

# NEWSLETTER

## FOR BIRDPWATCHERS

Volume 3-1963 September

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NEWSLETTER  
FOR  
BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 3, No. 9

September 1963

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RECOVERY OF RINGED BIRDS

Since the last announcement (Newsletter Vol. 3, No. 6, June 1963) of recoveries of birds ringed under the BNHS/WHO Bird Migration Field Study Project, information regarding two more recoveries of our ringed birds has come in. The particulars are as follows:

Date Ringed	Ring No. & species	Place ringed	Date re-covered	Place re-covered	Remarks
16.12.62	A-22268 <u>Motacilla flava thunbergi</u> (Grey-headed Yellow Wagtail)	Edanad, Chennannur, Kerala, c. 9° 20' N. x 76° 38' E.	Found dead 16.5.1963	Southern part of Karaganda region, Kazakhstan, USSR, c. 46° N. x 72° E.	c. 4170 km. north of Edanad
12.11.62	AB-1690 <u>Tringa stagnatilis</u> (Marsh Sandpiper)*	Point Calimere, Tanjore District, Madras State, c. 10° N. x 80° E.	Shot by man 4.5.63	Novosibirsk region, near Kupino, USSR, c. 54° 22' N. x 77° 18' E.	c. 4930 km. north of Madras

\*Tringa stagnatilis the Marsh Sandpiper, aptly also called Little Greenshank, breeds in the Palaearctic Region (except western Europe) across middle Asia east to Mongolia. It is a smaller and slimmer replica of the Greenshanks, with a very slender bill, white back and rump and more or less white upper tail-coverts, and altogether one of the daintiest and most beautiful of the tribe. In its winter quarters in India it keeps mainly to the sea coast; hardly ever seen inland.

Sálím Ali

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## BIRD NOTES FROM RAJKOT, GUJARAT

Normally July is a very wet month and most of our annual rainfall is received during this and the next month. The heavy showers are caused by strong convectional updrafts at the beginning of July, and there is usually much thunder and lightening to liven the performance.

This stormy beginning is then followed by a steady wind with low drifting clouds, which in the earlier parts of the morning almost percolate through the tree-tops and in hilly places everything is cool, damp, and misty. After the glare and heat and dust of summer this is very pleasant indeed. In August the clouds break up and then there are a few days of sun and clouds often with light showers and a brisk breeze. During this period, the crops and grass start growing rapidly and the countryside looks most charming. Birds are now busy feeding hungry and vociferous families. For the bird photographer starts a very busy period. The hot sun of September, soon asserts itself over the clouds, and there follows a period of high cumulous clouds, a gentle breeze, and everywhere there is a luminosity that enhances the colours of the sky, grass, and trees. As if to join in with the pageantry of colour, the little flowers start showing, and in grasslands, we see carpets of yellow composites, small, but making a brave show by their massed growth. The grass now tall and in seed, rustle and quiver as the wind plays among them. It is a fine period to be out. Most of the birds are being followed by fledglings on the wing, but there is again a certain amount of song in the air. Strangely enough, the Jungle Wren Warbler is on its eggs or has a nest-load of chicks; it has to wait for the grass to grow tall enough to hold its domed nest. This period is further enlivened by the arrival of a large number of migrants, many on passage to Arabia and Africa. Among these are the showy Kashmir Rollers and Bluecheeked Bee-eaters. White-throats, Spotted Flycatchers, and Redbacked Shrikes are plentiful, though soon to leave after a very short sojourn with us. There are a few violent storms with localised rain and strong winds and much lightening and thunder, and then one morning the wind veers to the north-west and the skies are clear and blue and the monsoon is gone. The grass now turns to a golden yellow or russet and with patches of green of late varieties. The mimosas and acacias are in bloom and the air is heavy with their scent and filled with the drone of bees and other insects. The cool season has set in and the air develops an edge to it in the mornings; winter migrants start dropping in and so one more monsoon and a bird-breeding season has gone.

This year, however, there has been very little rain, and we are faced with severe water shortage and of course a great need for fodder. The entire month has been inordinately cool and there has been much cloud, but none of the great storms have materialised, to pour down rains to slake the parched soil and to fill lakes and wells with life giving water. It is a very bad season for every one, including the birds and the birdwatchers. The question is what will happen to the drinking water supply as all the reservoirs are low, having received no fresh water. We shall have a very poor winter with waders unless we visit the sea coasts.

Strange as it may seem, I have made an addition to my list directly due to the drought, and that too of a bird of marshes. An old boy of my school saw a strange bird skulking in his agave hedge some 15 miles from here. Fortunately for the bird, his curiosity did not make him take up a gun, but instead as the bird seemed loath to fly, they beat around until it was disturbed and flew into trees of their near-by orchard. Here, strange to tell, the bird flew from one tree to another until exhausted, and hid under cover and allowed itself to be caught. As it would not eat grain offered to it, though resembling a game bird, but nothing like anything seen by the nimrods of the village, the boy had the sense to bring it over to me. At first glance I was completely nonplussed as to its identity. It was obviously one of the rails. The key in the FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA, Birds, proved very handy in placing the bird as a female Kora or Water Cock. Being great skul-

kers, they are not seen frequently, and the female looks like a crane and is probably overlooked as one of those mysterious creatures that tread reedy labrynth, their identity best left to a future date.

Readers will be happy to know that the bird has been released in the place it was caught. The question arises as to what a waterside bird was doing in a field hedge? No doubt, the drying up of its reed-fringed pools in the near-by stream had forced it to take up temporary abode in the shelter offered by the hedgegrove, and on being disturbed, it was at a loss to know where to go, being surrounded by vast expanses of open fields, and so it took refuge in the orchard where it was captured.

This is an interesting record for Saurashtra. I will now never fail to give every rail or moorhen a second and more careful glance, and every rustle in a reed-bed will be investigated for the possible presence of a male Kora with his heraldic shield over the head.

K.S. Lavkumar

✓Apropos of this note by K.S. Lavkumar we are giving two extracts about the Kora or Watercock which may interest readers.

Frank Finn (1906) in HOW TO KNOW THE INDIAN WADERS (pp. 96-7) writes: "This is a peculiarly leggy, long-toed bird, with a shield on the forehead pointed at the back, and growing out there into a long horn in the breeding male, which also differs much from the female in plumage, and is much larger."

"Out of the breeding season both sexes are pale brown, heavily streaked with dark brown above and finely barred with that colour below. In the breeding season the male becomes slaty-black nearly all over."

"In the male the bill, shield, and legs are red; in the female the bill is yellowish and the legs are dark green; the eyes, which are red in the male, being brown. Young birds are like the hen, but less barred below."

"The cock is nearly a foot and a half long, with the wing over eight inches, and the shank three, the middle toe being even longer than this. The hen is only fourteen inches in length, with the wing seven inches, and the shank about two and a half."

A letter to the Editor of the defunct Stray Feathers from J.R. Cripps dated July 10th 1874 reads: "Sir, Are you aware that the natives of the Dacca and Tipperah districts very often themselves hatch the eggs of the Watercock (Gallix cinereus)? The modus operandi is to take half a coconut shell, put a layer of cotton in, on top of which place the egg and fill up with cotton; the shell is then placed on the man's navel, and tied on with a long strip of cloth, which is wound round the body. Until the egg is hatched the man never bathes. At first I discredited the story, but many respectable natives assure me that they have known instances of this being done; they value those birds hatched by man very much. Jerdon says, on the authority of Dr. Taylor, that the 'Korah' is kept for fighting purposes; they are kept for the purpose of catching wild ones. When a wild one is heard calling, the tame bird being let loose finds him out, and grappling keeps hold until the owner comes up and catches both. I know two zamindars in the Tipperah district who are enthusiasts at this. Now ✓July is the time for this sport."

It would be interesting to learn from "respectable natives", if such there be (!), whether this hatching technique and sport are still in vogue, and details in this connection would be welcome. -- Editor

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#### GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD BREEDING IN RAJASTHAN DESERT

During July 1963, twentytwo Great Indian Bustards were observed in the Pokran-Chandan region. Nine birds were seen at a time in an overgrazed grassland of Cymbopogon sp. On the 26th of July, an egg was observed in an 1 cm. deep oval scrape which was 15 cm. long and about 10 cm. broad

On the wider side. The scrape was much smaller than the one observed by Shri Dharmakumarsinhji (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 59:173-184) who records 'a typical bustard-scrape, oval in shape and about a foot in length, pointing north-south, in short and long thin grass with Zizyphus bushes and a dry leafless plant close by'. This scrape was situated in loose sand and there was no lining except a few pebbles. It was situated in the centre of three Cymbopogon stalks which were 10-15 cm. wide and hardly 3 cm. tall. The egg was visible from a distance. Although Aerva tomentosa, Zizyphus nummularia, and Capparis aphylla bushes were there, yet the bird preferred to lay the egg in an open plain. The egg was 100 mm. long and 50 mm. in diameter at the wider side. Its weight was not taken as it was thought that handling might scare the bird. The egg was light olive-green in colour with paler tint on the broader end. It had linear dark brownish streaks.

At 2 p.m. the bird was nowhere near the egg. It was observed hatching it between 8 a.m. and 9.30 a.m. and in the evening. During the night the egg was lying unattended.

It is surprising how the bustard eggs survive unprotected in such open land where hundred of chinkara and thousands of sheep and cattle graze. There are lots of predators also like the desert cat, desert fox, jackal, mongoose, and a good many raptors.

Two more eggs have been reported by our field-staff in this area. Hatching of the eggs and growth of the young chicks will be observed.

Ishwar Prakash & Pulak K. Ghosh

Special Animal Studies Div., Central Arid Zone Research Institute, Jodhpur, Rajasthan.

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#### WHERE TO GO TO WATCH BIRDS

Many an enthusiastic birdwatcher firmly believes that one should do a lot of trekking in the countryside in order to come across 'rare' birds. I have found that if luck favours, 'rare' birds will come knocking at our doors! During the first fortnight of April 1963, at Ernakulam, in the heart of the town I was able to watch two birds -- till then practically unknown to me -- from my house, and watch them to my heart's content.

The first bird was a Drongo Cuckoo (Surniculus lugubris). My wife drew my attention to a small dark bird which was clinging to the spear-like, sprouting leaf of an arecanut tree. Having brought my binoculars out to confirm my identification of it as a Pigmy Woodpecker, I decided to scan the branches of a mango tree close by. What appeared to be a King Crow was sitting on a mistletoe-covered branch. I wouldn't have taken a second look at it if it had not jumped off to take a caterpillar from one of the leaves. Its flight was not at all drongo-like, but even then I did not take real notice of it. When it fluttered back to a perch, I looked at it through the glasses and was surprised to see it sitting with its tail laid horizontally on a few leaves. No Drongo would ever sit crouched like that, I felt. Then I noticed that the bird had 3 small white feathers on the hind crown! The shape of the head and the bill seemed to be 'different' too. By that time the bird had begun to pluck off and swallow, one by one, some large caterpillars that clung in a row to a mistletoe leaf. As the bird's tail moved about I was able to see also that its vent as well as most of the tail feathers had thin, white crescents on them. There could be no more doubts about its identity! I was able to watch it for the most part of half an hour. My only regret was that the bird never uttered its call. Having eaten a number of the thick juicy caterpillars, leaving quite a few still feeding on the leaf, it hopped off and began preening.

Thought that was the only time I saw the Drongo Cuckoo here, it was the

discovery of this 'rarity' that led to my spotting a Blacknaped Oriole on the same tree on the 10th of April. Having got into the habit of looking for the return of the Drongo Cuckoo, I was studying the birds on the mango tree and found what seemed to be an Indian Oriole. The bird, however, was not yellow enough to be a male Indian Oriole while its eye-stripe was too black and too striking for a female Indian Oriole. The binoculars settled the question. It was Oriolus chinensis! This bird, however, paid repeated visits to our area, gave me my fill of its voice, and obliged me by showing me the back of its head to make confirmation doubly sure. I saw the same bird almost every day till the 17th of April.

It is interesting to note that both these birds had been attracted to the place by the occurrence of a particularly suitable kind of food: the Drongo Cuckoo had undoubtedly come in search of the large caterpillars; the Oriole had come for the ripe fruit of a large mulberry bush growing 15 yards away from the mango tree.

These berries were being greedily eaten by Green Barbets, Redvented Bulbuls, and Magpie Robins. But neither the Blackheaded nor the Indian Oriole ever came near the mulberry plant, though they used to visit the mango tree fairly regularly. Why?

It is probable that mulberry fruit is well known to the Blacknaped Oriole while it is comparatively unknown, owing to its rarity in this region, to the other two species of oriole. But if Green Barbets, Bulbuls, and Magpie Robins (strict residents of the locality) could discover that mulberry fruit is delicious, what prevented the orioles from following suit?

If any budding birdwatcher asks me again where he should go to look for birds, I will tell him, with religious conviction now, "Go home and look at the nearest trees or ponds, or up into the sky that is right over your roof".

K.K. Neelakantan

XXI/12799, Karikamuri Road, Ernakulam,  
Kerala

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#### NON-HEREDITARY WHITE PLUMAGE

So far it has been assumed that abnormal white plumage in wild birds is hereditary, but studies at the World Bird Research Station in England have shown that a good deal, but not all, of such abnormal white plumage results from the intake of excessive artificial food and is non-hereditary. They feel that with the increasing number of people feeding wild birds such plumage might be on the increase, since it is frequently associated with the haunts of man, though it varies widely between different countries of the world, and within countries is much more frequent in some areas than in others.

The World Bird Research would be thankful if readers send them the following information about abnormally white marked birds:

Species

How much of the plumage affected and where.

Type locality, e.g. garden, park, scrub, forest.

Whether in a town, town edge, suburbs, rural area or area completely beyond the habitation of man.

If the bird(s) has been seen for more than a year, please state if the plumage has stayed the same or altered.

#### F u r t h e r   S t u d y

For those interested in further study, counts of the proportion of birds

with abnormal white plumage can be made in two ways:

(a) On finding a bird with abnormal plumage, count a hundred other birds in the same area without regard to species and including birds of the same species as the abnormal one. Among these 101 birds there may or may not be other birds with abnormal plumage. While reporting describe the abnormal bird as given above, and the numbers of the different species examined in the hundred together with sex where distinguishable. The count can be made over a period of several days.

(b) The second way is to visit a place at random and report on a total of hundred birds, giving the names and numbers of species, and descriptions of abnormal birds, if any. The most useful areas are either towns or deep in the countryside. If a rural area is studied give the distance to the nearest town. More than one set of observations can be made if time permits.

It must be remembered that negative results are as important as positive ones, and all reports should be sent to Mr. Noble Rollin, World Bird Research Station, Glanton, Northumberland, England.

(Mrs.) Jamal Ara

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THE LARGE CORMORANT : UNITED FRONT

A crisp, cool morning breeze, low-lying clouds covering the hills and the various birds chirping and singing away while searching for insects; I had set out on such a morning accompanied by my dogs round the Nakhi Lake. About half-way round, my attention was drawn by five Large Coromorants which had started their daily work. They were all proceeding abreast in a straight line and the amazing part of the whole performance was they were all diving simultaneously. Blob-blob they would disappear and come out one by one. The one emerging first would give a sort of look around for the others. When all five had surfaced, they would again get into formation and repeat the submerging again. This united front was carried on right till they came to the opposite shore of the lake which roughly took them fifteen minutes to reach. This unique sort of team-work among birds is observed by me for the first time.

Nirmalkumar of Jasdan,  
Sanand House, Nakhi Lake, Mt. Abu

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CAT-AND-MOUSE ANTICS OF A CORMORANT

A note in my diary made at Keoladeo Ghana, Bharatpur, 3 years ago reminds me of this interesting incident. A Large Cormorant (Phalacrocorax carbo), obviously sated, dived and brought up a catfish about 6 inches long in its bill. It swam with the quarry to the shore some 30 feet away and dropped it struggling on the bank, obviously enjoying the spectacle. Presently it picked up the fish again and swam out with it some distance, released it in the water, dived after it, caught it again and carried it back to the shore. The bird repeated these manoeuvres deliberately several times before jerking the fish into position and swallowing it head foremost, which it seemed in no hurry to do. This is manifestly the same play as a cat makes with a mouse it has caught, and clearly for the fun of it.

Sálim Ali

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ON THE NESTING HABITS OF THE INDIAN ROBIN,  
SAXICOLOIDES FULICATA (LINNAEUS)

In 1958 I saw a pair of Indian Robin, Saxicoloides fulicata (Linnaeus) building a nest on a fuse-box in our lecture theatre. The nest was completed towards the end of February and by the end of the breeding season three successive broods of robins were raised in the same nest.

At the same spot in 1959 a pair built a nest in which once again three successive broods were raised.

Again in February 1960, a pair of robins came to nest at the same traditional spot. The female laid the first clutch of two eggs in the first week of March but with one reason or the other the birds were disturbed quite often, so the eggs failed to hatch and the female laid in the same nest a second clutch which was also of two eggs. Out of these eggs one was destroyed but the other hatched out on 10 April. This time I ringed both the birds and their chick. The chick left the nest on the 22nd, but did not leave the lecture theatre till the 26th; between the 22nd and 26th I often saw the male bringing food to the chick which had by now turned into fledgling. After that I did not see this young bird for two days. When I saw it again on the 29th, I saw it far away from its parents' territory and curiously enough in association with another pair of robins, which was also ringed by me earlier. The fledgling was following the female (of this pair) feeding on the ground and I watched its movement for about half an hour. While still following the female it begged for food time to time and though though at times the female responded by feeding it, the former often tried to chase it away. However, the chick persisted in following this female, and once when it was mobbed by sparrows, it was this female that rescued it. During all this time the mate of this female was busy carrying away nesting material and the fledgling paid no attention to it. After the 29th I saw the fledgling quite often and on 18 May when I saw it for the last time it was still following the same female begging for food.

While the fledgling was wandering with other robins, its parents were busy making their old nest (on the fuse-box) tidy. Once the nest was arranged the female laid the third clutch of three eggs, out of which the egg that was laid second did not hatch but the other two hatched out by 15 May. Both the chicks steadily grew up and left the nest together on the 26 May. Thereafter, I did not see the chicks but saw their parents several times during the month of June; the male even visited the lecture theatre from time to time. After June 1960 I have not seen the female up to this date, (21.8.63), but the male came to the same place to breed again in 1961.

In 1961 when the male came back in the company of a female that had no ring, the lecture theatre was converted into a laboratory, and a number of changes had been made in the hall. That year, the traditional place of nesting on the fuse-box was abandoned in favour of a cardboard box lying on a window sill. In this box the robins managed to raise their first brood, but after the departure of the chicks the female was killed accidentally and the male left the hall never to return there again. Since then the robins have stopped nesting in that hall.

R.M. Naik, Ph.D.  
M.S. University, Faculty  
of Science, Baroda

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REVIEW

PAVO : The Indian Journal of Ornithology, Vol. I, No. 1. Published by the Dept. of Zoology, M.S. University, Baroda

This is the first issue of a half-yearly journal which will be published by the Society of Animal Morphologists & Physiologists. As the editor, Prof. J.C. George says, it is 'the outcome of a long cherished desire to have a distinctive Indian journal of ornithology to publish original research papers on the life of Indian birds in particular, and of the birds

of the world at large.'

The first article in the new journal, is an account by J.P. Thaker of the place of the peacock in India's history and literature. Among the other contributions Dhruv Dixit has written a carefully analytical account of the nesting of a Redvented Bulbul which chose to nest on the cup of a light elevator in his bedroom, an excellent site from the observer's point of view. The article is illustrated by photographs as well as sketches by the author. B.S. Lamba has written about the nesting of the Pond Heron. A particularly interesting note about the discovery of the Honey-guide in Nepal has been contributed by R.L. Fleming.

The bird is like a female rose-finch. When the bees which build hives on abrupt cliffs and rock walls desert their hives, the Honey-guide comes in flocks of thousands to feed on the surplus wax until the cliff is once more smooth. Dr. Fleming's discovery of the bird was, apparently the first record in that area and he was justly elated with his success.

Pavo will have the good wishes of everyone who is interested in the bird life of our country. And we hope that it will soon establish a place for itself among the ornithological journals of the world.

L.F.

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

In the June-July issue of Natural History there is an interesting article by Karoly Koffan on the ways of a parasitic bird. There are excellent photographs of a young European Cuckoo being fed by female birds of other species that were in the neighbourhood. Apparently the hungry cry of a young bird stimulates not only its own parents real or foster but females of other species also lend a hand. The author transferred a newly hatched cuckoo from a distant Wood Lark's nest on to the nest of a Spotted Flycatcher. The new comer ejected the rightful owner but the foster parents dutifully fed it. The persistent cries of this young cuckoo attracted flycatchers, warblers, song thrushes, and tree sparrows, and it was fed on earthworms, grubs, caterpillars, etc.

Some of our readers may have seen a note by Malcolm Macdonald about a group of Jungle Babblers which looked after the young of their own kind, published in 1959 in the J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 56(1):132-3, but apparently social instincts in birds go far beyond their own species. It will be interesting to learn if any of our readers have come across situations of this kind.

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CORRESPONDENCE

Baroda Birdwatchers' Club

In 1960 Shri Dharmakumarsinhji inaugurated the Birdwatchers' Club. Smt. Saralaben J. Mehta was elected President, and Prof. J.C. George and Dr. R. M. Naik as Vice-Presidents.

With the cooperation and help received from the Zoology Department of the M.S. University, the Club was able to usher in scientific birdwatching in Baroda. This year's activities of the Club started with a film show on 3 August, attended by about 300 enthusiasts. We owe an apology to the many others who could not be accommodated in the theatre. On 4 August the Club conducted an excursion to the 'Kamati Baug' to put in track the neophytes. The grand old man of Baroda gardens, Shri Zal P. Popat, the talented naturalist, Shri D.D. Gaikwad, and Prof. George's students explained the birds to the neophytes.

It will be a pleasure for the Club to welcome and help birdwatchers who

happen to drop in at Baroda. They may contact the Honorary Secretary of the Club.

A.R.K. Das  
Honorary Secretary  
Baroda Birdwatchers' Club  
c/o Division of Avian Biology  
M.S. University of Baroda

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An unforgettable moment in birdwatching

Thinking over some of the exhilarating experiences I have had in my few years of birdwatching, I feel I must record the following incident as my most unforgettable moment in birdwatching.

The place was Edanad and the day a very rainy one in late March. All day the inmates of the 1962 spring migration camp were hoping against hope that the rain would stop in time to allow the evening's netting. Then at 5 p.m. it happened. The rain suddenly stopped and out stepped a majestic rainbow arching triumphantly over the dark and white clouds. Soon the wagtails started arriving too, flocks after flocks of them winging their way east to the nightly roost. The 'inverted cup' of the Edanad sky was soon full of myriads of milling Yellow Wagtails, in various stages of the drop-to-roost. Caught against a back-drop of the rainbow and clouds their underparts shone like a million specks of gold. The orange rays of the setting sun added to their lustre. For a fleeting moment it looked as though the starry firmament had come nearer. Soon it was all over as the wagtails hit hay but the scene remains fresh in my mind.

Daniel Mathew  
Santa Cruz

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Which is our National Bird?

The official circular of the Government of India on the subject of our National Bird states that the Peacock Pavo cristatus has been chosen as our National Bird.

Which is our National Bird? The Peafowl Pavo cristatus or the Peacock which is the male of the species Pavo cristatus?

Joseph George  
Central Building Research  
Institute, Roorkee

Will Government please explain? -- Ed.

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Strange behaviour of the Whitespotted Fantail Flycatcher!

A pair of Fantail Flycatcher (Rhipidura albogularis) built a nest in a lemon tree near my house. The nest was complete by the end of April 1963. On 2 May three eggs were laid. I found that the nest was not left unattended during that whole day. A crow was driven away at about 17.30. The incubation continued. Both sexes shared the duty for several days continuously. On 8 May I found one egg turned one-third muddy coloured. I became suspicious about the other two eggs. I continued my observations. On 11 May at 13.45 I found something unusual happening. There was unrest among the birds. One of them was pecking in the inside and at the bottom of the nest. The other bird was very near. The nest was under my eyes at a distance of a metre. I could not understand the behaviour of the bird. I took it for granted that the bird was trying to make its accommodation in the nest safe. In the meanwhile it took to its wings suddenly. I looked into

the nest. There were only two eggs. A question arose. What about the third one? I thought that it might have been broken and the birds might be trying to throw away the debris. I watched steadfastly. After some time I found that the bird in the nest was actually pecking at the bottom of the nest. It then caught something red (about 0.4 cm. long) in its beak and flew away. It again returned to the nest. This time the pecking at the bottom was hard. It shook the nest and the eggs too. One of the eggs turned upside down. I found a small crack in it. The bird pecked at that very crack. I could not understand the situation. The bird caught the egg in its beak and flew away. I came running back to the nest. The third egg was intact and the bird was incubating it.

On 16 May in the early morning I found the last egg lost. And that finished my observations.

C.S. Suthar  
Sharda Mandir, Vallabh Vidyanagar  
Western Railway.

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#### On the House Sparrow

When I read your note I decided that I might as well study the sparrows (a number of them had moved in during our month's absence) as the birds had come to share our home with us. As a first step I put a shallow palmyrah leaf basket in one of the caves in the hall. Sure enough a sparrow couple came and decided to take it on as their homestead. I sat down to watch them. It took them fifteen minutes (I clocked the time) to make sure it was safe. It is quite interesting to watch. Mr. Sparrow jumps on the edge of the basket and hopping sideways makes a tour of the rim of the basket. All this while the dutiful wife is inside waiting patiently. Then the male sits inside, and the female starts reconnoitering. When they are satisfied, both step into the basket and we hear a lot of pecking. A complete three minutes of argument takes place. Only after that they start their hunt for building materials. Our house being a bit isolated, they have not much trouble collecting grass and straw. Within a very short while, I could see the basket filled full to the brim with straw. I had left an interspace of a couple of inches from the roof for the sparrows to go into their nests. Even that space seems to be filled with grass. When the main nest frame is completed, the weaving begins. It is quite a pretty sight how they perch on the branch of an acacia, slowly nip a little bunch of leaves and fly to their nest. Then, of course, they draw on me by helping themselves to the little bits of cotton or thread that I leave about by oversight. The jute threads I find are first given a complete softening treatment on the ground itself. They stand on one end of the thread and start pecking till it becomes fluffy. Then it is carried off.

I kept another basket in the other hall. To my surprise I find sparrows do not trouble us now. But for the couples in the two rooms there are not many. What has happened to all the crowd?

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