

Summer is upon us. The land lies dry, parched & yellow.
~~The~~ ^T trees look withered & wilted under the oppressive heat.

But nature is not all that harsh. Look at the bignonia tree. Its bloom appears as if ~~the~~ heavenly stars have alighted on it.

For the season also is one of joy. Birds are singing like ~~this~~ magpie robin ^{is} calling ^{to} his mate. They will soon pair & begin nest-building.

Everywhere you will find the ^{other} birds busy. The ashy-crowned finch lark has already laid its eggs under a clump of grass on open ground. The heat hardly deters it.

^A pair of red-wattled lapwings also has ^{its} nest among boulders & grass but it is not easy to find it.

Look how the lapwing's eggs merge completely with their surroundings. The bird, ^{when} it sits on for incubation also becomes invisible. See if you can find the yellow-wattled lapwing brooding her eggs in the open.

Cryptic coloured birds like this bustard quail ^{also} build their nests in the open fields which are now ploughed in anticipation of rains. ^{When} before the rains descend their chicks ^{will be} are out and on their own.

In the woods ~~the~~ trees are still leafless & the pair of grey fronted green pigeon can hardly hide themselves.

But in their ~~joy~~ joy of union they appear oblivious to the danger & their melodious song echoes through the trees. (bird call).

^{That} fine songster & mimic racket-tailed drongo has also found a mate & has already begun his nest in the fork of a jamun tree, joyously calling. (bird call).

His cousin of the country-side the king crow has built his nest at the end of a twig on the babul tree.

This ever-watchful pair of king crow is fearless in the defence of their nest, a fact known to other birds also for they need have no fear about the safety of their nest, ^{if} ~~which~~ ^{they have their nest} they ~~also~~ build in the vicinity.

Tall grasses use to shelter a flock of purple moorhens beside the lake. That cover is now no more & the moorhens feel awkward and exposed in the sea of pigmy grass.

By the road ^{side} banyan trees have less leaves & more fruits. The berries attract a variety of birds.

They are a favourite of ^{the} grey hornbill who has enclosed his wife in a small cavity in the mango tree.

^{He} ~~They~~ will feed her not only berries but also lizards & large insects ~~for~~ ^{his} beak is a ^{fear} fierce-some weapon.

^{But} Soon the weather will change. From the west an army of dark clouds will invade the skies. ~~But~~ ^A cool breeze will bring a promise of relief to the thirsty land.

The familiar note of the Hawk-cuckoo will ring thro' the skies and the tap-tapping of rain will soon follow.

(Bird call & rain)

Within a short time ^{it} ~~which~~ is green everywhere the bountifull skies will cover the earth & ^{water will} start-cascading down the mountains.

The rains have filled lakes & reservoirs and the low-lying portions have become wet-lands.

The wet-lands attract a variety of birds for they provide plenty of food like aquatic plants, insects & fish.

They also maintain the water table acting as a sponge to store and retain the life-giving waters.

No doubt ~~the~~ birds prefer to nest in colonies ~~round~~ around wet lands. Birds like white ibises, little cormorant darters ^s ~~waters~~ and painted storks. During rainy seasons these areas present a scene of immense activity.

Birds big and small like this pied wagtail are now

busy bringing up their chicks.

The Indian moorhens also nest in such areas on the edge of water amidst tall grass.

These can be distinguished from the white-breasted waterhen, also a shy bird often found among paddy fields. Its call is a familiar sound commonly heard early morning and late evening. (Bird Call)

When all is quiet the bird will come out to show its black and white plumage.

The Purple moorhen sporting the colours of a peacock ~~has~~ nests in such surroundings by the lake or marsh. This handsome bird is unfortunately persecuted and in consequence has become very shy and wary.

The pheasant-tailed jacana is an in conspicuous, dingy-coloured bird in winter. Have you ever seen a large, tailed chocolate brown wader in summer? For you will not recognise the familiar pheasant-tailed jacana, if you see him in this garb.

But as ~~as the~~ breeding season approaches his long tail will give him an entirely different appearance. The jacana is aptly named 'Lily trotter' for with his extra long toes he can walk on floating vegetation.

As grass grows taller & taller the weaver birds begin to carry it to build their nests on a palm tree on the edge of water. The weaver has now ~~put~~ put on a magnificent yellow ~~breast~~ ^{dress} to attract his mate. Soon ~~the pair~~ ^{the male} will complete the tubular entrance to their nest.

Large ~~wetlands~~ ^{zheels} and wet lands are not common in Maharashtra but are a feature of the northern plains. Bharatpur is one of the famous wetlands in our country and is also a world famous bird sanctuary.

Here in the autumn thousands of birds are busy with their family ~~chorus~~ ^{chorus}. The sanctuary is alive with their comings and goings. The darter sits on a submerged stump

of a tree to look for a fish,

It is also called a snake bird on account of his long neck.

A grey heron belongs to the same family as our familiar egret and is a regular breeding bird in this sanctuary.

Its cousin the purple heron is however a very shy bird. He effectively camouflages himself in tall weeds.

Flocks of ibises throng this wet land and breed in huge colonies in company with egrets, storks and cormorants. Early morning and evening these flocks come down to collect their insect food in the mud at the edge of the marsh. The huge painted stork also nests in colonies on the baobab trees and is often seen carrying twigs to repair his nest.

The nestlings are an ungainly, shaggy affair and look very much different.

by some invisible links hardly
take cognisance of the male woods
with his mate with a sweet lullaby.

(Note of Green Pigeon)

The racket-tailed drongo is
singing too (Song)

His more ubiquitous cousin
the King crow is keeping a watch
from a short-bush near his
nest in the babul tree

The pair is known for their
bravery & timid birds will often
build their nests close by to
profit by from ^{their} fearless defence
of the area.

~~The gregarious spotted quinnis
who are fond of gathering grass seeds
or have begun collecting in flocks~~

By the lake where the
flock of purple morkens used
to hide behind a screen of tall
rushes

Hardly anything remains
and the flock feels awkward
& exposed in the sea of pygmy grass.

By the roadside the banyan
tree is in fruit (music)

They are a great favourite of the
grey hornbill who has his nest
in the mango tree.

His beak is a fearful weapon
enabling him to gulp large fruit & as
well as lizards.

Soon however, the weather will change. Dark clouds will start invading the skies from the west - A welcome breeze will bring the promise of relief to the parched ~~land~~ ^{land}

Hidden the foliage the hawk-cuckoo will commence his familiar melody, as if insisting that farmers should begin sowing (soon)

Soon cool showers will descend from the heavens & the land will smile in all gratitude.

It is green everywhere, water will cascade down the mountains & light, wispy clouds drift slowly in the valleys.

Water is everywhere, brooks & rivulets, ~~springs~~ brooks & rivulets, rivers & lakes are overflowing.

The land has become a mammoth sponge soaking water.

~~These wet lands offer excellent forage to a number of birds who flock to them & often nest close by.~~

The season of plenty has come. ~~Birds~~ Green fields & wetlands offer a variety of insect & other food to birds & animals.

They flock to these

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— Look how the lapwings' eggs merge
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— This ever watchful pair of king crow is fearless in the defence of their nest. A fact known to other birds also for they need have no fear about the safety of their nest, in which they also build in the vicinity.

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