

NEWSLETTER

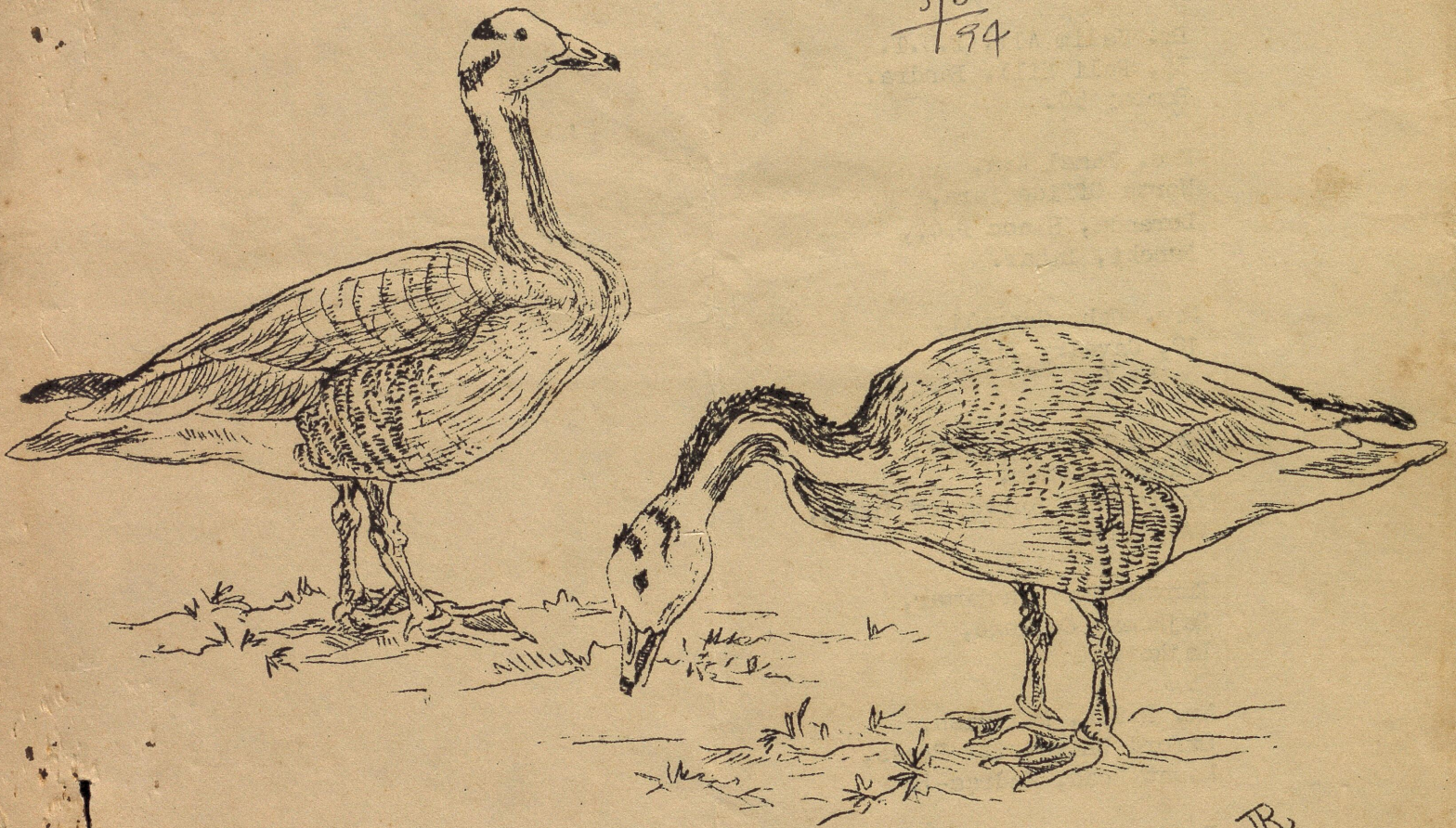
FOR BIRDWATCHERS

7

VOLUME 8; No 7.

Indexed

5/5
194



This journal is published monthly.
The subscription is Rs 5/= per year.

Editorial Board:

Dr. Salim Ali, F.N.I.
33, Pali Hill, Bandra,
Bombay 50.

Mrs. Jamal Ara,
North Office Para,
Doranda, Hinoo P.O.,
Ranchi, Bihar.

Mrs. Usha Ganguli,
10, Cavalry Lines,
Delhi 6.

Dr. Biswamoy Biswas,
Indian Museum,
Zoological Survey of India,
CALCUTTA.

Kunvar Shri Iavkumar,
Rajkumar College,
Rajkot.

Mr. R.S.A. Melliush,
Oxford University Press,
Mount Road, Madras-1.

Prof. K.K. Neelakantan,
University College,
Trivandrum (Kerala).

Mr. S.V. Nilakanta,
Theosophical Colony,
Juhu, Bombay 54.

Mr. K.R. Sethna,
Kartikerre Estate,
P.O. Bedaguli, via. Chamrajnagar,
Mysore State.

Editor:

Mr. Zafar Futehally,
Juhu Lane, Andheri,
Bombay 58-AS.

NEWSLETTER
FOR
BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 8, No. 7

July 1968

CONTENTS

A glimpse of Ganesh Himal bird life, Nepal. By Robert L. Fleming, Jr. ...	1
Birdwatching in Darjeeling and Sikkim. By N. M. Mistry	2
Birds of Mahabaleshwar. By Shama Futehally	4
<u>Prosopis juliflora</u> and bird nesting. By J. M. Johnson	5
Review: WORKING FOR NATURE. Council for Nature Report 1967/68. (Z.F.) .	6
NOTES AND COMMENTS	6
Correspondence: Black Drongo and Snakes. By H. P. Mookherji (p. 7); Summer Birdwatching in the plains. By K. S. Iavkumar (p. 7)	
Index to backnumbers of the <u>Newsletter for Birdwatchers</u>	

A GLIMPSE OF GANESH HIMAL BIRD LIFE, NEPAL

By

Robert L. Fleming, Jr.

Our camp might have been called ' Titmouse Terrace '. Perched at 10,000 feet elevation on a grassy rise between flowing Rhododendron barbatus, our tents were within the territories of six species of Paridae.

As we were setting up camp on 29 April 1968, a flock of six Rufousfronted Titmice, Aegithalos iouschistos, arrived in a nearby maple tree. They foraged on twig tips and also clung to the tree trunk. We knew that their nests had never been discovered so we dropped tent pegs and rushed after them, only to discover no particular signs of nesting activity. Perhaps it was a bit early. In early May, however, we could find only solitary birds and so the females may have been incubating. We felt that these tits definitely breed at this altitude; probably in May. The closely allied Redheaded Tit, Aegithalos concinnus, occupies an altitudinal zone directly below the R. f. tits and breeds earlier. We found a nest with nearly fledged young at 8500 feet on 27 April.

The Himalayan Coal Tit, Parus ater, was the most conspicuous and audible tit near our camp. They were breeding in late April and early May. During most of the day this tit spends its time high in the towering conifers (Hemlock, Tsuga, was most common here). In the early mornings they often came down to water and we caught and released a number from our nets. When alarmed by an owl call, these birds sometimes swarm around a tree (usually a maple) in such an excited state that they resemble a gathering of bees rather than birds. In one such flock, at 10,000 feet, there must have been over 70 birds.

The Rufousbellied Crested Tit, Parus rubidiventris, was not especially common around our camp. It became more conspicuous at 10,500 and at 12,000 feet it had virtually replaced the Coal Tit. These two black tits resemble each other in the field. We found the most easily recognizeable field character was the crest ' thickness '. The Coal Tit has a ' thin ' crest of a few elongated feathers, whereas the R. b. C. Tit has a ' bushy ' crest. Of course, the Coal Tit is smaller than the other and has a double row of wing spots, but this is sometimes hard to see as the birds are usually in silhouette high in some ' neck-breaking ' tree. We had thought that the R. b. C. Tits were always in tall, conifer forest so were surprised to see them in semi-open country of low bushes and dwarf rhododendrons between 12,000 and 13,000 feet.

The Brown Crested Tits, Parus dichrous, were neither as conspicuous nor as

as common as the Black Tits. The Brown Tit occupied an altitudinal level from 10,000 feet through 13,000 feet where they kept to the secondary trees and bushes, rather than the tall conifers. We also found the Brown Tit on the ground, foraging amongst the leaves. While the Black Tits were sometimes in flocks even during the breeding season, the Brown Tits were seen only in pairs or singles.

The colourful Greenbacked Tit, Parus monticolus, was common here but could hardly be called conspicuous. Two pairs were nesting, evidently, near our camp but try as we might we couldn't locate a nest. Netted females had brood patches and occasionally we saw a pair chasing through a tree. Their high, lispy call was infrequently heard. This bird is a frustrating one to watch for we often caught glimpses of one only to lose it quickly among the new maple leaves and swarming leaf warblers. Even birds released from our nets soon ducked out of sight! In any case, this titmouse was definitely breeding in late April and early May at 10,000 feet. Apparently young had not yet hatched.

The Yellowbrowed Tit often enjoys a bath in the late afternoon. A pair, showing little fear of me, flew down into dwarf bamboo and then fluffed around in a small forest pool (we used water from the same trickle for our camp chores). After the bath, the pair preened for a long time in a neighbouring rhododendron bush. This titmouse appears uniform dull green. The eyebrow just barely shows when the bird is excited but this can hardly be seen from a distance of over six feet. This bird is often confused with leaf warblers and an observer must look carefully to spot one. We found the easiest way, for us, to tell the difference between a leaf warbler and a Y. b. Tit was bill thickness. In silhouette, which is the way these birds usually appear, the thin bill of a leaf warbler is easily distinguished from the thicker bill of the Tit. Behaviour is also a good indicator. The Tit flicks its wings constantly, as do warblers, but it does not change branch positions as frequently as a warbler. For example, if a green blob disappears behind a leaf and remains there for over two seconds it may be a Y. b. Tit. Warblers, unless sick or resting, usually change position within two seconds. Also, if a bird hangs upside down on some twig tip, it is likely to be the Tit.

Besides titmice, the forests around our camp held numerous Leaf Warblers (P. pulcher, raculipennis, reguloides, proregulus and magnirostris). Nutcrackers, Nucifraga caryocatactes, had fledged from the nest but fuzzy young will still be fed by the adults. They spent a good deal of time looking for food on the ground. The Whitespotted Laughing Thrushes, Garrulax ocellatus, were relatively tame here, in contrast to reports of how shy they are in other places (see Ali, THE BIRDS OF SIKKIM, 1962: 178), and allowed us to watch them feed on the forest floor and sing from rhododendron trees. At first we were puzzled with a loud, mammal-like rruunk cry but then realized it was the Crimson Horned Pheasant, Tragopan satyra, calling. These birds inhabited the moss-covered forest floor, usually near streams. The sight of a magnificent male walking through bushes of flaming rhododendron was unforgettable.

The wooded hills north of Kathmandu teem with birds in April and May. We identified 201 species on our recent trip. The weather is usually good but cool at higher altitudes. It is an ideal time for a vacation visit for those interested both in birds and flowers.

BIRDWATCHING IN DARJEELING AND SIKKIM

By

N. M. Mistry

This summer I trekked from Darjeeling to Gangtok with two friends. We followed a somewhat circuitous route which took us first along the Singhalila Ridge to Sandakphu and Phalut and then across the hills and valleys of southern Sikkim to Gangtok. However the gods of the weather were not in our favour, and I am sure that we missed much birdlife owing to poor visibility.

On the way from Darjeeling to Ghoom the first bird to greet us was the Common

Cuckoo. A little later, near Batasia Loop, we ran into a party of noisy Rufousnecked Laughing Thrushes (Garrulax ruficollis), squeaking and churring tirelessly. Beyond Ghoom Railway Station we turned towards Sandakphu along what is popularly known as the Nepal Road, and were soon lost in a forest of tall deodars and conical pines. Here we heard the Himalayan Cuckoo (Cuculus saturatus), whose call so closely resembles that of the Hoopoe in everything except in consisting of four notes instead of three. Black Drongos, Black Bulbuls, and Common Mynas were seen quite often on this route. Later in the afternoon, in a village called Sukhia Pokhri we saw some Eastern Swallows (Hirundo rustica) swooping low over the streets. In the evening we spotted a beautiful male specimen of a Verditer Flycatcher (Muscicapa thalassina) in the garden of the dak bungalow at Jhorpokheri (74000 ft).

Next morning we woke to find the hillside, including our bungalow, enveloped in grey clouds. In any case I was lucky enough to see, at close quarters, a Redcapped Tit (Aegithalos concinnus) and a Yellowbacked Firetailed Sunbird (Aethopyga ignicauda). From Jhorpokheri we trekked to Simmana and then plunged into a valley. By now the visibility had improved somewhat. We heard the familiar call of a male Cuckoo followed by the burbling call of its mate at a very close range. We stood quite silent and still and the unsuspecting pair shot out of a tall tree, one behind the other; but on seeing us they quickly wheeled back. Beyond Mane Ehanjang the road climbed steeply; here we heard for the first time, a call which was to become very familiar in the next few days. It was a scream, repeated five or six times, each time rising in pitch and then breaking off abruptly. The call was repeated at short intervals. We flushed the bird from its tree and there was no mistaking its identity -- a Large Hawk-Cuckoo. The road in this area ran very close to the Nepal border and an occasional 'short-cut' diversion actually passed through Nepalese territory. On one such diversion, near a village called Megma (9000 ft) I saw a Yellowbilled Blue Magpie (Urocyon flavirostris). From Megma there was a steep ascent of about a mile to Tonglu (10,074 ft) and here we saw our first Whitecapped Redstart.

The next day we trekked in bitterly cold and cloudy weather from Tonglu to Gaibas (8428 ft) and then up again to Sandakphu (11,930 ft). There were intermittent rain and hail storms, and the only birds which seemed to be braving the fury of the elements were the Black Tits, Whitecapped Redstarts, and the Tree-Pipits. The next day was bright and clear; indeed the sunrise at Sandakphu on a clear morning is perhaps one of the finest sights in the world. The Kanchenjunga rassif was afire, while in the distance the summit of Mt Everest glowed like a polished brass pyramid. A couple of Black Tits were the first birds we saw, while later a Golden Bush Robin (Erithacus chrysaeus) and a Firetailed Sunbird flitted blithely in the juniper and rhododendron scrub.

Between Sandakphu and Phalut there is a beautiful rhododendron forest, destroyed unfortunately in many places by lightening and thunderstorms. The trees were in bloom and, typically, they attracted a large variety of birds. We saw Black Tits, Black Bulbuls, Redflanked and Golden Bush Robins, Mountain Thrushes and Whitecapped and Plumbeous Redstarts. At Phalut again we saw some Tree-Pipits and Small Skylarks feeding on the lawn in front of the dak bungalow.

Beyond Phalut we entered Sikkim. The path climbed up to the top of the Singhalila peak at well over 12,000 ft. Here there were some Yellowbilled Choughs (Pyrrhocorax graculus) and plenty of Whitecapped Redstarts. On the other side near a village called Kalijar we caught a glimpse of a Tickell's Willow-Warbler. At Chiyabhanjan, we left the main track and plunged into the valley of the Kulhait river. As we lost altitude very quickly the nature of vegetation changed with remarkable rapidity. The forests of rhododendrons and junipers gave place to a thick jungle of ferns and moss-covered deciduous trees. The Common Cuckoo, the Hawk-Cuckoo, and the Rufousthroated Laughing Thrushes again enlivened the jungles. At Chitre (where there was a Geological Survey Camp), we heard two new bird calls -- those of the Whistling Thrush and the Great Himalayan Barbet. After crossing a rickety bridge we saw some Grey Wagtails on the banks. Just outside Uttare we encountered a beautiful male Scarlet Minivet and then, quite by chance, a Rufous Piculet (Sasia ochracea) working its way up a bamboo stem. Beyond Uttare, the vocal supremacy of the Whistling Thrushes and the

Great Himalayan Barbets was challenged by the Blackheaded Sibias. We were to see a good number of these birds between Kewzing and Temi and again in the Botanical Gardens at Darjeeling.

Near Dentam (4000 ft) low-altitudinal birds began to appear. We saw Spotted Doves, Whitefronted Kingfishers, Golden Orioles and even a Magpie Robin. In the garden of the dak bungalow there were a number of Himalayan Striated Swallows. In the morning the next day we crossed the Kulhait river and started the climb to Pemayangtse. There was the terai avifauna we were beginning to get used to -- Cuckoos, Hawk-Cuckoos, and Great Himalayan Barbets; we also saw Tree-pies and one Goldenbellied Chloropsis. In the garden at Pemayangtse (7000 ft) we saw Scarlet Minivets and a Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler. Next morning we descended to Legzip (1500 ft) on the banks of the Great Rangit river. On the way down we passed through Geyzing Bazar where the Jungle Mynas mixed freely with the Common ones. Near Legzip we heard a call, which seemed at first like that of a Green Barbet, but which we later identified as the Bluethroated Barbet's. After crossing the Great Rangit river, we climbed the slopes of the opposite hill to Kewzing (6000 ft). The bird most commonly seen in this region was the Hair-Crested or Spangled Drongo. Aslo, I at last managed to glimpse what we had been hearing day in and day out since leaving the heights of Phalut and Sanghalila -- the Great Himalayan Barbet. Near Kewzing we spotted a Greyheaded Flycatcher.

On the following day our road climbed up further through a dense wet forest of ferns and moss-covered trees, where blood-suckers gave us an uneasy time. Of the places we had experienced in the trek, this was the area most rich in bird life and I think a number of them must be living on the blood-suckers. Sometimes we heard almost six different calls at a time. The Blackheaded Sibia was the star performer, but the Common Cuckoo, Hawk-Cuckoo, Great Himalayan Barbet, and the Bulbuls were close runners-up. Moreover, a new Cuckoo had lent its voice to the jungle orchestra, the Indian Cuckoo, popularly known as the Kaphel-Pakoe. A party of Whitethroated Laughing Thrushes once flew across our path. Then we descended to Demthang and further down to Temi (5000 ft). On the way we encountered some Slatyheaded Parakeets, a Bluethroated Barbet and a Dark Grey Bushchat.

From Temi we descended into the valley of the Teesta river, the principal river of Sikkim. On this stretch we saw a Blue Jay, a Bluethroated Barbet and a Whitethroated Fantail Flycatcher. Black Drongos and mynas were plentiful and Redvented Bulbuls were seen occasionally. We then crossed the Teesta at Shironi and climbed the slopes of the opposite hill to Sang. These slopes were dominated by the Yellowbilled Blue Magpies and Bluebearded Bee-eaters. We also saw some Greenbacked Tits. From Sang there was an easy steadily-ascending road to the Rumtek Monastery with a number of pretty waterfalls by the roadside. Here we saw some Whitecheeked Bulbuls, in addition to the Blackheaded Bulbuls which were, however, more common. From Rumtek we descended to the Rani river and then climbed up the slopes to Gangtok, where we were welcomed by a pair of Redbilled Leiothrix!

BIRDS OF MAHABLESHWAR

By

Shama Futehally

We were in Mahableswhar for the first four or five days of June. A visit to Periyar last year had given rise to extravagant expectations about every mountainous area as far as birds went; but Mahableswhar, for the short time that we remained there, was not as exciting as I had thought.

There were very few crows, and all of them were Jungle Crows; it was the same with mynas. If there were Common Mynas at all I did not notice them. The forests comprised thick growths of trees such as Eugenia jambolana and Ficus glomerata, and since they were in foliage most of them, we were aware always of calls we could not track down. The most persistent singer was perhaps the Whitethroated Ground Thrush which was present everywhere from the town itself

to the ' scenic spots ' which were far out on the tableland. I actually spotted only one -- a confused glimpse. Yellowvented Bulbuls were very common, and reassuring on otherwise birdless outings. Around the hotel and in other parts of Mahableshwar there were very many Southern Blackbirds all black with red bills, which are local migrants to the outskirts of Bombay in winter. Their call is a ' throaty chuck-chuck ' which is very easy to recognise. Whistling Schoolboys were also fairly common in the deeper forests, continually emanating clear rounded notes. We saw only one Purple Sunbird, a female, tackling some berries.

Near the lake, which was I thought the most beautiful setting in the area, there were flocks of Cattle Egrets, Redvented Bulbuls, solitary Crested Larks, and one wonderful flock of Weaver Birds which we saw from less than ten feet away. Pied Bush Chats were seen on the barer branches along trees lining the paths and roadsides.

My father saw one bird he could not identify; he said it was a typical Chat, slightly larger than a Collared Bush Chat, but heavily striated. We were to discover that these observations were too scanty to fix the bird's identity from the books. There were plenty of White-eyes flitting and foraging for food, and large noisy groups of Jungle Babblers. A repeated call which might be interpreted as He'll beat you... He'll beat you must have been a Spotted Babbler; we heard it only once. Another bird hastily glimpsed and doubtfully identified was the Wood Shrike. On several occasions we heard the Deccan Scimitar Babbler from a long range; the call is described by Salim Ali: ' a deep mellow whistling call ... consisting of three or four notes Oo-pu-pu,'

The climax however was when we saw a ^Shain Falcon (a first for me) wheeling and diving in a valley while we watched from a peak. This was when the evening was mellowing -- around sunset perhaps. The bird finally rested in a hollow on a steep jutting crag, and as long as we could not see it properly, of course, we were sure there was a nest. The next evening we went there again and this time there was a pair circling the mountain and occasionally making a dramatic swoop toward the plain. Finally one bird settled across the neighbouring slope where we got a superb view of it, the brown legs, underparts, slaty back and yellow, we couldn't ever have got a better view. The scene embodied all the romance connected with birds of prey.

Editorial addition: One species to which Shama does not refer and of which I saw quite a lot, were Dusky Crag Martins. From the hotel verandah I saw a flock of about a hundred hawking insects over a field about half a mile below. I went down and was rather surprised to find the birds circling a tree around which there presumably were a lot of midges in the air. Also the field was bordered by a steep valley. The birds came to the edge of the land and turned back from there, never venturing much beyond the boundary of the land. Perhaps wind currents had something to do with this. -- ZF.

PROSOPIS JULIFLORA AND BIRD NESTING

By J. M. Johnson

This author's interest in birds and bushes is hardly a decade old and his observations are confined to particular localities, Forest-Agriculture College Estates and Gaushen Park, Coimbatore, Birganj (Nepal) -- Raxaul (Bihar), and Forest School Estate Vaigai Dam where Prosopis juliflora had been grown as fence but spread by itself extensively. The trees were 10 ft or more in height.

The doubt that birds are not ' at home ' on Prosopis juliflora arose in me first in 1959 when some of us as students were taking a census of birds' nests within the Forest College Estate, Coimbatore. Thereafter I seemed to be looking for a bird's nest on this species in vain.

Prosopis juliflora appears to provide near identical conditions and shelter for nesting bird with Acacias, Capparis, etc. on which crows, jungle babblers, shrikes, spotted doves, redvented bulbuls and whitethroated munias nest, in the observed localities cited here. However, birds do perch on them or use the branches for building nests. In the Koonthakulam heronry Painted Storks use invariably branches of Prosopis juliflora for base sticks in their nest.

Interesting in this connection are Dr Salim Ali's observations in the Rann of Kutch where Prosopis juliflora had been widely planted for desert reclamation. It has taken well and now forms flourishing and extensive thickets here and there. Curiously enough in spite of the shade it provides in a land where any shade is welcome contra its cogener, Prosopis spicigera, this species is studiously avoided by birds of all kinds (Jour. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. Vol. 59(1)).

REVIEW

WORKING FOR NATURE. Council for Nature Report 1967/68.

Britain is fortunate in having a large number of vigorous natural history institutions which play the double role of doing a great deal themselves as well as stimulating government into appropriate action. One such body is the Council for Nature whose energetic Press Officer, Martin Jones, has sent me the Annual Report of the Council for 1967/68. It evokes admiration for its many sided activities. Its Parliamentary Group has been responsible for getting much legislation passed or laws amended according to the needs of Conservation. The Countryside Bill includes provisions for country parks and measures to encourage urban people to enjoy country relaxation. The Council was successful in getting the Wild Plants Protection Bill taken up. It is now busy with the Conservation of Seals Bill. It is taking active interest in combatting the spread of poisons on land and sea, and its Conservation Corps consists of 13,500 volunteers. These volunteers have done work during week ends ranging from pond and marsh management to giving illustrated lectures to colleges, schools and youth clubs. One would have thought that a body doing such good work would not invite criticism, but there is no sanctum sanctorum from 'political' pressures. Sir Landsborough Thomson's letter to the press, after the meeting, suggests that the discussion at the AGM was not confined to natural history or conservation:

' I beg leave to comment on your correspondent's second-hand account (22 April) of the Extraordinary General Meeting of the Council for Nature held under my chairmanship on 20 April. I find it sadly lacking in accuracy and objectivity.

' It presents a fanciful picture of the "representatives of more than half a million local naturalists" vainly battling for power against a few large conservation bodies.

' Anyhow, a distinction between conservationists and naturalists is invalid; most of us are both.

' It represents a stage in protracted negotiations towards rationalising the voluntary conservation movement, which now presents a confusing multiplicity of fronts to the public.

We hope that the new Council will fulfill the expectations of the Chairman.

Z. F.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Many members of the Club residing in Bombay had the opportunity of listening Mr M. Krishnan give a talk on Wild Life Photography at the Bombay Natural History Society on Friday, the 28th June.

One of the points which Mr Krishnan stressed in his talk was the need for a photographer of wild life to establish a friendly relation with the animal he was trying to photograph. In the case of mammals it is important to place oneself in such a position so that the animal does not catch the scent of the human intruder. The attempt should be to make the animal realize human presence through sight in the first instance. Once this is done there is a possibility that the animal will accept the human being in its environment provided that one keeps to a reasonable distance.

In the case of bird photograph the sense of smell does not come into play as birds have a very weak sense of smell. It is their eye sight which is their strong point, and the only thing one can aim to do is to approach the

bird by very very slow stages.

Incidentally this morning (29th June) Mr Krishnan while staying with the editor had a curious experience. He found a young myna in the compound, and having read only the night before that it was possible to catch certain species of birds if only the approach was made in very very slow stages, he started to extend his hand towards the young myna. He almost caught it, and it was only at the very last moment that the adult birds came on the scene and pecked at Mr Krishnan's hand.

There is a proposal by a member of the Bombay Natural History Society to organize a course in Nature Photography. Will those of you who are in a position to take advantage of this offer please write in to the Honorary Secretary, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Apollo Street, Bombay 1. If there is sufficient response perhaps we could have some interesting sessions.

CORRESPONDENCE

Black Drongo and Snakes

Much has been written about the fearless attacks of the Black Drongo (Dicrurus adsimilis) by various naturalists. Recently I encountered one. It was in the field when we had put out some bird traps, and two drongoes appearing, were hopeful of a catch. Suddenly two snakes appeared, and while we were all apprehensive, the aggressive birds immediately began attacking the pair of reptiles with such ferocity that eventually they had to give up and moved off disgustedly.

H. P. Mookherji
Zoological Survey of India
Lindsay Street, Calcutta

Summer birdwatching in the plains

Before I receive a rap on the fingers or worse still, am thrown out from the Editorial Board, I hasten to send you some material for the Newsletter.

If you remember, I had written a note last summer on the delights of the hot season. I forget whether I had written this from the cool heights of Manali or from Rajkot. However, this summer, I was dismayed to find myself for the first time in years in the plains throughout the summer. I was a little nervous when a small voice from within kept up a jeering ' Well enjoy yourself now in the heat '. And so, I cautiously awaited the blistering heat, and by evening would be relieved to find that it indeed had not been unpleasant and have infact enjoyed the change of a summer at home in familiar surroundings. So, now with the rains almost on us it has rained last night (17 June) and today in the afternoon there was an immense thunderstorm and things look ominous even now after sunset, I can again say with confidence that complaining about the heat is a part of attitudes left behind by the Raj, but then so is the apparently idle hobby of watching birds and so we might tolerate this ~~action~~ of complaining about the heat. This summer was indeed pleasant and there is no sour grapes about the statement. Even the mango trees have been complaining about the lengthened cool weather. Only a few days in the first half of June were a bit unpleasant, but the nights have always been very pleasant, while the mornings have been lovely almost into midday. The trees all looked fesh with their new leaves, and the Gulmohors and Indian Laburnums were a blaze of colour. There were a lot of birds around as well.

Golden Orioles were heard calling throughout the summer and Redvented Bulbuls have been attempting to breed from the middle of May. A couple of these jaunty birds have a brood of three fledglings in a clipped bougainville in the garden. One morning, I had the good luck of strolling to one of the dis-used lily tanks in the front lawns and there to my surprise, I found a Copper-smith clinging for dear life to the wall, head just above the stagnant water. It was horribly wet and would have drowned had I not happened by just when I did. The ungrateful wretch game me a couple of bad nips even when it was in

such a sad condition. Purple Sunbirds are always common and pleasant inmates in our garden, and I never tire of watching them. Males are in purple right into April and May.

Black Ibis find our tall cork trees very useful for nesting, and a pair are incubating high up in wind-tossed isolation. These ibis are regular breeders, using our trees which are the largest in the area. Their gauky chicks use the top of the school buildings for their first landing after leaving nest.

Throughout summer, the garden hedges have been a haven for a pair of Ashy Wren-Warblers, while Tailor-Birds are very common and confiding. They have little nests harboured in shelter of thick, broadleaved bushes. These charming little birds are most fearless and breed with us, under suitable conditions from the middle of summer till the end of the rains.

April and May are interesting months because the last of the migrants are congregating to leave. They all seem rather reluctant to go. Large flocks of Rosy Pastors collect in fig-bearing trees and set up a considerable clattering. They are filling up as it were on figs which are abundant at this time of the year. Booted Warblers and Chiffchaffs are quite plentiful as well and every neem tree seems to harbour a couple or more of these non-descript, little, brown puzzles. On the water's edge, stints and a few other species of waders are seen, but this lingering is deceptive because all of a sudden they are gone.

In May, I visited the Lalpari Lake near here and we watched stints, a flock of godwits (Blacktailed), these last are still around in late June! Large Sand Plovers were puzzling at first glance because they looked so colourful in their blacks and chestnuts of summer as against their drabness during the winter period. Migratory terns are with us still such as the Gullbilled and the large and bouyant Caspian Terns. The Whiskered Terns which are quite the commonest for most of the year are nowhere to be seen. I have been noting the Little Tern more frequently these last few years, though the Indian River Terns and Blackbellied Terns, both of which are residents are less apparent, mainly I suspect on account of the repeated droughts which have depleted our streams of fish.

and
May and June are important months for our resident waders. This is the time of the year when every permanent piece of water is an attraction for Stilts, Little Ringed Plovers, Redwattled Lapwings. These are all having chicks now. I was amazed to see stilt chicks in fluffy down brazenly walk into water and swim across a fifty foot channel of wind whipped water, the parents fluttering above with much agitation. I would not restrict the Redwattled Lapwing to lakesides because it is so widely distributed throughout the countryside that at times one wonders whether it is any longer dependant on water at all, but a little search will reveal some, in its territory, be it an irrigation channel, or a stagnant cesspool from a sewer. No, this plover is a great success and good too, because it is a very fine bird and very useful.

Lalpari Lake is now worth going to for the number of Pratincoles one can see at very close range and the large flock of Spotbill Ducks, a dozen or so of Whistling Teal, a pair of Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, and a growing throng of Painted Storks, Spoonbills, White Ibis, assembling to feast on the fish easily had as the water recedes. Four Large Flamingos have made their appearance, possibly the vanguard of the larger numbers to come. The pratincoles are very charming creatures and so confiding too. I suspect they have bred at Lalpari, though we have not been able to locate any birds on nests, or young. I did find a nest with three eggs which most assuredly were of this bird, rather largish for Ringed Plover, and certainly not of Stilt. The birds did a broken wing display the last time some members of our birdwatching group went over.

Of the Hirundidae, all have left except Wiretailed Swallows and Sand Martins. These fly swiftly and very low along the water's edge, while higher up House Swifts are busy the entire day. An amazing sight is the flight of the Pipestrelle bats at sundown. The entire sky over the lake becomes a cloud of these small little bats fluttering and dipping in their characteristic-

ly erratic flight.

In my room, I have had two pairs of House Sparrows alternating their household chores in excavations above the wooden rafters. One pair thus raised two broods while the other reared one in between. One of the hens of the pair which bred twice, showed the interesting ability of birds to adapt themselves to human surroundings in that she kept late hours, catching mosquitos and other insects attracted by the electric lights and feeding on into the night right until I called it the day and switched off the lights!

It is interesting how flocks of male Bayas raid the urban areas and their noisy groups are commonplace wherever a babool or a date palm grows in a compound. In the school, I have a tentative piece of construction work going on in the great grape vine up the walls of the boys' bathroom block. These colonies never seem to attract the hens and are soon abandoned once the rains have produced grass and other vegetation in the countryside. It is interesting however to find these birds so habitually entering built up areas and I should not be surprised if a flight of hens come to town and decide to settle in. We may then well have Bayas entering houses as sparrows have been doing for centuries. Purple Sunbirds have successfully raised young right inside homes on several occasions. Infact, for most small birds in India, the safest place to site a nest would be inside the house. Who knows to what extent birds will adapt to human facilities, crows have built on electric poles, and with wires too, Redvented Bulbuls have used curtain supports in a friend's drawing room!

The Rajkot Birdwatchers' group has been particularly active, and though of late we have not increased in population, our members have been rather regular and those of us who have by their careers been scattered through Gujarat, have kept in contact. It has also been heartening to read notes from Mr Shukla of the Bank of Baroda, and Ialsinhbhai Raol. To these and to the others in other parts of the State, I would like to convey my best wishes through the pages of the Newsletter so that we may all keep in contact with one another and our observations may be of use to others like us throughout the country. It is otherwise quite a lonely experience to be a birdwatcher in India.

K. S. Iavkumar
Rajkumar College, Rajkot, Gujarat

Zafar Futehally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
32-A Juhu Lane
Andheri, Bombay 58-AS