaputra River. The Bird was a White necked Stork (*Ciconia epispopus*). The following was inscribed on the Ring.

Inform

Ring No-B-155294  
Coobuln  
MOSKWA UEHTP Konbu

Location of Ring Recovery 95°E — 27°N, the bird was killed by the fisherman by chemical poison for Publicity.

**News From IWRB  
ANATIDAE 2000**

5-9 December 1994 Strasbourg — France

Plans for Anatidae 2000 are progressing well with over 250 waterbird experts expected to attend this major international conference.

A draft action programme (linked closely to the proposed migratory water bird agreements under the Bonn Convention) for research and conservation will be available for delegates on arrival in Strasbourg and will be developed during the Conference and published in 1995.

For more detailed information Please Contact : Sarah McKean at IWRB, Slimbridge, Gloucester, GL27BX, UK. Tel. : (44-453) 890624 ; Fax : (44-453) 890697

ANATIDAE 2000



(Contd. from front inside Cover)

Some species may have a broad geographical distribution, but may be confined to very specific habitats within that range. For example, there are some types of fishes which seem to be confined to acid blackwaters found in peat swamp areas. A recent study of North Selangor Peat Swamp Forest in Malaysia showed that 13 of the 47 species recorded from the area are confined to acid black waters. If peat areas are drained and the peat, which produces the acid blackwaters, destroyed, there is a great danger of losing these species.

Similarly, the Proboscis Monkey *Nasalis larvatus* in Borneo is restricted to pristine riverine forests and coastal mangroves, two habitat types which are fast disappearing. Also in Borneo, a subspecies of the Banded Leaf-monkey *Presbytis melalophos cruciger* is restricted to only one area of peat swamp forest which has been intensively and destructively logged. This population is now almost certain to face extinction.

Species which exhibit large-scale movements or have large home ranges, are also vulnerable, especially if an ecosystem which is used at a critical stage of their life cycle is degraded. This is particularly relevant with regards to waders which require safe feeding and roosting stops along their migratory routes. Migratory species of fish under threat due to the modification of rivers include the Giant Mekong Catfish *Pangasius gigas*, which has had its numbers reduced by over-fishing but which will come under

even greater threat if the plans to dam the mainstream Mekong are realised.

### Their Conservation

Wetland specialist flora and fauna are threatened with oblivion globally. Civilisations grew and developed in close proximity to wetlands and today, the population explosion has destroyed most of the surrounding natural environment. We feel the effects now and slowly begin to respond. The secret of our success is the choice we must make for appropriate responses. This task will not be easy but a clear commitment will go a long way towards ensuring that both natural habitats and species survive for posterity.

Habitat destruction is the chief threat to the continued existence of most species. Whilst hunting, over-fishing and most types of pollution are serious threats, they often do not lead to the complete eradication of species. If habitats remain intact and threats are minimised, there is a good chance that populations of species will recover. The ecosystems which support these vulnerable species must be safeguarded and sufficient areas protected to ensure that viable populations are maintained.



### Biodiversity Conservation Initiatives

In the recent years, realising the importance of wetlands, some conservation measures have been

instituted in the Asia-Pacific. Some examples of successful cooperative action plan have been the Berbak National Park in Indonesia, Kuala Selangor Nature Park in Malaysia, Pattani Bay in Thailand and Olango Reserve in the Philippines. These are some of the finest examples of *in situ* conservation measures undertaken by NGOs and governments with a strong people's participation. The Asian Wetland Bureau (AWB) was one of the key partners in this exercise. AWB has also been involved in promoting such actions elsewhere in Asia with possible financial assistance from aid agencies. Some of the probable project sites are, the Great Vedaranyam Swamp, south India, Kosi-Tapu wetland in Nepal, Haors and Bheels of Sylhet, Northeast Bangladesh, Bundala National Park, Sri Lanka, North Selangor Peatswamp Forest, Malaysia, and some other sites under consideration. These projects are aimed at conservation and sustainable utilisation of wetland resources with a strong emphasis on people's participation.

After the Rio Summit, conserving biodiversity has become a top priority the world over. Most of the Governments, which hitherto were considering conservation movements rather suspiciously, have realised the gravity of the situation and are now making efforts to fall in line. It is to be seen, in the next decade, how the world communities will come to grips with their respective responsibilities in biodiversity conservation.

Courtesy : Asian Wetland News, June 1994.

---

Editor : ZAFAR FUTEHALLY, No. 2205, Oakwood Apartments, Jakkasandra Layout, Koramangala 3rd Block, 8th Main, Bangalore 560 034.

Printed and Published Bi-Monthly by, S. Sridhar at Navbharath Enterprises, Seshadripuram, Bangalore 560 020, for Private Circulation Only.

---

---

Cover : Little Ringed Plovers (*Charadrius dubius*) changing over at nest. These active little birds are found on sandy or stony ground near streams, lakes and tidal mudflats. They run about with dainty steps; head half drawn into shoulders and bobbing down now and then with a peculiar movement to pick up food. Little Ringed Plover has a plaintive whistling call "tee-ooo", and is adept at "distraction displays", drawing intruders away from its nest with a trailing wing to feign injury. The little ringed plover has the habit of soaking its belly in a pond before settling on the eggs.

Photo S. Sridhar, ARPS

---