

Newsletter for Birdwatchers



VOL. XXXI No 7 & 8

July - August 1991

ICBP MEMBER ORGANISATION SUED

The Malta Ornithological Society (MOS) is being sued for £52,000 by Sphinx Tours, a bird-hunting tour company who claim they have lost revenue as a result of an MOS anti-hunting campaign. Until the case is heard, the MOS's assets have been frozen by the court, thereby preventing them from operating.

The MOS, with director Paul Portelli, has about 2,000 members and is supported by ICBP. It has been very active in trying to stop illegal bird hunting, and in 1988, launched a campaign against Maltese hunters visiting Egypt and shooting protected species. The campaign, which included international pressure from ICBP member organisations on the Egyptian authorities, resulted in the Egyptian Government imposing restrictions on the activities of foreign hunters.

Despite the restrictions, hundreds of thousands of birds are still illegally shot in Egypt. In April 1990, an Egyptian tour guide was jailed after a raid on a hotel where Maltese hunters were staying in which more than 150 bird corpses, including several species protected under Egyptian law, were confiscated. Maltese custom officials have also confis-



Leaflets and stickers produced by the MOS (Photo: J. Sultana)

cated bags of corpses from returning hunters on several occasions.

As a temporary measure until the case is heard, the RSPB has made a loan to

MOS. ICBP is gathering funds to support them through the case so that they can continue their invaluable work.

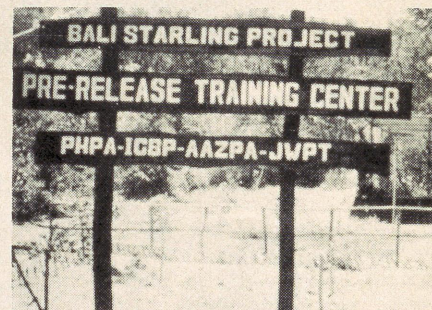
RECENT NEWS FROM BALI

Good news from Bas van Balen and M. Noor Soetawidjaya, the ICBP project officers on the Bali Starling project in Bali, Indonesia (see *World Birdwatch* 12,2:3). A recent count of the only remaining wild population of Bali Starling *Leucopsar rothschildi* in the Bali Barat National Park indicates that there are now 36-39 birds. This is almost a doubling of the numbers counted in March this year, when the population was estimated at 13-18 individuals.

Good weather conditions are partly responsible, resulting in a successful breeding season. The dry season was late to start and some pairs even reared more than one clutch.

In April 1990, 13 birds bred in the Surabaya Zoological Park in East Java were released into the wild. At least one of these captive-bred individuals paired with a wild bird this spring, and that pair was amongst those that were successful in raising young.

Improved guarding of the National Park has also undoubtedly contributed to the increase. Groups of poachers have been driven away from the area by park staff on several occasions. The site known as Teluk Kelor, where the largest number of birds are found, is now closed off completely and the whole park is being well protected.



Sign at the Bali Starling project site (Photo: K. Bell)

Courtesy: World Birdwatch, June 1991.



CYPRUS SHOOTING BAN

ICBP congratulates the President of Cyprus, George Vassiliou, for upholding the ban on spring shooting in his country this year, despite great pressure from the powerful hunting lobby. The ban, announced last November, is the result of growing international pressure as the outcry from the general public against the annual massacre of migratory birds in the Mediterranean increases.

Enforcement of the ban is now critical. Clearly, the legislation is the first step, but migratory birds are still far from safe on their passage through this island.

WOODSTAR TURN

Thick and fast in Ecuador! After the last issue's story of Robert Ridgely's rediscovery there of the Cocha Antshrike *Thamnophilus praecox*, news comes that he and the Philadelphia Academy team have now found the long-lost Esmeraldas Woodstar *Acestrura berlepschi* in extreme north-west Guayas province, just outside Machalilla National Park. The population appears to be fairly good and, interestingly, the Little Woodstar *A. bombus*, another threatened hummingbird (and joint contender for smallest bird in the world), occurs alongside it there.



Newsletter for Birdwatchers 1991

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You are welcome to enrol your friends as members of this Newsletter.

Editor



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EDITORIAL

Managing Wetlands

Wetlands are very much in the air these days, and this is understandable because they are the most productive regions of our planet. Some of you must have come across that splendid publication, *Managing Wetlands and their Birds*, edited by D.A. Scott and published by IWRB, Slimbridge, Glos. England. Several chapters of this book need to be publicised as they are likely to stimulate the right kind of ecological thinking in this country. In this issue I reproduce Chapter 35: The introduction of exotic species. This is a fascinating subject, and one on which no foolproof, time tested, decisions can be taken. In the last issue of our Newsletter there were comments on the proposal to introduce Barn Owls in the Andamans for rodent control. I understand that the decision has been reversed because of the warnings by ecologists about the dangers of exotic introductions.

Bird calls

The song and calls of birds are valuable aids to the identification of species, specially in wooded areas where the birds are offener heard than seen. Some calls like that of the Indian Cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus*, described as *cross- word puzzle*, and of the Common Hawk Cuckoo *Cuculus varius*, likened to *Brain fever brain fever brain fever* are most helpful. The difficulty arises from the fact that different people "perceive" sounds in different ways. Someone described the call of the Redvented Bulbul as *tea for two*. I have never been able to gather this impression. Nevertheless it would be an interesting exercise for someone to list the sounds of our common birds for a start. Let us see if a consensus can be arrived at. The Spotted Babbler *Pellorneum ruficeps* has a lovely voice. Hugh Whistler says: "The call is a clear mellow whistle, *Wheat-eer* or *three-cheer*. Salim Ali says : *Pret-ty sweet* or *He'll beat you* One bird which I have often identified by its call is the Large Cuckoo Shrike *Coracina novaehollandiae*. The books describe the call as "a distinctive shrill but pleasant double noted call *ti-tee* from time to time. Once in the sal forest near Ranchi I heard this call. Jamal Ara who was present pointed out that the Hindi name of the bird *Chumkari* was based on the fact that the call resembled the sound of a kiss. If you kiss the palm of your hand, the sound does remind you of the call of this bird. Describing calls is a tricky business but sometimes one does come across a description which can be accepted as definitive. I think I landed on a good rendering of the calls of the Himalayan White Crested Laughing Thrush *Leucolophus leucolophus*. This has found a place in the Handbook, Vol.7, No. 1283. While with Salim Ali in Bhutan, I thought that the calls, or rather the explosive laughter of a group of these birds sounded like *re, re, re, marigio, marigio, marigio*, which is Gujarati means, I am dead, I am dead. So as far as bird calls are concerned, we need not stick to English. Vernacular words are often very expressive.

International Symposium on Environmental and Hormonal Approaches to Ornithology, Garhwal 27th November - 1 December, 1991

Details of this Symposium were given in the previous Newsletter, and I am glad to find that several of our readers have decided to attend. It promises to be an interesting meeting, and the general session on conservation of Indian birds (which the Editor is supposed to organise, perhaps in absentia) will be an excellent forum for airing the knowledge which our serious bird watchers have gathered from their field visits. Don't be put off if the deadline for the registration is past. I am sure that the Secretary of the Symposium, Dr. Mrs Asha Chandola-Saklani will welcome "late-comers".

Hosting Birdwatchers

Theodore Baskaran writes to say that we should have a column about people who are prepared to welcome birdwatchers, and take them out birding in the localities where they stay. This is certainly a laudable undertaking. Novices can learn a great deal by going out with knowledgeable persons. If you are of this generous disposition please write to the Newsletter.

The International Ornithological Congress

was reconstituted at its last meeting in New Zealand in December '90. Four persons were nominated from India: Dr. Mrs Asha Chandola-Saklani, S.A. Hussain, B.M. Parasharya and Zafar Futehally. Dr. Parasharya (AICRP on Economic Ornithology, Gujarat Agricultural University, Anand, 388 110) would like to be advised about suitable topics for the next IOC meeting to be held in Vienna in 1994.

Suraha Tal

R.S. Bhadauria IFS, CCF (Wildlife) and Chief Wildlife Warden U.P., 17 Rana Pratap marg, Lucknow 226 001, writes: "In Ballia district of U.P. there is a big wetland known as Suraha Tal. During monsoons it spreads over nearly 35 sq. km., and during summer it shrinks to about 25 sq.km. About 97% of the submerged land is under private ownership, and the rest is gram samaj land. As the lake dries, the owners of the land cultivate it and raise crops, but still most of the private land remains under water throughout the year. Because of this ownership position, the owners have fishing rights and about 3000 local fishermen with nearly 1200-1300 boats remain engaged in fishing by netting all the year round.

"Notwithstanding this kind of biotic pressure on the wetland, a large number of resident and migratory birds (waders, swimmers, and divers) take shelter in the wetland as there is plenty of food in and outside the lake. However, the lake offers immense scope for developing it into a better habitat for water birds, and also a place for ornithological studies Before commencing the work we would like to solicit your help and guidance to decide the measures to be taken ..."

I have written to Mr Bhadauria that several contributors to our Newsletter have acquired considerable knowledge about wetland birds, and I hope that some of you will be able to interact usefully with him, and make your suggestions. The two people who come to mind are Asad Rahmani (now with the Aligarh University) and Abdul Jamil Urfi. Incidentally our former Prime Minister, Mr. Chandra Shekhar is very interested in this project.

Biblical Chaos and after

The Chaos Theory is coming into prominence. It is assumed that before our world was created there was great confusion among the elements, until God put the various components in their proper place. Environmentalists are hoping that they can play a similar role in the world of nature and redress the mistakes of the past. Abdul Jamil Urfi is working on this subject in the JNU Delhi. He writes: I have teamed up with some theoreticians and what we are trying to do is to study some applications of "Chaos Theory", to bird diversity in the Indian Sub-continent. My job in this project is that of a biologist, and I have to make frequency distributions of bird taxa at different levels viz., subcontinental level, regional checklist level, etc. I don't know what the outcome of this work is going to be, but if we are successful then we may be able to provide an insight into some important questions relating to bird diversity.

The Village Pond

I often wonder why our villagers are so uninterested in protecting the village pond. If they kept it clear and unpolluted it would be a marvellous asset of the community. In 1972 a Save The Village Pond Campaign was initiated in England and supported by the Ford Motor Car Company. The Foreword says: "The motor car has given greater freedom and mobility to more people than ever before to enjoy the countryside. It has also contributed to changes which have altered the character of some aspect of that countryside." And the Introduction continues: "A victim of neglect, pollution and vandalism, the village pond is fast disappearing. For centuries it has played a fundamental role in rural life: its story is as long as the history of the village as a community.... The few village ponds that can still be seen in good condition are vivid demonstrations of the need to halt the decay ... Children feed the ducks, or fish for sticklebacks, birds such as swifts come down to find clay for their nests, dragonflies hover amid the reeds and whirling beetles describe crazy patterns of ripples on the pond's still surface... The capital cost of cleaning out a decaying pond and putting it back on the road to recovery is practically nothing. Restoring it for the amenity of the neighbourhood and the benefit of wildlife is expensive only in terms of effort and enthusiasm".

I think some of our birdwatchers must make a beginning by adopting a pond and putting it back to life. It will indicate to ourselves and to the authorities that birding is a valuable "profession".

A MALE PAINTED SNIPE AND HIS CHICK

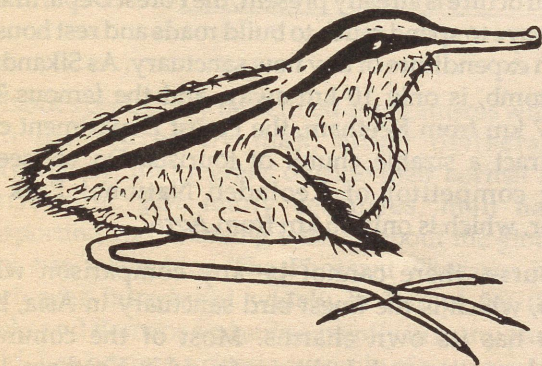
H. DANIEL WESLEY, 126 Ramalinganagar South, Tiruchirapalli 620017

At 5.45 a.m. on 28 April 1982 a painted snipe chick hatched out of an egg. It was being led away almost immediately by the male parent, the female parent not having been there during the entire period of incubation. About 20 feet away from the nest, the parent rested on a relatively dry ground. His throat was bulging and falling. The chick climbed on the back and under the wing. As the parent again got up to walk, the chick dropped down, and was being led, nudged, as it were, with the beak.

Before they would both escape to freedom beyond the territory, I went down to fetch the chick for a quick examination. As I walked along the narrow bare area often used by the parent, I observed pieces of one half of the shell in the water, the other being in the nest along with the three unhatched eggs. No attempt had been made by the parent to remove the shell pieces. The bird shares this character with the South African counter-part (Schmidt 1961).

When I walked down to fetch the chick the parent flew up and dropped ten feet away, hissed at me like a cobra, spreading the two wings to display the beady spots. Finding me not to be frightened off, he jumped and dropped a few feet away twice and then flew off to the adjacent fallow land some fifty feet away. I could not find the chick too soon. As I was wading through cautiously, water covering only my feet, now stopping to look around and now moving not to trample upon it, I had agitated the water and the chick was carried floating on it. It was floating close to my right foot and I would have missed it mistaking it for a mass of algae, if I had not bent down to take a closer look at it. Keeping it close to my ear I could hear a feeble 'keong, keong, keong'. That the chick of the painted snipe can float on water is confirmed also by those of the Australian birds. (Lowe, 1963). The chick of the Tiruchirapalli bird did not squeak so audibly, however.

I took the young one into the house and noted the colour pattern, length and weight (Fig. 1).



Painted Snipe-chick

The body was covered with fine short down. In general the plumage was buff. There were four longitudinal black dorsal bands, two on each side of a median brownish buff that stopped at the nape. On the head were three black bands: One on each side extending from the side base of the black beak, the black eyes included in them; and a median band that extended from the upper base of the beak to the nape in line with the dorsal median brownish buff on the trunk. The South African bird differs by having one lateral band less on each side on the trunk (Schmidt 1961). At the tip of the bill was a white nib of egg-tooth.

The legs, tarsus and the digits with nails, were black, differing from the dark greenish grey in the South African one (Schmidt 1961). There were no fingers for the wings. A dark, black pre-axial margin was conspicuous.

Without movable eye lids but with only a membrane over it, the eyes never blinked at all. Perhaps they did not see and the young followed the parent bird responding to his call signal only. The father may not have been nudging; instead, he was calling into its ears, quite inaudible to the human ear and only the gulping movements of the throat visible.

From bill tip to tail end it measured 2", the length of the beak covering 0.4 of an inch. The tarsus measured 1.1" and the longest third toe, 0.5". The young weighed, about 10 gm.

Within ten minutes of returning the chick to the nest with three unhatched eggs at 6.15 a.m. the male parent was standing in the puddle of water 20 feet away from the nest. Coming to the nest at 6.30 a.m. he sat on the chick and the unhatched eggs, facing South West. In another fifteen minutes both were in the water puddle from where the chick had been fetched and the parent bird displayed at me. They remained there for more than an hour, till 7.50 a.m. As the parent was sitting on his tarsi, the chick was clambering about on his back between the wings and the body, alternating between the right and the left wing; its head could be seen projecting up at the shoulder. At 8.10 the chick was dropped and was lying in front of the parent who made signal calls by the gulping movements of the throat. By 8.40 a.m. they were about 30 feet away from the nest but within the breeding territory. It had taken ten minutes to cover 10 feet in the grass. The male probed the mud surface thrice on the way. They were not seen in the area since 9.30 a.m. A snake was moving about in the grass. At 2.30 p.m. I removed the eggs and found them to be addled.

References

- Lowe, V.T. 1963. Observations on the painted snipe, *Aust. Bird. Watcher* Vol.3, No.7: pp.218-219.
Schmidt, R.K., 1961. Incubation period of the painted snipe, *Rostratula benghalensis.*, *The Ostrich*, 32: 183-4.

WETLANDS OF UTTAR PRADESH - PART I

ASAD R. RAHMANI, Centre of Wildlife and Ornithology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh 202 001
and

V.M. ARORA, Divisional Forest Officer, National Chambal Sanctuary Project, Agra, UP

Uttar Pradesh state perhaps has the largest number of natural wetlands in India. Most of the wetlands are formed by rain water filling depressions or due to monsoonal flooding of rivers and streams - when the water recedes, depressions remain water-logged. By the time winter arrives in October, many of these wetlands are drained for cultivation. However, the larger ones, sometimes with disputed land tenure, are left behind and serve as haven for migratory and resident waterfowl.

As UP is the most populated state of India, not much of natural vegetation is left. Most of the forest and wildlife reserves are in the north i.e. in the *terai* (e.g. Dudwa, Katerniaghat), *bhabar* (e.g. Corbett, Rajaji) and the Himalayas (e.g. Nanda Devi, Valley of Flowers) or in the South, bordering Madhya Pradesh (e.g. Ranipur, Kaimur). The fertile Gangetic Plain of UP is densely populated, with many large cities such as Lucknow, Kanpur, Allahabad, Agra, etc. The Gangetic Plain has some of the finest wetlands in India. The UP Forest Department is very keen to protect these wetlands and has identified 20 for conservation attention. Some of them, for example, Samaspur in Rai Bareilly, Lakh-Bahosi in Farrukhabad, Okla in Gaziabad and Nawabganj in Unnao are already bird sanctuaries. Either alone or together we have visited many wetlands and this is the first part of a series of articles which we intend to write in the *Newsletter*. In the first part we describe two wetlands which we visited in January 1991.

1. Keetham Lake

About 19 km from Agra, Keetham is a man-made reservoir with a water spread of about 770 acres. Earlier drinking water to Agra was supplied from Keetham reservoir but now it is piped to Mathura refinery, about 24 km away. River Jamuna flows about 0.5 km in the north-east. The Jamuna *khader* (gullied wasteland on either side of the river) may not be the best place for tourists, but for birdwatchers, *khader* holds some interesting species such as Common Babbler *Turdoides caudatus*, Large Grey Babbler *Turdoides malcolmi*, Rufous-fronted wren warbler *Prinia buchanani*, etc.

Keetham lake is now called as Sur-Sarovar Bird Sanctuary, after the great blind poet Surdas, whose hut is located about 900 metres from the lake. Surdas, the foremost among the saint poets who were the source of medieval renaissance lived in it more than 500 years ago.

The area surrounding Keetham reservoir which is covered with dense growth of *Prosopis juliflora*, still have Nilgai *Boselaphus tragocamelus*, Wild Boar *Sus scrofa*, Hare *Lepus nigricollis* and some Cheetal *Axis axis*. The UP Forest Department has declared 4.03 sq. km. as Sur-Sarovar Bird Sanctuary which will give protection not only to birds but also to Nilgai, Boar, etc. Earlier poaching of Nilgai was very common, especially by military people from Agra cantonment but now it is controlled.

At one time, Keetham suffered from wetland's menace - water hyacinth - but it was cleared. The Irrigation Department, which controls Keetham reservoir spent Rs.16 lakhs to eradicate water hyacinth. In February 1991, due to negligence of the Irrigation Department, two nets (inlets) at the mouth of the Keetham reservoir were not repaired which resulted in invasion of water hyacinth. After repeated persuasion by the wildlife authorities, the Irrigation Department repaired these nets but it was already too late. By mid May, nearly 25% of the lake was covered with water hyacinth. In June with the help of UP Council of Agricultural Research, one hundred thousand weevil insects (*Neochetina bruchi*, *N. eichhornia*) were introduced in the lake as a biological control of the water hyacinth.

Seventeen species of fish are noted from the reservoir, and the annual fish auction fetches Rs.4 lakhs to the Irrigation Department. From this year, fishing was stopped, with loss of revenue to the Irrigation Department. Once the sanctuary is fully developed, the Forest Department hopes to recover the revenue from tourism. As the infrastructure is already present, the Forest Department does not have to spend much to build roads and rest houses - the main expenditure of any new sanctuary. As Sikandra, Akbar's tomb, is only 10-km away, and the famous Taj Mahal, 27 km from Keetham, the Forest Department can easily attract a sizable chunk of tourists. Do we see a budding competitor of Keoladeo National Park at Bharatpur, which is only 55 km from Agra?

Of course, there cannot be any comparison with Keoladeo, which is the finest bird sanctuary in Asia, but Keetham has its own charms. Most of the common waterfowl seen in north India are found in Keetham. We saw 52 species, mainly pintail, wigeon, shoveller, gadwal, spotbill, nukta, greenshank, sandpipers, (marsh, common,

green, spotted), ruff, snipe, stints (little and Temminck's) etc. Painted, Openbill, Blacknecked and Lesser Adjutant storks, Spoonbill, White ibis, four species of egrets, two species of herons, and three species of cormorants can be easily seen from the road around the reservoir. Sometimes large numbers of Pelicans arrive to devour the fish. Earlier fishermen used to chase them away but we hope, now these majestic birds will fill their stomach unmolested.

Earlier very few 'heronry' species used to breed at Keetham but in 1990, large number of egrets, cormorants, herons, Spoonbill and White ibis made their nests on the *Prosopis* trees. In order not to disturb the birds, no proper nest census was done but a rough estimate shows that there were at least 2000 nests. Sight of an active noisy heronry clinched the issue to develop Keetham as a bird sanctuary.

2. Patna jheel

Patna jheel in Etah district is one of the finest natural wetlands in western Uttar Pradesh. This jheel with an area of 268 acres, with 173 acres private land, was declared a sanctuary in December 1990. It is a shallow waterbody, with depth of about a metre, less in some parts. The jheel is surrounded all around with agricultural fields and serves as drainage of the area.

On our joint visit on 7 January 1991, we estimated about one hundred thousand ducks and waders more or less uniformly dotted all over the jheel. Large flocks of Small Indian Pratincoles, consisting of 500 to 1000 individuals, flying over the water were seen in many parts of the jheel.

Owing to different water depths, Patna jheel is suitable for both diving and dabbling ducks like Pintail, Shoveller, Wigeon, Gadwall, teals and pochards. Crested, Little and

Red-necked were the three grebes which we could identify.

Patna jheel has an island in which an old temple is present. A narrow approach road now connects this island to the main road but during monsoon, it remains disconnected and one has to wade through knee deep water to reach the temple. This island is thickly vegetated, and it is really an 'island' in the vast surrounding agricultural land where all natural vegetation has been removed. Perhaps the villagers dare not cut temple trees in fear of the deity. Like the sacred groves of Maharashtra, such temple forests now serve as refuge to many forest birds.

Being a sacred place, villagers do not allow killing, resulting in unusual tameness of wild birds. Most of the birds confine their foraging to the wetland, so there is no man-wild-birds conflict, but Nilgai, of which there are many, is the real agricultural menace. Most of the villagers whom we talked to complained about Nilgai. They fear that once the forest department takes control of the jheel and establish a guard-post, Nilgai will increase and take shelter in the forest patch around the temple. Moreover, poachers will also stop coming for fear of being caught by wildlife guards so whatever control is present on the Nilgai population by illegal shooting will also disappear.

The UP Forest Department plans to build a rest house near the temple on an elevated spot with a panoramic view of the jheel. With its wonderful scenery, abundant bird life, an exquisite temple and a comfortable rest house, in a few years time Patna jheel can attract visitors to this dreary, forlorn, little-known area in one of the most backward districts of UP. Hopefully, birds and a temple will give solace to many tired nerves.

(to be continued)

THE INTRODUCTION OF EXOTIC SPECIES

J. ROOTH and D.A. SCOTT

Exotic species may be defined as organisms which have been introduced by man, either deliberately or inadvertently, into regions outside their normal range of distribution. For many centuries, man has been transporting and releasing wildlife about the globe as his fancy has taken him. The Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*, which was introduced widely in Europe by the early Greeks and Romans and subsequently in many parts of the world, has become a classic example of a successful exotic species widely accepted by wildlife biologists, sportsmen and naturalists alike. More recently, a wide variety of exotic gamebirds and waterfowl have been introduced into the

wild, particularly in Europe and North America, in an attempt to increase hunting opportunity, or simply to 'enrich' the existing fauna. This introduction of birds throughout the world has recently been comprehensively reviewed by Long (1981).

Unfortunately, a great deal of damage has been incurred as a result of the introduction of exotic species. This has been especially the case on oceanic islands, where the native wildlife is often incapable of withstanding competition from the more aggressive introduced species, is highly susceptible to avian diseases brought in with the

introductions, and falls easy prey to introduced predators. Many island species have been exterminated as a direct result of the introduction of alien predators or competitors, and entire island ecosystem of great interest are threatened; indeed, very few island faunas have not been seriously disturbed. The much larger and more resilient continental faunas are less easily disturbed, but nevertheless the scale of introductions has in many areas reached such a level that native species are suffering.

Despite the many mistakes which have been made in the past, man continues to spread exotic wildlife around the world. Two main arguments are put forward in support of introductions:

In regions extensively modified by man, new niches have been created which native wildlife species are slow to fill. The wildlife manager can often speed up the occupation of these vacant niches by bringing in species which have become adapted to similar niches elsewhere. Unfortunately, the manager can never guarantee that his introduced species will restrict itself to the newly created niche; all too easily it can spread into the remnants of the natural habitat and constitute yet another competitor for the diminishing native species. Furthermore, the deliberate filling of a new niche by an exotic species may preclude subsequent colonization of that niche by a native species, which given time might otherwise have been able to adapt to the new conditions.

Introduced game species can provide the sportsman with an abundant alternative to native game species, and thereby help to reduce hunting pressure on the native species. This argument is valid only if it is established that the introduced species does not compete with and thereby cause a reduction in the numbers of the native species. Intensive management in favour of an introduced game species might well have a detrimental effect on native species, and thereby negate any advantages accruing from the reduced hunting pressure on them.

The argument that exotic species 'enrich' an environment by increasing species diversity is becoming less convincing as more and more conservationists and naturalists come to regard introduced species as faunal contaminants. The arguments against introducing exotic species can be summarized as follows:

Exotic species cause 'faunal falsification', as natural ecosystems are contaminated.

Introduced subspecies, and in some case even species, can interbreed with native forms, contaminating gene pools and potentially leading to the extermination of the native form. This is particularly the case with the Anatidae which hybridize freely, even at generic level.

Introduced species can compete directly with native species to the detriment of the latter. Amongst waterfowl, competition for nest sites can occur particularly in hole-nesting species.

Introductions can inadvertently bring in diseases which, although relatively harmless to the introduced species, are highly virulent to the native species. Warner (1969) demonstrates that this has had a disastrous effect on the Hawaiian avifauna.

Native species are often very vulnerable to introduced predators, since these may constitute a new type of predation to which the native species have never been exposed and are thus unaccustomed. The mink *Mustela vison* typifies this type of problem to the waterfowl in Europe.

The introduced species, if very successful, can become serious pests and further aggravate existing pest problems from native species. This is becoming very evident in parts of Europe where the introduced Canada Goose *Branta canadensis* has become a pest on agriculture and added to the already serious problem of crop damage by native geese.

The potential dangers of exotic Anatidae introductions have been discussed at some length by Weller (1969), who stressed in particular the dangers from hybridization in this group of birds. He raised the ethical question of whether wildlife managers acting on behalf of one interest group, e.g. sport hunters, should proceed in endeavors when the welfare of native species is at risk.

In recent years, IUCN has issued several directives urging for strict control of the introduction of non-native species, while the Berne Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural habitats, and the European Economic Community's Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds have also called for restrictions. In many countries, statutory controls already exist. These usually demand that detailed studies be conducted before any species be released into the wild. However, even if an intensive investigation is made of a species in its native habitat or in captivity, it is doubtful if we can ever predict exactly what will happen when it is introduced into the wild, except when failure is certain. Furthermore, as Weller (1969) pointed out, there is no such thing as a 'local' experimental release. Any release of free-flying birds designed to study species interactions and habitat usage is a release, not an experiment.

Most Anatidae are highly migratory, and are therefore particularly inappropriate for introduction because of the possibility, if not probability, that they will spread widely from the point of release, and perhaps into neighbouring

countries. A species highly desirable to sportsmen and aviculturalists in one country may come as a complete nuisance to a neighbouring country with a different attitude to exotic species. Thus the problem becomes international.

In some countries there has been a call for positive action to be taken against exotic species already present. This is the case in the Netherlands, where measures are now under way to reduce and eventually eliminate some of the more recently introduced waterfowl, e.g. Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*, Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* and Canada Goose.

This will doubtless constitute a subject for much controversy in years to come. There would, for example, be considerable opposition to elimination of the Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata* in Britain, since this species, although well established in parts of the country, has shown no tendency for further spread, and is becoming increasingly uncommon and vulnerable in its native range in eastern Asia. On the other hand, the Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*, which became established in southwest England in the early 1960s, is a very common and

widespread bird throughout its native range in the Americas. It has continued to spread in England and in recent years has reached Scotland, Ireland and northwest France. The possibility of it eventually spreading south into Spain and there competing or hybridizing with the tiny and endangered population of the White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala* is causing considerable alarm amongst conservationists. Whether or not a vigorous species like the Ruddy Duck could ever be eliminated in Europe is, of course, another matter.

Attempts to introduce an exotic species usually either fail, in which case the effort and expenditure involved were wasted, or are very successful, in which case serious problems can arise, and control becomes difficult, if not impossible. Whenever there is a demand for the introduction of non-native species, the wildlife manager should look closely at those deficiencies in the environment which have given rise to the demand, and seek first to remedy them through other management techniques. All too often in the past, managers have failed to face the real management problems of the native wildlife and have sought ready 'cure-alls' in the form of exotic species.

DILEMMA NEAR THE NEST OF A PAIR OF RED-WATTLED LAPWINGS

S. SRIDHAR and PRAVEEN KARANTH, No 10, Sirur Park 'B' Street, Seshadripuram, Bangalore 560 020

Introduction

The sky was scintillating and decorated with the loveliest of clouds after a day of rains in June, as we watched a family of White-headed Babblers, politely quarreling amongst themselves over a large Praying Mantis that was captured by one of them. A Black Drongo arrived to inspect the commotion and was pleasantly delighted at the sight of a new found morsel. At once it swooped on the Babbler holding the Mantis and tried to dislodge it. Nevertheless the other Babblers mobbed the Drongo and chased it away. But this opportunistic Drongo was unrelenting. It swooped again when the babblers were momentarily indolent and made off with the meal.

Our attention was now drawn towards a pair of Red-wattled Lapwings. Most of the lapwings by now have completed their nesting and they could be seen ceremoniously leading their young ones on their first ever adventures. But this pair was ominously silent and the typical 'tail twitch'- demonstrating the incubation instinct was a give away hint. Therefore we waited for a while to confirm our pre-conception.

Then came to us a shock of the first magnitude. For, the lapwing pair had located their nest with three eggs in the middle of an agricultural field. Two adjacent fields having been ploughed using a tractor on the advent of monsoon, this particular field would be coming under the tractor any hour now! With a great sense of occasion we at once planned a strategy to avoid this purposeless destruction of the lapwing eggs.

First Tactical Move

Our mission was to relocate the ill-fated eggs of the Lapwing pair. After consulting the available books on the subject just to make sure, we made the first tactical move by shifting the eggs about six inches away from the original site and waited patiently for the Lapwing pair to make their decision. There may be many occasions on which an animal benefits from having its mood accurately read, and its behaviour accurately predicted. The first thing we needed to know was whether the lapwing suffered or benefited from having its mind accurately read, in other words whether it really was a 'victim' at all, or a willing participant in the process.

Any animal could benefit if it could behave as if predicting the future behaviour of other animals in its world. McCleery has observed that at any moment an animal is faced with choosing which of its repertoire of behaviour patterns to perform next: feed, mate, drink, attack, flee, approach, withdraw, etc.

According to the Nobel Laureate Konrad Lorenz, for an animal, the equivalent of the data-collection and statistical analysis is performed either by natural selection acting on the mind-reader's ancestors over a long period, or by some process of learning during its own lifetime.

What might the Lapwing whose mind was being read do about it? What mechanisms for responding to mind-reading might natural selection build into lineages that are susceptible to being mind-read? What if the bird was an unwilling victim of mind-reading? What counter measures might the Lapwings take? Would they abandon the eggs?

Behavioural Hypothesis

Let us take a look at a few pioneering studies accomplished by the veterans. The theoretical basis of influencing a living creature is demonstrated by the fact that ethologists can do it. They have manipulated the actions by analysing the usual triggers of an organism's behaviour.

By administering correct external stimuli to the animal's sense organs one can achieve equally powerful control over them. The ideal dummy-presenting experiments of Nobel Laureate Tinbergen and others are the well defined illustrations. That animals react in mechanical, robot-like fashion to key stimuli is one of the basic inferences derived from these experiments. They can normally be 'fooled' into reacting to crude replicas that resemble the real, natural stimulus situation only slightly, or in superficial appearance. To a human being, for illustration, it is surprising that a Black-headed Gull will show its normal aggressive response to a stuffed Gull's head mounted on a stick, with no body, as observed by Stout and Brass. Another novel example is the aggressive response of Tinbergen's male sticklebacks to the red mail van passing the window. Yet another identical, less dramatically documented fantasy is the red-coloured *Anolis* lizard that jumped excitedly into a camper's bowl of tomato soup!

Species-specificity in Nest and Egg Recognition by Parent Birds

All birds that lay their eggs should ensure that they care for their own eggs and offsprings and not some other bird's. Tentatively we might presume that birds have a meticulously engineered inborn talent for recognising their own eggs, in view of the wide range in color and

markings of their eggs. Nevertheless, this is rarely the case as confirmed by some experiments.

Tinbergen found that most Herring Gulls were more attracted to the nest site than to their eggs and would incubate on an empty nest while their eggs were in sight a short distance away. Not only would a gull accept the eggs of some other gull, but also it would incubate wooden "eggs" painted blue or yellow. The importance of tactile stimulation in egg "recognition" is shown by Tinbergen's findings that Herring Gulls would return to nests containing wooden "eggs" of various shapes (rectangular, cylinder, prism) but would not incubate them if they had sharp edges. Tinbergen remarked: "For when the the birds made their choice and went to the rectangular blocks, they could truly be said to 'recognize' them as eggs. But when, after touching them, they left them, one could with as much justification say that now they did not 'recognize' them as eggs."

The problem of recognition can be solved by parents and/or offspring learning to be attracted to the other partner in the relationship and/or learning to recognize a home site to which both are attracted. Among Gulls and Terns (*Laridae*) there is a great deal of interspecific distinction in how this confusion is solved, and the different solutions seem to suit the different situations in which the species nest. For instance, Royal Terns *Sterna maxima* make rudimentary nests but make egg recognition simpler for themselves by producing variably patterned eggs. We have noted that the egg colouration and pattern of Red-wattled lapwings varied markedly even though they seldom nest in colonies.

Ease of discrimination would have to relate to all aspects of the learning situation. For instance, Kamin has noted that if the nest is easily learned about, this could prevent learning about the eggs that are added later on, a phenomenon known in associative learning models as 'blocking'.

Further, it is necessary to test for learning in a way that discriminates among different reasons why a Gull might reject or accept test stimulus objects. Buckley and Buckley exchanged eggs between neighboring Royal Tern nests and found that terns usually chose a neighbor's nest containing their own eggs, showing they did recognize their eggs. However, choice of the eggs did not mean that the birds failed to recognize their own nests, since they acted as though disturbed when brooding on a strange nest.

Supernormal Stimuli

Tinbergen used the term "supernormal stimuli" in describing certain behaviour reactions. The Ringed Plover, for example, "is more strongly stimulated by a white egg

with large black dots than by its own eggs, which are buff with small brownish dots." When given a choice between a real egg and a giant artificial egg, Herring Gulls try to incubate the artificial egg even when its volume is 8 to 20 times that of the normal egg. Elegant Terns studied by Walker incubated the larger egg of the Royal Tern, and Black Terns accepted chicken eggs "over 35 times the volume of the tern's egg"

Richardson noted that Black Tern eggs placed just outside the nest usually were retrieved but that some terns incubated the displaced eggs. However, "moving a whole nest island up to 23 feet ... did not cause desertion of the eggs even when the island was moved 15 feet in two steps in two hours." We presumed that the Lapwings might behave like Black Terns and planned to shift the nest to a safer zone step by step.

Howell and Bartholomew have found that Red-tailed Tropicbirds rolled their own eggs back to the nest from a distance of 6 inches. Half of the birds tested rolled an albatross egg (much larger than a tropicbird egg) into the nest, whereas only one tropicbird retrieved a much smaller tern egg. We hoped against all odds that the lapwings should not roll the eggs back to their original nest site, just to be squashed under the tractor's wheels!

Egg Transport

Audubon wrote in 1831 that, if a person touches the eggs, a Chuck-will's-widow will shift them to another location, transporting the eggs in the beak. His report was long repudiated as a figment of his imagination, but in 1944 Rysgaard revealed that a Chuck-will's-widow carried an egg in its left foot, and later Kilham in 1957 reported similar behaviour by a Whip-poor-will. In fact in 1967 Truslow submitted photographs of Pileated Woodpeckers carrying eggs in their bills from the nest hole after the tree had broken through the upper part of the nesting cavity. Goertz and Rutherford watched a Carolina Chickadee remove four small young from a nesting cavity. We have ourselves observed and reported a Yellow-wattled Lapwing holding her four chicks under her armpits; two on either side, when threatened and transporting them with closed wings to safer zones.

Successful Translocation

The answer we got from the Lapwing was an emphatic Yes! After carefully and sensitively pondering for a short while near the new nest site, the Lapwing accepted the eggs and immediately absorbed itself in incubation.

We continued to induce the Lapwings to accept a newer nest site by shifting the eggs step by step. They were seemingly sceptical initially, but soon they overcame their

initial restraint and approached the newer nest sites at remarkable speed, as we shifted the eggs in stages. Thus we could successfully translocate the eggs to a safer zone about sixteen feet away from the original nest site by late afternoon and the Lapwings had followed their eggs most willingly!

Conclusion

After this successful paradigm we have realised there is abundant scope for an inquisitive birdwatcher for deliberating and integrating theoretical ideas with field trials. Johnston has pointed out that there is no species specificity in learning ability. The different and ecologically appropriate ways in which different birds ensure that their parental investment is directed appropriately need not imply any differences in learning abilities, however, and it is not an easy matter to discover whether they do. The entire structure of the situation, much of it created directly and indirectly by the birds, probably conspires with learning ability and perceptual and motivational factors to produce a functionally appropriate outcome. He has also inferred that as in other aspects of behavioural development, there may be alternative pathways to a similar end. In this context we vividly recall what the 17th century Italian scientist Lorenzini had once said "...Nature Never acts Casually."

Finally, many birds are facing numerous challenges for their survival and reproduction. Interaction with the behavioural patterns of some endangered birds by conservationists can help these birds in achieving their evolutionary goal of fostering new generations. Especially endangered waterfowl such as the Black-bellied Tern that traditionally nest around flood prone regions and suffer tragically when water is repeatedly let off the dams, can benefit most by well timed nest translocations.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE LAMMERGEIER FLIES AGAIN. AAMIR ALI,
14 Ch. de la Tourelle 1209 Geneva

The Lammergeier (or Bearded vulture, *Gypaetus barbatus*) which disappeared from the Alps a hundred years ago, may soon be flying over the Swiss mountains again.

It was plentiful in the Alps, as it is in the Himalayas, but was exterminated by assiduous and misinformed hunters. Eighty five of them were killed between 1800 and 1887 and the last nesting was reported in 1887. It has never been recorded as eating any living animal but no doubt was hounded out because popular mythology had it that it ate innocent lambs - perhaps even human babies! The last known kill by hunters was in 1913, in the Italian Alps near Aosta.

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) organised a campaign for its reintroduction. It took a lot of persuasion, but finally the hunters and shepherds - unwilling to abandon the myths on which they had been nurtured - also agreed.

The first attempts to reintroduce Lammergeiers in the Alps (in France) was in about 1975; then in 1987 three more young ones were released in the Haute-Savoie. Two others were released in 1988, five in 1989, making a total of ten: five females, two males and three of undetermined sex (perhaps unisexism had come to the Lammergeier world as well). These young birds, aged about three months, were placed in protected sites. Three were known to have died soon after, from natural rather than human causes.

In Austria, the first young Lammergeier was released in 1986, and 8 more between 1986 and 1988. By 1990, 21 young Lammergeiers had been released in the Alps. There is now a population of 22 Lammergeiers in the Austrian and French Alps.

What about Switzerland? It was decided that if there were enough fledglings in 1990, Lammergeiers would be introduced in Switzerland in 1991. While all associations of hunters, representatives of the forest economy, and tourist offices agreed to this, the Union of Peasants opposed it, still claiming that Lammergeiers ate their lambs.

So, in June this year, young volunteers carried up three young Lammergeiers on their backs (in specially arranged rucksacks) to Margunet, at 2339 metres, in the Swiss National Park in the Grisons, and placed them in a specially constructed nest. The fledglings, 5-6 weeks old, will be fed by rangers until mid-July or so, when they will be able to fly on their own. Generally, there are quite enough dead animals in the park so that the young birds will manage to feed themselves with relative ease.

Lammergeier (or Lammergeyer) seems a pleasanter and more romantic name than Bearded vulture. "Vulture" raises the image of a bare necked, rather unpleasant, carrion-eating bird. The Lammergeier actually looks more like an eagle than a vulture; its little beard gives it a scholarly look.

A special characteristic of the Lammergeier is the way it breaks up bones and eats the marrow. It flies up to a height of 50-70 m to drop a bone on the rocks below. If the first attempt doesn't crack it, the bird will try again.

It is found ordinarily at 1200-4000 m but has been observed by an Everest expedition at about 7500 m. It is a magnificent bird to watch, as it "sails majestically on outstretched motionless wings", sometimes stretching to a span of nine feet.

In the breeding season, male and female indulge in spectacular aerobatics.

In Himalayan hill stations, it often scavenges at garbage dumps. We need several thousands, because there doesn't seem to be any other system of garbage disposal.

The Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) has already benefited from protective measures and there are now reported to be 200 couples nesting in the Alps. This is regarded as an optimum population.

In a world full of doomsday forebodings of disappearing species, the occasional flash of cheerful news shines all the brighter.

OWLS ASSOCIATED WITH PADDY FIELDS.
DR.S.HIRUMURTHI and MRS. C.P. BHANUMATHI, 4,
University Quarters, Agricultural Research Station,
Bhavanisagar 638451

The news about the possible control of rodents by barn (screech) owls, *Tyto alba* in Thanjavur District of Tamilnad (The Hindu, April 4) and the observations of DR.Gunathilakaraj on owl predations of rodents (NLBW Vol.XXXI-3 & 4) are very interesting. In an eight week survey here, we have come across three species of owls visiting paddy fields. These visits were observed between 1930 hours and 2230 hours. The species were identified by quick focussing of flash lights on them when they alighted on trees or field perches provided amongst rice plants.

The major species we encountered was the spotted owlet, *Athene brama* accounting for 72.9% of the total owls sighted. The barn (screech) owl, *Tyto alba* formed 18.8% of the visitors, while the Great Indian Horned owl, *Bubo bubo* accounted for 8.3% only. The total number of all owls observed was 96. In our experience this area does not suffer from rodents, at least during the past five years. This observation indicated that a single species of owl may not be effective in rodent destruction in all locations. In the case of the present studies the spotted owlet appears to be more effective predator of rodents than the barn owl. Incidentally the rice ecosystems here also harbour snakes including the rat snake and cobra for further effective rat control. The common Indian nightjar *Caprimulgus asiaticus* visits the paddy fields, but its role in rodent control is not known.

CROWS AS MAJOR PESTS OF MATURED GROUNDNUTS. MRS. C.P. BHANUMATHI and DR.S.THIRUMURTHI, 4, University Quarters, Agricultural Research Station, Bhavanisagar 638 451

Both species of crows viz., the common house crow *Corvus splendens* and the jungle crow *C. macrohynchos* have been known as depredators of freshly sown groundnut

seeds. However, recent observations in Periyar and Coimbatore districts of Tamilnadu indicate that these birds have already become serious pests of groundnut pods at the time of maturity and prior to harvest. They come in flocks during early hours in mornings and late evenings to dig out the pods. The seeds are removed from the pods and subsequently eaten. The crop in shallow and loose soils such as red soils is more vulnerable than the crop in heavy black and deep soils. Under gardenland conditions the crop is irrigated prior to harvest to make the operation easy and complete. The crows could virtually remove all the pods from such wet soils if not sacred away properly.

The farmers try to scare the crows by hanging a dead crow from a pole in the field. Sometimes large strips of black or white cloth are made to fly like flags from posts. The crows are used to these and could adapt in a short time. The irrigated groundnut farmers drive away these birds by employing labourers who shout and beat metal containers to scare them. However this system could not be practised in vast areas of rainfed groundnut covering thousands of hectares located throughout the districts.

ANTICS OF A HOUSE CROW, KUMARAN SATHASIVAM, 29, Jadamuni Koil Street, Madurai 625001

Yesterday I saw an interesting episode in which a House Crow was the sole participant. This individual was perched on the edge of a concrete sunshade above a window, holding some food in its beak. Below it a pipe to drain water from the sunshade extended a few inches out. The crow bent over as I watched it and pushed the food into the protruding end of the pipe. Then it proceeded to take a bunch of dry leaves lying on the sunshade and push that into the pipe, after doing which it flew away. About fifteen minutes later, a crow, presumably the same specimen, came there and extracted the food from the pipe. It flapped away with the morsel to a nearby tree and began eating it. I had to leave at that juncture and so could not observe the crow after this.

The incident left me wondering what urgent matter the crow could have been attending to in the interval that it went away from its food. The bird's use of leaves, either to conceal the food, or as a plug to prevent the food from falling out, seems to be an illustration of the crow's intelligence, almost amounting to tool usage.

HINDI NAMES OF BIRDS, NARENDRA SINGH RATHORE, Sherkote House III, Rani Bagh, Dhampur 246 761 Dist. Bijnor (UP)

Please refer the editorial in Vol.XXXI No.3 & 4, March-April 1991 of the Newsletter.

I would tend to agree with L. Balasubramaniam from the Centre of Environment Education, Thaltej Tekra, Ahmedabad, that it is imperative that we must start using Hindi names for birds if we wish to widen the interest in birdwatching in India.

I do realise that this is a very difficult task, and may perhaps, be confusing initially, but eventually a uniform code can be worked out. This has to be done sooner or later, and I think that with the very wide readership of the Newsletter and its obvious popularity, thanks to the consistent hard work of Mr. Zafar Futehally, and the good work of Mr. S. Sridhar, the Newsletter should pioneer this urgent task.

I think even the late Dr. Salim Ali has emphasised the need for using Hindi names.

I am trying for some time to collect the local names of hill birds of the Uttarkhand region, comprising of Garhwal and Kumaon, where the names are similar and perhaps continue into neighbouring Nepal. Most of the names of birds are obviously onomatopoeic, deriving from either the call or behaviour. For instance the migratory cuckoo is called 'kaffu', and the turtle dove the 'ghoo-ghooti'.

Once I get a fairly comprehensive collection from the various regions of Uttarkhand, I shall send you a list. Perhaps other birdwatchers in this region who are interested may get in touch with me at: Vienna Lodge, Ayarpatta, Naini Tal 263 001 or the above stated address.

PAINTED BUSH QUAIL NEAR BANGALORE. DR.S. SUBRAMANYA, HPHT Scheme, J Block, University of Agricultural Sciences, GKVK, Bangalore 560 065, and J.N. PRASAD, 13, 8th Cross, 30th Main, J.P. Nagar I Phase, Bangalore 560 078

While surveying the Kardikal State Forest (about 35 km south of Bangalore) in Bannerghatta Range Forest for the Yellowthroated Bulbul *Pycnonotus xantholaemus* on 14 October 1990 we flushed a male painted Bush Quail *Perdicula erythrorhyncha* from a dense Lantana bush close to a finger millet *Eleusine coracana* field. The millet field was surrounded by spare stony scrub forest adjoining a few hills that were covered with dry deciduous forest mixed with bamboo. The quail took off as we walked close to the bush and landed at about 10 feet from us and started running after a brief pause to look at us.

According to the Handbook (Vol.2 : 51-52) the species is distributed in the Western Ghats, Nilgiris and other associated hills in Karnataka and Tamilnadu. During his survey on birds of Mysore, Salim Ali (JBNHS 44: 209) recorded the species at Biligirirangan Hills (of Nilgiri range) and Kemmangundi in Bababudan Hills (Western

Ghats complex) and indicates it to be confined to evergreen biotope.

However our sighting of this species near Bangalore in a totally different habitat and away from the 'prescribed' habitat, though its exact status is unknown, indicates that the Painted Bush Quail is possibly more wide-spread than it is thought to be and appears to have a more wider habitat preference. This is the first sighting of the species in Inland Karnataka.

COMMON ROSEFINCH IN BANGALORE.

S.KARTHIKEYAN, 24, Opp. Banashankari Temple, 8th Block, Jayanagar PO, Bangalore 560 082 and J.N. PRASAD, 13, 8th Cross, 30th Main, J.P. Nagar, I Phase, Bangalore 560 078

While watching birds in the Bannerghatta Range Forest (12° 48' N, 77° 34' E), Bangalore on 17 January 1991, four female Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus* (Pallas), were observed flying about in a scrub jungle mixed with Bamboo *Dendrocalamus strictus*. Of these, two individuals were observed feeding on seeds of *D. strictus*.

During a subsequent visit to the same forest range on 27 January 1991, a flock of four comprising two males and two females of the species was observed in another location (12° 46' N, 77° 35' E). Again on 3 February 1991 during a trip to Madeshwara Range Forest (12° 41' N, 77° 39' E) about 36 km from Bangalore four individuals were seen of which one was a male.

The Common Rosefinch is known to winter in South India and during his Mysore Survey, Salim Ali in 1939 has recorded this species at Namadchilume and Kolar Gold Fields about 70 and 105 km from Bangalore respectively (AI, 1943). The above sightings are held to be significant as the species is being reported to be wintering in Bangalore for the first time.

Reference

Ali, S (1943). The Birds of Mysore. *Journal Bombay Nat. Hist. Society* 43 : 573-595.

GULLBILLED TERN IN INLAND KARNATAKA.

J.N.PRASAD, 13, 8th Cross, 30th Main, J.P. Nagar I Phase, Bangalore 560 078, S.KARTHIKEYAN, 24, Opp. Banashankari Temple, 8th Block, Jayanagar PO, Bangalore 560 082 and DR. S. SUBRAMANYA, HPHT Scheme, J Block, University of Agricultural Sciences, GKVK, Bangalore 560 065

Several of us from the Birdwacher's Field Club of Bangalore counted birds at Tailur Tank (12° 36' N, 77° 05' E) as part of Waterfowl Census on 6 January 1991. After winding up the census we were returning to our overnight

camp-site when we sighted a Gullbilled Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* flying parallel to the tank bund. Though our club members have been censusing this tank since 1987 this was the first time that we came across the species.

The Gullbilled Tern is a coastal species and is often known to stray inland. However, the available publications on the birds of Karnataka (e.g. see Ali S, 1943, JBNHS, V.44, pp 206-220) indicate that the species has not been recorded in inland Karnataka. In the absence of any published information on the tern's occurrence inland, our sighting appears to be the first of the species away from coastal Karnataka.

If other birdwatcher's in Karnataka or elsewhere have any information or sightings confirming our observation, please send us the details on date, locality and number of birds sighted.

THE PONDICHERRY VULTURE. ARUN BHATIA, "Dewdrop", 241, 4th Cross, I Block, Koramangala, Bangalore 560 034

A recent UNI despatch mentions: "The extremely rare Pondicherry vulture has found a home in Ahmedabad's Kamla Nehru Zoo". Apparently there was a survey regarding this "rare species which is on the verge of extinction." Of the eight species of vultures found in India, this is the most vulnerable to destruction of habitat. It was not endemic to India, was found in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh but became extinct.

Newsletter readers would find it interesting to hear from Ahmedabad readers who may have been involved, as the three Pondicherry vultures in the Kamla Nehru zoo were kept in a crowded place and were then shifted - at the instance of the zoo authorities - to a solitary corner over Kankaria Lake. The UNI despatch also says that Jacksonville Zoo in the U.S. has been the only one to breed these birds.

Were any readers involved in the survey? Perhaps they can relate their experience?

INFORMATION ON WOODPECKERS. V.SANTHARAM, 68, I Floor, Santhom High Road, Madras 600028

As I had written in my earlier letter, I am planning to work on woodpeckers for my Ph.D. degree at Salim Ali School of Ecology, Pondicherry University. I would be studying the habitat requirements and ecology of sympatric species that occur at Peechi Wildlife Sanctuary, Kerala. My field of work will commence, hopefully, by this August.

In this connection I would like to get some help from you. I understand that you have received /been receiving copies of various foreign journals such as *Ornis Fennica*. If it is not too much of a bother could you send me photocopies of *papers on woodpeckers* and other hole-nesting birds? I shall reimburse the expenses on hearing from you. [Those readers who have relevant information on Woodpeckers, please send it on to Santharam].

ASIAN HORNBILL CONSERVATION ACTION PLAN WORKSHOP. Singapore, Sept 24-26, 1991

DRAFT AGENDA

Overview

The purposes of the workshop are to:

- (1) to review the status and prospects of each and every taxon (all subspecies most commonly described in the literature) of Asian Hornbill in the wild and in captivity and
- (2) to develop scenarios to assure their survival, especially to recommend what kinds of intensive management actions may be appropriate, e.g. in situ management, captive propagation, further PVA analysis.
- (3) to conduct model population viability assessments for two taxa.

The ultimate goal is to produce documents which summarize recommendations representing a consensus of participants concerning future actions.

Invitees include hornbill managers and researchers (representing both governments of range states and relevant non-governmental organizations) in the wild and in captivity, conservation biologists, and others interested and involved in conserving hornbills.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please reply to:

S.A. Hussain
Senior Scientist, Bombay Natural History Society
Hornbill House, S.B. Road Bombay 400 023

1. SPECIES OF HORNBILL :
2. AREA REPORTED FROM :
[State, Province, Forest;
National Park; Sanctuary;
Unreserved Forest; Open scrub]
3. STATUS OF HABITAT :
[Poor; fair; good; excellent]
4. THREATS TO HABITAT :

5. POPULATION ESTIMATE :
[Abundant; common, uncommon;
sparse; rare]

6. POPULATION TRENDS WITHIN PAST 5 YEARS :
[Increase; decrease; stable; no change]

7. THREAT TO HORNBILLS :
[Trade; hunting; habitat
destruction; other]

Name of sender :
Address :

:

PIED GROUND THRUSHES IN SOUTH INDIA. KRYS KAZMIERCZAK, C/o . 9, Norwich Road, Northwood Middx HA6 1ND UK

On a recent birdwatching trip to South India I was fortunate enough to find some Pied Ground Thrushes *Zoothera wardii*. The dates on which I saw them would indicate to me that they were wintering at that location, although both the Handbook and the Synopsis of Ali and Ripley refer to them as only being recorded on passage in South India on the way to their wintering grounds in Sri Lanka where I have also previously seen them.

Both of my sightings this time were during a stay at the Hill Station of Yercaud in the Shevarov Hills of Tamil Nadu at an altitude of 1500 m or thereabouts. The first sighting was of two female types near a stream through a coffee plantation some four or five kilometres from Yercaud town late morning on 28 December 1990. When disturbed they flew up from the ground into some tall shade trees. The second sighting was of a male at dawn on a footpath through a coffee plantation quite near Yercaud town itself on 30 December 1990.

I would be interested to know if there are any other records of wintering Pied Ground Thrushes since the publication of the Handbook and Synopsis.

BIRD STUDY TRIP TO INDIA. JOHN ANDERTON, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560, USA

I am back in Washington hard at work on the plates for Dillon Ripley's guide to Indian birds. Our trip finished well, thanks to the advice and contacts you gave me and Tom Schultz at our meeting in late January. As we were told then, Darjeeling was not the best area for finding birds, so we drove into Sikkim, finding some pockets of good habitat along the way to Gangtok, particularly around the Teesta River. Most of the best areas remain closed to

foreigners, and it is sad to see much of the rest heading for the same state as Darjeeling; nonetheless, feeding flocks of small birds were everywhere, and the babblers were particularly impressive.

After two weeks in the northeast, we set off for Delhi and several predictably good days in Bharatpur. The highlight of that leg of the trip, however, was certainly Binsar, a reserve of spectacular rhododendron/oak and pine forests in Uttar Pradesh recommended to us by Mrs. Tara Gandhi at the World Wildlife Fund in New Delhi. Although we dropped in on her without warning (as we did to you!), she was very helpful and made the last part of our visit a great success despite such obstacles as lost reservations and fuel shortages.

All in all we saw about 460 species, most repeatedly and very well, from most of the major genera. It was a good start, and I look forward to getting to know the wildlife and people of India better, hopefully at a more leisurely pace next time.

"ELECTRIC SPARKS" FROM ASHY WREN WARBLER. DR. J.C. UTTANGI, 36, Mission Compound, Dharwad 580 001

In the Book of Indian Birds, Salim Ali describing the Ashy Wren Warbler *Prinia socialis* says - "when suddenly disturbed off its nest this warbler and several others of its near cousins emit a peculiar kit-kit-kit, as of electric sparks. Whether this is produced by snapping the bill or in some other way is controversial."

My observations based on the study of a number of breeding Ashy Wren Warblers occurring in the undershrub-growth of *Cassia tora* plant growing extensively in the open sites and along road sides at Dharwad revealed that these emissions were from the mouth, and one is likely to assume that they are produced by snapping the bill. The bill itself being very small and slender cannot cause or bring about such a sharp sound

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similar to those of electric sparks. The sound that emerges from the birds of the family *Sylviidae* are vocal in origin and are controlled by the muscles of the syrinx or the song organ of birds, and not by snapping the bill.

PROJECT PEREGRINE FALCON IN ALVSBORGS LAN, SWEDEN. LARS HILLEFORS, Hasselkullegatan 56, S-461 62 Trollhattan, Sweden

Project Description

Background :

The work with rescuing the peregrine falcon began in Alvsborgs lan at the end of the 1960's, from the beginning by placing its nesting areas under protection and during the breeding season guarding its nests.

Objectives :

When SNF's (Swedish Nature Association) "Project Peregrine Falcon", which started in 1972, through breeding in cages had produced so many young birds that it had been time to set them out through so called "hacking" there were many competent persons interested in birds there to help. For this reason proportionately many young falcons have been set out in Alvsborgs lan. At the same time peregrine falcons have returned to a couple of old breeding places which involved guarding and supervision of at least three nest sites this year.

Activities :

The costs which are to be met with funds from Alvsborgsfonden (fund of the province) - WWF are in the first place travelling expenses and costs of materials. To this must be added costs for telephone calls and postage and not to say the least for food to the young falcons.

Progress to date and expected outputs :

The work with the falcons in cages that has been carried out during more than 10 years, has given an addition to the peregrine falcon population which together with the measures that have been taken to promote the population seem to be able to re-establish a population capable of reproduction in the southwest of Sweden. This will be to the benefit of a better ecological balance and of course to the delight of all people interested in wildlife. The work with the peregrine falcon has in many local branches of SNF acted as a stimulus for continued work with wildlife preservation.

Cover: Male Golden-backed Woodpecker (*Dinopium bengalense*) is equipped with hard chisel like bill to hammer repeatedly into wood. The wedge shaped tail is augmented with stiff feathers to act as a prop while the bird moves actively up and down the tree trunk. The woodpeckers are apt to be recognised as good indicators of diversity and health of forest ecosystems. They also provide an array of holes for a great number of secondary hole nesting birds, most of which are important in forest ecology.

Photo S. Sridhar, ARPS

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Printed and Published by S. Sridhar at Navbharath Enterprises, Seshadripuram, Bangalore 560 020, for Private Circulation only

Red Data Bird

Short-tailed Albatross

by Hiroshi Hasegawa

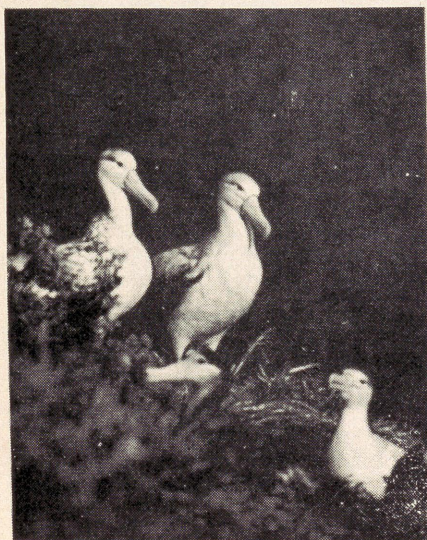


Short-tailed Albatross (Photo: H. Hasegawa)

The Short-tailed Albatross *Diomedea albatrus* once nested in huge numbers on some remote islands south of Japan in the western North Pacific. In the non-breeding season it dispersed widely over the northern North Pacific, frequently visiting coastal waters. About 100 years ago, however, it began to be a victim of feather hunters. Over-exploitation quickly diminished the breeding populations, and by 1949 it was believed to be extinct.

Early in 1951, however, an extremely small population, perhaps less than 50 birds, was discovered on Torishima Island in the Izu Islands, Japan — one of the species's former breeding stations. Since its rediscovery, the species has been strictly protected by the Japanese Government.

From 1976/1977, population monitoring and conservation studies of this species have taken place on Torishima. During the past decade, from 1981 to 1990, an active conservation project has been run by the Environment Agency of Japan and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government.



The primary objective of the project has been to improve the nesting area, which is on a bare slope of loose volcanic ash and sand. Clumps of grass have been transplanted to the area to protect it from soil erosion. This has been fairly successful, not only in providing nest-sites but also in increasing the breeding success by reducing egg losses. Before the grass transplant, breeding success varied from 33% to 59%. In the 1976/1977 season only 15 chicks were reared, and in 1979/1980, 50 eggs were laid with 20 chicks produced. After the grass transplant, breeding success increased gradually to 60% to 70%, and the yearly variations decreased greatly. This season (1990/1991), 66 chicks have been raised from 108 eggs. The Torishima population of Short-tailed Albatross now stands at approximately 500 birds and is increasing at about 7% per annum, thus doubling in size in 10 years.

In early April 1971, Professor Sadao Ikehara of the University of Ryukyus discovered the Short-tailed Albatross surviving on Minaimi-kojima (South Islet) in the Senkaku Islands, the south-western Ryukyus — also one of the species's former breeding stations. He found 12 adults on a narrow terrace at the midpoint of a nearly vertical 150 m cliff, completely inaccessible to humans on foot. He did not observe any chicks. In 1979 and 1980, Ikehara made aerial observations of the ledge, and observed between 16 and 35 birds, but again no chicks.

In April 1988, aerial observation finally confirmed the presence of at least 7 chicks on Minaimi-kojima. In March 1991, I was able to land on Minaimi-kojima via the sea and observed at least 10 chicks. The current estimate for the population on the Senkaku Islands is about 75 birds, with 15 breeding pairs.

In September 1988 I visited Alaskan waters to search for Short-tailed Alba-

tross, and to initiate a co-operative programme with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to gather information on any sightings of the species in the northern North Pacific. Since all the chicks reared on Torishima Island from the 1979/1980 season onwards have been ringed with metal and coloured plastic bands, it was requested that special attention be given to identifying the colour of the band on any sightings, if possible. Over the past two years, more than 25 birds have been sighted at sea, with even the band number being identified on one! These observations indicate that the albatross is expanding its marine range in the non-breeding season.

The bands are also providing information on the life history and population biology of the species. Although the data at present are not sufficient for detailed statistical analyses, some interesting facts have been obtained. The youngest age at which adults first return to the breeding colony is two years old, and most only return after three or four years. Birds first breed successfully at five years old, and most probably breed annually. Annual adult mortality is estimated at about 5%.

To ensure the continued growth of the Short-tailed Albatross population, the conservation project is now progressing into a third stage. One of the measures to be taken is the artificial creation of a new colony at a stable site on the other side of Torishima, by attracting pre-breeders with decoys and sound playback.

Dr Hiroshi Hasegawa is at the Biology Department, Toho University, Japan. He has been responsible for work on the Short-tailed Albatross and its conservation since 1976.

Flash Floods Ravage Ranganthittu Bird Sanctuary

Roaring down from the suddenly opened sluice gates of the KRS Dam, the overflowing waters of the river Cauvery completely submerged South India's most important bird sanctuary - Ranganthittu - destroying over 600 nests of Darters, Shags, Spoonbills, Cormorants, Herons, Egrets, Storks and Ibises on the fateful night of 28th July 1991, S. Sridhar reports.

With the rain fury unabated in the catchment areas of Coorg and Mysore districts of the Karnataka State, this year KRS reservoir recorded the highest inflow of water (1,73,786 Cu Secs on 28th) in three decades. Flood waters discharged from other upstream dams reached the KRS Reservoir and threatened the dam. Hence the excess water had to be released at once by opening the sluice gates. The fury of flood waters let off at 7.30 p.m. headed towards Ranganthittu Bird Sanctuary, 20kms away leaving a trail of destruction.

Natural Islands

Since time immemorial, thousands of birds including the much endangered Oriental Darter, Indian Shag and Spoonbill along with other less endangered birds such as the Little Cormorant, Openbilled Stork, Night Heron, White ibis, Large Egret, Little Egret, and Cattle Egret converge on these natural islands at Ranganthittu by June every year to commence their annual breeding cycle. Scores of trees of *Ficus glomerata*, *Commiphora caudata* and *Terminalia arjuna* present amidst thick clusters of *Pandanus*, provide most ideal nesting niches for these birds. When this tragedy struck, most of the nests were complete with eggs, and many others had nestlings in various stages of development

Real Tragedy

Earlier in the evening, the birds had returned to their nests, unprepared for the impending catastrophe. The flood waters swirled and cascaded towards the Islands, with waves five meters high. Only the stronger trees could withstand the flood fury while most others including the *Pandanus* on which the birds nested were plucked out, tossed about like match-sticks and washed away in a jiffy without any trace.

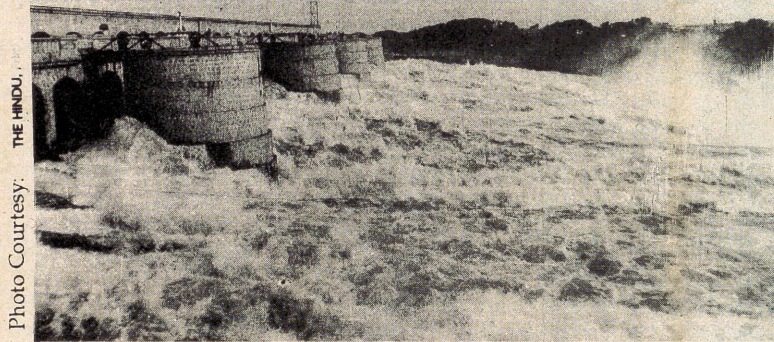


Photo Courtesy: THE HINDU.

Roaring down from the KRS dam

Dawn broke on Monday over a macabre scene of utter desolation as much of the bird sanctuary was under several meters of flood waters. Hundreds of grief stricken birds could be seen flying about feverishly, while a few others were perched atop the tallest branches above the river, trembling and cowering, too dazed as they were, lamenting the loss of their nests and nestlings and in many cases their beloved companions.

For the Oriental Darter, considered as one of the most endangered birds by IWRB, UK this is a real tragedy. Only 1260 Darters have been counted all over India during the 1990 January Waterfowl Census. This sanctuary is one of the last known breeding centers for the Darter which has terribly suffered in silence. Two more equally endangered birds that have also suffered tragically are the Spoonbill and the Indian Shag.

It is not the birds alone that have suffered. The flood waters have also washed away animals that have been inhabiting the islands such as the Crocodile and the Smooth-coated Otter.

Challenge to Conservation

One would have expected after this death and destruction of bird life unprecedented in the sanctuary's living memory, the birds would abandon it at once. But within a week some of the seemingly indomitable birds have renewed their efforts to build the nests anew. But this tragic event has posed many formidable challenges to conservationists. Chief among them is the replanting of trees and the *Pandanus* clusters that provided the crucial nesting sites, before the catastrophe. The vital need to grow such trees and more importantly translocating trees and *Pandanus* from the adjoining mainland to the islands is an urgent priority.



The Oriental Darter, Suffering in Silence Photo: S. Sridhar