

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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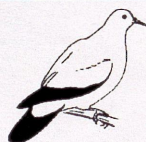
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December 26, 2002 saw me strolling through the moist deciduous forest of the Bhadra Tiger Reserve (BTR) in the heart of the Western Ghats for my first passion - birding! It was 7:15 hr., the sun had begun painting the top canopy with its beautiful golden light; the winter mist had started ascending slowly over the meandering rivulets; the overnight dew, to the dismay of the spiders, had played a significant role in transforming their well-concealed insect-traps into conspicuous sparkling necklaces; hordes of birds were readying themselves for a demanding day by preening their feathers atop boughs of the giant bamboo; the Indian giant squirrels were synchronizing their rattling calls with the avian-orchestra....

Sharing this surreal atmosphere with me were Mr. Satyanarayan, the RFO, BTR and Harsha, a friend and snake-savior from Bangalore. I was in BTR to oversee the arrangements of the 'Kids for Tigers' regional camp, which was designed in association with the Forest Department to provide a firsthand jungle experience to three teams of 10 kids and 10 teachers each from Chennai,

Editorial

Andamans in trouble : In the Times of India of 22nd April we were told that the islands of the Andamans and Nicobars are being leased out to developers and hoteliers in the interest of tourism. I quote: "Ever thought of having your own coral island with a golden beach washed by the blue waters of the Bay of Bengal, and tall coconut trees gently swaying in the cool breeze? Well that's the way the Andaman and Nicobar Administration is planning to develop the islands into a hotspot for tourism".

I had asked Rauf Ali, who spends a great deal of time in the Andamans researching on its ecology, to write about his findings. His article appears in this issue and is worth pondering over. It is disturbing to see that in spite of signing International Conventions and passing Legislation on the need to protect natural Biodiversity, this is forgotten immediately there is prospect of financial gain. The battle between Ecology and Economics has only been joined. It has yet to be won.

Regional Newsletters : We have *Pitta* (Newsletter of the Birdwatchers Society of Andhra Pradesh), *Blackbuck* (of the Madras Naturalists Society), *Hornbill* of the BNHS, *Sansad News* from West Bengal, to name just a few and now we have *Flamingo* (Newsletter of the Bird Conservation Society of Gujarat) and fresh from the oven, *North Karnataka Birders Network*. This is a happy development, because activities at the LOCAL level, where we can see, and monitor the landscape from day to day that is likely to be of lasting value. Already the members of *Flamingo* in association with Sacon, have organized a training workshop on "Inland Wetlands of Gujarat"

Eyeless Editor : As I informed you in the previous Newsletter the cataract in my eye is naturally a handicap for birding. So also it is for editing. I would have liked to edit some of the articles in this issue but I find this difficult so I have (more or less) left them as they are. I hope that from mid-August after the purdah has been removed I will see things as they are, and not just a blur.

Birds of Bhadra Tiger Reserve

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Hyderabad and Bangalore. As always, in my itinerary, a day had been reserved for a tête-à-tête with my feathered friends.

Almost an hour into our walk and we had sighted amongst others chestnut-headed bee-eater *Merops leschenaulti* making short sorties for lethargic dragonflies; grey junglefowl *Gallus sonneratii* digging into the leaf-litter for grubs; rufous woodpecker *Celeus brachyurus* excavating juicy larvae from dead giant thorny bamboos, *Bambusa arundinacea*, a flock of yellow-footed green-pigeon *Treron phoenicoptera* jetting away along the path probably to a waterhole for a drink; black-hooded oriole *Oriolus xanthornis* searching for bugs and berries amidst *Ficus benghalensis*, *Terminalia tomentosa*, *Adina cordifolia* and *Careya arborea*; large cuckoo shrike *Coracina macei* basking atop a gigantic *Dillenia pentagyna* and brown shrike *Lanius cristatus* making a meal out of grasshoppers around *Lantana camara* thickets.

We were elated by the avian display thus far, but little did we know that the best was yet to follow! The dirt track curved right,

passing through a relatively uncluttered patch of forest with a 25-meter strip of knee-length grass on both sides. To our right, about 90 meters away, I saw a huge *Ficus* tree quivering in an unusual manner. On closer inspection through the binoculars however, I was amazed to find that the shiver in the tree was caused by a large conglomeration of Malabar grey hornbills *Ocyrceros griseus*. Within seconds we were convinced that there were in excess of 100 hornbills on that single tree. While scanning through the *Ficus*, my attention got diverted to some black blotches in the foreground on a slanting bough of *Bambusa arundinacea*. A slight readjustment of the focusing ring brought into focus an equally large flock of sunbathing hill mynas *Gracula religiosa*. The mynas were perched midway up the bamboo about 15 meters from the ground. As we approached the flock, we could hear surprisingly soft notes from these otherwise raucous songsters. We counted about 115 birds.

By now, we were about 30 meters from the bamboo. As I scanned upwards through the flock of mynas, I caught a glimpse of an upside-down bird, considerably smaller than the myna. Soon, I was looking at a large flock of nearly 90 vernal hanging parrots (lorikeets) *Loriculus vernalis*. True to their name, almost 20 per cent of the birds were hanging in an inverted fashion, clasping the perch with one limb. They quietly occupied the upper storey of the same bamboo as the hill myna. Many of these birds had fluffed their feathers to facilitate an efficient permeation of sunlight to raise their metabolism for the long day ahead.

There were more birds than the three of us could handle and our eyes were soon tired shuttling between the hornbills, mynas and lorikeets. As if to relieve our exhausted eyes, the ears decided to takeover and I began noticing the monotonous *tuk tuk tuk* of the crimson-fronted barbets *Megalaima rubricapilla*. Guided by the audio signals, the binoculars soon located the source of this cacophony. It emanated from the adjacent bough of the same bamboo clump. So engrossed were we in observing the large congregation of the three species that we had failed to notice the hullabaloo created by the barbets. Easily over 85 barbets participated in this noisy ensemble. Though unsynchronized, the head bobbing coupled with the lateral body swing of the entire flock was fascinating to say the least. How on earth does a tiny bird like the *M. rubricapilla* produce such a loud sound without even opening its beak? This unanswered query resurfaced once again in my mind and haunts me even today.

We were now only about 10 meters from the bamboo when suddenly the barbets, mynas and lorikeets burst into the air, circled over us and resettled in their respective positions. A solitary green imperial pigeon *Ducula aenea* too emerged from the *Ficus* along with a few hornbills and disappeared back into the same tree. I don't know if it occurred to my accompanying friends, but I was conscious of the fact that we had experienced one of the most spectacular birding extravaganzas of our lives. We gazed at the birds for another 10 minutes and with great reluctance moved ahead.

The remaining portion of our walk was equally exciting as our bird-list kept swelling at a consistent pace. A pair of heart-spotted woodpeckers *Hemicircus canente* and a solitary streak-throated woodpecker (little scaly-bellied green woodpecker) *Picus xanthopygaeus* were seen feeding on termites simultaneously from the same infected tree. Large flocks of fast flying malabar parakeets *Psittacula columboides* disappeared as quickly as they

appeared on the scene. A solitary common kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* hovered about 20 meters from the ground probably in search of an unwary field mouse or a warbler. A sub-adult changeable hawk eagle (Indian crested hawk-eagle) *Spizaetus cirrhatous* perched quietly on a *Tectona grandis* pretending to be indifferent towards the many smaller animals around. A single pompadour green pigeon *Treron pompadora* had descended on a dried-up pond for reasons unknown to us, but, seeing the contrasting bright green and maroon bird against a cracked and colorless background was a great pleasure.

It was 11:30 a.m., and time for us to return. Thus, after a scrumptious breakfast at a remote anti-poaching camp, we headed back to the campsite. Five hours had passed since we left Muthodi campsite, but it felt like five minutes - thanks to the flying jewels of Bhadra. As if this was not enough, back at Muthodi, a mixed hunting party comprising small minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*, bar-winged flycatcher-shrike (pied flycatcher shrike) *Hemipus picatus*, bronzed drongo *Dicrurus aeneus*, black-naped monarch *Hypothymis azurea*, Asian paradise-flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*, common iora *Aegithina tiphia*, blue-capped rock thrush *Monticola cinclorhynchus*, orange-headed thrush *Zoothera citrina*, Asian brown flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*, red-throated flycatcher *Ficedula parva*, Tickell's blue flycatcher *Cyornis tickelliae* and black-lored (yellow) tit *Parus xanthogenys* awaited us. Not too far from this hungry bunch of birds were five black-throated munias *Lonchura kelaari*. Oh, what a day! "This is exactly what keeps people like me ticking and this is precisely what I want to live for", I said to myself!

My very first association with this picturesque 492 sq. km. tiger reserve, located in the districts of Chikmagalur and Shimoga (Karnataka) had thoroughly captivated me with its extraordinary assemblage of wildlife. The secret behind its impressive biodiversity is a profusion of rivulets and streams like the Somavahini, Odirayanahalla and Thadabehalla that originate in the surrounding mountains. These three tributaries of river Bhadra contribute immensely in maintaining high atmospheric moisture, a prerequisite for a biological hotspot! Moreover, the park is blessed with 1200 to 2600 mm of rain, which in turn supports a luxuriant plant life. Some of the important tree species, excluding the ones mentioned in the previous paragraphs, are *Terminalia belerica*, *T. paniculata*, *T. alata*, *T. arjuna*, *Dalbergia latifolia*, *Wrightia tinctoria*, *Calophyllum tomentosa*, *Artocarpus hirsuta*, *Anogeissus latifolia*, *Mangifera indica*, *Pterocarpus marsupium*, *Gmelina arborea*, *Bombax cieba*, *Syzygium cumini*, *Schleichera oleosa*, *Kydia calycina*, *Grewia tilaefolia* and *Vateria indica*. Amongst the noticeable shrub species are *Clerodendrum infortunatum*, *Stachytarpheta indica*, *Cipadessa baccifera*, *Randia sp* and of course *Lantana camara*. While *Tinospora cordifolia* and *Calycopteris floribunda* represent the climber fraternity of the park. BTR also harbors five species of bamboos including *Dendrocalamus strictus*, *Oxytenanthera monostigma*, *O. stockii*, *Ochlandra rheedii* and above all *Bambusa arundinacea* the giant bamboo, which is synonymous with Bhadra. In other words, BTR supports some of the most pristine bamboo forests in peninsular India.

After browsing through the above list of plants, it becomes apparent why BTR is so rich in animal life. Amongst big mammals, I sighted the sambar *Cervus unicolor*, chital *Axis axis*, barking deer *Muntiacus muntjac*, elephant *Elephas maximus* and Indian

wild boar *Sus scrofa*. It is by far the best place for seeing the barking deer in peninsular India. Other herbivores, though not seen during our visit, include gaur *Bos gaurus* and mouse deer *Tragulus meminna*. Two species of primates viz. bonnet macaque *Macaca radiata* and common langur *Presbytis entellus*, and two species of squirrels viz. the Indian giant squirrel *Ratufa indica*, and its nocturnal cousin the common giant flying squirrel *Petaurista petaurista* were also seen in respectable numbers. Some of the carnivores sighted were striped-necked *Herpestes vitticollis* and brown mongoose *Herpestes fuscus*, wild dog *Cuon alpinus* and tiger *Panthera tigris* (seen by five of our group members). In addition to this, spoors of sloth bear *Melursus ursinus*, Indian porcupine *Hystrix indica*, smooth Indian otter *Lutra perspicillata*, leopard *Panthera pardus* and tiger were observed during jungle walks.

The highlight of the trip however, was the sighting of a 10-foot long king cobra *Ophiophagus hannah*. The snake had climbed up a giant bamboo about 150 meters from the Muthodi campsite and could be observed for over an hour! Two other species of snakes viz. vine snake *Ahaetulla nasutus* and rat snake *Ptyas mucosus* were also seen.

Given below is the list of birds sighted at Bhadra Tiger Reserve between 25th and 29th December 2002:

Species

Grey junglefowl *Gallus sonneratii*, Indian peafowl *Pavo cristatus*, Rufous woodpecker *Celeus brachyurus*, White-bellied woodpecker *Dryocopus javensis*, Heart-spotted woodpecker *Hemicircus canente*, Streak-throated woodpecker *Picus xanthopygaeus*, Black-rumped flameback *Dinopium benghalense*, White-cheeked barbet *Megalaima viridis*, Crimson-fronted barbet *Megalaima rubricapilla*, Malabar grey hornbill *Ocyrceros griseus*, Indian roller *Coracias benghalensis*, White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*, Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater *Merops leschenaulti*, Asian koel *Eudynamis scolopacea*, Greater coucal *Centropus sinensis*, Vernal hanging parrot *Loriculus vernalis*, Plum-headed parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*, Malabar parakeet *Psittacula columboides*, Asian palm-swift *Cypsiurus balasiensis*, Nilgiri wood pigeon *Columba elphinstonii*, Green imperial pigeon *Ducula*

aenea, Oriental turtle dove *Streptopelia orientalis*, Spotted dove *Streptopelia chinensis*, Eurasian collard dove *Streptopelia decaocto*, Pompadour green pigeon *Treron pompadora*, Yellow-footed green-pigeon *Treron phoenicoptera*, Crested serpent eagle *Spilornis cheela*, Shikra *Accipiter badius*, Besra *Accipiter virgatus*, Oriental honey buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*, Changeable hawk eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatu*s, Common kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, Little cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*, Little egret *Egretta garzetta*, Intermediate (Median) egret *Mesophoyx intermedia*, Cattle egret *Bubulcus ibis*, Indian pond-heron *Ardeola grayii*, Brown shrike *Lanius cristatus*, Rufous treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*, White-bellied treepie *Dendrocitta leucogastra*, Large-billed crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*, Eurasian golden oriole *Oriolus oriolus*, Black-hooded oriole *Oriolus xanthornus*, Large cuckooshrike *Coracina macei*, Small minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*, Scarlet minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus*, Bar-winged flycatcher-shrike *Hemipus picatus*, Ashy drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*, Bronzed drongo *Dicrurus aeneus*, Greater racket-tailed drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus*, Black-naped monarch *Hypothymis azurea*, Asian paradise-flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*, Common iora *Aegithina tiphia*, Blue-capped rock Thrush *Monticola cinclorhynchus*, Malabar whistling thrush *Myophonus horsfieldii*, Orange-headed thrush *Zoothera citrina*, Asian brown flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*, Red-throated flycatcher *Ficedula parva*, Tickell's blue flycatcher *Cyornis tickelliae*, Oriental magpie robin *Copsychus saularis*, White-rumped shama *Copsychus malabaricus*, Pied bushchat *Saxicola caprata*, Chestnut-tailed starling *Sturnus malabaricus*, Hill myna *Gracula religiosa*, Great tit *Parus major*, Black-lored tit *Parus xanthogenys*, Barn swallow *Hirundo rustica*, Wire-tailed swallow *Hirundo smithii*, Red-rumped swallow *Hirundo daurica*, Red-whiskered bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*, Red-vented bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*, Grey-breasted prinia *Prinia hodgsonii*, Jungle prinia *Prinia sylvatica*, Booted warbler *Hippolais caligata*, Common chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, Greenish warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*, Indian scimitar babbler *Pomatorhinus horsfieldii*, Jungle babbler *Turdoides striatus*, Brown-cheeked fulvetta *Alcippe poiocephala*, Purple sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica*, White-browed wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis*, Grey wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*, Black-throated munia *Lonchura kelaarti*, Common rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*



Introduction

Invasive species are floral or fauna elements that are introduced into areas outside their normal range. These get established, breed, and finally spread in their new locale. About 10% of each stage survives to the next.

Invasive species are reported to have serious consequences in the areas into which they have been introduced. Compared to the other threats to biodiversity, invasives come only second to habitat destruction, with 49% of the endangered species in the U.S. being so partly because of invasives (Simberloff, 2002).

They may compete with local species for food or nesting sites; they may prey upon the nests and eggs of indigenous species; they may carry disease vectors; they may affect forest

Invasive Species in Andamans

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regeneration by crowding out indigenous species; and herbivory by them may affect the structure of the forest.

Globally, considerable effort has gone into research on invasive species, and on mechanisms to control and eradicate them. The Rio Treaty on Biodiversity explicitly recognizes the magnitude of the problem represented by invasives species. Section 8h of this Treaty explicitly binds signatory states to taking measures to eliminate invasives. IUCN(2000) has developed guidelines for the prevention of biodiversity loss caused by alien invasive species. It lays out protocols for the prevention of introductions, eradication and control. It lays down norms to be followed, and identifies research issues. This is implemented by the Invasive Species Specialist Group, which maintains a database on invasives (ISSG, 2002).

However, within India almost no work has been done on invasives, except for on a handful of well-known ones such as water hyacinth and lantana. Below, I list a few of the invasives that have been noted recently in the Andaman Islands, and suggest how these might be affecting the avifauna in the islands.

Chital (*Axis axis*) were introduced around 1915, and have spread to all the islands in the Andaman group except for Little Andaman. A study finished recently (Ali *et al*, in review) suggests that browsing by this introduced deer affects regeneration very drastically. In areas where chital densities are high, very few species of trees are allowed to survive beyond the seedling stage. This leads to there being very little undergrowth. Bird species that feed or nest at this level would be affected. No specific studies have been done in the Andaman Islands as to what these could be.

Elephant (*Elephas maximus*) There are two populations that have turned feral in the Andamans. The main one is on Interview Island, and derives from captive elephants that were released into the forest when a timber contractor operating there went bankrupt in 1962. These elephants have made certain plant species such as bamboo, cane and *Pandanus* scarce, and this would have affected the insects associated with these plants; in turn the birds that feed on these insects would also be affected. Their debarking of trees and the suppression of regeneration by chital have also led to a very open canopy having been created. This would have its effects on the community structure of the bird populations there.

Dog (*Canis familiaris*). These have gone feral in a number of places and hunt wildlife to survive. They have been observed digging up sea turtle nests and attacking sea turtles on the beach. Attacks on sea turtles have been reported from areas as distant as Galathea in Great Nicobar Island. Ground living birds such as crakes and waterhens are at threat from them.

Cat (*Felis catus*) Again, a large feral population exists, and cats are sometimes seen in remote forest areas. Nesting birds are obviously targeted by cats.

Cattle (*Bos taurus*) Some cattle appear to have gone feral within the Jarawa Reserve on South Andaman. Their grazing near wetlands is likely to affect ground nesting birds such as crakes and ducks.

Goat (*Capra hircus*) This is a recent introduction, but even though populations are domesticated they are grazed in and around forest areas. Browsing by these may be affecting birds that nest at low levels.

Common mynah (*Acridotheres tristis*) This species has become extremely common in Port Blair, as well as the rural areas near it.

It has so far failed to cross the forest patches in between South and Middle Andaman, and is not found further north. It competes fiercely for nesting holes, and competitive interactions between it and the endemic Rosy-cheeked parakeet have been observed. Aggression has also been observed being displayed towards the Glossy stare. Glossy stares appear less common in the areas near Port Blair than they were a decade ago; however this is a subjective impression. If true then competition for nesting holes might well be a factor.

House sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) Is abundant in Port Blair town, but has spread further north to Mayabunder. Nothing is known about which other species it might be competing with, and the form this competition takes.

House crow (*Corvus splendens*) A small population of around seven birds has recently been spotted in Port Blair, and has obviously been introduced very recently. It may establish and spread unless control measures are taken soon.

Water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) This plant has started taking over wetland areas in and around Port Blair. Its spread could well affect water bird populations.

Recommendations

This paper seeks to identify the research gaps that need to be filled to understand the impact of exotics. However, in a few cases it is obvious that control measures need to be taken immediately. These include dogs, cats, chital, elephant and common mynah. In the case of the latter three, there is a stumbling block created by the Wildlife Act, 1972. The latest amendments do not allow the Chief Wildlife Warden of a State to allow culling even for the purposes of scientific management. Obtaining permission for control from the MOEF has always been problematic since they do not wish to set precedents. For a start, species exotic to a particular part of the country should be exempt from the provisions of the Act. Culling needs to begin in earnest to protect the native ecosystems of the Andamans.

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Summary

Ornithologists and bird watchers in India agree that knowledge about the present status of common birds in the subcontinent is wanting. This note sketches the present state of knowledge, and suggests some lines along which future surveys of the common birds in the agrarian landscapes may be conducted.

Population Decline of Birds in the Open Landscape of North India

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Stig Toft Madsen works with International Development Studies, Roskilde University in Denmark. He first visited the Indian subcontinent in 1969, and has since lived in the area for about ten years. His work as a sociologist and anthropologist in the rural areas of western Uttar Pradesh (UP) and in coastal Karnataka, as well as an occasional tour leader in protected areas, has familiarized him with some of India's landscapes and habitats.

A Limited Probe

On January 26, 2003, I made a probe into the field of bird population studies by posting an e-mail on the NatHistory-India website hosted by Princeton University. My inquiry ran thus:

"I want to ask if anyone of you can suggest sources, which deal with the longer-term changes in the bird population in the open, agrarian landscape in North India. I have looked at birds, especially in western UP off and on for about 30 years. I think there is a general decline in the number of common birds. I think this applies not only to vultures, but for example to Pariah Kites as well. I also feel there are fewer doves, fewer drongos, fewer rollers, - but may be not fewer parakeets. Who has studied this systematically? (PS: I just went to southern Sweden today on a bus trip, and we saw about 20 eagles. The number of breeding White-Tailed Sea Eagles in Sweden has gone UP about ten times in the last 30 years. I wonder if the opposite is the case for some species in Northern India). (<https://new-lists.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0301&L=nathistory-india&T=0&P=13629>)

My posting elicited a handful of responses most of which came from very experienced birders in India. I would like to summarize their response.

Ghazala Shahabuddin wrote: "A number of bird-watchers and ornithologists feel the same in India. I also feel that birds of agricultural fields, such as bee-eaters, drongos, rollers etc, have particularly undergone a decline." Ghazala Shahabuddin added that precise figures are hard to come by. This applies even to vultures, which are regularly monitored by BNHS only at a few places (but see also Chhangani 2002). Delhi is one of the few places that has been systematically surveyed. According to Shahabuddin, Kalpavriksh has organized biannual bird counts in ten sites in the city of Delhi for about ten years. A report exists on these counts, but it has not been published. She also mentioned an eight-year count of the birds at Sultanpur Jheel 45 km from Delhi. The data from this exhaustive count, however, remain unanalyzed and unpublished. On the other hand, Hindustan Times has reported that the Delhi Bird Club is soon to bring out a bird atlas of Delhi and Haryana (Chaturvedi 2003).

Gopi Sundar wrote in response to my posting that since 1999 he has been working in south-western Uttar Pradesh, mainly in Etawah and Mainpuri. His work has concentrated on the Sarus Crane and other large water birds, such as the Black-necked Stork. The cranes are clearly among the species that have attracted the widest attention. Most of the work on cranes has centered on Bharatpur, but parts of western India have also been looked into. In his recent book on cranes, Peter Matthiesen has devoted a chapter called "Gujarat and Rajasthan" to cranes in these parts of India. Sundar's data from UP show a surprising stability in population: "The population estimate of Sarus Cranes made by Prakash Gole in 1988-89 (2,700-3,100, Gole 1989) and my estimate (2,500-3,000, unpublished information) are both exactly the same. This is the highest known density of these birds anywhere in the world." Similarly, Sundar found that Black-necked Storks breed in good numbers, sometimes in the same nesting trees as they did in the 1940s (Lowther 1944, Sundar in press). Altogether, birdlife in the area seems to be thriving except as regards vultures. Sundar ascribes this fact to the "relatively little change in land use patterns". In areas with extensive cane cultivation or with large areas under soybean, bird populations may have declined, he feels.

Mahesh Rangarajan in his response to my query noted that there was a discussion of the decline of raptors in *Newsletter for*

Birdwatchers back in the 1970s. I have not read this correspondence, but it goes to show that even then some people felt there was a decline among some of the larger species at the top of the food chain.

How bad is the overall decline supposed to be? Many birders have noted that the Indian subcontinent is rich in birds compared to, for example, China. Is India going the way of China? I put this question directly to *Ranjit Daniels* who replied: "I do agree that birds are declining all through the Indian countryside. But certainly not as bad as China....". Ranjit Daniels is one of the few people to have done a long-term comparative study of birds in India. Between 1983 and 1988, he surveyed the district of Uttara Kannada in Karnataka making 107 sample "strip transect" walks of 600 meter each in 15 different habitats (Daniels 1989:13). He combined his study with early data from the same district published in 1883, 1898 and 1942 respectively. Daniels' study may be unique. I wonder whether a similar study has been made in any district in the open countryside in North India?

SA Hussain responded to my query by pointing out that he has actually written a similar message some time back. He wrote: "Most birdwatchers of long standing would perhaps remember some traditional Myna roosts which typically occur in some giant trees at the edges of railway platforms (why do they do that?) and/or in some ancient Banyan trees in the middle of a village square. It would be interesting to know how many of these traditional roosts are still active and where they are." He also wondered about the number of Spotted Doves, Red-turtle Doves, Ring Doves and Little Brown Doves. Have they decreased? Hussain added that VS Vijayan from the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) has planned to organize "an all India enquiry through a network of birdwatchers as a SACON sponsored project on similar lines as the ongoing UNDP/SACON national freshwater wetlands project." This proposed project apparently focuses on the domestic sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), but Hussain suggests that the project "clubs" it with other common species such as the Common Myna. From what I can see at the SACON website, it would appear that a survey of common birds is not included among SACON's present projects.

Thus, the consensus seems to be that many common birds are declining, but there is no good data to substantiate it! Some earlier studies would appear to support this general conclusion. Thus, Gaston has shown that endemic passerines in highly cultivated areas tend to have a very local distribution compared to endemics in areas not so intensively cultivated (Gaston 1984). On the other hand, Tom Roberts has noted that many birds in the cultivated plains of Pakistan have become more common precisely because cultivation has intensified. The old riverine thorn forests have mostly disappeared, but new habitats have been opened up, including extensive canal and roadside tree belt plantations and wetlands created by seepage from irrigation canals and dams (Roberts 1991:14-16).

What to do?

The most surprising response I got to my query was from *Asad R Rahmani*, Director of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS). He pointed out that he had written an article called "Give a Thought to Common Birds" at the *Mistnet* website (Rahmani 2002a). This was followed, more recently, by an editorial in the *JBNHS* (Rahmani 2002b). Rahmani takes up species such as House Sparrow, Black Drongo, Indian Roller, Magpie Robin, Redvented Bulbul, Ashy Prinia, Tailor Bird, Common Iora, Asian Paradise

Flycatcher, River Tern and the Little Grebe wondering how they are presently doing.

Moreover, Rahmani sketches BNHS' plans to start a scheme to census and monitor common Indian birds in collaboration with the Indian Bird Conservation Network or IBCN (see www.ibcnetwork.org), and other interested ornithologists. Most importantly, the BNHS seems to be in the process of adapting some of the methods, which the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) has been using in the UK for a number of years.

As far as I can gather, the BTO works with two main methods. The Common Bird Census (CBC) is an annual and very comprehensive count started in 1962. It is based on eight visits per year to each site. A newer scheme called the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) was introduced in 1994. The BBS is unusual among sampling systems for common birds because it is based on a "formal randomized design". Thus, a computer has chosen some 1,708 1x1 km grid squares to be visited three times per year by skilled volunteer ornithologists. The first visit fixes the route and notes the habitat. During the following two visits in spring all birds are recorded in various distances along two transect lines. Based on these relatively few visits, the results are interpolated for the entire country. Because the distribution of habitats in the UK is already known, the extrapolated figures are quite accurate for the lowland areas that are the focus of this survey (see <http://www.bto.org/birdtrends/index.htm>). The method appears attractive because it requires relatively little input.

In Denmark, we have had two major surveys of breeding birds based on a comprehensive sampling. These surveys depended on the voluntary labor of about 10% of the members of the Danish Ornithological Society, i.e. about 1,500 people. For these surveys the entire country was divided into some 2,170 grid squares of 5x5 km each. The final result of the survey is an atlas for each breeding species showing the squares in which the species bred in 1993-1996 and also where it bred during the first survey in 1971-74. Other maps depict the density of the 50-60 most common breeding species in the country. These maps are based on counts at 16,425 points. In addition to the atlas, annual point counts of breeding birds have been conducted since 1976. These counts have shown that most farmland species decreased rapidly between 1976 and 1990. Since then, population levels have remained largely stable. Altogether the Danish atlas survey and the annual point counts have provided a very detailed mapping of the birds of Denmark (Grell 1998 for the atlas and Jacobsen 2002 for the point counts). A similar, and equally attractive, atlas has been produced in Sweden although its size and the extensive wilderness areas meant that large parts of middle and northern Sweden remained uncovered (Svensson 1999:12-13). Currently, some 18 European countries are collaborating to combine their data about common birds using a program called TRIM (Trends and Indices for Monitoring data).

The question is how the work should be done in India.

It should be agreed on which organization and persons should coordinate the work, and how the venture should be funded.

India has few skilled ornithologists. To judge from a survey of checklists by Shyamal (2003), the ornithologists keeping lists are concentrated in the Delhi region (covering roughly the stretch up to Dehra Dun and down to Bharatpur), in the south (especially in the Western Ghats, and around Bangalore and Madras), and

more surprisingly in some parts of the northeast and in the Andamans and Nicobars. How should their skill and labor be mobilized and organized?

Environmental change is sometimes monitored through participatory methods (Abbot and Guijt 1998). To what extent should bird populations be monitored together with local non-specialists? How should the knowledge that various local people may already possess be utilized, and what will be the status of oral and written testimonies of non-ornithologists? (Agrawal 1995).

The breeding seasons in India are spread out over a larger part of the year. How should that be taken into account? Will it be enough with one "summer" and one "monsoon" counting?

The country is large. Will it be feasible to divide the entire country into grids and cover each of these, or will it be sufficient to randomly select a smaller number of grid squares, line transects or points and cover only these? If so, in which parts of the country should the selected areas be located? Will it be sufficient to start with some 300-500 transects or point counts distributed in the areas where birdwatchers are located, and then increase the number the following years?

Most of the densely cultivated arable lands are in the plains. How to study the seemingly uniform plains? How duly to consider the varied and changing land-use patterns? How, indeed, to view the history of the countryside over longer time periods? (Robbins 2001, Gold and Gujar 2002).

These appear to be some of the questions that now need to be addressed.

I would like to thank all the people who responded to my query as well as Bo Kayser and Wolfram Dressler for help and advice.

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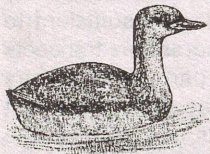
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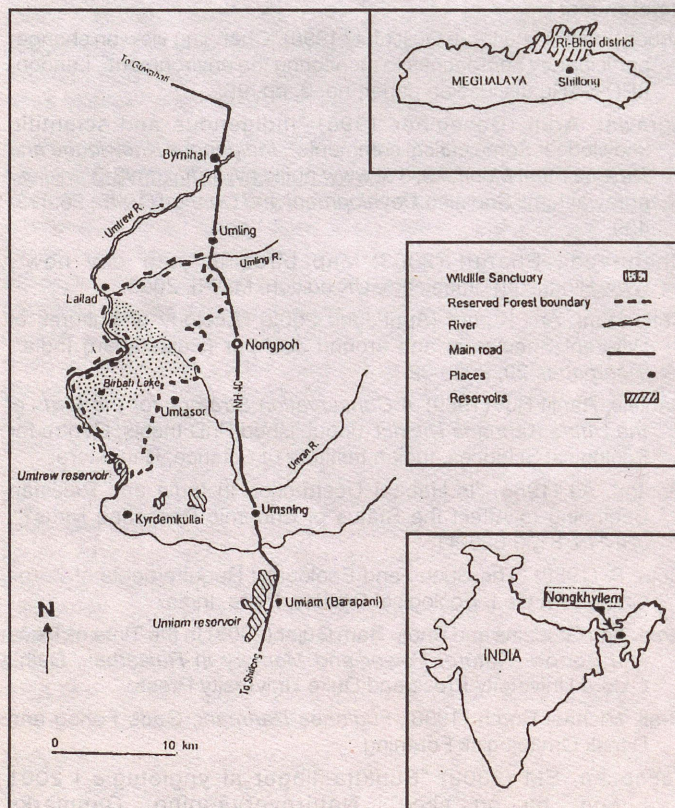
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Nongkhylllem Wildlife Sanctuary (NWS) (25°50'-25°58'N, 91°45'-91°50' E) and Umiam Reservoir are located in Meghalaya.

Although few ornithologists have visited Nongkhylllem, there is sizeable material on Khasi Hills as a whole including a good specimen collection at the Zoological Survey of India (Baker 1907, Godwin-Austen 1870a,b, 1872, 1873, 1876, Hume 1888, Koelz 1954, and Majumdar & Roy 1995). A bird survey was conducted in 1996-1997 (Choudhury 1998) with brief visits in 1998-2002 (last being in January). More than 400 species of birds have been recorded in the area, which included more than 250 observed by me. Some rare and endangered species are listed in Table 1 with their seasonal status.



The Birds of Nongkhylllem

Among the first records for Meghalaya were the Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*, Black-necked Grebe *P. nigricollis*, Red-necked Grebe *P. grisea*, Indian Shag *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*, Little Green Heron *Butorides striatus*, Malayan Night Heron *Gorsachius melanolophus*, Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, Greater Adjutant Stork *Leptoptilos dubius*, Ferruginous Pochard *Aythya nyroca* and Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*. Interestingly, all the grebes, Black Stork, Ferruginous Pochard and Black-headed Gull were sighted in Umiam Reservoir while the Greater Adjutant at Baridua near Assam-Meghalaya interstate border, about 15 km away from Lailad (Choudhury 1996).

Other noteworthy species recorded during the survey were Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*, Jerdon's Baza *Aviceda jerdoni*, Black Baza *A. leuphotes* and Blyth's Kingfisher *Alcedo hercules*. There are past records of Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala* (stray at Umiam), Wood Snipe *Gallinago nemoricola* and Tawny Fish Owl *Ketupa flavipes*.

NWS and NRF also supports some globally threatened mammals: Asian elephant *Elephas maximus*, tiger *Panthera tigris*, clouded leopard *Neofelis nebulosa* (a skin confiscated from a poacher in 1996), gaur *Bos gaurus*, and hoolock gibbon *Hylobates hoolock*.

Mid-winter waterfowl count

The first midwinter waterfowl census in NWS (at Birbah; a Darter and a Pintail *Anas acuta* seen) and NRF (at Kyrdenkullai Reservoir; only Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo*) was conducted in January 1997. A count was done in January 2002 also. At Umiam, it was conducted on 24 January 1999 and also in January 2002. Noteworthy records were one each of Black Stork and Ferruginous Duck in 1999 and >200 Pintails in 2002. A count for passage migrants was conducted at Umiam on 11 April 2001 when more than 40 Brown-headed Gulls *Larus brunicephalus* were counted.

Conservation status

In the whole of NRF, the encroachment is negligible and in NWS proper, there is none. However, the unclassified forests, which are vital elephant movement corridors, are being cleared and encroached upon rapidly causing much concern. In Lailad, the forest towards the west of the Umtrew River have already been cleared and settled. In areas near Kyrdenkullai and Umtasor also, the entire west-bank areas are under *jhum* cultivation.

Poaching is still a major conservation problem. Before the declaration of a sanctuary, the entire area, both the reserved forest as well as the unclassified forests was affected by uncontrolled hunting and deer meat was regularly sold at Nongpoh market. Birds such as the Kaleej Pheasant and Red Junglefowl were snared and shot regularly. However, with the notification of the wildlife sanctuary in 1981, poaching inside has been reduced to a great extent but it is still done in the reserved forest area. In the unclassified forests and *jhums*, it is rampant. The local poachers mainly go for deer, wild pig, and birds such as hornbills, junglefowl and pheasants but also primates, small mammals such as porcupines, other birds, reptiles (especially the monitor lizards), and occasionally gaur and elephant. Slingshot is very common in all the fringe villages.

The *jhum* of slash-and-burn shifting cultivation of the hill tribes (Khasis in this area) is a major conservation problem outside the sanctuary and reserved forest. Continuous *jhum* is fast turning Nongkhyllem into an island of forest amidst degradation. It is more severe towards the west of the Umtrew River. One impact of such cultivation on the birdlife of the area is an increase of grass and scrub birds due to availability of habitat in the form of abandoned and current *jhums* and decline of forest birds (e.g., hornbills). The high growth rate of human population in the fringe villages is the main reason for increase in *jhum* areas. This has also increased man-elephant conflict as bulk of the elephant-movement corridor outside Nongkhyllem has been cleared for *jhum*.

Although most of the wildlife sanctuary is free from logging, some takes place in the reserved forest area. This is mainly for local use in the fringe villages. The unclassified forests in the fringe areas have been heavily logged and there is hardly any mature tree left. Private ownership is the main reason for this.

Table 1 Some endangered and locally rare birds recorded from Nongkhyllem, Umiam and adjacent areas, India.

White-cheeked Partridge	NT	<i>Arborophila atrogularis</i>	R,U
Ferruginous Duck	NT	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>	W,U
Great Pied Hornbill	NT	<i>Buceros bicornis</i>	R,U
Wreathed Hornbill		<i>Aceros (syn. Rhyticeros) undulatus</i>	R,U
Red-headed Trogon		<i>Harpactes erythrocephalus</i>	R,U
Blyth's Kingfisher	NT	<i>Alcedo hercules</i>	R,O
Brown Fish Owl		<i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>	R,U
Tawny Fish Owl		<i>Ketupa flavipes</i>	R,U
Wood Snipe	VU	<i>Gallinago nemoricola</i>	(Hume 1888)
Jerdon's Baza		<i>Aviceda jerdoni</i>	R,U
Black Baza		<i>Aviceda leuphotes</i>	R,C
Lesser Fish Eagle	NT	<i>Ichthyophaga nana</i>	O
White-backed Vulture	CR	<i>Gyps bengalensis</i>	O
Long-billed Vulture	CR	<i>Gyps indicus</i>	O
White-legged or Pied Falcone		<i>Microhierax melanoleucos</i>	O
Red-necked Grebe		<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	W,O
Black-necked Grebe		<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	W,O
Darter	NT	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	R,U
Malayan Night Heron		<i>Gorsachius melanolophus</i>	U
Painted Stork	NT	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>	Stray
Black Stork		<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	W,U
Greater Adjutant Stork	EN	<i>Leptoptilos dubius</i>	outside (15 km away), O
Spotted - winged Stare		<i>Saroglossa spiloptera</i>	W,U
Grey Sibia	RR	<i>Heterophasia gracilis</i>	R,U
White - naped Yuhina	RR	<i>Yuhina bakeri</i>	R
Forest Wagtail		<i>Motacilla indica</i>	O

Key: R=resident; W=winter visitor; L=local movement; C=common; U=uncommon; O=occasional.

Some of the installations of the Meghalaya State Electricity Board such as power houses, staff quarters and road network are located inside NRF. These often cause disturbance inside the forest, however, NWS area is still free from such problems. Plantation of Sal and pine on a monoculture basis, renders the forest unsuitable for most birds as well as other wildlife.

It has been proposed that the entire reserve forest area (125.9 sq km) should be declared a wildlife sanctuary. This will increase the sanctuary area to 149 sq km including part of community forest, perhaps the last remaining forest, important from the biodiversity point of view in the entire Meghalaya Plateau.

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Birds of Tribal and Hilly District of Dungarpur

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There is hitherto hardly any published record on the avifauna of the hilly landscapes of the tribal district Dungarpur of south Rajasthan. An attempt was made to explore the diversity of avifauna in this area over a period from January 2000 to September 2001. It was of particular interest in the light of the fact that once rich, the area has lost its forest and wildlife wealth drastically over the past years due to factors including human interference, population pressure, changing land use and repeated droughts.

The Study Area

(i) **Geography:** Present in the southernmost region of the State of Rajasthan (India), the Dungarpur district occupies a position amidst the Aravalli ranges of pre-Cambrian period. The district extends between 23° 20' and 24° 01' N latitudes and 73° 21' and 74° 23' E longitudes, and the highest hillock present in the north-west region is at c. 572 m MSL. Two major rivers, the Som and the Mahi, mark the boundaries of the district with Udaipur and Banswara districts, respectively. The south-west region of the district is coterminous with the State of Gujarat. The region represents a hilly topography holding dry deciduous forests.

(ii) **Weather:** The region has a dry climate. Average annual minimum and maximum ranges of temperature are recorded as 4°C and 38°C; however, minimum and maximum records are of 1°C and 44°C, respectively. The average rainfall in the region is 728.9 mm although fluctuations of great extent are recorded over different years. About 96% rainfall takes place over monsoon season, more particularly during the month of July.

(iii) **People:** The population of the district is 8,74,549 representing only 1.99% of the total population of the State. Out of this, 92.79% rural and 7.21% urban population. Tribal population dominates (65.84%; 1991 census) the area.

(iv) **Forest:** This hilly region is covered by dry deciduous forests which become lush green during the monsoon but become almost dry over the rest of the year. Total forest cover of the district is 61,126 ha constituting 15.85% of the total land area. Major vegetation includes: *Pongamia pinnata* (Karani), *Tectona grandis* (Sagwan), *Acacia catechu* (Khair), *Acacia nilotica* (Babul), *Dendrocalamus sp./Bambusa sp.* (Bans), *Delbergia sissoo* (Sheesham), *Zizyphus sp.* (Ber), *Azadiracta indica* (Neem), *Mangifera indica* (Aam), *Emblica officinalis* (Anwala), *Maduca indica* (Mahua), *Butea monospora* (Dhaak), *Diospyros melanoxylon* (Temru/Tendu), *Phoenix sylvestris* (Khajoor), *Alianthus excelsa* (Adusa), *Ficus religiosa* (Pipal), and *Prosopis cineraria* (Khejri).

Methodology

Field observations were made over the summer, monsoon and winter seasons (year 2000-2001) in the district in different far-fung locations representing agriculture farms, forests, human settlements and wetlands. Binoculars and telescope were used for the closer look of the fauna. Identifications were made following Ali & Ripley.

The Avian Fauna

There are no published records available on the avian diversity of the district, except for a checklist by Sharma & Tehsin (1994)

which presents the bird fauna of southern Rajasthan but does not provide area-wise or district-wise distribution. Some stray references may also be found in the records of local Forest Department. To fill up this gap, a checklist of avian fauna along with record of their type of habitation based on present observations was prepared as given in Table 1. It includes 88 species belonging to 37 families. Surprisingly, the house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) is highly uncommon while Common Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) is a vagrant in the region, though both these birds are quite common in the rest of the State. Well irrigated cultivations, particularly paddy fields; and ponds display a high diversity and density of avifauna. Out of the total 19 bird species noted in the local Forest Department's record (1973) some like grey tit (*Parus major*) and whitethroated fantail flycatcher (white spotted ssp. *Rhipidura albicollis albogularis*) were not seen during the present survey. At the same time, some species noted are not reported by Sharma & Tehsin (1994). These include flamingo, garganey, redbacked shrike, common wood shrike, plain sand martin, collared sand martin, greyheaded myna, rufous chat, little pied flycatcher and Bonelli's eagle. The present list is not claimed to be exhaustive and since we intend to continue an intensive survey of the area, some more avian records are expected to be added.

Acknowledgments

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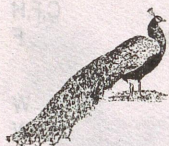
Table 1 Avian fauna of Dungarpur district (S. Rajasthan) as recorded during the years 2000-2001

Family and Common name	Scientific Name	Habitation*
FAMILY: PODICIPEDIDAE		
Little Grebe or Dabchick	<i>Podiceps ruficollis</i>	W
FAMILY: PELECANIDAE		
White or Rosy Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>	W
FAMILY: PHALACROCORACIDAE		
Darter or Snake-bird	<i>Anhinga rufa</i>	W
Large Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	W
FAMILY: ARDEIDAE		
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	W
Pond Heron or Paddybird	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	W
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	C
Smaller Egret	<i>Ergetta intermedia</i>	C,W
Little Egret	<i>Ergetta garzetta</i>	C,W
Large Egret or Great White Heron	<i>Ardea alba</i>	C,W
FAMILY: CICONIIDAE		
Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>	W
Openbill Stork	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>	W
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	W
Whitenecked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>	W
Blacknecked Stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i>	W
FAMILY: THRESKIORNITHIDAE		
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	C,W
Black Ibis	<i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>	C,W



White Ibis	<i>Threskiornis aethiopica</i>	C,W	Rufousbacked Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>	C,F,H
Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	W	Common Wood Shrike	<i>Tephrodornis virgatus</i>	F
FAMILY: PHENICOPTERIDAE			FAMILY: HIRUNDINIDAE		
Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	W	Plain Sand Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>	W
FAMILY: ANATIDAE			Collared Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	W
Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	W	FAMILY: BUCEROTIDAE		
Spotbilled Duck	<i>Anas poicilorhyncha</i>	W	Common Grey Hornbill	<i>Tockus birostris</i>	F
Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	W	FAMILY: PICIDAE		
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	W	Yellowfronted Pied Woodpecker	<i>Picooides mahrattensis</i>	F
White-eyed Pochard			FAMILY: DICRURIDAE		
or Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>	W	Black Drongo or King Crow	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>	C,F
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	W	FAMILY: STRUNIDAE		
FAMILY: PHASIANIDAE			Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	C, F, H
Common or Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	C,F	Blackheaded or Brahminy Myna	<i>Sturnus pagodarum</i>	H
Rock Bush Quail	<i>Perdica argoondah</i>	C,F	Greyheaded Myna	<i>Sturnus malabaricus</i>	H
FAMILY: GRUIDAE			FAMILY: CORVIDAE		
Sarus Crane	<i>Grus antigone</i>	C	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	C,F,H
FAMILY: RALLIDAE			Jungle Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	C,F,H
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	W	Indian Tree Pie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>	F
FAMILY: JACANIDAE			FAMILY: PYCNONOTIDAE		
Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>	W	Redvented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	C,F,H
FAMILY: RECURVIROSTRIDAE			FAMILY: MUSCICAPIDAE		
Blackwinged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	W	Rufous Chat	<i>Erythropygia galactotes</i>	C,F,H
FAMILY: CHARADRIIDAE			Brown Rock Chat	<i>Ceromela fusca</i>	C,F,H
Redwattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	W,C	Plain Wren-Warbler	<i>Prinia subflava</i>	C, F, H
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	W,C	Large Grey Babbler	<i>Turdoides malcolmi</i>	C, F, H
Wood or Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	W,C	Indian Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicata</i>	C, F, H
Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	W	Indian Robin (Brown-backed ssp.)	<i>S.f. cambaiensis</i>	C, F, H
Blacktailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	W	Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	C, H
FAMILY: COLUMBIDAE			Little Pied Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa westermanni</i>	C,F
Blue Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	C,F,H	Whitebrowed Fantail Flycatcher	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>	C,F
Indian Ring Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	C,F,H	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	C,H
Red Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>	C,F,H	FAMILY: MOTACILLIDAE		
Little Brown or Senegal Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	C,F,H	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	C,F
FAMILY: PSITTACIDAE			Pied or White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba dukhunensis</i>	C,F
Roseringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	C,F,H	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	C,H
FAMILY: CUCULIDAE			FAMILY: NECTARINIIDAE		
Koel	<i>Eudynamis scolopacea</i>	C,F	Purple Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>	C,F
Crow-Pheasant or Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	C,F	FAMILY: PLOCEIDAE		
FAMILY: STRIGIDAE			House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	H
Spotted Owlet	<i>Athene brama</i>	F	Baya	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>	C,F
FAMILY: APODIDAE			FAMILY: ACCIPITRIDAE		
House Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	F,H	Blackwinged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	C,F
FAMILY: ALCEDINIDAE			Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	C,F
Lesser Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>	W	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus fasciatus</i>	F
Whitebreasted Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smymensis</i>	W	FAMILY: LARIDAE		
FAMILY: MEROPIDAE			Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>	W
Green Bee-Eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	C,F	Indian River Tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>	W
FAMILY: CORACIIDAE			<hr/>		
Indian Roller or Blue Jay	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	C,F	* C = Cultivation; F = Forest; W = Wetland and around; H = Human settlements		
FAMILY: UPUPIDAE			References		
Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	F	Ali, S. and Repley, S. D. 1981. <i>Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan</i> . Oxford University Press, Delhi.		
FAMILY: LANIIDAE			Ali, S. and Ripley, S. D. 1983. <i>A Pictorial Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent</i> . Oxford University Press, Delhi.		
Redbacked Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	C,F,H	Sharma, Satish Kumar and Tehsin, Raza. 1994. Birds of southern Rajasthan. <i>Newsletter for Birdwatchers</i> , 34 (5): 109-113.		
Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	C,F,H			





The Balh is a very fertile valley located in the middle Himalayan ranges at an average altitude of 870m above mean sea level. It experiences summer, winter as well as rainy seasons. The temperature ranges from 6°C to 35°C and the mean annual rainfall of 1600mm with June-August being rainy months. The vegetation of the area is sub-tropical type supporting large-scale agriculture, forested patches and some fallow land. Suketi and Kansa are perennial streams flowing in the middle of the valley besides, a few village ponds are also present in the valley. The construction of about 11km long BSL canal from Baggi to Sunder Nagar has provided good irrigation facility to the area. A reservoir has been built at Sunder Nagar by BBMB for de-silting purpose.

The observations showed that the diversity of birds was high in the mixed forest patches, including birds represented by Himalayan ecosystem as well as the plains. The population of blossomheaded parakeet, roseringed parakeet, Northern speckled piculet, black drongo, whitecheeked bulbul, redvented bulbul, black bulbul, Simla streaked laughing thrush, yellow-naped yuhina, whitethroated fantail flycatcher, brown chiff-chaff, greyheaded flycatcher warbler, Himalayan whistling thrush, Kashmir grey tit, Indian white eye and yellow throated sparrow was fairly good in the valley. Roosts of Indian myna were observed at some places. The BBMB reservoir, village ponds and streams attracted a good number and variety of resident and migratory water birds.

Mahabal & Mukherjee (1991) have listed 70 species of birds from district Mandi. However, the present observations reveal the existence of 121 species of birds in the area. More species may be added to this list on further exploration of the valley in different seasons.

Systematic list of Birds of Balh Valley, district Mandi (H.P.)

Family: ARDEIDAE

Ardeola grayii Pond Heron or Paddy Bird, *Bubulcus ibis* Cattle Egret, *Egretta garzetta* Little Egret.

Family: ANATIDAE

Anas crecca Common Teal, *Anas platyrhynchos* Mallard, *Anas strepera* Gadwal, *Anas penelope* Wigeon, *Aythya ferina* Common Pochard, *Aythya fuligula* Tufted Duck

Family: ACCIPITRIDAE

Milvus migrans Pariah Kite, *Milvus migrans lineatus* Blackeared kite, *Accipiter badius* Indian Shikra, *Gyps bengalensis* Indian Whitebacked Vulture

Family: FALCONIDAE

Falco tinnunculus Kestrel

Family: PHASIANIDAE

Francolinus francolinus Indian Black Partridge, *Perdica asiatica* Jungle Bush Quail, *Lophura leucomelana* Whitecrested Kaleej Pheasant, *Pavo cristatus* Indian Peafowl

Family: GRUIDAE

Grus antigone Indian Sarus Crane

Family: RALLIDAE

Amaurornis phoenicurus Indian Whitebreasted Waterhen, *Gallinula chloropus* Indian Moorhen, *Fulica atra* Coot, *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* Pheasant tailed Jacana

Birds of Balh Valley

H S MEHTA, R PALIWAL and M L THAKUR, Zoological Survey of India, High Altitude Zoology Field Station, Solan (H.P.) 173211

Family: CHARADRIIDAE

Vanellus indicus Redwattled Lapwing, *Charadrius dubius* Little Ringed Plover, *Tringa hypoleucos* Common Sandpiper.

Family: COLUMBIDAE

Treron phoenicoptera Yellowlegged Green Pigeon, *Columba livia* Blue Rock Pigeon, *Streptopelia decaocto*, Indian Ring Dove, *Streptopelia tranquebarico* Indian Red Turtle Dove, *Streptopelia chinensis* Indian Spotted Dove.

Family: PSITTACIDAE

Psittacula eupatria Large Indian Parakeet, *Psittacula krameri* Roseringed Parakeet, *Psittacula cyanocephala* Blossomheaded Parakeet, *Psittacula himalayana* Himalayan Slatyheaded Parakeet.

Family: CUCULIDAE

Clamator jacobinus Pied Crested Cuckoo, *Cuculus varius* Common Hawk Cuckoo, *Cuculus micropterus* Indian Cuckoo, *Cuculus canorus* Cuckoo, *Eudynamis scolopacea* Indian Koel.

Family: STRIGIDAE

Athene brama Spotted Owlet

Family: CAPRIMULGIDAE

Caprimulgus macrurus Indian Longtailed Nightjar

Family: ALCEDINIDAE

Ceryle rudis Indian Pied Kingfisher, *Alcedo atthis* Central Asian Small Blue Kingfisher, *Halcyon smyrnensis* Indian Whitebreasted Kingfisher.

Family: MEROPIDAE

Merops philippinus Blue tailed Bee-Eater, *Merops orientalis* Small Green Bee-Eater.

Family: UPUPIDAE

Upupa epops Hoopoe

Family: CAPITONIDAE

Megalaima virens Great Hill Barbet, *Megalaima asiatica* Bluethroated Barbet, *Megalaima haemacephala* Crimsonbreasted Barbet.

Family: PICIDAE

Picumnus innominatus Northern Speckled Piculet, *Picoides macei* Indian Fulvousbreasted Pied Woodpecker.

Family: ALAUDIDAE

Galerida cristata Indian Crested Lark

Family: HIRUNDINIDAE

Riparia riparia Collared Sand Martin, *Hirundo rustica* Swallow, *Hirundo smithii* Indian Wiretailed Swallow.

Family: LANIIDAE

Lanius schach Rufousbacked Shrike

Family: ORIOLIDAE

Oriolus oriolus Indian Golden Oriole

Family: DICRURIDAE

Dicrurus adsimilis Black Drongo, *Dicrurus hottentottus* Hair crested or Spangled Drongo.

Family: STURNIDAE

Sturnus pagodarum Blackheaded or Brahminy Myna, *Acridotheres tristis* Indian Myna, *Acridotheres ginginianus* Bank Myna, *Acridotheres fuscus* Jungle Myna.



Family: CORVIDAE

Cissa erythrorhyncha Himalayan Redbilled Blue Magpie, *Dendrocitta vagabunda* Indian Tree Pie, *Dendrocitta formosae* Himalayan Tree Pie, *Corvus splendens* Indian House Crow, *Corvus macrorhynchos* Jungle Crow

Family: CAMPEPHAGIDAE

Pericrocotus ethologus Longtailed Minivet

Family: IRENIDAE

Aegithina tiphia Common Iora

Family: PYCNONOTIDAE

Pycnonotus leucogenys Whitecheeked Bulbul, *Pycnonotus cafer* Redvented Bulbul, *Hypsipetes madagascariensis* Himalayan Black Bulbul

Family: TIMALINAE

Pomatorhinus erythrogenys Rustycheeked Scimitar Babbler, *Turdoides caudatus* Common Babbler, *Turdoides striatus* Jungle Babbler, *Stachyris pyrrhops* Blackchinned Babbler, *Garrulax linaetus* Simla Streaked Laughing Thrush, *Yuhina flavicollis* Yellownaped Yuhina

Family: MUSCICAPINAE

Muscicapa strophiiata Orangeorgeted Flycatcher, *Muscicapa leucomelenura* Slaty Blue Flycatcher, *Muscicapa sundara* Rufousbellied Niltava, *Muscicapa thalassina* Verditer Flycatcher, *Rhipidura hypoxantha* Yellowbellied Fantail Flycatcher, *Rhipidura aureola* Whitebrowed Fantail Flycatcher, *Rhipidura albicollis* Whitethroated Fantail Flycatcher, *Terpsiphone paradisi* Paradise Flycatcher

Family: SYLVIINAE

Prinia socialis Ashy Wren-Warbler, *Orthotomus sutorius* Indian Tailor Bird, *Phylloscopus collybita* Brown Chiff-Chaff, *Seicereus xanthoschistos* Greyheaded Flycatcher Warbler

Family: TURDINAE

Copsychus saularis Indian Magpie Robin, *Phoenicurus ochrurus* Black Redstart, *Phoenicurus frontalis* Blue fronted Redstart, *Rhyacornis fuliginosus* Plumbeous Redstart, *Enicurus maculatus* Western Spotted Forktail, *Saxicola torquata* Indian Collared Bush Chat, *Saxicola ferrea* Dark-grey Bush Chat, *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus* Whitecapped Redstart or River chat, *Saxicoloides fulicata* Brownbacked Indian Robin, *Myiophonus caeruleus*



Himalayan Blue Whistling Thrush, *Zoothra dauma* Golden or Smallbilled Mountain Thrush

Family: PARIDAE

Parus major Grey Tit, *Parus xanthogenys* Yellowcheeked Tit

Family: SITTIDAE

Tichodroma muraria Wall Creeper

Family: MOTACILLIDAE

Anthus hodgsoni Indian Tree Pipit, *Motacilla citreola* Yellow Wagtail, *Motacilla caspica* Grey Wagtail, *Motacilla alba* Indian White Wagtail, *Motacilla maderspatensis* Large pied wagtail

Family: NECTARINIIDAE

Nectarinia asiatica Indian Purple Sunbird, *Aethopyga siparaja* Indian Yellowbacked Sunbird.

Family: ZOSTEROPIDAE

Zosterops palpebrosa Indian White-Eye

Family: PLOCEIDAE

Passer domesticus Indian House Sparrow, *Passer montanus* Tree Sparrow, *Petronia xanthocollis* Yellowthroated Sparrow, *Ploceus philippinus* Indian Baya, *Lonchura punctulata* Indian Spotted Munia

Family: EMBERIZIDAE

Melophus lathami Crested Bunting

Acknowledgements

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Bird Life on a Pacific Island

Lt. Gen. BALIJIT SINGH (Retd.), House 219, Sector 16-A, Chandigarh 160 015



"Morgan's Run" is one of the widely acclaimed, recent historical fiction. Coleen Mc Clullough, the author, draws heavily from the original logs of the first batch of settlers to set foot on the Australian soil at what is Sydney today. Fewer than a hundred of them were transported to Norfolk Island, about 1,600 km due East of Sydney to extract timber for construction. This 8 x 6 km at the widest island was a tropical forest at best, with not a single *Homo-sapiens* on it till then.

The bird life on Norfolk island as recorded in a log for Jan - Oct 1788 might interest the readers of NLBW.

"Save for different kinds of rats and millions of ants, beetles, centipedes, spiders and other inimical insects, life forms anchored to the ground seemed rare, in contrast to the sky and trees, both

full of thousands upon thousands of birds, most of them spectacularly beautiful. Of parrots there were more sorts than imagination dreamed existed - huge white ones with striking, sulphur-yellow crests, grey ones with cyclamen breasts, black ones, rainbow-hued ones, tiny speckled chartreuse ones, red and blue ones, green ones and dozens more besides. A big brown kingfisher bird killed snakes by breaking their backs on a tree branch and laughed maniacally; one large ground bird had a tail like a Greek lyre and strutted in the manner of a peacock; there were reports from those who walked in the Governor's train on his explorations of black swans; eagles had wing span of up to nine feet, and competed with hawks and falcons for prey. Minute finches and wrens, cheeky and vivid, darted about fearlessly. The whole bird kingdom was gorgeously painted and vocal to the point

of distraction. Some birds sang more exquisitely than any nightingale, some screeched raucously, some chimed like silver bells and one, a huge black raven, owned the most soul-chilling, desolate cry any Englishman had ever heard....

Brilliant green parrots flashed overhead and weeny fantail fluttered twittering only inches from his face, as if trying to tell him something; it kept him company for at least a hundred yards, still trying to communicate. He thought he saw a quail, and then stumbled upon the most beautiful dove in the world, soft pink-brown and iridescent emerald green. So tame! It simply glanced at him and waddled off, head bobbing, quite indifferently. There were other birds too, one of which looked to be a blackbird save that its head was grey. The air was full of song unlike any he had heard in Port Jackson. Melodic except for the parrots, which screeched.....

More birds arrived, among them a small kingfisher in cream, brown and a brilliant, iridescent, blue green exactly the colour of the

CORRESPONDENCE

REDNECKED GREBE IN EASTERN INDIA. PRASUN DASGUPTA, WIB (M)-3/2, Phase II, Golf Green, Kolkata 700 095

In course of showing around a batch of trainees on the Purbasthali Gangetic Isle Complex on 16 and 17 February 2003, the team members came across a group of 6 birds of the species rednecked grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*). The birds were clearly in their non-breeding plumage, the squarish head and thick neck, dark colour cheek and foreneck clearly visible through spotter and binoculars. They were seen on both the days in company with other birds, such as lesser whistling teals (*Dendrocygna javanica*), mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), Northern pintail (*Anas acuta*), Northern shoveller (*Anas clypeata*), various species of Pochard etc. Purbasthali falls in the district of Bardhaman, West Bengal. Its geographical co-ordinates are lat 23°27'45" to the North and long 88°19'45" to the East. The Complex is essentially a cluster of riverine isles and an ox-bow lake along the river Bhagirathi (the Ganges). This bird habitat, that is, the river course with its string of 14 islets abounds in fish and aquatic crustaceans, various other varieties of life forms and aquatic fauna and it provides a large food base for the great number of migratory fowl visiting this habitat for many years regularly. And it is only this year that we sighted the said bird. The watching team included members of The Jungles, an NGO of naturalists based in Kolkata, experts from the Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata, particularly Dr. Srikumar Chatterjee, its Deputy Director and about 25 teachers of local schools. So far as our knowledge goes, this species has not been seen till now in the eastern states of India, nor in the south and the central Indian States. If that were so, this is first sighting of rednecked grebe in these parts of the country. If not, I shall be thankful to receive further information regarding the matter.

* * *

LARGE HAWK CUCKOO. Dr. (Mrs.) SARASWATHY UNNITHAN and VINOD PATIL, Bombay Natural History Society, S.B.S. Road, Mumbai 400 023.

On the morning of 8th November, 2002 a very exhausted juvenile large hawk cuckoo was brought to BNHS bird room by a person from a house behind Taj Hotel at Gateway of India, Mumbai and handed over to the second author (V.P.). The person said that

lagoon. The most mysterious bird he did not see until it moved, for it looked like a continuation of the mossy stump upon which it perched. The movement was sudden and startling: Richard jumped involuntarily. The thing was an enormous parrot.

'Hello,' he said. 'How are you today?'

It cocked its head to one side and stalked towards him, but he had the wisdom not to hold his hand out; that huge, wicked black beak was powerful enough to take a finger off. Then, it seemed, deciding that he was beneath contempt, it disappeared into the ferny or broad-leaved undergrowth along the banks of the brook.....

Perhaps this was God's first attempt to create land out of the sea? Or perhaps it was His last attempt? If his last, he gave it no people. Which might lead a man like Jem Thistlethwaite to say that God had come to the conclusion that Man was not a desirable addition to His menagerie."

the bird was chased by crows and entered his house. The large size and strongly barred underparts of the bird made the first author (S.U.) think that it is the large hawk cuckoo which is very rare in this part. On checking the literature, it was found to be a first record for Maharashtra. The bird is recorded from Goa¹. It breeds in the Himalayas and is a rare winter visitor in Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu^{1,2}.

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* * *

A VISIT TO 'DECCAN TRAP'. A. SHIVAPRAKASH, 478, 8th Main Road, 3rd Cross, Ramakrishna Nagar 'H' Block, Mysore 570 022

An expedition cum exploration trek 'Girisanchar' in northern Western Ghats - Ratangad range, two of its east expanse Harischandra ghad and Ganachakkar ranges was conducted by the department of Atomic energy, Mumbai. The route selected was Khireswar - Harischandragad (4671 ft) - Palad gad - Kumshetcha kombda - Ajoba (4571 ft) - Ganachakkar (5028 ft) - Ratangad (4253 ft) and backwaters of Pimpalgaon, Bhandaradhara dams. These dams are constructed on Mula, Pravara and Mangalaganga - tributaries of River Godavari. This range comes under Ahmadnagar district of Akola taluk in Maharashtra state. Period of expedition was 11 to 18 December 2002. The variation in temperature recorded 8° to 29°C.

Western Ghat terrain here is formed by a basaltic lava flow of the Deccan volcanic that erupted 65 million years back coinciding with the time the dinosaurs became extinct. As one moves in Western Ghats of Maharashtra the 'cake layered rocky stairs' presents a splendid view. Stunted evergreen forests spread on lower elevation as well as at top plains of these ranges except at foothills of Ratangad where trees are tall and large. Flowering wild plants *Senico graliami*, *Cyathocline purpurea*, *Trichulepis amplexicaulis*, *Dysophylla stella*, *Polygonum glabrum*, *Celosia argentic* and *Gnida eriocephalus* were added attraction at this time of the year.

It will be waywardness if the magnificent forts built on inaccessible steep hillocks of Harischandra ghad, Palad ghad and Ratan ghad are not mentioned.

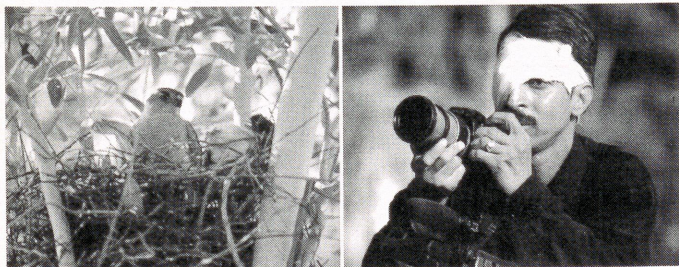
Inadequate Monsoon during was felt by the dry grass and no water in the ranges traveled at this month of the year. Due to extensive cattle grazing and firewood extraction, enduring stunted thick evergreen forest in the valleys and ridges of the hill is slowly changing into scrub devoid of green. Extreme use of downhill streams with the help of diesel pumps for standing commercial crops has left the streams dry.

Some significant observations are as follows:

- * Totally 107 species of birds were recorded in seven days.
- * Interesting observation is the surprising absence of Large cormorants and Brahminy kites on all the days.
- * Sighting of rare Blue-eared kingfisher in the northern most stretch of Western Ghats and Olive-backed pipit, large billed leaf warbler and red breasted flycatcher.
- * In all 27 species of water birds including common pochards, brahminy duck, white wagtail, painted stork and white-necked storks were sighted mainly in backwaters of Pimpalgaon and Bhandaradhara dam.
- * Around 13 species of birds of prey :- paraiah kite, blackwinged kite, shikra, sparrow hawk, tawny eagle, common kestrel, lesser kestrel, laggar falcon, montagus harrier, paleharrier, Indian griffon vulture, Short-toed eagle, Mountain hawk eagle(?) and Booted hawk eagle were found.
- * A pair of Indian griffon vultures found atop Ratangad for almost two hours busy flying, exhibiting their airborne skills.
- * Witnessed a Paradise flycatcher quenching thirst from a water hole. Other flycatchers observed:- Asian brown, verditer and red breasted.
- * Dusty martins were in large numbers in all the ranges whereas Alpine swifts, common swallows, red rumped swallows were few.
- * Found a number of redvented and red whiskered bulbul nests of previous broods. Red whiskered bulbul nest contained black root fiber used as cushion. villagers identified this cushion as supporting root of a creeper.



SHIKRA ATTACKS PHOTOGRAPHER. HARKIRAT SINGH SANGHA, B-27, Gautam Marg, Hanuman Nagar, Jaipur 302021



A wildlife photographer, Raj Kumar Chouhan was attacked by an agitated Shikra *Accipiter badius* near its nest, seriously injuring his left eye. Having found a nest 12 m above the ground on an eucalyptus tree in the campus of the Birla Institute of Scientific Research adjoining Jhalana Reserve Forest in Jaipur he put up a *machan* about 8 m from the nest on another eucalyptus tree.

Photographing the birds from his open-sided *machan* since during the incubation period he had not noticed any anti-predator behaviour or aggression from the breeding pair. However, on

While scanning the above photograph, the image was inadvertently inverted. The error is regretted.

-ed.

May 18, 2003 at c.06h55 while sitting in the *machan* he saw their aggression when five or six house crows *Corvus splendens* came to the nest to peck at the three weeks old chicks. The pair attacked the house crows and badly injured two of them. During this melee one of the chicks fell out of the nest to the ground. Chouhan decided to descend to the ground to rescue the chick and as he was climbing down with his photographic equipment the agitated male shikra attacked him but he was able to shield himself with the help of a branch he had broken from the tree. Once safely on the ground and away from the nest he was not expecting another attack. Nevertheless, he decided to leave the site and while he was removing his camera from the tripod the male shikra swooped down at him (c.07h10). Though he tried to parry the frontal attack with the help of the branch, the bird inflicted serious injury to his left eye and he was not able to see then.

Dr. V. Agarwal, one of the two doctors, who operated on his damaged eye, told me that the raptor's attack had left him with a torn cornea and a ruptured lens. Fortunately, after corneal repair and lens implantation the photographer regained seventy percent of his vision and was able to photograph the shikras after the attack also. The photographer was probably attacked by the male shikra because the birds were highly provoked by the attack of the house crows on their nest and they treated him as a potential threat. A shikra possesses great pluck and dash and is known for using surprise tactics while hunting but it has never been recorded attacking human beings even near a nest (Ali and Ripley 1981 and Roberts 1991). However, I am aware of one more almost similar incident from Pune, Maharashtra. Recently when Satish Pande attempted to climb a tree to photograph a nest containing three chicks the female shikra swooped low suddenly from a nearby tree and almost brushed past his head. Unscathed he immediately abandoned the idea of photographing the bird (Pande in litt.2003).

I wish to thank Rishad Naoroji for making useful comments on an earlier draft and Satish Pande for sharing his lucky brush with the bird.

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NESTING OF RUFIOUS-FRONTED PRINIA IN THAR DESERT OF RAJASTHAN, INDIA. C. SIVAPERUMAN and SANJEEV KUMAR, Desert Regional Station, Zoological Survey of India, Jhalamand, Pali Road, Jodhpur 342 005, Rajasthan, E-mail : c_sivaperuman@hotmail.com

The Thar Desert blooms with nesting of birds especially passerines during summer, mainly due to flowering and fruiting of many trees and shrubs in this region. Like many other species, the Rufous-fronted Prinia *Prinia buchanani* Blyth 1844 was found nesting at DRS, ZSI campus on 13th July 2002.

The Rufous-fronted Prinia is like a tailor bird, brown in colour with forehead rufous crown, tail dark brown with broad white edged, ventral side whitish (Ali and Ripley, 1983). The frequent movement of the bird brought our attention to the nesting site and the nesting of Rufous-fronted Prinia was noticed at the

entrance gate of the office. The nest was cup shaped, made up of thin grass and cobweb and lined with fine grass. The nest was 0.5m high from the ground hanging in a broad leaf Croton (*Codiaeum variegatum*) of family Euphorbiaceae. The clutch was having 3 eggs, oval in shape and white with reddish brown spots, measuring 2.0, 1.8, 1.8 cm in length and 1.40, 1.30 and 1.30 gm in weight respectively.

The nest was observed for over a week. The birds were very active during the morning and late evening hours whereas during noontime, they were always found away from the nest. The nest was placed and built in safe locality. The planted pot when shifted a little disturbed the birds which finally abandoned the nest after a few days. According to Ali and Ripley (1983) Rufous-fronted Prinia breeds in the Western states of Rajasthan and Gujarat in India and also in Pakistan. This confirms the earlier report of Ali and Ripley (1983) that *Prinia buchanani* thrives well and breeds in the Thar Desert of Rajasthan.

Reference

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BIRDS OF THATTEKKAD. MOTTY J MATHEW, A-16/19, East, Trinity Acres, Sarjapura Road, Bangalore 560 034.

I was staying at Thattekkad for a couple of weeks in April, and on 25th April I was able to do some bird watching in the area. The following birds were seen at Thattekkad on that day :- Heart-spotted woodpecker - *Hemicircus canente*, Lesser goldenbacked woodpecker - *Dinopium benghalense*, Purple swamphen - *Porphyrio porphyrio*, Common moorhen - *Gallinula chloropus*, Bronze winged jacana - *Metopidius indicus*, Little egret - *Egretta garzetta*, Intermediate egret - *Mesophox intermedia*, Lesser whistling teal - *Dendrocygna javanica*, Watercock - *Gallicrex cinerea*, Indian pond heron - *Ardeola grayii*, Cinnamon bittern - *Ixobrychus cinnamomeus*, Yellow bittern - *Ixobrychus sinensis*, Asian koel - *Eudynamis scolopacea*, White-breasted waterhen - *Amaurornis phoenicurus*, Common kingfisher - *Alcedo atthis*, Red-wattled lapwing - *Vanellus indicus*, Stork-billed kingfisher - *Halcyon capensis*, Pheasant-tailed jacana - *Hydrophasianus chirurgus*, White-throated kingfisher - *Halcyon smymensis*, Darter - *Anhinga melannogaster*, Whiskered tern - *Chlidonias hybridus*, Black drongo - *Dicrurus macrocercus*, blue bearded bee-eater - *Nyctornis athertoni*, Red-whiskered bulbul - *Pycnonotus jocosus*, Pied kingfisher - *Ceryle rudis*, Little cormorant - *Phalacrocorax niger*, Jungle babbler - *Turdoides striatus*, Common myna - *Acridotheres tristis*, Rufous treepie - *Dendrocitta vagabunda*, Great egret - *Casmerodius albus*, Streak-throated woodpecker - *Picus xanthopygus*, Asian openbill - *Anastomus oscitans*, Plain prinia - *Prinia inornata*, Magpie robin - *Copsychus saularis*, Greater coucal - *Centropus sinensis*, Yellow-billed babbler - *Turdoides affinis*, Cotton pygmy-goose - *Nettapus coromandelianus*, Large pied wagtail - *Motacilla maderaspatensis*, Red-rumped swallow - *Hirundo daurica*, Great cormorant -

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Phalacrocorax carbo, River tern - *Sterna aurantia*, White-winged tern - *Chlidonias leucopterus*, Blue rock pigeon - *Columba livia*, Small Pratincole - *Glareola lactea*, Racket-tailed drongo - *Dicrurus paradiseus*, Crested treeswift - *Hemiprocne coronata*, Common lora - *Aegithina tiphia*, Golden-fronted leafbird - *Chloropsis aurifrons*, Hill myna - *Gracula religiosa*, Crimson-fronted barbet - *Megalaima rubricapilla*, Malabar whistling thrush - *Myophonus horsfieldii*, Bronzed drongo - *Dicrurus aeneus*, White-cheeked barbet - *Megalaima viridis*, Yellow-browed bulbul - *Iole indica*, Asian fairy bluebird - *Irena puella*, Dusky crag martin - *Hirundo concolor*, Vernal hanging parrot - *Loriculus vernalis*, White-rumped needletail - *Zoonavena sylvatica*, House swift - *Apus affinis*, Scarlet minivet - *Pericrocotus flammeus*, Chestnut-headed bee-eater - *Merops leschenaulti*, Crested serpent eagle - *Spilornis cheela*, Changeable hawk eagle - *Spizaetus cirhatus*, Rose-ringed parakeet - *Psittacula krameri*, Black-naped oriole - *Oriolus oriolus*, Plum headed parakeet - *Psittacula cyanocephala*, Indian pitta - *Pitta brachyura*, Dollarbird - *Eurystomus orientalis*, Jungle owlet - *Glaucidium radiatum*, Malabar grey hornbill - *Ocyrceros griseus*, Malabar parakeet - *Psittacula columboides*, Sri lanka frogmouth - *Batrachostomus moniliger*, Purple sunbird - *Nectarinia asiatica*, Ashy swallow-shrike - *Artamus fuscus*, Black-headed munia - *Lonchura malacca*.

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FOREST WAGTAIL AND CHESTNUT WINGED CUCKOO IN MALDA DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL. ARUNAYAN SHARMA, N.S. Road, In front of T.O.P., Malda - 732101, West Bengal

On 18th October, 2000 in the afternoon hours while observing the roosting behaviour of a blue throated barbet (*Megalaima asiatica*) in my neighbour's garden at around 5 p.m. I spotted a wagtail walking on a branch of a Guava tree (*Psidium guajava*), 4m from the ground. It was constantly wagging its tail and walking on the branch of the tree, occasionally shaking its tail side to side. On 19th October again I saw the bird in my garden in the morning hours and identified the species as an adult Forest wagtail (*Dendronanthus indicus*). Sighting of forest wagtail at Malda district is noteworthy. It has not been recorded in the Malda district before nor from central West Bengal.

Occurrence of Chestnut-winged cuckoo *Clamator coromandus* at Malda, West Bengal.

On 15th april 2001 I was watching birds at Malda agricultural training centre. I had a glimpse of a crow-sized brownish bird flying sluggishly from one mango tree to another.

After searching for more than five minutes. I spotted the bird on a *M. indica* tree, 4 m from the ground devouring caterpillars. As the bird flew from one tree to another. I followed it for more than 30 minutes. I did not hear any call but recorded its plumage as; wings rusty or chestnut with a long shiny black tail, orangish hue from throat to breast, with a white half band on its neck. The back was shiny black, having a prominent crest. I identified the species in the field easily as an adult chestnut-winged cuckoo *Clamator coromandus* (Grimmet et.al - 1999), Kazmierczak-2000).

Cover: White browed bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*) is a rather plain olive green bird, with rufous-brown wings and tail. The white on the forehead and eyebrow is taken care of in its name itself. It is an utterly shy and sulking bird of the scrub jungles. It betrays its presence by an explosive chuckle of whistling notes, often ending with an alarmed tone. The nest is an untidy and messy affair of small twigs and grass stems put together as a straggling cup, lined with coir and hair.

Photo S. Shreyas.