



Small Green Barbet Photo E. Hanumantha Rao

Sridhar 21/10/79

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers Field Club
of Bangalore
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barbet

Why, 'Barbet'?

During the months of February and March, when the Winter is fast receding and the Spring with all its glory is ensuing, the Garden city of Bangalore, resounds with the joyous calls of a little bird known as the Small Green Barbet. Seven years ago during the same season, a small group of enthusiasts came together and formed themselves into what eventually became the "Bird watchers Field Club of Bangalore" (BWFC).

In fact, some of the senior members of the Club might recollect that the very second or third field outing arranged was exclusively for 'Barbet - Watching'. If anyone were to ask a birdwatcher in Bangalore "Which is the bird of Bangalore?", the most frequent reply may be "Of course, the Barbet!"

When a bulletin of the BWFC was to be brought out, it was only natural that it was named as the "Barbet"; even though it is a difficult bird to emblemize so that people can recognise it easily, as, say it is the case with the Hornbill.



Small Green Barbet at the entrance of the nest
Photo S. Sridhar

About the Club

One of the first tasks the members of the Club set for themselves in the year 1972 was to bring out a much needed check list of the birds of Bangalore and surroundings. After much enthusiastic and perseverant effort over a period of five years this check-list was brought out in 1977. The fact that the field checklist, "Birds of Bangalore", was released by the doyen of Indian ornithology Dr. Salim Ali was cause for much joy, pride and inspiration to all the members of the Club!

In the short span in which the Club has been in existence several activities related to birds were undertaken by the members of the Club. The Club has actively co-operated with the Hobby Centre of the Visvesvaraya Industrial & Technological Museum (V.I.T.M.) in organising field outings for bird watching for school children of Bangalore.

A prominent mile-stone in the history of the Club has been the organising of an exhibition early this year on birds, which came out as a fruitful joint venture between the VITM and our Club. The exhibition, which was the first of its kind to be held in the city was aimed at creating an awareness in the citizens in general and school students in particular regarding all aspects of bird life, their importance to man, and the quality of his environment. On display were bird photographs by well renowned wild life photographers, bird paintings and sketches, collection of insects and bird stamps. An item which caught the imagination of all the visitors to this exhibition was the unique collection of original bird nests which were artistically displayed.

As the aim of the exhibition was to inculcate a love of nature at an early age in our future citizens, it was only apt that the exhibition was dedicated to the International Year of the Child.

About the Barbets

The Barbets belong to the large family of *Capitonidae*. They are characterised by compact bodies and strong beaks. They are as a rule colourful birds. The name "Barbet" implies the meaning of a beard and Barbets do have "beards" in the form of rictal bristles. Both sexes in Barbets are usually of similar colouration. Barbets are distributed all over tropical America, Africa and Southern Asia. There are sixteen genera with seventy six species.

Most of the species found in India belong to the genus *Megalaima*. Birds of this genus usually have predominantly green colouration. Both the sexes are of the same colouration, the young birds having a weaker colouration.

There are two species of Barbets, both belonging to the *Megalaima* genus, which dwell in Bangalore. They are the Small Green Barbet and the Crimsonbreasted Barbet (or the Coppersmith). Of these the Small green Barbet is perhaps the more abundantly occurring variety. The photographs given in this issue are those of the Small Green Barbet. In the next issue we shall describe the Coppersmith.

The Small Green Barbet

The Small Green Barbet (*Megalaima viridis*), is a bird which is about the size of a Myna with head, neck and breast brown in colour and with narrow pale shaft-streaks terminating in whitish spots. The bird has bright grass green upper plumage and its general appearance is that of a coarse green bird with brownish head and a swollen conspicuous pale orange beak.

The Small Green Barbet is an arboreal bird of the plains and it is best known from its loud call "kutroo....kutroo....kutroo....". It feeds mainly on the fruit of wild fig trees such as the Banyan and the Peepul and berries of other trees of heavy foliage. The bird is well camouflaged in its surroundings.

because its green plumage perfectly blends with the leaves. The flight of the bird is strong but rather heavy and undulating.

The nesting season of this bird is early Spring. The Barbet is a hole nesting bird. Its nest hole is a chamber excavated in the branch of soft-wooded trees and has a short entrance tunnel which is neatly cut and immaculately dressed into a round shape. It is excavated by the birds themselves and they work very hard and continuously until it is finished. The young remain with their parents for a long time after fledging. The parents feed them with a high-protein insect diet for the first few days and then berries and fruits form the staple food.

It is indeed a most exciting experience to watch the Barbet plummeting into the nest hole without reduction in the speed of its approach flight and later ejecting itself out from the nest hole like a bullet!

Dr. V. J. VICTOR

The Siberians are Comming!

We have as many as 50 species of birds visiting Bangalore during the winter months. They come from far off lands, lands which lie on Himalayas and beyond, right upto Siberia. These winter visitors are our special guests. When we see these tiny little birds hopping about our gardens, swimming quietly in our tanks, it is difficult to believe that these tiny creatures have travelled thousands of kilometers, braving all hazards, in search of warmth and food.

This year we already have several visitors with us, listed below with their earliest date and month of sighting at Bangalore :- Common Swallow-22/7, Spotted Sandpiper 29/7, Brown Shrike-18/8, Grey Wagtail-6/9 Yellow Wagtail-20/9, White Wagtail-9/10 Green Leaf Warbler-14/9, Marsh Harrier-6/10 Blue Winged Teal 3/10.

You will have a chance to watch these and many more visitors till early Summer in and around Bangalore.

S. SRIDHAR

Take a walk and become a Birdwatcher

It was a pleasant morning. The rainy season was over and skies were no longer covered over by the clouds. The sun had risen and the pleasant sunshine seemed to be driving out the chill of the early morning. I was just taking a walk on the bund of the Lalbagh Lake. Suddenly, I caught sight of an object which remained stationary in the mid air as if supported by invisible strings. It was not the black and white colour that caught my sight, but, it was the fantastic hovering of a bird. Yes, it was the Pied Kingfisher—that pastmaster in the art of hovering which has gained all its fame just for that very act. With the bill pointing downwards, it was only moving the wings. Suddenly, it half closed its wings and dived, just like a stone falling down into the water and disappeared with a splash. Shortly, it emerged with a tiny fish in its beak and swallowed it as it flew off.

This common bird is only one of the many beautiful treasures we have and it is a pity that we do not know much about them. Birdwatching, as the name itself indicates, is a hobby of watching and studying birds. Birds, in addition to the pleasure they give us, play an important role in maintaining the balance of nature. They play a very important role in agriculture by controlling pests. They are striving to do what our corporations have given up—that of keeping our habitations clean. These are but few of the many things that birds do for us. Much more is still to be known and anybody as a birdwatcher could do a lot to unveil the mysteries of bird life. So why not take a walk and become a birdwatcher today?

M. B. KRISHNA

Is Ranganthittoo Dying?

S. NAGARAJ ARPS A. FIAP

On the Bangalore-Mysore highway, just a few kilometers from Srirangapatam, Ranganthittoo—the once very famous, bird sanctuary—is located on the banks and small islands of the river Cauvery.

Between June and November, many migratory birds do come and spend their breeding season in their regular cycle of life here. The usual visitors seeking this spot are

White Ibis, Cormorant
Egret (a few varieties)
Openbilled Stork
Darter, Spoonbill
besides a few varieties of Heron.

I have been a regular visitor to this sanctuary for almost 10 years (every season a minimum of 3 trips I make to this sanctuary). My recent visits spread over 3 years, make me feel sad at the rate these lovely birds have started dwindling in numbers. The main reasons, I realise are :

- 1) The inflow of tourists (more for a picnic than for bird watching) with no education of how to behave in a sanctuary has caused lot of disturbance to the breeding operation of these lovely creatures;
- 2) Of late, I have witnessed the menace of the monkeys which swim across

these tiny islands, scare the birds at the nest and eat the eggs of the birds;

- 3) The waste from a nearby Paper Industry allowed to enter the river which flows towards the sanctuary has certainly caused ecological imbalance in the area thus making the habitat, probably not suitable for their breeding operation.

Besides the above main factors there are other obvious contributing factors. All these have very much come in the way of these lovely birds completing their breeding cycle. Consequently for a couple of seasons, Spoonbills were not seen in this sanctuary.

Though 2 pairs of Spoonbills have been seen attempting to nest since last year, I do not know how far they have been successful in breeding. What happened to the other Spoonbills? My only consolation is that they have found a suitable alternative spot with less human and other encroachment. I wish them safety and prosperity.

Being a lover of Nature and having got involved to whatever extent, on my own in the conservation attempts, I conclude with a heavy heart with a poser "can I see during the remaining span of my life the once famous Bird Sanctuary with varieties of water birds, in abundance?"



Darter in flight Photo S. Nagaraj