

[1/1]

REF: Your: nil.

June 11, 1994

Mr. Zafar Futehally  
# 2205, Oakwood II  
Jakkasandara  
Koramangala 8th Main  
BANGALORE - 560 034

Dear Mr. Futehally,

We have just returned from a lovely trip to Munnar - full of rain, mist and verdure. Lots of Nilgiri Tahr on the Rajamalai estate of Tata Tea, some good pictures. Birdwatching negligible due to rain and the monocultural habitat of tea bushes and eucalyptus.

I have received a letter from Dr. Asha Chandola-Saklani with enclosures of some correspondence between you and her. It makes things a bit confusing. I suppose she has circulated these to all RRs and EMs. Are you planning any clarification/note in the Newsletter ? The stand that the OSI and the NLBW shall have separate subscriptions might perhaps lead to the view that the two are not after-all working together. There is also a form for membership to the OSI. Please advice.


Enclosed is a Xerox from the Birdwatcher's Digest, of an idea I had one day, watching a tree-pie nest through my scope, and finding the whole thing tedious. I sent a small write-up for their MY-WAY column and they have actually published it. Thought it might interest you.

I have received an invitation for the function at Rishi Valley regarding release of the book on birds. I hope you will also be there and free over the weekend for a stint of birding at Horsley Hills. A friend and I are planning to drive down. Perhaps we could birdwatch together there !

A disk with a note on corrections, additions, etc., to the Nomenclature booklet has been left with Sridhar for inclusion in the Newsletter.

Hoping to meet you at Rishi Valley,

With best wishes,



Zafar Futehally

2205, Oakwood, 8th Main,  
3rd Block, Koramangala,  
BANGALORE - 560 034

Tele.No: 5533684

20th June 1994

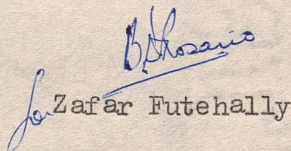
Mr. Aasheesh Pittie,  
14-7-370 Begum Bazaar,  
HYDERABAD - 500 012

My dear Aasheesh,

Thank you very much for your letter of June 11th. I know that our Secretary General and I do not see eye to eye on some problems. Since you are coming to Rishi Valley, we will get a chance to discuss this. I am also greatly looking forward to going out in the field with you.

You have made an interesting gadget for Scope users and perhaps you will give a demonstration in Rishi Valley.

Yours sincerely,

  
Zafar Futehally

received with NLBW

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**Keynote Address**

delivered by

***Padmashri Zafar Futehally***

on the occasion of the release of the book

***'Birds of Rishi Valley – and Renewal of their Habitats'.***

On 8th July 1994, at Rishi Valley.

It is of course a great pleasure and a great honour to be here today. The Rishi Valley School is a unique institution and its real worth can be judged by the many students who have passed out from here after being educated in the real sense of the term, and who in later life ascribe their success and happiness to the values inculcated in them while they were here.

I suppose it cannot be denied that what our country needs most today, is not liberalisation or foreign exchange or an agreement on GATT, important as these things are. What we really need are citizens of character. I believe I am right in saying that the Rishi Valley School lays equal emphasis on character as on examination results, and for this it deserves the highest praise as well as the widest public support.

It is not always obvious how important the natural environment is for the development of a well rounded personality. But you have kept this aspect in the forefront and seem to have succeeded in integrating the natural and the human environment in a most imaginative manner. Moreover, the fact that in your own development plans you have kept the interests of your neighbours at heart-both their economic as well as their ecological concerns-is an example - which needs to be followed. Instead of hostility you have engendered friendliness, and you will live in an atmosphere of peace.

I have been invited here to release this book on the Birds of Rishi Valley. I know that it is customary on such occasions to praise the book highly, and you might well think that I am doing only the customary thing. But for once I am speaking the truth when I say that this is quite a remarkable work. In a way it is a complete ornithological education. It contains the history of ornithology in India in a brief cogent manner ; it emphasizes the importance of birds in land use planning; it gives a lively and accurate description of the 150 bird species of your campus with superb accompanying photographs and paintings. Above all the book is no mere exhortation of what should be done - as so many are - but is a record of what has actually been achieved. As an example of what can be done to inject life, and improve the productivity of lands whose vitality had been destroyed by past misuse, this record and the guidelines it contains is of greater significance than ostentatious resolutions passed in international conference. Finally, the authors, Mr. S Rangaswami and Mr S Sridhar, must be thanked for this technically fine production which will I hope adorn both our public libraries and private homes.

Perhaps it is not inappropriate, that at this point I refer to a few incidents in Salim Ali's life. These may be of value as providing guidelines for the serious Birdwatchers of this institution. In my fifty years association with him, from 1938 to 1988, I learnt, or I might say more appropriately, tried to learn, firstly that where you are our

birdwatching, keep your imagination under control. Remember that there is an imaginary bird known as the "Hoodwink", which is always around and tempts you to describe colours and forms which you have not actually seen but only imagined. Sometimes what you have seen is not what you believe it to be. When we were in Bhutan in 1965, we saw a group of longtailed sibilias with white foreheads. This species is not supposed to have white foreheads, so we thought that we have discovered a new species, or at least a new race. But Salim Ali was not convinced. He said that only a bird in hand (not one in the bush), could convince him of the truth. The next morning he shot one from the group to find that the white colouring of the head feathers was due to the pollen from flowers. It would have been disastrous if on the basis of what he had seen, Salim Ali had announced the existence of a Whiteheaded, Longtailed Sibia. Then, while imagination has to be kept in check, at times it must be given its head to arrive at conclusions from observed facts. In Bhuj in Kutch, we came across the mud nest of a Redrumped Swallow with its head sticking out of the nest hole. The bird was dead and when the nest was broken open, we found the entire family with the other parent and three chicks, entombed inside. These swallows, Salim Ali said, had the habit of giving continuing finishing touches to the nest by wet mud pellets during the period of incubation. Apparently this bird was a bad architect, for during its last visit to the nest in the evening one day, it had made the entrance hole

too small white it was inside the nest for the night. When the plastered mud hardened by the morning the bird could not emerge. Nature is unforgiving, said Salim, and mistakes have to be paid for, sometimes with one's life.

Finally, one of the things which Salim Ali is admired for is his accurate descriptions of the habitat and its contents. He spent a long time with dictionaries and his thesaurus locating the right word for what he wanted to convey, and this in itself is an invaluable education for Birdwatchers. The capacity to describe what you have seen clinically without bias of any kind, is a very desirable attainment.

A Birdwatcher has to pass through several phases to maintain a life-long interest in the subject. He must first identify the bird and learn its common and scientific name; he then gets familiar with its habitat and interaction with its own species and with others around. All this is very pleasant and could sustain your interest for ever. But if one wishes to take a giant leap forward, then one must tag on to one aspect of bird life as a life-long pursuit, and I think that bird song or bird call is one such possibility. When the magpie Robin sings from its chosen post in the morning, is it trying to attract a mate, or is it trying to warn other males of the same species to keep away from its territory. In closely related species which look alike, is the different pitch and timbre of the song a help in preventing a mix-up of the species and hybridization? Nature is keen on

maintaining purity of the species, because in the long term this ensures the maximum utilisation of the ecological niches which are available. Do the birds hear the same sound as we do, and do they sometimes use a pitch which is above or below the human audio spectrum? In the case of elephants it has now been found that when the female is biologically ready for breeding she indulges in a booming call which can be heard up to a distance of 5 km. by a male elephant, but this is inaudible to human ears. One often comes across birds whose throats are in active motion but there is no apparent sound produced. It could be that I have now become deaf and this comment can be ignored. In any case, by the use of modern technology, some of you could try and find out whether there is something common in the vocalizations of elephants and birds.

Here I would like to quote from an essay by J.B.S Haldane who, as you know, was probably the most versatile scientist of this century, and who in fact became an Indian citizen, spent his last years in India, and had become seriously involved in Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of a non-violent approach to life.

"There is a very great opening for non-violent biological studies in India, and what is important, they require no complicated apparatus. Let me give some examples of what could be done. Do your songbirds sing their songs if they are brought up from the egg by human beings? or do they have to learn their song as a human

being learns a language? In Europe and North America we know that some birds must learn their song, while others produce it untaught, as some mythical Hindu characters were born with a knowledge of the Vedas. If they have to learn, some species learn from their fathers. Our English Robin sings very little while helping his wife to keep the eggs warm and to feed the children when they emerge from them. But when the children are just learning to fly he bursts into song again for a few weeks. This may be an expression of paternal pride, but it gives his sons the chance to learn from him. Other birds do not learn till they are nearly a year old, when they learn from other males. To bring up young birds till a year old requires an aviary where they can fly about, and a great deal of devotion. The latter is common in India, but it is commoner among illiterate people than among biologists."

Before leaving this subject of bird song, I would like to refer to a remarkable experiment undertaken by a research group in Sweden. As you know some birds are excellent mimics, and they enjoy (I know I am being anthropomorphic), interweaving the calls of other birds in their own song patterns. By tape recording and analysing the calls of certain species in their summer breeding grounds in Europe, the researchers were able to determine the migratory route taken by the birds in their journey through Africa and Europe. One group of resident birds in Kenya are good singers, and the fact that the migrants under study had incorporated snatches of the song of the

birds in Kenya in their own repertoire, was sound evidence that they had been to Kenya enroute. What a fascinating pursuit to determine a bird's itinerary through the medium of song. We could make use of the same strategy to determine the possible presence of certain bird species in a locality by analysing the bird calls of our famous mimics - the Racket-tailed Drongo and Jerdon's Chloropsis.

I have spoken mainly about birds, since the title of the book is Birds of Rishi Valley, but as I indicated earlier what we are most impressed with is the care with which you have designed the total environment of Rishi Valley. It is our hope that the natural and social edifice which you have created will not founder in the course of time, when you the Founders are no longer on the scene. But the foundations are so well laid that it should withstand the ravages of time; and indeed on the contrary its living components may prosper with the passage of years.

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