

# *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*

Vol. 38

No. 2 Mar. / Apr. 1998



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## Editorial

### Data about large whistling teal.

Readers are requested to send information about this bird to Prof. Sunil Choudhary. See his letter in the correspondence section. This bird with other whistling teals has been transferred to a separate family *Dendrocygnidae* from the previous *Anatidae* : I have written to Dr. D.K. Biswas, Chairman, Central Pollution Control Board to assist the Mandar Nature Club in their efforts to monitor water quality of Udhuara lake. Incidentally Dr. Biswas has offered to write to people in J & K about saving the Wetland in Srinagar (article by Khursheed Ahmad in Vol. 37, No. 6).

### Bharatpur

J.C. Daniel's note in the correspondence section (extracted from his monthly letter of 16.12.97) on the ecological and economic value of this small National Park is worth pondering over. There are so many wetlands of immense value for our country, and those familiar with these places should initiate collection of data on them so that the administration recognises their potential and agrees to protect them. In the Man and Biosphere project initiated in Europe by IUCN in 1966, it has been found that water bodies are far more productive than *terra firma*. For example one can get far more protein from fish and aquatic creatures of a wetland, than by draining the wetland and growing wheat on it. Therefore wetlands are appropriately named Liquid Assets by IUCN. Let us not drain them away. I regret that our attempts to conserve Dodda-gubbi Lake has been a failure. Instead of duck & waders, of which there were so many till a decade ago, we now have brick and mortar.

### Ornithological Congress

In the Jan/Feb issue I reproduced a part of the letter from Dr. Walter Bock about the I.O.C., and I hope some of you will visit Durban & play a role in deciding the future policy of the ornithological community. In this connection see also the letter from the President of the "China Ornithological Society" in this issue.

### The Redbreasted Parakeet

The article on the redbreasted parakeet in this issue is of particular interest to me as it deals with an area where I spent over 50 years of my life in Andheri, the northern suburb of Bombay. The only parakeets I saw there were the roseringed variety. But I recall seeing flocks of the redbreasted birds in Kaziranga or Manas, and I remember being struck by the lovely "Plum red" colouring. In a recent letter Anish Andheria writes: "(The birds) are easy to observe due to their vociferous nature and I see them almost every day on the *Michelia champaca* tree near my house. In fact their number has also risen to approx. 25. It is quite clear that they have adapted themselves excellently to this alien environment." Strange that a species of the Himalayan foothills should be so at home in a noisy, unwooded urban town.

### A tip to Birdwatchers from Salim Ali

In the March issue of the Newsletter 35 years ago (Vol. IV, 1964), Salim Ali commented on a possible error by Usha Ganguli when she wrote about a blind fledgling of a baybacked shrike in Kasauli going back into its nest from some distance away, Salim Ali wrote: "May I suggest that it will be fulfilling one of the important purposes of the **Newsletter** if readers will read all the notes critically, and seek clarification on, or correct, any seeming misconceptions, inconsistencies and errors that may catch their eye? Only thus can they help to prevent inaccuracies from being handed down and repeated. A great many such have crept into published Indian bird literature and been (forgivably - considering the eminence of some of the perpetrators) copied from book to book, simply because statements were accepted at the face value by contemporary readers, or because of undue sanctity attached to the printed word, or because readers did not wish to seem presumptuous by questioning the assertions of a 'Master' or casting doubt on his identification!"

I am glad to see that this advice is being followed and our readers are increasingly questioning doubtful identifications, and pointing out the presence of birds in places which were outside the range indicated by Messrs. Salim Ali and Ripley.

### Common name changes of the birds of the Indian Subcontinent

The BNHS has produced a splendid document inviting comments on the suggested changes of common names proposed by experts of the International Ornithological Congress. The next IOC meeting is being held in Durban, South Africa in August this year. Vol. II, No. 4 of BUCEROS (Dec. 1997) has been devoted to nomenclature and clear guidelines have been formulated on the basis of which decisions could be taken. For example:

- i) There should be no overlap of names in different countries. There is a Mountain Quail in India and also

one in the USA. Our bird is now renamed the Himalayan Quail.

- ii) Changes in names are necessitated when species are split, and / or placed in different Genera or Families.
- iii) Rectify inappropriate names or shorten lengthy ones. As you will recall I have been commenting on the proposed nomenclature changes in the Newsletter and my suggestions are:
  - There is much good sense in leaving a name unchanged - whether of a street, a city, or a bird.
  - Leaving common names unchanged does not come in the way of scientific advance, as scientific names are being changed anyway on the basis of DNA and morphological and ecological findings.
  - While the serious ornithologist refers to scientific names, the large number (and growing number) of birdwatchers in India identify a bird through its common English name. Novice birdwatchers do realise the inappropriateness of certain names, but overall they would, I think prefer the names they are familiar with in current literature - Salim Ali, Ripley, Whistler, Stuart Baker, Ben King and some of the foreign books. What is the point of making their search more difficult.

I would be unhappy if some of the suggestions made were finalised: The name, great Indian bustard downgraded to Indian bustard; and the yellowthroated sparrow to chennut-shouldered petronia. The existing names are part of Indian Ornithological History, and taking a holistic view old names should remain. A possible compromise would be to insist on a twenty year moratorium on change. All ornithological books published after 1-4-2020 could carry the new common names. This would give time to people to familiarise themselves with the new terminology.

### Home Study Course in Ornithology

This course run by the Rishi Valley Education Centre, masterminded by S. Rangaswami has progressed from its fledgling stage and is now ready to soar. A welcome corpus grant of Rs.10 lacs has made it possible to reduce the course fees from Rs.750 to Rs.600 and to provide 50% fee concession to deserving persons like students of age group 15 to 25 years, housewives, unemployed etc. I hope our readers will encourage young people around them to join this course and to develop a serious interest in this subject which will enrich their lives in many ways. Details can be had from Department of Bird Studies, Rishi Valley Education Centre, Rishi Valley 517 352, Chittoor Dt., A.P. with a remittance of Rs.20 by Bank Draft favouring Rishi Valley Education Centre, payable at Madanapalle or by M.O.





## The Redbreasted Parakeet - Escape to Mumbai

ANISH P ANDHERIA, 2, Sagar Building, V.P. Road, Andheri (West), Mumbai 400 058

It was a bright Sunday afternoon in April, 1994. I was making a Bird-List after a routine trip to the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP); Mumbai. Suddenly, a peculiar parakeet-like call diverted my attention and forced me to rush to the balcony of my ground-floor flat to survey the Golden Champa *Michelia champaca* tree in front, for some bird activity. This 10 meter tree is famous for attracting seed-eating birds like the rose-ringed parakeet *Psittacula krameri*, the golden oriole *Oriolus xanthornus* and the crimson-breasted barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*.

It took an unusually long time to trace the source of that loud monotonous call. I could see two 'Rose-ringed parakeet-sized birds' busy foraging on the fruits. Their camouflaging made them difficult objects to spot. It was however the repetitive call which gave them up. I was amazed at the exceedingly sharp call of these birds and for a moment thought it was a variation of the call of the rose-ringed parakeet.

To confirm this I decided to observe them through the binoculars. And.... no sooner did I focus on one of the noisy birds, than I realized that it was a parakeet all right, but with a distinctive pink patch extending downwards from the throat to the belly. It also had a conspicuous black throat band and a pinkish gray head with a cherry red beak. To re-check, I focussed on the other bird. It also had a pink breast and a clear yellow shoulder patch. This was proof that I was looking at the redbreasted parakeet *Psittacula alexandri*.

The only hitch was the range of distribution of these birds. According to the **Book of Indian Birds** by Salim Ali, the Indian redbreasted parakeet is confined to the lower Himalayas from Kumaon east to Arunachal Pradesh upto C 1500 m N.E. hill states, Andaman Islands and Bangladesh. Hence, to see them on a tree in front of my house amidst the busiest part of the metropolis - half way down the Indian peninsula was no less than a miracle.

I could observe them for about 15 minutes before they decided to move on to some other food-tree, leaving me in a dilemma whether to believe the Field-book or my eyes. I had never seen these birds in any of the forests of Maharashtra including the SGNP which I have been visiting at least once a week since 1985.

Nevertheless, I decided to keep a close vigil around the *M. champaca* tree to catch a glimpse of the birds if they returned to feed on subsequent days. The very next day I was

gifted with a welcome sighting of not two but five adult individuals.

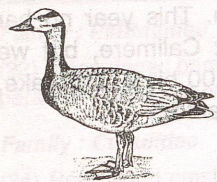
The possibility that these birds had migrated all the way from the Himalayan foot hills as far south as Mumbai, in search of food was most unlikely. It is more likely that they had escaped from cages and got acclimatized in the city. I had seen these birds in pet shops as well as in the local zoo.

The astonishing fact was that they had managed to adapt themselves not only to the climatic conditions but also to the pollution and commotion of the most busy city of our country. My respect for them increased and I began observing them daily. Countless questions regarding their roosting site, breeding cycle, nesting material, flock size and sex ratio emerged within me. But a month passed and I was still without a clue about the roost of these *fast flying feathered jets*. This could be partly attributed to the tall buildings which restricted my view.

And... one day, while I was speeding towards the Andheri railway station, I heard the same, high pitched call from a tree-top above the road which connects my society with the Swami Vivekanand Road, Andheri (West). The birds were hidden in the thick foliage of Jammun (*Syzygium cumini*) and mango *Mangifera indica* trees. There was no doubt in my mind that I had discovered their roosting site. There were 9 birds, screaming loudly, before and after taking off and while circling around the trees. They were a cacophonous lot, readily responding to the calls of fellow flock members to keep constant contact with one another. They shared the roost in a Jackfruit *Artocarpus heterophyllus*, a Mango and a Jammun tree with house crows, blue rock pigeons and house sparrows. I even saw them making sorties to a distant peepal *Ficus religiosa*, a copper pod *Peltophorum ferrugineum*, a suru *Casuarina equisetifolia* and of course the golden champa near my house.

Three years have passed, and the flock size has risen to fifteen individuals. My fascination for them has compelled me to mention this story to numerous Mumbaiites whom I have accompanied to the SGNP on nature trails and camps.

When I mentioned this to Dr. Asad Rehmani, I was made to understand the significance behind the finding, and was asked to submit a report. The effect of such accidental introduction of an alien bird, on native bird species remains to be investigated.



## Threatened Birds of Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary Tiruchirapalli - Tamil Nadu

Prof. A. RELTON, Staff-Advisor, Nature Club, Bishop Heber College, Trichy 620 017

**T**iruchirapalli area has a large number of irrigation reservoirs. These wetlands are fed by river Kaveri, which is one of the major perennial rivers of Peninsular India. The interaction of these *lentic* and *lotic* habitats of the river Kaveri is remarkable in this area.

Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary, a fresh water lake, is the biggest of the irrigation reservoirs, located near Ariyalur, Thiruvalluvar Perambalur District of Tamilnadu. It is fed by Pullambadi, Kattalai Canal, a major distributory of river Kaveri. This lake is 50 KM East of Tiruchirapalli Town (10° 59' N: 79° 2' E) and declared as a Bird Sanctuary only in February 1996.

### Birds of Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary

A large number of both migratory and resident waterfowl visit this lake during winter. Swimmers, divers, waders and shore birds find this place suitable for feeding, breeding and resting. *Seventy three* species of water fowl belonging to 7 Orders and 13 Families occur in this area. Some of the important migratory birds are spotbilled pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*, darter *Anhinga rufa*, white necked stork *Ciconia episcopus*, black stork *Ciconia nigra*, white stork *Ciconia ciconia*, white ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus*, glossy ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*, spoon bill *Platalea leucorodia*, bar-headed goose *Anser indicus*, wigeon *Anas penelope*, shoveller *Anas clypeata*, gadwal *Anas strepera*, pheasant tailed jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus*, golden plover *Pluvialis dominica*, black tailed godwit *Limosa limosa*, bar tailed godwit *Limosa lapponica*, brown headed gull *Larus brunnicephalus*, black bellied tern *Sterna acuticauda* and others.

### Breeding

Among the waterfowl, coots, little grebe, moorhens and darters, breed in this lake regularly. In 1994, spot-billed pelican, grey heron, cormorants, little egrets, pond herons and night herons were breeding in the *Acacia nilotica* trees planted inside the lake.

### Terrestrial birds

Beside the waterfowl, there occur in and around the lake terrestrial birds, numbering about *ninety one* species. Some of the important migratory birds are pale harrier *Circus macrourus*, marsh harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, Indian pitta *Pitta brachyura*, golden oriole *Oriolus oriolus*, rosy pastor *Sturnus roseus* and paradise flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*.

### Threatened birds of Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary

Out of the 69 birds declared as the 'Threatened Birds of Asia' by Birdlife International (BLI) Birdlife Asia Council and

Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON), 17 bird species are reported in this Sanctuary.

#### 1. (21) Spot billed pelican : *Pelecanus philippensis*

It is a regular visitor to this lake though only a small number of birds (5-10) have been recorded every year. Our highest single day sighting is 42 birds on 2nd May 1996. In 1994, 7 pairs were recorded breeding in this lake.

#### 2. (26) Cormorant : *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Even though earlier cormorants were recorded in thousands, only three birds of this species were recorded in 1996.

#### 3. (27) Indian shag : *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*

12 birds were reported for the first time in 1996. Probably there might be more birds, now.

#### 4. (58) Black bittern : *Ixobrychus flavicollis*

Again three black bitterns were reported for the first time in January 1996, when a buffalo entered a reed bed and disturbed the birds. The local people say they have seen more birds in this area.

#### 5. (60) Painted stork : *Mycteria leucocephala*

It is a regular visitor to this area. 30-50 birds were recorded every year. Our highest count is 172 birds in 1996.

#### 6. (61) Asian openbill : *Anastomus oscitans*

Commonest stork in this area..Over thousand birds were reported on a single day.

#### 7. (63) White stork : *Ciconia ciconia*

One to four birds were reported in this region, no records were made in 1996.

#### 8. (64) Black stork : *Ciconia nigra*

4 birds were recorded only once in 1994.

#### 9. (71) Glossy ibis : *Plegadis falcinellus*

It is a regular visitor since 1990, every year 20 to 30 birds were recorded.

#### 10. (72) Spoon bill : *Platalea leucorodia*

20 - 30 spoon bills were recorded since 1988, but no records were made in 1995 and 1996.

#### 11. (82) Bar headed goose : *Anser indicus*

Very regular visitor since 1988. In 1996 around 1200 birds were reported in a single day.

#### 12. (182) Indian long billed vulture : *Gyps indicus*

These birds were recorded along with white backed vultures in this area.

**13. (190) Pallid harrier : *Circus macrourus***

Very few birds (1-3) were recorded since 1994.

**14. (470) Black billed tern : *Sterna acuticauda***

A common bird of this lake area, every time 10 - 30 birds were recorded.

**15. (29) Oriental darter : *Anhinga melanogaster***

It is a very regular visitor to this lake, but found only in small numbers of 5-10. Once recorded breeding in the *Ipomea aquatica* plant inside the lake.

**16. (69) Black headed ibis : *Threskiornis melanocephalus***

These ibises were recorded feeding along with the spoon-bills, but the number of birds visiting this lake is shrinking every year.

**17. (62) Woolly-necked stork : *Ciconia episcopus***

Only 1-4 birds were recorded since 1994.

Of the threatened birds, bar headed goose, and black stork were recorded only in this lake, apart from Point

Calimere Bird Sanctuary in Tamil Nadu. This year no bar headed goose were reported in Point Calimere, but we recorded our highest ever number of 1200 birds. This lake, assumes significance because of these factors.

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## Birds of Pondicherry University Campus

K.S. GOPI SUNDAR, Salim Ali School of Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Pondicherry University, Kalapet, Pondicherry 604 014.

I have watched birds in the extensive Pondicherry University campus for the past two years (1995-1997) while I finished my M.S. course in Ecology. The campus is located about 10 kms. north of the Union Territory and lies next to the East Coast Road. The type of vegetation on the campus is the dry scrub type with patches of grassland breaking the monotony. A deep ravine runs through the entire length of the campus giving it the effect of wilderness. The entire area of the campus is 780 hectares and is encompassed by a wall 7 feet high. In Pondicherry, it rains sparsely and the annual rainfall of 1250 mm is brought in by the returning north-east monsoon from November to January, rarely continuing in February. As a result, it is quite warm and the mean annual temperature is 27 ° C, max. 42 ° C).

The commonest birds on the campus are the redvented bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*, the whiteheaded babbler *Turdoides affinis* and the Indian tree pie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*. The shikra *Accipiter badius* is the commonest raptor and I have seen it on several occasions swoop down on unsuspecting katyids and large grasshoppers. The great horned owl *Bubo bubo* is a regular sight in the ravines early morning or late evening. The ravine floor is cluttered with the pellets of this species. Pairs of spotted owl *Athene brama* are a common sight, both in the daytime as well as in the night hunting insects below the light poles.

Over the years, the campus has undergone a facelift for the worse. Large tracts of scrub and grassland have been cleared to give way to *Acacia* plantations. Groundnut *Arachis hypogea* cultivation along with Black Gram has increased

significantly. These factors have led to the loss of habitats for birds and could have serious impact on bird diversity in the future.

A list of the birds seen in the campus is given below :

**Family : Ardeidae**

(01) Pond heron *Ardeola grayii*, (02) Cattle egret, *Bubulcus ibis*, (03) Little egret *Egretta garzetta* (04) Night heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

**Family : Accipitridae**

(05) Honey buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*, (06) Pariah kite *Milvus migrans migrans* (07) Black-eared kite *M. m. lineatus*, (08) Shikra *Accipiter badius*, (09) Sparrow hawk *A. nisus* (10) Booted hawk-eagle *Haliaeetus pennatus* (11) Hen harrier *Circus cyaneus*, (12) Marsh harrier *aeruginosus*

**Family : Falconidae**

(13) Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

**Family : Phasianidae**

(14) Grey partridge *Francolinus pondicerianus*

**Turnicidae**

(15) Common bustard-quail *Turnix suscitator*

**Family : Charadriidae**

(16) Red wattled lapwing *Vanellus indicus*, (17) Yellow wattled lapwing *V. malabaricus*

**Family : Columbidae**

(18) Indian ring dove *Streptopelia decaocto* (19) Red turtle dove *S. traquebarica* (20) Spotted dove *S. chinensis*, (21) Little brown dove *S. senegalensis*

**Family : Psittacidae**

(22) Rose-ringed parakeet *Psittacula krameri*, (23) Blossom-headed parakeet *P. cyanocephala*

**Family : Cuculidae**

(24) Redwinged crested cuckoo *Clamator coromandus*, (25) Pied crested cuckoo *C. jacobinus*, (26) Common hawk-cuckoo *Cuculus varius*, (27) Koel *Eudynamis scolopacea*, (28) Coucal / crow pheasant *Centropus sinensis*

**Family : Strigidae**

(29) Barn owl *Tyto alba*, (30) Collared scops owl *Otus bakkamoena*, (31) Great horned or eagle-owl *Bubo bubo*, (32) Spotted owl *Athene brama*

**Family : Caprimulgidae**

(33) Common Indian nightjar *Caprimulgus asiaticus*

**Family : Apodidae**

(34) House swift *Apus affinis*, (35) Palm swift *Cypsiurus parvus*

**Family : Alcedenidae**

(36) Pied kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*, (37) Whitebreasted kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*

**Family : Meropidae**

(38) Chestnutheaded bee-eater *Merops leschenaulti*, (39) Green bee-eater *M. orientalis*

**Family : Coraciidae**

(40) Indian roller or blue jay *Coraicas benghalensis*

**Family : Upupidae**

(41) Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

**Capitonidae**

(42) Small green barbet *Megalaima viridis*, (43) Crimsonbreasted barbet or coppersmith *M. haemacephala*

**Family : Picidae**

(44) Lesser goldenbacked woodpecker *Dinopium benghalensis*

**Family : Pittidae**

(45) Indian pitta *Pitta brachyura*

**Family : Alaudidae**

(46) Redwinged bush lark *Mirafra erythroptera*, (47) Bush lark *Mirafra sp.*, (48) Ashycrowned finch-lark *Eremopterix grisea*

**Family : Hirundinidae**

(49) Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, (50) Redrumped swallow *H. daurica*

**Family : Laniidae**

(51) Brown shrike *Lanius cristatus*

**Family : Oriolidae**

(52) Golden oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

**Family : Dicruridae**

(53) Black drongo or king crow *Dicrurus adsimilis* (54) Ashy drongo *D. leucophaeus* (55) Whitebellied drongo *D. caerulescens*

**Family : Artamidae**

(56) Ashy swallow-shrike *Artamus fuscus*

**Family : Sturnidae**

(57) Brahminy or blackheaded myna *Sturnus pagodarum*, (58) Common myna *Acridotheres tristis*, (59) Jungle myna *A. fuscus*

**Family : Corvidae**

(60) Indian tree pie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*, (61) House crow *Corvus splendens*, (62) Jungle crow *C. macrorhynchus*

**Family : Campephagidae**

(63) Common wood shrike *Tephrodornis pondicerianus*, (64) Large cuckoo-shrike *Coracina novaehollandiae*, (65) Blackheaded cuckoo-shrike *C. melanoptera*, (66) Small minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*

**Family : Irenidae**

(67) Common iora *Aegithina tiphia*, (68) Goldfronted chloropsis *Chloropsis aurifrons*

**Family : Pycnonotidae**

(69) Redvented bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*, (70) Whitebrowed bulbul *P. luteolus*

**Family : Muscicapidae**

(71) Common babbler *Turdoides caudatus*, (72) Whiteheaded babbler *T. affinis*, (73) Brown flycatcher *Muscicapa latirostris*, (74) Paradise flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*, (75) Plain wren-warbler *Prinia subflava*, (76) Ashy wren-warbler *P. socialis*, (77) Tailor bird *Orthotomus sutorius*, (78) Booted warbler *Hippolais caligata*, (79) Dull green leaf-warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*, (80) Magpie robin *Copsychus saularis*, (81) Pied bush chat *Saxicola caprata*, (82) Indian robin *Saxicoloides fulvicata*

**Family : Paridae**

(83) Grey tit *Parus major*

**Family : Motacillidae**

(84) Paddyfield pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*, (85) Large pied wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis*

**Family : Dicaeidae**

(86) Thickbilled flowerpecker *Dicaeum agile*, (87) Tickell's flowerpecker *D. erythrorhynchus*

**Family : Nectariniidae**

(88) Purplerumped sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica*, (89) Loten's sunbird *N. lotenia* (90) Purple sunbird *N. asiatica*

**Family : Zosteropidae**

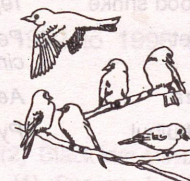
(91) White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosa*

**Family : Ploceidae**

(92) House sparrow *Passer domesticus*, (93) Baya *Ploceus philippinus*

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## Birds of Balaram & Pariej, and Nesting of Painted Storks

Dr. KETAN TATU & Dr. AMITA, A/31, Goyal Towers, University Road, Gulbai Tekra, Ahmedabad 380 015.

**B**alaram is a religious place of Gujarat State, located 16 kms from Palanpur city of Banaskantha district. We were there on 25th and 26th May, 1996.

Balaram has fairly dense deciduous vegetation consisting of *Ficus benghalensis*, *Ficus religiosa*, *Ficus glomerata*, *Butea monosperma*, *Terminalia arjuna*, *Eucalyptus sp.* *Eugenia jambolana*, etc. The density and diversity of plants seemed to be the result of a seasonal river called Balaram and a perennial natural spring existing near a temple. The temple situated on the bank of the river is surrounded by sacred groves containing many mature trees.

A variety of the birds were recorded during the visit to this wooded place inspite of the summer season. The checklist of the birds recorded is given in Table 1.

Table 1 : Checklist of the birds recorded at Baiaram

Species	Habitat	Status
Little cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>	P +
Pond heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	R +
Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	R +
Indian whitebacked vulture	<i>Gyps bengalensis</i>	SG ++
Grey partridge	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>	F ++
Whitebreasted waterhen	<i>Amauornis phoenicurus</i>	P, SG +
Redwattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	R +
Little brown dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	F +
Roseringed parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	SG, PL ++
Blossomheaded parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>	F, SG +
Common hawk cuckoo	<i>Cuculus varius</i>	SG ++
Koel	<i>Eudynamis scolopacea</i>	SG +
Palm swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>	SG +
Whitebreasted kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	SG, R +
Small green bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	SG +
Coppersmith	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>	SG, F +
Goldenbacked woodpecker	<i>Dinopium bengalense</i>	SG ++
Whitebellied drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>	SG +
Brahminy myna	<i>Sturnus pagodarum</i>	SG +
Common myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	SG +
Indian tree pie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>	SG, PL +
Jungle crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	SG +
Common wood shrike	<i>Tephrodornis virgatus</i>	F +
Small minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>	PL +
Common iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>	PL, SG ++
Redvented bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	SG, PL ++

Rufousbellied babbler	<i>Dumetia hyperythra</i>	F +
Whitebrowed fantail flycatcher	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>	SG +
Paradise flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>	SG +
Magpie robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	SG ++
Large pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>	R +
Purple sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>	F +
White eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosa</i>	PL ++
Yellowthroated sparrow	<i>Petronia xanthocollis</i>	SG +

Note : + : Species usually observed singly.

++ : Species usually observed in small parties.

F : Forest, P : Pond, PL : Plantation (Afforested),  
SG : Sacred Groves, R : River

From Table I, it can be seen that in all, 34 bird species had been recorded during our visit. The majority of species were found to occur singly.

Moreover, out of the total of thirty four species only 6 (17.1%) were aquatic and rest (82.9%) were arboreal / terrestrial. The importance of the sacred groves behind the temple as a good bird habitat can be seen from the fact that 61.7 per cent of all the recorded species were found using them. Since only a few picnickers visited these groves it remained undisturbed and even shy species like paradise flycatcher, small minivet, rufousbellied babbler, yellow-throated sparrow and common wood shrike were found here.

### Nesting of Painted Stork at Shilaj Village Pond

On 14th January 1998, we were returning from Thol Lake (Mehsana District) to Ahmedabad after enjoyable birding.

At the pond of Shilaj village (a suburb of western Ahmedabad), our attention was caught by a nosiy flock of storks. Some of them were perching on the top of the *Acacia nilotica* and *Prosopis juliflora* trees and some others were circling in the air over the pond.

On seeing through a pair of binoculars, we were able to identify them as painted storks *Mycteria leucocephala*. There were about 34 juveniles and 13 adults on the thorny trees whereas about 30 individuals were encircling over the pond. The juveniles had predominantly greyish brown plumage, blackish (instead of yellow of adults) bills and white legs. They were extremely noisy. We also spotted some platform-like nests on the trees.

On enquiring we were told that the birds have been nesting here for many years.



## Sighting of Great Crested Grebe and Red-necked Grebe at Pariej Lake (Kheda district, Gujarat), and Black Drongo feeding on fried food

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On 14-1-1997, I visited Pariej Lake, located in Kheda district about 70 kms from Ahmedabad.

The waterbird population of this wetland was quite high, and it was dominated by coots *Fulica atra*.

It was a pleasure, to see three great crested grebes *Podiceps cristatus* and five rednecked grebes *Podiceps griseigena* busy feeding near the edge of the wetland from where I was observing the birds with a pair of 8 X 40 binoculars. Though, I had seen the former grebe at Nal Sarovar (a wetland-based bird sanctuary of Gujarat) and was quite sure about its identity, the latter was a new species for me. However, I could identify it from its sharp yellow beak, gray neck, white underparts and smaller size than the great crested grebe. In fact, it was the careful observation of the colour of the beak (yellow) which helped me to distinguish this migratory grebe from other species of grebes known to Gujarat. It was identified using Peterson's 'Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe' (1988 edition) and a book on waterbirds written (in Gujarati) by a well-known ornithologist from Gujarat; Shri Lalsingh Raol ('Jal ane Jalashayna Pankhio' published by CEE, in 1991, Ahmedabad). In fact, the latter book describes the bird as 'very rare; recorded in Pakistan in 1967 and only recently in Saurashtra region of Gujarat (India) within last three years.'

Apart from these two rare grebes, I also recorded the presence of a few mallards *Anas platyrhynchos*, shovellers *Anas clypeata*, spotbilled ducks *Anas poecilorhynca*, cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo*, moorhens *Gallinula chloropus* and purple moorhens *Porphyrus porphyrio* at the lake. In the waterlogged land near this wetland, greater flamingos *Phoenicopterus roseus* and Brahminy ducks *Tadorna ferruginea* were also present.

### Black drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis* feeding on fried food

I daily commute by train between Ahmedabad and Anand; On 24-3-97, when I was waiting for the train at Anand station at 6.30 p.m., I was bewildered to see that three black drongos had settled in a big pan lying in a trolley of a fast food caterer. The pan was full of the 'Mung Pakoras'. (a Gujarati fried item called 'Dalvada'). All the three individuals were picking up pieces of Pakoras scattered in the dish. The feeding activity continued for sometime and then the birds flew away to perch on a nearby tree. When the birds were eating, the owner was patiently sitting on a nearby bench, watching the feeding birds.

As the black drongo is known to be an insectivorous species, its behaviour of feeding on the fried vegetarian item may be considered unusual.



## Avian Fauna of Sajjangarh Wildlife Sanctuary

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Sajjangarh Wildlife Sanctuary the smallest of Rajasthan is situated in Southern Aravallis on the outskirts of the Lake City of Udaipur between 73° 37' and 73° 40' E longitude and between 24° 35' and 24° 39' N latitude.

Maharana Sajjan Singh (1874-84) the then ruler of Mewar State, constructed the beautiful Sajjangarh palace atop a hill. The surrounding forest block was notified as Sajjangarh Wildlife Sanctuary. Once it was famous for tigers but the last tiger was seen during 1956.

The total area of this sanctuary is 5.14 sq. km. The terrain is hilly and undulating. Its altitude varies from 630 to 938 mts., above MSL. The average annual rainfall is 650 mm. The temperature varies widely from 4° C to 42° C.

The forests are of the Dry Tropical type. According to Champion and Seth forests of Sajjangarh Sanctuary can be categorised as follows :

5 -	Tropical dry deciduous forest
5/E - 1	<i>Anogeissus pendula</i> forest (Present on lower slopes).
5/E - 2	<i>Boswellia serrata</i> forest (Confined to steep slopes)

The major plant species of the area are *Anogeissus pendula*, *Boswellia serrata*, *Lannea coromandelica*, *Sterculia urens*, *Wrightia tinctoria*, *W. tomentosa*, *Zizyphus nummularia*, *Z. mauritiana*, *Acacia leucophloea*, *Acacia senegal*, *Dichrostachys cinerea*, *Cassia tora*, *Euphorbia spp.*, *Prosopis juliflora* etc.

A list of birds recorded from 1992 to 1996 from this sanctuary is given below :

### Family : *Accipitridae*

(1) Blackwinged kite *Elanus caeruleus*, (2) Black kite *Milvus lineatus govinda*, (3) Shikra *Accipiter badius* (4) Sparrow-hawk *A. nisus*

(5) Eurasian tawny-eagle *Aquila vindhiana* (6) Long-billed vulture *Gyps indicus*

**Family : Falconidae**

(7) Red-necked falcon *Falco chicquera*, (8) Common kestrel *F. tinnunculus*

**Sub Family : Phasianidae**

(9) Painted francolin *Francolinus pictus*, (10) Grey francolin *F. pondicerianus*, (11) Common quail *Coturnix coturnix*, (12) Rain quail *C. coromandelica*, (13) Rock bush quail *Perdica argoondah*, (14) Indian peafowl *Pavo cristatus*

**Sub Family : Charadriidae**

(15) Red-wattled lapwing *Vanellus indicus*

**Sub Family : Burhinidae**

(16) Eurasian thick-knee *Burhinus oedicephalus*

**Sub Family : Petrochelidonidae**

(17) Chestnut-bellied sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus*

**Sub Family : Columbidae**

(18) Yellow-footed green-pigeon *Treron phoenicoptera*, (19) Rock pigeon *Columba livia*, (20) Eurasian collared dove *S. decapoda*, (21) Red collared dove *S. tranquebarica*, (22) Spotted dove *S. chinensis*, (23) Laughing dove *S. senegalensis*

**Sub Family : Psittacidae**

(24) Alexandrine parakeet *Psittacula eupatria*, (25) Rose-ringed parakeet *P. krameri*, (26) Plum-headed parakeet *P. cyanocephala*

**Sub Family : Cuculidae**

(26) Pied cuckoo *Oxylophus jacobinus*, (27) Common hawk-cuckoo *Cuculus varius*, (28) Indian cuckoo *C. micropterus*, (29) Grey-bellied cuckoo *Cacomantis passerinus*, (30) Asian koel *Eudynamis scolopacea*, (31) Sirkeer malkoha *Phaenicophaeus leschenaultii*, (32) Greater coucal *Centropus sinensis*

**Sub Family : Strigidae**

(33) Great-horned eagle-owl *Bubo bengalensis*, (34) Spotted owl *Athene brama*

**Sub Family : Caprimulgidae**

(35) Indian nightjar *Caprimulgus asiaticus*

**Sub Family : Apodidae**

(36) Little swift *Apus affinis*

**Sub Family : Alcedinidae**

(37) White-breasted kingfisher *Halcyon smymensis*

**Sub Family : Meropidae**

(38) Blue-tailed bee-eater *Merops philippinus*, (39) Little green bee-eater *M. orientalis*

**Sub Family : Coraciidae**

(40) Indian roller *Coracias benghalensis*

**Sub Family : Upupidae**

(41) Eurasian hoopoe *Upupa epops*

**Sub Family : Bucerotidae**

(42) Indian grey-hornbill *Ocyroceros birostris*

**Sub Family : Megalaimidae**

(43) Copper-smith barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*

**Sub Family : Picidae**

(44) Rufous woodpecker *Micropternus brachyurus*, (45) Lesser golden-backed woodpecker *Dinopium benghalense*, (46) Yellow-crowned woodpecker *Dendrocopos mahrattensis*

**Sub Family : Alaudidae**

(47) Indian lark *Mirafra erythroptera*, (48) Ashy-crowned sparrow lark *Eremopterix grisea*, (49) Rufous-tailed lark *Ammomanes phoenicurus*, (50) Greater short-toed lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*, (51) Crested lark *Galerida cristata*

**Sub Family : Hirundinidae**

(52) Dusky crag martin *Hirundo concolor*, (53) Barn swallow *H. rustica*, (54) Wire-tailed swallow *H. smithii*, (55) Red-rumped swallow *H. daurica*

**Sub Family : Laniidae**

(56) Northern shrike *Lanius excubitor*, (57) Bay-backed shrike *L. vittatus*

**Sub Family : Oriolidae**

(59) Golden oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

**Sub Family : Dicruridae**

(60) Black drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis*, (61) White-bellied drongo *D. caeruleus*

**Sub Family : Sturnidae**

(62) Brahminy starling *Sturnus pagodarum*, (63) Rosy starling *S. roseus*, (64) Asian pied starling *S. contra*, (65) Common myna *Acridotheres tristis*, (66) Bank myna *A. ginginianus*

**Sub Family : Corvidae**

(67) Rufous treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*, (68) House crow *Corvus splendens*, (69) Large-billed crow *C. macrorhynchos*

**Sub Family : Campephagidae**

(70) Common wood-shrike *Tephrodornis pondicerianus*, (71) Large cuckoo-shrike *Caracina novaehollandiae*, (72) Small minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*

**Sub Family : Irenidae**

(73) Common iora *Aegithina tiphia*

**Sub Family : Pycnonotidae**

(74) Red-vented bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*

**Sub Family : Muscicapidae**

(75) Yellow-eyed babbler *Chrysomma sinense*, (76) Common babbler *Turdoides caudatus*, (77) Large grey-babbler *T. malcolmi*, (78) Jungle babbler *T. striatus*, (79) Red-breasted flycatcher *Muscicapa parva*, (80) Tickell's blue-flycatcher *M. tickelliae*, (81) White-browed fantail flycatcher *Rhipidura aureola*, (82) White-spotted fantail flycatcher *R. albicollis*, (83) Grey-headed flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis*, (84) Asian paradise flycatcher *Terpsiphona paradisi*, (85) Zitting cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*, (86) Ashy-grey wren-warbler *Prinia hodgsonii*, (87) Plain prinia *P. subflava*, (88) Ashy-grey prinia *P. socialis*, (89) Common tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius*, (90) Greater whitethroat *Silvia communis*, (91) Eurasian chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, (92) Siberian rubythroat *Erithacus calliope*, (93) Oriental magpie-robin *Copsychus saularis*, (94) Black redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*, (95) Indian chat *Cercomela fusca*, (96) Collared bush-chat *Saxicola maura*, (97) Pied bush-chat *S. caprata*, (98) Desert wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*, (99) Barne's chat *O. finschii*, (100) Indian robin *Saxicoloides fulcata*, (101) Blue rock thrush *Monticola solitarius*

**Sub Family : Paridae**

(102) Great tit *Parus major*, (103) Black-lored tit *P. xanthogenys*

**Sub Family : Motacillidae**

(104) Tree pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*, (105) Paddyfield pipit *A. novaeseelandiae*, (106) Tawny pipit *A. campestris*

**Sub Family : Nectariniidae**

(107) Purple sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica*

**Sub Family : Zosteropidae**(108) Oriental white-eye *Zosterops palpebrosa***Sub Family : Ploceidae**(109) Indian house sparrow *Passer domesticus*, (110) Yellow-throated sparrow *Petronia xanthocollis*, (111) Baya weaver *Ploceus philippinus*, (112) White-throated silverbill *Lochnura malabarica*, (113) Scaly-breasted munia *L. punctulata***Sub Family : Emberizidae**(114) Crested bunting *Melophus lathami*

This sanctuary is devoid of perennial open water body hence is poor in waterfowl. By constructing effective anicuts, an open waterbody can be created to attract aquatic birds. Since this sanctuary is located at the outskirts of the city, it has a great potential to create awareness among residents and tourists also.



## Some observations on the nesting of Whitethroated Ground Thrush *Zosterops lateralis* in Siruvani Hills, Tamil Nadu, and an unusual nesting site of Purplerumped Sunbird

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I have been studying the breeding strategies of birds in Siruvani hills, Tamil Nadu since December 1993. On 21st September 1994 I spotted a nest of a whitethroated ground thrush. Siruvani hills is a part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve and is dominated by moist deciduous forest. The nest was on a *Wrightia tinctoria* at a height of 7.12 m. Height of the tree was 9.23 m. The nest was made of dry leaves and mud, and had four eggs in it. The parent bird often visited the nest and from the white patches on the orange head it was clear that it was a whitethroated ground thrush. I started observing its activities through spotting scope. One of the eggs hatched on the day I sighted the nest. Another egg hatched on the 22nd, but the nestling fell off from the nest and died. The remaining two eggs hatched the next day. Again, one of the nestlings died on the 25th, after falling off from the nest. On the 28th, the remaining nestling also disappeared from the nest, and I found a half eaten body of the nestling with predatory signs.

Another nest was spotted on the 22nd of the same month at a height of 5.15 m. On inspecting the nest, I found a nestling of about a week old along with an egg. The nestling died on the next day. The appearance of the nest, nestling and colour of the eggs were similar to the first nest. I continued my observation and two days later I found only the remains of the egg shell. The nest was found abandoned. The presence of the unhatched egg even a week after the first chick hatched and death of the nestlings perhaps of starvation, confirmed my suspicion that the nest was abandoned by the adult birds.

The nesting season for the whitethroated ground thrush is from May to September, and the clutch size is three to four (Ali and Ripley 1987). In total, I recorded 11 nests in June 1995 and three nests in July 1996. From these observations it is clear that the breeding season in Siruvani is probably June to August. Desertion of nests could be associated with late nesting and (independent of date) with small clutch size. The decision to desert the clutch is typically made by low-quality

parents with low energy reserves and poor prospects for offspring production (Wiggins et al., 1994). Nest desertion can occur when nest relief is delayed, resulting in an unusually long spell for the incubating mate. Significant reduction in the incubating bird's fat reserves as a result of unusually long incubation is believed to be the main proximate mechanism causing nest desertion (Davis 1982, 1988; Groscolas 1990).

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### An unusual nesting site of the Purplerumped Sunbird *Nectarinia zeylanica*

On 26th January 1997, I spotted a Purplerumped Sunbird nest on an electric wire at Tamilnadu Water supply and Drainage Board (TWAD) quarters in Siruvani foot hills. The bird was incubating at that time. The nest was placed on a wire very close to the main post, about five metres above the ground and one meter away from the nearest house. I have been working on the breeding strategy of birds since June 1994, and I have spotted nine nests all on trees and shrubs with the exception of this nest. They were on *Terminalia*

*bellirica*, *Melia dubia*, *Delonix regia*, Citrus tree and Rose plant. All were successful except the one built on *Delonix regia* close to a house and at 2 m height from the ground. This nest was destroyed by children. The nest on the electric wire was built probably to avoid destruction or predation. Ali and Ripley (1983) report that the nest of the purplerumped sunbird is usually suspended at the tip of a branch, often in creepers growing on the trellis-work of verandas; sometimes even on pendent electric light bulbs and sockets or a wire dangling

from the ceiling actually within a bungalow, regardless of the movements of the inmates.

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## A Checklist of Birds of Morena District (MP)

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### Introduction

Ali (1939), during his survey of the birds of Central India, collected bird specimens in Kuno which is in Morena district, north Madhya Pradesh. Long after this survey, Mitra (1979) and Sharja and Singh (1986) prepared checklists of the National Chambal Sanctuary. The birds of this district have rarely been mentioned in ornithological surveys though barheaded geese and sarus cranes of Chambal region were mentioned by Gole (1982, 1991).

### Study area

With an area of 11,683 sq km, Morena district lies at the extreme north of Madhya Pradesh, just south of the river Chambal, bordering Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Its coordinates 25°15'-26°52' N and 26°22'-78°41' E. There are two sanctuaries in the district : (a) The National Chambal Sanctuary (NCS) and (b) The Kuno-Palpur Sanctuary (KPS) with its deciduous mixed forest. There are a few other tracts of forests, especially in Sheopur tehsil (sub-division). The rivers Chambal, Kunwari, Asun, Kuno, Sip and Aheli run through the length and width of the district. With the construction of the Chambal canal and the reservoirs, there has been a tremendous increase in agricultural production. Apart from the usual crops like wheat, rice, maize, groundnut, pulses, mustard and sugarcane are grown on a large scale. The reservoirs teem with fish specially after the rains, and attract a large number of fish eating birds in winter. The district receives rainfall of 8415 mm in a good monsoon year (e.g. 1990) as against 4585 mm in a drought year (1987). Average temperatures range from 6.6°C min in January and 39.8°C max in June. The most elevated places (498 and 493 m) are situated in Sheopur tehsil.

### Method and Limitations

The author started recording the birds of this district in 1980 in a random manner. After being posted as district treasury officer in Morena in June 1992, he got the opportunity to visit several tehsils and some remote places as well.

Despite the disappearance of major dacoit gangs there are still some pockets where one cannot venture alone with binoculars and camera. Such places were visited only in a group. The Kuno-Palpur Sanctuary was visited through jeepable roads in the dry months, while only selected ghats like Atar, Raghu, A.B. Road Bridge of river Chambal were visited.

There are only five species, black stork, blacknecked stork, crested hawk eagle, Pallas's fishing eagle, short-toed eagle, (S.Nos. 18, 19, 46, 48 and 54) which were seen by Mitra (1979) or Sharma and Singh (1986) but not by me. All other species plus 55 new species were recorded during the present study.

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### Birds of Morena District

#### Family : Podicipedidae

- (1) Little grebe *Podiceps ruficollis*

#### Family : Pelecanidae

- (2) Spottedbilled pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*

#### Family : Phalacrocoracidae

- (3) Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* (4) Indian shag *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*, (5) Little cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*, (6) Darter *Anhinga rufa*

**Family : Ardeidae**

- (7) Grey heron *Ardea cinerea*, (8) Purple heron *Ardea purpurea*,  
 (9) Pond heron *Ardeola grayii*, (10) Cattle egret *Bubulcus ibis*,  
 (11) Large egret *Ardea alba*, (12) Smaller egret *Egretta intermedia*,  
 (13) Little egret *Egretta garzetta*, (14) Night heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

**Family : Ciconiidae**

- (15) Painted stork *Mycteria leucocephala*, (16) Openbill stork *Anastomus oscitans*, (17) Whitenecked stork *Ciconia episcopus*,  
 (18) Black stork *Ciconia nigra*, (19) Blacknecked stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*, (20) Adjutant stork *Leptoptilos dubius*,  
 (21) Lesser adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus*

**Family : Threskiornithidae**

- (22) White ibis *Threskiornis aethiopica*, (23) Black ibis *Pseudibis papillosa*, (24) Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

**Family : Phoenicopteridae**

- (25) Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*

**Family : Anatidae**

- (26) Barheaded goose *Anser indicus*, (27) Ruddy shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*, (28) Pintail *Anas acuta*, (29) Common teal *Anas crecca*,  
 (30) Spotbilled duck *Anas poecilorhyncha*, (31) Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, (32) Gadwall *Anas strepera*, (33) Wigeon *Anas penelope*, (34) Garganey *Anas querquedula*, (35) Shoveller *Anas clypeata*, (36) Redcrested pochard *Netta rufina*, (37) Common pochard *Aythya ferina*, (38) White-eyed pochard *Aythya nyroca*,  
 (39) Tufted duck *Aythya fuligula*, (40) Cotton teal *Nettapus coromandelianus*, (41) Comb duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos*

**Family : Accipitridae**

- (42) Blackwinged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*, (43) Pariah kite *Milvus migrans*, (44) Sparrow-Hawk *Accipiter nisus*, (45) White-eyed buzzard eagle *Butastur teesa*, (46) Crested hawk eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatius*, (47) Tawny eagle *Aquila rapax*, (48) Pallas's fishing eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*, (49) King vulture *Sarcogyps calvus*, (50) Indian whitebacked vulture *Gyps bengalensis*, (51) Scavenger vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, (52) Pale harrier *Circus macrourus*, (53) Marsh harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, (54) Short-toed eagle *Circaetus gallicus*, (55) Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

**Family : Falconidae**

- (56) Laggard falcon *Falco biarmicus*, (57) Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

**Family : Phasianidae**

- (58) Black partridge *Francolinus francolinus*, (59) Grey partridge *Francolinus pondicerianus*, (60) Grey quail *Coturnix coturnix*, (61) Blackbreasted or rain quail *Coturnix coromandelica*, (62) Jungle bush quail *Perdica asiatica*, (63) Galloperdix (Spurfowl sp.), (64) Common peafowl *Pavo cristatus*

**Family : Turnicidae**

- (65) Common bustard quail *Turnix suscitator*

**Family : Gruidae**

- (66) Common crane *Grus grus*, (67) Sarus Crane *Grus antigone*, (68) Demoiselle crane *Anthropoides virgo*

**Family : Rallidae**

- (69) Whitebreasted waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*, (70) Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, (71) Purple moorhen *Porphyrio porphyrio*, (72) Coot *Fulica atra*

**Family : Jacanidae**

- (73) Pheasant-tailed jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus*, (74) Bronze winged jacana *Metopidius indicus*

**Family : Recurvirostridae**

- (75) Blackwinged stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

**Family : Burhinidae**

- (76) Stone curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*, (77) Great stone plover *Esacus magnirostris*

**Family : Glareolidae**

- (78) Small Indian pratincole *Glareola lactea*

**Family : Charadriidae**

- (79) Redwattled lapwing *Vanellus indicus*, (80) Spurwinged lapwing *Vanellus spinosus*, (81) Yellow-wattled lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus*, (82) Golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, (83) Little ringed plover *Charadrius dubius*, (84) Kentish plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*, (85) Redshank *Tringa totanus*, (86) Marsh sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*, (87) Wood sandpiper *Tringa glareola*, (88) Common sandpiper *Tringa hypoleucos*, (89) Fantail snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, (90) Little stint *Calidris minuta*

**Family : Laridae**

- (91) Brownheaded gull *Larus brunnicephalus*, (92) Blackheaded Gull *Larus ridibundus*, (93) Whiskered tern *Chlidonias hybrida*, (94) Indian river tern *Sterna aurantia*, (95) Blackbellied tern *Sterna acuticauda*, (96) Indian skimmer *Rynchops albicollis*

**Family : Pteroclididae**

- (97) Indian sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus*

**Family : Columbidae**

- (98) Blue rock pigeon *Columba livia*, (99) Indian ring dove *Streptopelia decaocto*, (100) Red turtle dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica*, (101) Spotted dove *Streptopelia chinensis*, (102) Little brown dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*

**Family : Psittacidae**

- (103) Alexandrine parakeet *Psittacula eupatria*, (104) Roseringed parakeet *Psittacula krameri*, (105) Blossomheaded Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*

**Family : Cuculidae**

- (106) Pied crested cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus*, (107) Common hawk cuckoo *Cuculus varius*, (108) Koel *Eudynamis scolopacea*, (109) Crow-pheasant or coucal *Centropus sinensis*

**Family : Strigidae**

- (110) Barn owl *Tyto alba*, (111) Eagle owl or Great horned owl *Bubo bubo*, (112) Spotted owl *Athene brama*

**Family : Caprimulgidae**

- (113) Indian jungle nightjar *Caprimulgus indicus*

**Family : Apodidae**

- (114) House swift *Apus affinis*, (115) Palm swift *Cypsiurus parvus*

**Family : Alcedinidae**

- (116) Lesser pied kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*, (117) Small blue kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, (118) Storkbilled kingfisher *Pelargopsis capensis*, (119) Whitebreasted kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*

**Family : Meropidae**

- (120) Bluetailed bee-eater *Merops philippinus*, (121) Green bee-eater *Merops orientalis*

**Family : Coraciidae**

- (122) Indian roller *Coracias benghalensis*

**Family : Upupidae**(123) Hoopoe *Upupa epops***Family : Bucerotidae**(124) Common grey hornbill *Tockus birostris***Family : Capitonidae**(125) Crimsonbreasted barbet *Megalaima haemacephala***Family : Picidae**(126) Lesser goldenbacked woodpecker *Dinopium benghalense***Family : Alaudidae**(127) Redwinged bush lark *Mirafra erythroptera*, (128) Ashy-crowned finch-lark *Eremopterix grisea*, (129) Rufoustailed finch lark *Ammomanes phoenicurus*, (130) Crested lark *Galerida cristata***Family : Hirundinidae**(131) Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, (132) Wiretailed swallow *Hirundo smithii*, (133) Indian cliff swallow *Hirundo fluvicola*, (134) Striated or redumped swallow *Hirundo daurica***Family : Laniidae**(135) Grey shrike *Lanius excubitor*, (136) Baybacked shrike *Lanius vittatus*, (137) Rufousbacked shrike *Lanius schach*, (138) Brown shrike *Lanius cristatus***Family : Oriolidae**(139) Golden oriole *Oriolus oriolus*, (140) Blackheaded oriole *Oriolus xanthornus***Family : Dicruridae**(141) Black drongo or king crow *Dicrurus adsimilis*, (142) Whitebellied drongo *Dicrurus caerulescens***Family : Sturnidae**(143) Brahminy myna *Sturnus pagodarum*, (144) Rosy pastor *Sturnus roseus*, (145) Pied myna *Sturnus contra*, (146) Common myna *Acridotheres tristis*, (147) Bank myna *Acridotheres ginginianus*, (148) Jungle myna *Acridotheres fuscus***Family : CORVIDAE**(149) Indian tree pie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*, (150) House crow *Corvus splendens*, (151) Jungle crow *Corvus macrorhynchus***Family : CAMPEPHAGIDAE**(152) Small minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus***Family : IRENIDAE**(153) Common lora *Aegithina tiphia***Family : Pycnonotidae**(154) Redwhiskered bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*, (155) White-cheeked bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys*, (156) Redvented bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer***Family : Muscicapidae**(157) Yellow-eyed babbler *Chrysomma sinense*, (158) Common babbler *Turdoides caudatus*, (159) Jungle babbler *Turdoides striatus*, (160) Whitebrowed fantail flycatcher *Rhipidura aureola*, (161) Paradise flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*, (162) Rufousfronted wren warbler *Prinia buchanani*, (163) Plain wren warbler *Prinia subflava*, (164) Jungle wren warbler *Prinia sylvatica*, (165) Tailor bird *Orthotomus sutorius*, (166) Bluethroat *Erithacus svecicus*, (167) Magpie robin or Dayal *Copsychus saularis*, (168) Black redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*, (169) Brown rock chat *Cercomela fusca*, (170) Desert wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*, (171) Indian robin *Saxicoloides fulicata***Family : PARIDAE**(172) Grey tit *Parus major***Family : Motacillidae**(173) Indian tree pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*, (174) Yellow wagtail *Motacilla flava*, (175) Yellowheaded wagtail *Motacilla citreola*, (176) Grey wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*, (177) White wagtail *Motacilla alba*, (178) Large pied wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis*, (179) Paddyfield pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae***Family : Dicaeidae**(180) Thickbilled flowerpecker *Dicaeum agile*, (181) Tickell's flowerpecker *Dicaeum erythrorhynchus***Family : Nectariniidae**(182) Purple sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica***Family : Zosteropidae**(183) White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosa***Family : Ploceidae**(184) House sparrow *Passer domesticus*, (185) Yellow-throated sparrow *Petronia xanthocollis*, (186) Baya *Ploceus philippinus*, (187) Streaked weaver bird *Ploceus manyar*, (188) Red Munia or avadavat *Estrilda amandava*, (189) Common silverbill, whitethroated munia *Lonchura malabarica*, (190) Whitebacked munia *Lonchura striata***Family : Emberizidae**(191) Blackheaded bunting *Emberiza melanocephala*, (192) Redheaded bunting *Emberiza bruniceps*, (193) Crested bunting *Melophus lathamii*

## Commentary by a bird Watching Naturalist - 1. Nomenclature, Checklists, Warblers, Cuckoos & Stuart Baker

Dr. KUMAR GHORPADE, 1861 Bethel Street, St. Thomas Town, Bangalore 560 084

The target issue of this opener is NLBW 37 (5) of Sept./Oct. 1997, which came on 10th December last year and was the 342<sup>nd</sup> issue of the Newsletter for Birdwatchers. Zafar

mentions that Ripley's sequence "has ..... been changed", "After the 1992 International Ornithological Congress", and directs us to follow the sequence and nomenclature that was

adopted by Sibley and Monroe, but suggests that "If for any reason you wish to follow the sequence in the Handbook, please say so." Well, I would still like to use Ripley's 'standard', the NEW SYNOPSIS, and not only will I "say so" but will write about it here, giving reasons for my 'errant' behaviour.

My brief analysis of the basics of these changes, introduced by Sibley, Monroe & Ahlquist, and incorporated in Inskipp et al.'s ANNOTATED CHECKLIST and Pittie & Robertson's NOMENCLATURE REVIEW, has appeared in *Pitta*, Nos. 81-83 (January-March 1998). My recommendation, that we in South Asia should continue to use the system published by S.D. Ripley in his SYNOPSIS (1961, 1982), is based on current practicability and convenience of bird watchers here, permitting easy, non-ambiguous referral to existing reference works. Until the largely DNA-hybridization influenced classification modifications are confirmed through future debate by biosystematists, who will also use other kinds of phylogenetic data to arrive at a logical, factually plausible decision, it would be premature to adopt these putative leads. As a trained taxonomist, I am currently in the process of examining and evaluating these suggested alterations to Ripley's nomenclature and phylogenetic sequence. Until a future comprehensive update of the SYNOPSIS is published, it would be wiser to resist adopting any changes hastily. Even Inskipp et al. (1996 : 7) cautioned users of their ANNOTATED CHECKLIST not to globally adopt the English names included by them. My projected UPDATED CROSS-REFERENCE, to the NEW SYNOPSIS and ANNOTATED CHECKLIST now in preparation, should, hopefully, be another step towards a final revision of the nomenclature (Scientific and English), and phylogenetic sequence, of the 1290+ bird species residing in, or visiting, our sub-continent.

I am unable to understand our Editor's reasoning behind his "half a loaf of bread (or a few scraps) is better than none" principle regarding **checklists**, and his notion that "sometimes they are unnecessary". It is instead a healthy trend that is currently noticeable in the several checklists being submitted to the *NLBW* today. Unfortunately, most of these are in the form of skeletal, abbreviated lists, unlike the much more 'meaty' and informative, annotated catalogues and regional avifaunas that were the norm earlier. True, the *NLBW* has limited space and cannot accept anything other than these sketchy checklists, but 'mutilating' such lists, to offer readers some selectively curtailed 'remains' is, to my scientific mind, futile and counterproductive. I would recommend printing of the *complete* list of an area's avifauna, using SYNOPSIS numbers, and alphabetical letters or acronyms to indicate status, distribution, abundance, habitat, etc. I notice a lot of space wastage in the *NLBW*, which could be easily avoided to fit in twice the number of bird names in the same space. I appeal to Zafar to accept such carefully prepared 'skeleton checklists' for the *NLBW*, if authors do the required "Number - Name-Code" homework, because such lists reveal a lot about an area's bird life, and through it, of its environment as well, and could be updated and researched.

I will now deal with two other subjects broached by our Editor, about **Warblers** and **Cuckoos**. His question, "Are Warblers less important than tigers", is like the age-old,

quintessential query about whether the egg preceded the chicken or *vice-versa*. A process or situation, that is both dynamic and diverse, cannot be ridiculed with such simplistic enquiry. The very essence of Nature is so complex that it is indeed very difficult to generalize about any aspect or component of her versatility and combined "running power", her still many unexplained and undiscovered secrets. I have not read Katti's "fascinating article", but only wish to say, to entomologically ignorant persons (like Salim Ali confessed to me he was, as did my boyhood *Guru* M. Krishnan, two 'larger-than-life' native naturalists, who never feared to exhibit remarkable humility when necessary), that 1) the vast majority of insect species are *not* destructive, unless at any time a species' local population 'explodes', and 2) their main natural enemies are other *insects*, rather than birds, especially not the "billions" of warblers belonging to 18 migratory species of *Phylloscopus* that descend on India south of the Himalayas every winter. Incidentally, has anybody thought about the excreta actual *trillions* of insects defecate while alive, which must be the single most life-sustaining organic manure resource that the plant cover growing on earth depends on?

On to **Cuckoos** then. Gadagkar's complaint, that little work is being carried out on the behaviour ("ethology" sounds too technical!) of birds and other animals, is valid. However, there must be someone who can teach or explain the 'how-to-do-it' of behaviour study, so, I feel a good *teacher* needs to precede interested, willing, students. Niko Tinbergen is synonymous with Bird Behaviour and his books are good starting points for anyone who wants to pursue this fascinating line of investigation. Brood parasitic cuckoos and their host bird species (Koel-and-Crow is the commonest pair-bond) would be ideal subjects to practise behaviour studies on, but, in my opinion, repeating observations on subjects investigated quite thoroughly would be inadvisable, especially when what is known is available in print. B.S. Lamba of the Zoological Survey of India has made extensive studies on the breeding biology of House and Jungle Crows and of the Koel [see *J.B.N.H.S.*, 60: 121-133, 62: 425-433, 63:750-751, 64: 560-561, 65: 777-778, 66: 72-80; *Cheetal*, 16 (4): 38-45; *Rec. Zool. Surv. India*, 71: 183-300]. There is also a perhaps little-known, but comprehensive, book on this bird group by E.C. Stuart Baker, titled **Cuckoo Problems** (1942, H.F. & G. Witherby Ltd., London; 207 pp., 12 pls, some in colour), which includes abundant information on our 'parasitic' *Cuculidae*, that prospective students could refer to and absorb.

**Stuart Baker** (see his Obituary, with portrait and list of publications, by Norman B. Kinnear in *J.B.N.H.S.*, 45; 212-220; 1945), who painstakingly compiled the 8-Volume NEW FAUNA (1922, 1924, 1926-1930) and wrote four volumes of **The Nidification of the Birds of the Indian Empire** (1932-1935) treating the breeding biology of Indian birds in some detail, also published several books on Indian Game Birds. Besides being an extremely productive Ornithologist, who named and described several Indian species (*Falco tinnunculus objurgatus*, or Baker's Kestrel, is a 'subspecies' breeding in the southern Western Ghats, which perhaps needs to be elevated to species level?), and worked

out the biologies of many others, Baker was a "great shikari" and an all-round sportsman, wielding an excellent tennis racquet and a cricket bat as well. Exactly a hundred years ago he joined the Bombay Natural History Society in 1898, while he was serving as a police officer in Assam and Cachar, which, in those days, must have been teeming with abundant, diverse, wildlife! The best introduction to Stuart Baker's work philosophy, and his involvement with, and respect for, his co-workers in India, would be these two passages I quote below from his book on **Cuckoo Problems** :

"Obviously a work of this nature must be in some measure a compilation of investigation of other ornithologists and field-workers. There is, however, a mass of new evidence brought forward to add to the old and, whether the conclusions arrived at are accepted or rejected, the material is on record available for study and for others to form other conclusions if they deem such necessary.

"My own investigations have been conducted almost continuously with but brief intervals for nearly seventy years, and in the course of these I have had opportunities offered to few.

"One remark must be added concerning the assistants who helped me in my work. Most of these have been amateurs, but keen and capable observers, employed in our Indian and Colonial services or men in the Army and Navy. My *paid* collectors have been European taxidermists and collectors who have in every case sent the skins of the parent birds with the eggs taken. Otherwise I have not accepted them as beyond doubt. My Indian collectors have been four Khasias, educated men, trained to the work by Alan [*sic!*] Hume or myself, Nagas or other Hill tribesmen, and trustworthy beyond all doubt. I emphasize this as it has often been said that Indians are not to be trusted implicitly in such work. This may be true of Plains Indians who have no interest in nature observation, but it is not correct of Hill tribesmen,

people whose whole life may depend on the proper understanding of the habits and calls of birds and animals. Nature to these men is an open book, although read, with any facility, in very few instances by white men. They know every bird by sight and have a name for it; they are acquainted with its voice, habits and idiosyncracies to a degree impossible to anyone who does not always live in the jungles. No Englishman, however great a field ornithologist he may be, knows the 500 or so British forms better than a Naga knows the far greater number which are found in his own country, or a Khasia knows those found in his.

"Again it must be remembered that the wild tribes do not lie and, if the trivial offence of cutting off the heads of other people is omitted, they have no petty sins. The consequence is, one can believe them almost implicitly; they state facts as they see them and do not embroider." (pp.xi-xii)

"To escape an accusation of cruelty in what may be deemed an unnecessary slaughter of birds I would like to explain that for many years I worked in an almost unknown country in which I was so fortunate as to discover the breeding habits of about 300 birds hitherto unknown to science. In every such case it was essential that one of the parents should be caught *on the nest*. The wild hill tribes, among whom I lived, were adepts at this and all nests and eggs were brought to me *with* the parent bird, while, of those I found myself, or the still greater number which were shown to me *in situ*, the sitting birds were either trapped or shot. Again, when forming series of little known birds I always attempted to obtain a series of them from the nestling stage to the fully adult breeding bird. For this purpose I often had to shoot young and old when the latter were feeding the former. Examination of the birds was then made to ascertain the sex and in doing this I found the above theory most satisfactorily proved". (p. 149)

## CORRESPONDENCE

**ON NESTING OF BONELLI'S HAWK-EAGLE (*Hieraaetus fasciatus*).** RAHUL PURANDARE and SWAPNA PURANDARE, 18 A, Kapila Soc., Gokhalenagar, Pune 411 016, Maharashtra, India

Location : Elphinston Point, Mahabaleshwar, Maharashtra  
 Elevation : 4500 ft. approx. above sea level  
 Date : 18th October 1997  
 Time : Approx. 11.00 am  
 Weather : Sunny and Windy  
 Light conditions : Good  
 Observers : Rahul Purandare, Swapna Purandare  
 Optical aids : 8 x 30 binoculars  
 Viewing range : Approx. 100 m i.e. 350 ft approx.

On the 18th October, 1997 we visited Mahabaleshwar. It was a wonderful sunny morning when we approached Elphinston Point, that is at a distance of approximately 10 km from Mahabaleshwar. While we were enjoying thrilling flights of Alpine swifts, we were surprised to see a pair of Bonelli's hawk-eagle building a nest on the cliff. It was a different experience observing the powerful raptors from the top because that is not what usually happens! Usually, they make you turn your neck back to ninety degrees till it, if not also your hands holding binoculars, starts paining!

We found, not only us, but also the birds themselves enjoying their activities. One of the two birds, was collecting large leafy branches and occasionally dead sticks. The bird was able to cut sticks with the help of its bill and was carrying them in its feet with some part of a branch projecting outwards in a somewhat funny manner. The other bird was simply assisting its mate in the aerobatics, and sometimes testing it by giving a naughty chase. Sometimes, one bird used to disappear behind the cliffs and only the other one was visible.

Due to the peculiar geometry of the cliff, we were neither able to see them all the time, nor we could see the nest. Only thing we were certain that the nest must have been on the cliff as we could not think of any suitable tree on the cliff. We confirmed this by observing the cliff from its opposite side from a great distance.

We revisited the same place on 31st January, 1998 and spent half an hour in the morning, but could not see the eagle this time. However, we could see a black eagle flying steadily at a level very close to tree-tops down the mountain. We guess, that must be the incubation period for the nesting pair of Bonelli's hawk-eagle and that was the reason why we could not observe them at all.

We do not know whether Bonelli's hawk-eagles nest regularly on cliffs in adjacent areas and in Maharashtra. So far we have known all its nests on trees in Maharashtra (mainly around Pune). In the compact handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan, it has been mentioned that "In S.India (Kerala and the Nilgiris) (a nest) is built most commonly on lofty trees; elsewhere and in the Himalayas chiefly on ledges of cliffs". It has also been mentioned that "Both sexes share in nest-building, the male bringing larger sticks and tangles of branches in his feet, often with green leaves adhering, the female arranging them".

We would be happy to know the reason behind its habit of nesting (mainly) on cliffs in N.India and on trees in S.India. We would also be glad if other birdwatchers share their information on its nesting especially in W. and C.India.

#### Reference

Ali, S. and Ripley, S.D. (1987): The Compact Handbook of Birds of India and Pakistan, Oxford University Press.

**LARGE WHISTLING TEAL.** PROF. SUNIL K. CHOUDHARY, President, MNC, T.M. Bhagalpur University, Pollution Research Laboratory, Department of Botany, T.N.B. College, Bhagalpur 812 007

I hope you are aware of the activities of Mandar Nature Club (MNC), Bhagalpur (A non-profit Voluntary Organisation) related to the conservation of Wetlands and its birds (resident, local migratory and migratory). MNC has been working hard since 1990 to protect and conserve the Udhuwa Lake Bird Sanctuary in Sahibganj District in the state of Bihar. We are the first agency to document the baseline data on the lake's water chemistry, its biota and the birds visiting the sanctuary lakes in thousands every year in winter.

During the course of census of birds, we have sighted the rare and endangered species, the large whistling teal (mentioned in Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 and revised in 1990) in the sanctuary area. The details of the numbers sighted are given below :

18 Jan 1994	Nos. 35	Census made for AWB
03 Mar 1994	Nos. 175	
14 Jan 1995	Nos. 200	Census made for AWB
14 Dec 1997	Nos. 19	
01 Feb 1998	Nos. 31	

In a personal communication, Dr Rashid Raja of Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun has also referred to the sighting of the large whistling teal at Udhuwa Sanctuary in Jan 1996. From the scanning of the literature available, it is obvious that this particular species of bird is rare in the Eastern Region of India. That is why, we have selected this species for detailed study.

May I request you to provide us information about the present status of this bird in India and elsewhere in the world.



**THE FATE OF BHARATPUR.** J.C. DANIEL, Hon. Secretary Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Dr Salim Ali Chowk, Saheed Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai 400 023

In the last week of November I participated in a training course on Critical Wetland Habitat Management held at the Keoladeo Ghana National Park at Bharatpur. The Ghana had been Salim Ali's live laboratory and received more attention than any other protected area in the Society's research programmes. Currently we have at the Ghana two projects funded by the Fish & Wildlife Service, USA, on the Birds of Prey and a Project on the captive bred Siberian Cranes released into the Sanctuary with the hope that they will be accepted by the wild Sites that winter in the Sanctuary and go back with them. I spent a day with the two young researchers who work on the projects, Gargi Rana who shepherds through telemetry the released cranes and Ashok Sharma who is looking at harriers and other birds of prey. Happily they have both absorbed the ethos of the Society that in the field your clock is synchronized to the animal that you are studying. The Society is also involved in the study of environmental economics under the Capacity 21 Programme of the UNDP in collaboration with the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Mumbai. How much does a protected area generate? In the case of the Ghana, Salim Ali estimated that a small section of the heronry of about 4000 painted storks consumed 90 tons of fish in a 3 months period. Dr Vijayan, presently Director of SACON, estimated during the BNHS study of the ecology of the Ghana that in a year 460 tonnes of fish were consumed by the heronries at the Ghana. This works out to approximately 14 million Rupees at a value of Rs 30/- per kilogram of fish. In addition there is a considerable quantity of fish which is not harvested by animal or man and is recycled into the system. Grass which is freely harvested by the surrounding villages with permits from the Park authorities is valued at 28 to 63 lakhs Rupees annually and tourism generates over 2 million Rupees revenue. Environmental economics looks at wealth generated by an ecosystem and used within it as in the case of the fish at the Ghana and

available for dispersal as in the case of the grass from the Ghana and generated by but outside the system as the tourist traffic. Can these be maintained is the question.

Salim Ali's birthday and the associated Salim Ali Bird Count have both come and gone. Our idea when we set in motion the bird count in 1993 was to have Salim Ali's birthday recognised as Indian Bird Day, a day when members and others can appreciate the solace that birdwatching as a hobby brings to this stress-filled world and to recognise the services that Salim Ali rendered by making this excellent hobby popular. We do not wish to have an accurate tally of birds nor are we much worried about the identification which we can check. What we would like to see is members and their friends out in the field on that day relaxing and watching birds, to make it a *national day for birds*. The response has been poor, perhaps we did not get the message across.

The Freedom/Memorial Grove grows slowly. 30 saplings have been planted so far but one still remains hopeful that we will plant all fifty before the 50th year of Independence ends in July 1998.

One gratifying result of the recent rules referendum was that we were contacted by some of our oldest life members who were perturbed that they may not receive their *Journal* — a fear that is unfounded as changes in rules are not retrospective. We are happy that Mr A.E.G. Best who in the late nineteen forties published a comprehensive note in the *Journal* on the Butterflies of Bombay and Salsette Island, wrote to us from Australia. Mr Best is now 92 years of age and continues to have an active interest in Indian Natural History. Another Australian connection who responded is Mr Angus Hutton formerly of the Highways Mountain in South India, who has a pit viper named after him *Trimeresurus huttoni* (the generic name has since been changed). He also discovered the rare, endemic fruit bat *Latidens salimali* recently rediscovered in the same area by our mammalogist Dr Manoj Muni. Mr Hutton has offered the Society his natural history library. The trouble is to get it across! Mr Hutton is now in his seventies. Another member who is in his nineties and active is Mr Thomas Gay of Pune whose book on butterflies written in collaboration with Mr Isaac Kehimkar of the Society was published by WWF-India.

The response to our advise on the availability of fieldwork funds in the Salim Ali Loke Wan Tho Ornithological Research Fund and the Salim Ali Nature Conservation Fund is quite satisfactory. The applications are being processed.

The Society's contribution to conservation in the form of collaborative studies was recognised by the Department of the Interior, Government of USA by the presentation of a Citation to the Society for its collaborative programmes with the Fish and Wildlife Service of the Interior Department.

The Forest Bill which is to be enacted has given rise to considerable controversy and we purpose to hold a seminar on it in January.

This year's high quality wall calendar draws attention to the highly endangered Sanjay Gandhi (Borivli) National Park on the outskirts but within the Municipal limits of Mumbai. We hope you will contribute to its conservation by purchasing copies and spreading the message for as the poet says :

"E'en now the destruction is begun,  
And half the business of destruction done".



**BIRDING IN RADHANAGRI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, DAJIPUR AND MAHABALESHWAR. MUKUND THAKKAR and CHIRAG PATEL, E-98, Chhadva Nagar, H.P.K. Marg, Kurla (w) Mumbai 400 070**

As usual, we opened the Tourist map of Maharashtra in order to search for a suitable place to spend Diwali holidays and this time we chose Radhanagri W.L.S. near Kolhapur. We were attracted to the place mainly because of the differences in the type of vegetation and biotope from that of Mumbai and its nearby areas.

Radhanagri Wildlife (Bison) Sanctuary is situated in Dajipur in South-West Maharashtra (Kolhapur district) on the Western Ghats range of mountains encompassing 351 sq km of moist deciduous and evergreen forest. It is well-known for its population of Bisons. The Sanctuary and the nearby hills are also home for variety of species of birds.

We reached there on November 9, 1996 and spent almost three days watching birds in that region. We noted around fifty-five species of birds. Among them, notably, was a pair of blacknaped oriole which is a stray migrant in Maharashtra as per Humayun Abulali's 'Checklist of the Birds of Maharashtra' (BNHS, 1981). In the latest revised edition of Salim Ali's 'Book of Indian Birds' (BNHS, 1996) it is mentioned that it is an occasional visitor to SW India in winter. And similarly we saw a rufoustailed flycatcher, perched on a tree-top early morning on 11th November. It was possible to identify that bird only with the help of the notes given in the 'Book of Indian Birds' about its habits. It is also a visitor to SW India in winter.

Also, we were amazed by the presence of the small sunbirds and red whiskered bulbuls which were in plenty. We also saw many plain coloured flowerpeckers and small green barbets. We could not identify some warblers and flycatchers because of absence of any particular features. Though the back-waters of Radhanagri Dam, which is almost 15-18 kms away, reach right upto the Sanctuary, surprisingly there were hardly any water birds. We could only see a couple of common sandpipers, pond herons and whitebreasted waterhens.

From Dajipur we went to Mahabaleshwar for three days and there also we did see a few interesting birds. For the sake of brevity, the list of birds seen in the Mahabaleshwar are merged in the list of birds seen in Dajipur.

Sr. Ref. No.	Name	Scientific Name			
1. 42	Pond heron or paddy bird	<i>Ardeola graii</i>	45. 1461	Paradise flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
2. 133	Pariah kite	<i>Milvus migrans govinda</i>	46. 1661	Magpie robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
3. 148	Sparrow hawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	47. 1692	Brown rock chat	<i>Cercomela fusca</i>
4. 185	Indian whitebacked vulture	<i>Gyps indicus</i>	48. 1712	Pied chat	<i>Oenanthe picata</i>
5. 275	Red spurfowl	<i>Galloperdix spadicea</i>	49. 1723	Blueheaded rock thrush	<i>Monticola cinclorhynchus</i>
6. 301	Grey junglefowl	<i>Gallus sonnerattii</i>	50. 1728	Malabar whistling thrush	<i>Myiophonus horsfieldii</i>
7. 343	Whitebreasted waterhen	<i>Amauornis phoenicurus</i>	51. 1809	Yellowcheeked tit	<i>Parus xanthogenys</i>
8. 366	Redwattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	52. 1858	Paddyfield pipit	<i>Anthus novaeseelandiae</i>
9. 401	Common sandpiper	<i>Tringa hypoleucos</i>	53. 1875	Yellow wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava beema</i>
10. 530	Rufous turtle dove	<i>Sreptopelia orientalis</i>	54. 1885	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla dukhunensis</i>
11. 546	Large alexandrian parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>	55. 1891	Large pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>
12. 550	Roseringed parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	56. 1899	Tickell's flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>
13. 567	Indian lorikeet	<i>Loriculus vernalis</i>	57. 1902	Plaincoloured flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum concolor</i>
14. 600	Crow-pheasant	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	58. 1909	Small sunbird	<i>Nectarinia minima</i>
15. 703	House swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	59. 1917	Purple sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>
16. 719	Lesser pied kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>	60. 1949	Yellowthroated sparrow	<i>Petronia xanthocollis</i>
17. 736	Whitebreasted kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>			
18. 750	Green bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>			
19. 756	Indian roller or blue jay	<i>Coracias bengalensis</i>			
20. 780	Large green barbet	<i>Meagalaima zeylanica caniceps</i>			
21. 785	Small green barbet	<i>Megalaima viridis</i>			
22. 902	Sykes's crested lark	<i>Galerida deva</i>			
23. 907	Eastern skylark	<i>Alauda gulgula</i>			
24. 946	Rufousbacked shrike	<i>Lanius schach erythronotus</i>			
25. 954	Blacknaped oriole	<i>Oriolus chinensis diffusus</i>			
26. 962	Black drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis albiventer</i>			
27. 1057	Jungle crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos culminatus</i>			
28. 1081	Scarlet minivet	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>			
29. 1101	Iora	<i>Agithina tiphia multicolli</i>			
30. 1104	Goldfronted chloropsis	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>			
31. 1108	Goldmantled chloropsis	<i>Chloropsis cochinchinensis</i>			
32. 1120	Redwhiskered bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>			
33. 1128	Redvented bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>			
34. 1144	Yellow browed bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes indicus</i>			
35. 1149	Black bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes madagascariensis</i>			
36. 1154	Spotted babbler	<i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>			
37. 1173	Slatyheaded scimitar babbler	<i>Pomatorhinus horsfieldi</i>			
38. 1254	Common babbler	<i>Turdoides caudatus</i>			
39. 1259	Rufous babbler	<i>Turdoides subrufus</i>			
40. 1262	Jungle babbler	<i>Turdoides striatus</i>			
41. 1389	Quaker babbler	<i>Alcippe poioicephala</i>			
42. 1409	Rufoustailed flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa ruficauda</i>			
43. 1442	Tickell's blue flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa tickelliae</i>			
44. 1451	Whitebrowed fantail flycatcher	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>			

#### The books referred for the identification are :

- The Book of Indian Birds, by Dr Salim Ali, twelfth revised edition
- The Pictorial guide to Birds of Indian Subcontinent, by Dr Salim Ali,
- The Birds of India, by Bikram Grewal, 1993 edition.



#### FIVE STAR BIRDING AND COMMENTS ON NEWSLETTER. LAVKUMAR KHACHAR, 646, Vastunirman, Gandhinagar, GUJARAT 382 002

On Beyt Dwarka or more correctly Beyt Shankhodhar, off the port of Okha at the entrance of the Gulf of Kachchh I have had constructed a simple residential complex right on the bluff overlooking the Balapar Bay. On the terrace one gets an unhindered view east over the clear waters and every day starts, with a spectacular sunrise. Some 20 feet below are a shelf of rocks and beyond is a stretch of tidal mud over which the sea quietly comes and goes creating a rich feeding expanse for an assortment of waders, gulls, terns and of course herons, egrets and storks. Here is birdwatching at its luxurious best. Sipping hot coffee in the chill of dawn or sucking coconut juice seated in the warm winter sun one can pick up a pair of binoculars to watch a crab plover stalk its prey or examine the upturned curve of a terrestric sandpiper's bill or the downward curve of a curlew sandpiper's. Quite casually one becomes conscious of the idiosyncracies of different birds for example, a grey heron on taking flight almost invariably utter three or four "wak"... "wak"... "wak"s while the curlew on alighting seems to want every bird in the vicinity to know of its arrival by uttering its characteristic high pitched call. The scientists among you may like to puzzle out the survival value

of these idiosyncracies; for me, they are just that - demonstration of heron or curlew exhibitionism.

When the tide has ebbed to the maximum, the concourse of birds is widely dispersed and one has an impression of there being little by way of birdlife; glassing the glistening mud one makes out first the oystercatchers, then the whimbrel, the godwit and the curlew; the smaller waders are barely visible. The large and handsome crab plovers are surprisingly invisible as they feed in widely spaced solos. Or this time when in fact bird activity is at its highest, the birds are least visible except for the elegant terns quartering the mud. The commonest tern is the all white, black billed gull billed tern; occasionally the spectacular, large Caspian terns with their brilliant coral red beaks arrive and alight on some oyster encrusted rock out-crop to wait for the water and with it the fish to return.

When the tide turns, there is suddenly considerable activity as the forward birds flight back in front of the encroaching water. There is much chittering and chasing and one suddenly notices how many birds there are. Slowly the water covers the mud and the birds, still feeding begin to flock closer and closer and then one can make out the dunlins, the curlew sandpipers, possibly a few broad-billed sandpipers, marsh sandpipers, redshanks and terek sandpipers feed briskly till the very last. It is now that one can observe the characteristic movements of the sand plovers, the probings and quick spurts or light jabs on the mud surface of the different often confusingly similar species.

As the tide continues to rise, the herons and egrets settle on rocks or the few small mangroves while the waders assemble in tight flocks both to have a siesta and patiently to wait for the tide to turn. It is in these massed numbers that most birdwatchers find excitement, though identifying waders huddled together is not easy and one feels the need for a powerful telescope.

A little distant away from the terrace, in the mud, I have had a tall iron girder erected. Very frequently, when the water is at its greatest an osprey alights on it offering some grand poses.

Friends wanting to do some highly relaxed birding, relaxed in the winter sun should write to the Education Officer, SUNDARVAN Nature Study Centre, Jodhpur Tekra, Ahmedabad 380 015. Birds apart, there is swimming in crystal clear waters with dolphins and if lucky a dugong.

#### **Comments on Newsletter Vol. 37, No. 5 and other matter.**

The "Birds of Palakkad Hills" made fascinating reading. This is the sort of material we need to see and our amateurs and ornithologist experts should be able to send in light, well written pieces which are a pleasure to read and the pleasure enhanced by becoming an armchair companion to the writer. Perhaps as one gets on in age, one has to reveal having accumulated "expertise" and so pin pricking tends to become

a habit. What on Earth are the "Three toed and four toed quails" that are "spotted" on "lucky days"?

The reference to a frigate bird is interesting and reminds me to report that during the last monsoon (I must be careful to indicate the SW Monsoon) in September a masked booby was recorded on the Mandir beach of Kachchh. Ashwin Desai who saw the bird took some good photographs. A note has been sent to BNHS. The editor might consider having an outline map of India and indicate where the various articles emanate from. It would need a little planning to begin with.

I have sent an article called My Year of the Pelican. Fittingly the last Newsletter for 1997 carries a piece on the Kokrebellur Pelicans.

And finally, a rejoinder to my friend Baljit. I do not think pigeons cause any problem to the MPs in Lok Sabha. They have long ago been scared off by the fish market it has been converted into.

In the early 1970s the Gujarat Information Department had asked me to write a book on the birds of Nal Sarovar. It was profusely illustrated by KP Jadav and the text was printed and colour separations made of the illustrations and then for some mysterious reasons, the project did not move forward. Well, all of a sudden I got news that the material was neatly stacked in the government press and through the good offices of the Chief Secretary we located the material. Today morning was spent in salvaging the illustrations and the text. It was like finding a long lost child. Hopefully, with a little changes a Book of Gujarat's Wetlands will finally see the light of day!

This reminds me, what has happened to India Through Her Birds ?



**INVITATION TO HOST 2002, INTERNATIONAL ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS IN BEIJING, CHINA.**  
*ZHENG GUANG-MEI, Chairman, National Committee for 2002 Ornithological Congress, President, China Ornithological Society, Department of Biology, Beijing Normal University, Beijing 100875, China*

As you know, the site for the 2002 International Ornithological Congress will be decided upon at the IOC meeting during the Ornithological Congress in Durban, South Africa, in August 1998. The National Committee of China for the 2002 International Ornithological Congress has recently sent its formal invitation to the President and Secretary of the International Ornithological Committee to hold the 23rd International Ornithological Congress in Beijing, China, in August 2002.

We are attaching a summary of our invitation for your reference in a hope that you will give your comments and suggestions. If you have any inquiries and questions about the details of our invitation, please do not hesitate to contact

us. We will be glad to provide as detailed information as possible.

### A Summary

**General :** China has a land with high biodiversity. The variations of topography, soil, climate, humidity and vegetation provide favourable conditions for many kinds of wildlife. So far, 1260 species of birds have been recorded in the country. Of the 49 species of pheasants in the world, 27 are found in China. Of the 15 crane species of the world, 8 occur in China. A number of species, such as golden pheasant, Chinese monal, brown eared-pheasant and Sichuan hill-partridge, are endemic to China. If the 2002 congress is held in Beijing, it will be the first ever to be held in Asia, and be a good opportunity for International Ornithologists to learn about China and learn about Chinese ornithology. It will also promote the development of ornithology and contribute to the conservation of the threatened or endangered bird species in Asia.



### TAMED ASIAN OPENBILL STORKS *ANASTOMUS OSCITANS* IN KULIK BIRD SANCTUARY, RAIGANG, NORTH DINAJPUR DISTRICT OF WEST BENGAL.

ARUNAYAN SHARMA, *Green Peoples India (Office), Pranta Pally, P.O. & Dist. - Malda, West Bengal 732 101, India*

On 7th December, 1997, I went to Kulik Bird Sanctuary of Raigang to survey Asian openbill storks *Anastomus oscitans* population. Kulik is a Bird Sanctuary (heronry) specially for Asian openbill storks, but cormorants, egrets and herons breed here.

I reached the Sanctuary at 11.15 a.m. and followed the path which started near the main entrance gate. Half an hour later I stopped for a while near the forest guard quarters, and I saw a few Asian openbill storks roaming around searching for food. Three birds moved in the backyard with domesticated junglefowl and duck as part of the same flock, some times pecking each other.

To watch them closely, I approached the birds, but surprisingly they ignored my presence even when I was at a distance of just 2 m from them. They behaved just like tame birds. There was also a roosting tree in the backyard where there were 12 nests. All birds were adults.

This behaviour of Asian openbill stork is notable because they have completely lost their wild feeding behaviour and have adapted themselves to Human Society.



### HIGHLIGHTS OF MID-WINTER WATERFOWL CENSUS - JANUARY 1998. BIRDWATCHERS' FIELD CLUB OF BANGALORE, 13, 2nd 'A' Cross, 7th Main, KSRTC Layout, JP Nagar, 2nd Phase, Bangalore 560 078

**Hoskote Tank, 18.1.98 :** White stork - 6; Grey pelican - 2; Brownheaded gull - 65; Brahminy duck - 10; Spoonbill - 43;

Bar headed geese - 13; White ibis - 6; Painted stork - 84; Open bill stork - 60; River tern - 8; Unidentified ducks - 2, 500 +

**Yellamallappa Shetty Tank, 18.1.98 :** Large cormorant - 20; Grey pelican - 1.

**Jigani Tank, 25.1.98 :** Comb duck (Nakta) - 2; Lesser whistling teal - 40; Cotton teal - 22; Pheasant tailed jacana - 2; Kestrel - 1 (Male).

**Byramangala Tank, 25.1.98 :** Grey pelican - 2.

**Bellandur Tank, 26.1.98 :** Shoveller - 7, 216; Pintail duck - 128; Black winged stilt - 51; Purple moorhen - 24; Marsh harrier - 3.

### MADRAS NATURALISTS' SOCIETY

Eight members took part in the bird count of Pulicat Lake on 15- 16 January 1998. The counts were made both by boat as well as along the roads. Unlike in earlier years, an attempt was made to do a more comprehensive count, covering the southern and northern ends of the lake. A total 82,455 birds were counted. Of this 52,353 were ducks of atleast 7 species. The waders, represented by atleast 14 species, accounted for 12,563 birds. There were 10,777 flamingoes including 355 lesser flamingoes, egrets of five species accounted for 3085 birds while gulls and terns of six species added another 1816 birds to the total. Besides, there were 95 grey pelicans, 80 white ibises, 231 painted and 605 openbill storks and 350 cormorants. Rarer birds counted include 245 barheaded geese, 5 ruddy shelduck (Brahminy duck), a peregrine falcon and a greater spotted eagle. This count is perhaps the highest ever for Pulicat, though with the best efforts we could cover just over 60% of the lake area. We are grateful to the DFO (Wildlife), Sullurpetta and his staff members who co-operated with us for the count.



### PURPLE HERON EATING WHITE BREASTED KINGFISHER. DR. PIYUSH PATEL, X-Ray & Sonography Clinic, Avi Arcade, Halar Road, Valsad

25th December was a rather cold and cloudy day. While walking through the marshy land at about 9.30 am in the Ghana National Park, Bharatpur, Rajasthan, we observed a Purple heron *Ardea purpurea* trying hard to eat something in the marsh about 20 feet from us. Through our Binoculars (10 x 50) we saw the heron feeding on a whitebreasted kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*. It was obvious from the kingfisher's size and shape that the kingfisher was a freshly killed adult. We were surprised on seeing this, as to the best of our knowledge this has never been recorded in the dietary of the purple heron.

We spent half-an hour observing the heron making an effort to gulp the kingfisher as a whole just like a fish. However, it did not succeed as the bill of kingfisher was too big and hard to gulp. After about fifteen minutes the heron left the prey, for a few seconds in the marsh and once again tried to swallow the beak and the head portion of the kingfisher. It even tried to tear out the bill without success. After observing this for 30 minutes we left the scene.

Till today, we have not come across any publication recorded of purple heron attempting to feed on birds, especially whitebreasted kingfisher.



**BIRDS AT FULBARI BARRAGE. MAYUKH CHAKRABORTI, 78, DR. S.P. Mukherjee Road, Sibmondir, Kadamtala P.O., Siliguri, Darjeeling District, West Bengal 734 433**

Last 4th February '98 I went to Fulbari Barrage with my Biology Teacher to see some RM resident/migrant and M type birds. Fulbari Barrage (Undertaking by Teesta Valley Corp.) is 5 km from Siliguri City.

At Fulbari, I saw 6 RM and 2 M birds. These birds usually arrive here in Dec. - Jan. and depart in April.

Name of the birds	Number of birds I saw
1. Alpine swift (RM)	Near about 200
2. White wagtail (RM)	" 60
3. Little cormorant (RM)	" 170
4. Large cormorant (RM)	" 02
5. Common or fantail snipe (RM)	" 220
6. Brahminy duck (RM)	" 250
7. Common crane (M)	01
8. Demoiselle crane (M)	02



**FEEDING ON STEM BORERS OF BAMBOO CULMS BY YELLOW FRONTED PIED WOODPECKER *Picoides mahrattensis*. SATISH KUMAR SHARMA, Range Forest Officer, Aravalli Afforestation Project, Jhadol (F.), Udaipur 313 702.**

Quite often when I go to Jhadol Forest Range in Udaipur district of Rajasthan State, I find a few Yellowfronted pied woodpeckers *Picoides mahrattensis* clinging on bamboo *Dendrocalamus strictus* culms. Invariably these woodpeckers probe into the nodes of the culms. They alight lowdown on the culms and gradually move upwards searching for insects on each node. Stem borers inhabit the holes just above the nodal joint which remains well protected by a nodal sheath. These woodpeckers are capable of pulling out the borers from the holes and thus help the plant to get rid of these pests. Yellowfronted pied woodpeckers seem partial to stem borers of bamboo culms, and I have never seen any other species of woodpecker feeding on stem borers of bamboo.



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.

**FALCONS AT JFK. CHARLES LAURENCE in New York.**

Thirteen falcons with six falconers to control them have been put on the payroll at New York's Kennedy Airport in the latest effort to protect passengers' safety.

Their job is to frighten away seagulls and vast flocks of migrating birds which could cause serious accidents if sucked into jet engines. The airport managers have brought the 4,000 year old art of falconry into the world of jet engines and radar beacons after struggling for years to control birds.

Two teams of falconers, each with specially equipped vans, now patrol around the clock, ready to release a peregrine falcon. "Just the sight of an actively hunting falcon is enough to scare away almost any bird within half a mile," said Thomas Cullen, one of the falconers, on patrol with a bird called Basil.

The falcon programme was introduced last year, and airport authorities say it was so successful that they now propose to make it permanent. A £ 140,000 annual contract with the falconers has been approved.

A measure of success was that while Department of Agriculture pest control officers shot 6,700 hazardous birds the year before, the number dropped to 2,000 once the falcons were introduced.

"It is worth spending a little to save major costs from damage to aircraft and God forbid, loss of life or limb," said Albert Graser, the Port Authority manager of airport operations and security.

The authority said other airports in Europe, Taiwan and Canada had experimented with falcons, but none on the scale of the team at Kennedy. The US air force is also running trials on the technique. Kennedy is particularly vulnerable to bird intrusion because it is built on a seashore which is a natural breeding and feeding ground for birds.

The National Park Service has set up a huge bird sanctuary next door at the Jamaica Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Canada geese and migrating swallows both use Jamaica Bay as a resting station on their journeys from north to south and back again.

Fifty thousand swallows are expected at the airport's north east corner next month. But the greatest hazard is now reported to be thousands of laughing gulls, a species hunted almost to extinction for its feathers but now rebounding.

Their numbers have multiplied since the Park Service launched a breeding programme early in the 1980s, and there are at least 3,000 nests within a mile of the main Kennedy runway. The Federal Aviation Administration says bird strikes cause about £ 250 million in damage to civilian and military aircraft every year in America.

In 1995, 24 people died when an air force surveillance jet crashed after four geese were sucked into its engines.

**Cover : White Eye (*Zosterops palpebrosa*).** This restless tiny olive green bird has a marked preference for gardens and hill jungles close to cultivation. Found in small parties always on the move, making pleasing jingling notes *cheen...cheen*. These birds help in pollination of many flowering plants. The male white eye renders a short melodious warbling song from a favorite perch during the breeding season.

Photo : S. Sridhar, ARPS



# Canaries in the global mineshaft

JOHN VIDAL and STEPHEN MOSS Report

*One in 10 bird species face extinction and two thirds are endangered.*

**H**ello *Xenoperdix udzungwensis*. This partridge-like bird - not just a new species but a new genus of birds - was found last year with its beak firmly down in Tanzania's mountain forests. Its discovery by four Danes is poignant because bird populations are declining or collapsing all over the world. Of almost 10,000 bird species, more than 1,000 are in danger of extinction and 6,000 are noticeably declining in numbers.

*Xenoperdix*, this month's avian cover-girl, goes straight into the world's red data list of threatened birds run by Birdlife International. The Cambridge-based global conservation body sifts individual country data, prepares the red book of endangered birds and is in a sophisticated flap at the significance of what is happening.

Extinctions are not uncommon in nature, says Dr Nigel Collar, a researcher. But to be on the point of losing a tenth of the world's bird diversity is decidedly unnatural. It's unprecedented in scale and is linked directly to the global intensification of development in the past 25 years.

Natural extinctions occur when a species fails to respond to changing circumstances or when one evolves into something else. But a human hand is behind almost every one of the 1,000 threats.

In a limited way, this has long been so; homo, the dominant hunter, trained his dogs, introduced and bred his cats and pigs and has wiped out waves of species. The Maoris took out the moa birds 1,000 years ago, the Malagasy did the same with Madagascar's elephant bird. Adios the dodo, not because it was a stupid, flightless, un-reconstructable bird (it was, but not in its peculiar island niche), but, says Collar, because it never stood an earthly when the first prow touched Mauritian sands.

Birds are now recognised as part of the ecological web. Essential to the vitality of plants, they help prevent insect plagues, suppress explosions of rodents, scatter seeds and generally protect. Farmers, foresters, botanists, and agronomists are concerned, too. The corollary is obvious; lose the birds and the economic problems can multiply.

Birds, moreover, are now recognised as the canaries in the global mineshaft - reliable indicators of trouble ahead. A good, diverse, healthy bird population makes a good index for the overall well-being of an eco-system, but if birds are falling off their perches, as the figures suggest, we should beware - the trouble is with us now.

Most of the threatened extinctions are tropical forest species, whose habitats are falling to the chainsaws, whose range is limited and whose numbers are small. The Phillippines, says Birdlife, is a disaster zone with 126 species immediately threatened with extinction, Brazil has 97, China 81, Peru and Colombia more than 50.

But extinctions are only the tip of the problem. Birdlife research being collated now (and to be published later this year) from 45 European countries will show that 280 out of 530 species are vulnerable. More than a third of European species have declined in numbers in the last 20 years, some rapidly.

"Changes in farming systems, the intensification of agriculture, drainage of moorland and irrigation works all have a big impact on habitats", says Melanie Heath, who is co-ordinating the work.

The biggest survey of the nation's birdlife, written up as *The New Atlas Of Breeding Birds In Britain And Ireland*, contains the results of fieldwork between 1988 and 1991 by thousands of observers, who registered more than 1.25 million records of over 200 species.

During the four survey years, 219 species bred at least once in Britain, with 142 in Ireland - a net increase of three. But the status of our breeding birds cannot be judged simply by looking at the total number of species. The researchers also mapped the change in each species' distribution in the past 20 years, and the results confirm Birdlife's observations. Several species are in rapid decline. The range of the corncrake, a shy relative of the coot, has, for example, contracted more than two-thirds in 20 years and the authors of the atlas conclude that it may be extinct in the British Isles within 20 years.

Countryside birds aren't the only ones threatened. Familiar town and garden species like the house sparrow, blackbird and song thrush show small contractions in range while many familiar summer visitors are also threatened. Severe drought in the Sahel zone of western Africa in the 1970s and early 1980s devastated British populations of whitethroat, sedge warbler and sand martin. Many of these long-distance migrants now seem to have stabilised at a lower level.

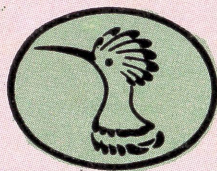
Its not all bad news. Many of Britain's birds of prey have come back from the brink of extinction, thanks to the banning of organo-chlorine pesticides like DDT. Britain's sparrowhawks are now a familiar sight in our suburbs and even city-centres and the peregrine has survived egg-collectors and falconers.

The fish-eating osprey, which only recolonised Scotland in the 1950s, has expanded its range five fold. The soft winters during the survey period helped the wren retain its pole position as Britain and Ireland's commonest breeding bird, with an estimated 10 million pairs.

Perhaps the most surprising finding is that of the top 10 expansions in range, no fewer than five are introduced, alien species. these include the exotic ring-necked parakeet. Having escaped from zoos and private aviaries, this Asian species has found an ecological niche in London's suburbs. In years to come *Xenoperdix udzungwensis*, too, may be bred in British zoos, and in turn escape. Whether it will find a niche, however, is debatable.

*Guardian Weekly, February 13, 1994.*

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This is a self-study course of six months duration ; students will put in personal effort at their own convenience. Lessons will be despatched in two or three lots. There will be two tests, one during the middle of the course and the other at the end. Answers will be sent by post and certificates will be awarded on satisfactory completion.

Courses commence on the first of the month following the date of registration. Intakes are restricted to 15 to 20 a month. In the event of rush, every effort will be made to accommodate within three months from the date of registration.

The course aims at imparting Environmental Education with birds as basis. Topics include avian biology, bird behaviour, ecology, conservation principles, biodiversity protection, saving endangered birds, field ornithology, caring for birds in distress, deep ecology etc.

### Fees

To make the course affordable to larger numbers and to promote bird consciousness among the public, the youth in particular, the fee has been lowered to Rs. 600/=. Further, **50% fee concession** is offered to **students of the age group 15-25 years** (Std X and above). This concession is also extended to **housewives, unemployed persons and other deserving cases.**

### Roster

**Dr. Radhika Herzberger,**

**Stephan Harding,** B.Sc., D.Phil (Oxon),

Resident Ecologist, Schumacher College, U.K.

**S. Rangaswami,** M.A. B.Sc. M.Ed.

Hony. Chief Warden, Rishi Valley Bird Preserve

**S. Sridhar,** ARPS,

Bird Photographer and Field Studies Expert

**V. Santharam,** M.Sc. Ph.D.,

Ecologist and Ornithologist

Director

Hony. Advisor

Head of Dept., & Faculty

Faculty

Faculty

(Rangaswami and Sridhar are authors of *Birds of Rishi Valley and Renewal of their Habitats*)

Apply to **Rishi Valley Education Centre (B.S.), Rishi Valley - 517 352**, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh with a Bank Draft for Rs.20/- (Rs. Twenty Only) in favour of Rishi Valley Education Centre on any bank with branch in Madanapalle or by Money Order. (with address on the reverse of the M.O. coupon).