

Mr Taej Mundkur
Junior Research Fellow (UGC)
Department of Biosciences
Saurashtra University
RAJKOT - 360 005

4th January, 1985

My dear Taej,

Yours of 6/10/85 and 13/12/85 have been lying in my pending file for quite some time and rather guiltily i sit down to write. You know my excuse though! Thank you for the reprints and as per your wish, i am enclosing a reprint of the note on the Blackbreasted Weaver. I have got a good enlargement in black and white, of the males of this species and note that they have white chins and throats. Contra black-chinned forms which you have seen.

It was really good to hear that you have got the UGC fellowship. But with what study you have been doing on the WWF project and your decision to stay on with it - i hope we will be able to read of it in the Journal or the WWF newsletter, sometime in the future.

Birdwatching for the last quarter of last year was rather dull. But on our honeymoon, to Andaman (Port Blair and surrounds), i had some really good fun. Practically every bird we saw was a new sub-species and at least two-thirds of them were new to me. I was particularly happy to see the endemic forms of birds there. The Andaman Drongo, the Dark and Pale Serpent Eagles, the Broad-billed Roller, the Blacknaped Tern, the Barred Cuckoo Shrike, etc. And the fascinating ocean and beach life. Snorkleing was thrilling and opened a whole new world of underwater beauty. Fishes in so many species, colours, sizes, patterns, shapes, and those magnificent corals! Exquisite. We spent hours in the sun, floating on the water, drinking in the beauty. If you get a chance Taej, go to the Andamans now. Trees of over 100 feet are quite common outside the municipal limits. And above 150 feet are seen often. It is very beautiful. Green poetry. If you are interested, i could send you a list of the birds i saw, later. Now, after a longish break, i am picking up the threads of my earlier days.

Hope to hear from you soon. And all the best for 1986 from both of us!

Yours sincerely,

ZH

Encl: As above.

Tarj Mundkur
Research Fellow

Department of Biosciences
Saurashtra University
Rajkot - 360005
Gujarat

30 March 85

Recd: 8/4/85

Dear Ashesh,

Perhaps you had given up hope. I hope I am wrong but do forgive me for not replying ages back. Your card was redirected to me here at Rajkot where I am working on a WWF sponsored project on the "Ecology of the Gulf of Kachchh with emphasis on the anthropogenic pressures".

I finished my MSc microbiology and have joined here under Prof. R. M. Wail for my PhD for which I will work on the "Nesting distribution of coastal birds in the Gulf of Kachchh."

Our work is very interesting and we have to use boats to visit the islands & reefs staying there for our ~~work~~ data collection. The life is tough & area-wise it is very disturbed with ^{large} ~~great~~ scale cuttings of the mangrove on the many islands that dot the area. We hope our study will understand the problems involved & methods to prevent it.

Your idea for a directory for birdwatchers seems to finally come through with the questionnaire in the last ~~last~~ newsletter. I agree with you that this was really necessary. The 'Oriental Bird Club' is to be started this year by the RSPB, England & they will print 2 bulletins & one journal, ~~the~~ 'the Forktail' every year. The areas included are Pakistan east upto Japan.

Mr. James Hancock, President of the British Trust of Ornithology was here a few days ago and I went over to Bhavnagar to study the interbreeding of little reef herons
egret

there.

One of the research workers on this project is Rishad Havez from Hyderabad. He had finished his MSc in the Bio Sciences Dept. And he is working on the marine fauna - its diversity and distribution.

I don't remember reading any articles of yours in the newsletter. What's happened on the bird watching front? Nothing new from Hyderabad. That reminds me that last September near Jamnagar at the Khijidia Bird Sanctuary we found the Great Crested Grebes nesting, this being the first record in 93 years of these birds nesting below the Himalayas.

I guess that's all for now. Let's have a newswy letter from you now. Let me know what you are doing & if you ever plan to visit these parts make it in winter.

Regards,

Taj

Mr Taej Mundkur
Research Fellow
Department of Biosciences
Saurashtra University
RAJKOT - 360 005

9th April, 1985.

Dear Taej,

In our world of avian wonder, surprises generally come in winter, from the north - or from the south in this season of return migration. Your letter was doubly surprising! Not knowing your present address, i had mailed the card to your home. Nice to hear it reached you.

Your work, your pleasure actually (because it is the thing you really enjoy) must indeed be fascinating. I envy you but respect you more for the job you do is the one you like. Anyway,

The bit you wrote on the Oriental Bird Club was pretty interesting. Could you send me some more particulars about the membership, etc?

I have not been writing for the Newsletter because some of us have started (it is 5 years old now) a Birdwatchers Society of Andhra Pradesh which publishes a newsletter of its own, and i have been writing for this regularly. In this newsletter, MAYURA, we have tried to include material on only those birds which are found in AP. The notes published must have been observed somewhere within the political boundaries of the state. A concession which has recently been made is the inclusion of interesting/informative pieces on birds found in the state, but whose activities were observed elsewhere. You are well aware of the paucity of bird-literature from this area. In our small way we want to try and fill the gap. I am mailing you a copy by separate post. Tell me how it is.

Birding and bird news from this state have been very good of recent. First there were the GIB findings. Now we have received a specimen of a Lesser Florican, shot very near Hyd. The BNHS team was down to make enquiries of these two species. They want to start a project for the GIB, but the forest dept. is trying to ensnarl all their proposals in red-tape. With the number of migrants coming to and passing through Gujarat, 'new' birds from here may be old-feather for you, but let me write of the new birds which i have seen of recent in and around Hyderabad.

9/IV/1985.

In August last year, we were birding around a small lake with rocks all around, when we spotted 2 Alpine Swifts. It just goes to show how widely these birds wander. Then there was a pair of Blackbacked Woodpeckers in a forest about 60 kms from Hyd. In brilliant plumage, these birds were very active and chased each other constantly, calling now and then. In this same forest we also spotted a male Little Pied Flycatcher busily feeding in the canopy overhead. This latter was a good record. More recently i saw and still see a Barred Jungle Owlet in a residential garden of the city and in a public park, we came upon a Dark Grey Cuckoo Shrike!

In the latest issue of the Journal you must have read Krishnaraju(s) note on sighting the Great Crested Grebe in A P!

I don't think that i will come that side in the foreseen future - but if i do, it shall be in winter. What about your trip down south?

Hyderabad is becoming very hot. The boon we have is once heat sets in for 2 to 3 days, a couple of showers cool us. Galmchar, jacaranda, copper pods are in flower and the song of the keel and other various cuckoos fills the air with richness. Life ticks...

Hoping to hear from you soon,

Best wishes and regards,

JT

Saurashtra University

DEPARTMENT OF BIOSCIENCES

RAJKOT-360 005. (GUJARAT) INDIA

Taej Mundkur
Research Fellow



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CARE UNIVERSITY

In reply please refer
SU/Bio/
of date

Mr. Aasheesh Pittie
14-7-370 Begum Bazar
Hyderabad 500012

Dear Aasheesh,

Thank you for your letter dated April 9, and the issue of "Mayura". This time of year has been very busy for me and I have been out of town a majority of the time.

My thoughts are reflected perfectly by Mr. Lavkumar Khacher to you. I am very glad you have started and continued the newsletter including only state information. Our hopes of starting one in Poona for the city or state did not materialize due to the splintering of all the groups involved though a general wildlife newsletter did come out in Marathi which has focussed on education of children.

Hyderabad through your letter seems to be quite a bird haven and so I must add it to my must see list. Of late very close to our house we saw Brown Crakes, Koras, Chestnut Bittern, and Painted Snipe all on one evening after a flash flood in our stream. All these birds were new to my Rajkot list and in Gujarat the Kora is not a common Bird. I carried out a small study on the nesting river terns on a small island at a local reservoir. Along with the terns I also found Little Terns, Little Pratincloe, Great Stone Plover, Redwattled Lapwing, Large Pied Wagtail nesting. New records of breeding for Rajkot included the terns and the Pratincole.

In the first week of June I spent a week for reference^{work} and other work in Bombay where I was able to meet Parvish, Sunil among others. The rains caught me in Bombay but I was fortunate to leave before they flooded the town disrupting life.

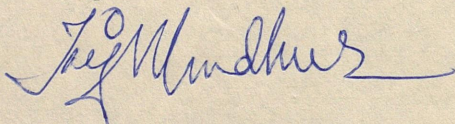
The Great Crested Grebe seems to be making a southward progress. A friend of mine saw it some time ago in ~~Taxra~~ Tadoba, Maharashtra adding it to our state list also. I am reminded of an editors note to a note on the Crab Plovers in the Journal of how so many new occurrences could be attributed to the increase of the bird enthusiasts rather than the new appearances of the birds.

We hope to be visiting the Pirotan islands shortly which is to be one of our permanent sites of study. This island is the pride of the forest department in their Marine National Park and so we hope facilities in this marine desert will be more easily available.

Most of my seniors save one are now busy completing their theses and so the lab. is full of furious activity.

I guess thats all for the present.

Regards.



Taej Mundkur
June 24, 1985

4 July 1985.

Mr Taej Mundkur

Research Fellow
Department of Biosciences
Saurashtra University -
RAJKOT - 360 005

My dear Taej,

Life here, seems to have almost stalled on one field, and racing ahead in another. The problem is with birds.

A bird actually. I have got engaged to a girl from Bangalore, and my mind is much deviated. Birdwatching is on, but in low-key just now. Smriti Poddar, that is my fiance's name, is constantly on my mind and invariably when I am at the typewriter, the letter which materialises, is to her. Anyway,

Of recent, Mayura has taken up some of my time. We are a year behind in its publication - and you having been associated with such newsletters should know - due to a paucity of articles. The third issue of last year is now ready, and I will send you a copy by separate post. In fact, most of the members of our Society now want to stretch their feathers and form a more wide-ranging one - which will be on the lines of the BNHS (do not laugh, my friend, for there is nothing wrong with thinking big!) and which will act as the forum for us to act on all nature-conservation aspects in the state.

Some friends and I had gone to Narsapur again last week. The forest is lush green and teak is teeming. There was an area where some sort of larvae of a moth covered much ground - tree-ground actually. The hill slope was littered with their droppings (fraz) and most of the trees were 'moth-eaten'. The whole day was filled with the calls of various cuckoos - very appropriate actually for my state of mind - crying love. The 'one more bottle', the 'brain-fever', the 'pteer-pteer' - all were there. There was a bonus too! A *Cuculus canorus* male. Resoundingly, its call haunted the forest. I had heard it for the first time in Borivili, last September, when birding with our friend

Taej Mundkur
Research Fellow

Department of Biosciences
Saurashtra University
Rajkot - 360005
Oct.6, 1985

Dear Aasheesh,

I rediscover with fair shock that your letter lying in my one time filing system is dated way back 4 July. Do forgive my oversight in not replying earlier. Congratulations on your engagement and I wonder when the big day comes along.

I received your "Mayura" too and my thoughts are perfectly reflected by the letter from Lavkumar in that issue. I feel that your stretching of feathers may cause a watering down of your initial idea of upgrading bird knowledge in the state. Though an improvement usually helps in the long run. Perhaps you would restrict information of the south east coast states only.

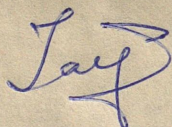
Soon after having read your note in the Journal about the Blackthroated Weaverbirds in Hyderabad my friend and I had the good fortune of seeing the birds in Rajkot, adding it to the list and then in the same place finding them nesting. I did a small study of them and soon we shall send it for publication. I wonder if you have been able to see the birds again? In Baroda last week, I was shocked to see these birds nesting in many places and the population of the birds was tremendous and probably numbered in the thousand.

Here in Rajkot we added the Chestnut Bittern and Yellow Bittern in addition to the nesting of the Red Munia. Otherwise with the drought and near drought conditions in most places, the bird life has diminished considerably. The freshwater marshes of Khijidia are bone dry and even though the migrant waders have shown up, they are in no real volume. The cranes are just a sprinkling and I miss their trumpeting at night as they fly over en masse as in the last year.

I have had news from Parvish but I hear that he is very busy organising in his organization on environmental lectures and courses. I wonder if you have met Ravi Chellam from Madras. Well he is to do a study on the Gir Lion associating himself with the Dehra Dun, Forest Research Institute. He was keen to study the Wild Asses, but the dear Govt. vetoed his plan as it was supposedly too close to the border.

No other news, but I look forward to your letters.

Yours sincerely,



Taej

Taej Mundkur
Junior Research Fellow (UGC)
Department of Biosciences
Saurashtra University
Rajkot 3600005 Gujarat
December 13, 1985

My dear Aasheesh,

I was happy to receive your wedding card and please accept my conagratulations and best wishes for the special occasion.

I suppose you will now be quite busy for some time to come due to your recent change in status and so do have a good time and take your time to reply. I have been out of town for over a month now for my sisters wedding in Poona after which I stayed on for Diwali and my parents Silver wedding anniversary. My sister got married to Vihang Desai, an engineer in New Jersey and so she has gone quite a distance from all of us.

Some time ago the univ. finally gave me the UGC fellowship, the exam for which had passed last year. So I have resigned from the WWF project that I worked for, but I will continue the same work, namely the study on the birds of the salt pans and those that live on the islands of the Gulf. It is very interesting that a number of birds that are known to be migrants linger on throughout the year and so as a result one gets to see the Red-necked Phalarope, Spotted Redshank and Ruffs in bright breeding plumage. I am not sure whether I wrote to you about the finding of the Blackthroated Weaverbirds here, and then three nesting colonies only 10 km from my house. I would be very grateful if you would send me a reprint of your note on the weavers from the BNHS journal. In the future if you do come across these birds, do note if the males have any black chins as we have seen this form here in addition to the white ones.

The drought this year has given us some variations in bird patterns. The number of small waders seen along the gutters has increased and this can be well understood to be the result of the drying up of most of the normally watered tracts. Even the large reservoirs have dried up or are nearly so. The number of birds there has naturally reduced and this year we have had an influx of Skimmers.

A few days ago, Ravi Chellam from Madras who is a popular WWF member was in town. He is very interested in nature education and has recently done a lot of work in the Delhi area and is currently to work on the lions at the Gir. I think you may know him as he has been an instructor at a lot of the camps.

Gujarat has been cold recently and day before we had an all time low of 8.5°C and the strong winds made it worse. Tomorrow I am off for my routine survey to the coast at Navlakhi and Kandla.

Before I end for now I wish you both all the very best in life.

Yours sincerely,



From: Taej Mundkur <taej@wiap.nasionet.net>
To: "Aasheesh Pittie (E-mail)" <aasheesh@hd1.vsnl.net.in>
Subject: Flamingos at Pulicat
Date: Fri, 6 Feb 1998 16:24:17 +0800

Dear Aasheesh,

A very happy Lunar New Year to you, and may you thrive in the year of the tiger. Where the poor animal will, of course seems to be another question of course.

It is different to be back in the office after being in India for a month long holiday and in the Netherlands at our headquarters.

While in India, I visited the Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat, India in early January and was very happy to see juveniles of Greater and Lesser Flamingo that would have had to breed somewhere in the Little Rann. Some of the juveniles of the Lesser Flamingo that we got close to, were incapable of sustained flight and preferred to walk/run away from us. A friend told me that he had visited the Little Rann in Nov 97 and saw thousands of eggs littered in the Rann and collected 15 eggs. So, it does appear that this area is being used regularly by the birds.

In August last year, there was a IUCN meeting in Kenya on conservation of the Lesser Flamingo that was very useful at identifying conservation and research priorities for the species. It is amazing that we have so little definite knowledge about the species. One point was clear, that we need more information about numbers of the species and it was agreed that a special effort in the Asian, African and Western Palaerctic Waterfowl Census is needed to collect information on distribution and numbers.

I had presented a paper on the status of the species in India, attaches is a copy of the draft for your information and kind comments.

While in India, I heard that about 3,000 Lesser Flamingo had been recorded at Pulicat. Is this true, are they regularly seen there, what time of the year, any threats known to the bird at the site, any published information on this? I would appreciate if you could send me any information at the earliest. In the paper, you will see that the criterion for selecting sites of importance is low enough to accomodate this site. Are there any other sites in AP or elsewhere of which you are aware of?

I understand that a report from the meeting is being prepared in March and so I need to send the final draft in the next week. Any comments would be appreciated by email.

With my very best wishes,

Taej

Taej Mundkur
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Home page: <http://ngo.asiapac.net/wetlands>

Date: Sun, 08 Feb 1998 08:12:00 -0800
From: Aasheesh Pittie <aasheesh@hdl.vsnl.net.in>
To: Dr Taej Mundkur <taj@wiap.nasionet.net>
Subject: Lesser Flamingo

Dear Taej,

Nice to hear from you after quite a long time. I hope things are well.

Last year, 1997, AP Forest dept. staff counted 1,850 Lesser Flamingo at Pulicat Bird Sanctuary. This might warrant inclusion of Pulicat. However, I feel the place deserves it as nobody has been able to count it properly ever and there might be vast areas with these birds which are totally overlooked!

If there is anything more I can do, please do let me know.

--

Best wishes and regards,

Aasheesh Pittie <aasheesh@hdl.vsnl.net.in>

Date: Sun, 15 Feb 1998 08:16:20 -0800
From: Aasheesh Pittie <aasheesh@hdl.vsnl.net.in>
To: Dr Taej Mundkur <taej@wiap.nasionet.net>
Subject: Hi!

Dear Taej,

Just a quick reply to yours. The APFD count date was 20-1-1997. Santharam is not on e-mail and I think his count of 6,000 flamingos would mainly be of the Flamingo. Such large numbers of Lesser would have made 'major' news. Will try and get back with more details about development plans at Pulicat, shortly. About my Index also shortly. You sent something as an attached file. My computer could not access it. I can only download something which has been formatted in MSWord, eg., your paper with the last e-mail.

--

Best wishes and regards,

Aasheesh Pittie <aasheesh@hdl.vsnl.net.in>

From: Taej Mundkur <taej@wiap.nasionet.net>
To: "aasheesh@hdl.vsnl.net.in" <aasheesh@hdl.vsnl.net.in>
Subject: RE: Lesser Flamingo
Date: Mon, 16 Feb 1998 08:38:03 +0800

Dear Aasheesh,

Thanks for your immediate response. I am glad to hear from you.

I will add the information into the paper. Do you have a date or month for the observation. In Bombay, I wrote down a figure of 6,000 birds counted by V.Santharam, but cannot remember who told me this. Do you know if Santharam is on email?

Are there any threats to the birds and or site? Are flamingos hunted there? One of Bittus emails mentioned that there was a big port being planned for Pulicat. Would that cause any problems?

It is very good that you have expanded the scope of the Pitta to include information on bird observations of South India. I am interested to know how you are planning to store this information so that it is easily retrievable for place, season or species for example. Can you turn this information into an atlas of bird distribution?

In an earlier mail, you had mentioned that since the publication of your bibliography, (which by the way I find a very useful reference), you had updated this. Does it now include BJNHS, NFB, Stray Feathers, Pavo, Ibis, Forktail and other references? It would certainly be useful to put it up as an online version on a homepage. I do not know how this could be done, let me know if you cannot find out locally, maybe a library can help. Alternatively any of the Indians in a US. univ. on the South Asian Nat. Hist. group could advise on systems available there via the net for this kind of information access.

Today, I went birding in a forest park close to home and watched Crimson Woodpecker, Banded Woodpecker, Buff-necked Woodpecker, Grey and Buff Woodpecker, all in a small area. To end the day, a Black-thighed Falconet watched the view from the top of dead tree. Thought I would whet your appetite to come and visit Malaysia. Well do plan a trip here sometime, you are most welcome to stay with us in Kuala Lumpur - with the SE Asian currency crash, it is supposed to be a great time for foreign tourists.....

Rishad Naoroji is threatening to be here in a few days. The

Date: Mon, 16 Feb 1998 21:10:44 -0800
From: Aasheesh Pittie <aasheesh@hd1.vsnl.net.in>
To: Dr Taej Mundkur <taj@wiap.nasionet.net>
Subject: Pulicat

Hi Taej!

Met the Chief Wildlife Warden yesterday and spoke about Pulicat & Nelapattu at length. According to him, there was never any serious talk about a port at Pulicat. The only threat which existed was from prawn farms, which are at present at a very low key. The best and most important point now is that Pulicat has finally become a legal sanctuary what with the Final Notification to that effect being published in the Gazette! Whew! He said something which is quite interesting. Flamingos are found in thousands in Pulicat, throughout the year! What theories do you have?

He was speaking of Kolleru and do you know what he said? Two months ago he was there and there must have been 3-4 million birds on the water. The man may have been exaggerating, but he is a pucca wildlifer and will not go over-board. Can you imagine that sort of count for the AWB Census. Jesus, those forms do not have enough space for such counts! Next year this is the place on our agenda. "A flock of shovellers passes by you for 5 whole minutes!!

Will get back later about other points in your letter. You rest till then and digest the above!

--

Best wishes and regards,

Aasheesh Pittie <aasheesh@hd1.vsnl.net.in>

From: Taej Mundkur <taej@wiap.nasionet.net>
To: "aasheesh@hdl.vsnl.net.in" <aasheesh@hdl.vsnl.net.in>
Subject: RE: Hi!
Date: Tue, 17 Feb 1998 11:56:14 +0800

Dear Aasheesh,

Thanks, for your note and clarification on the flamingo. Look forward to further info on Pulicat.

Not to worry about the attachment, it was just a cyber cartoon. I note format to send you future attachments.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Taej Mundkur
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Home page: <http://ngo.asiapac.net/wetlands>

-----Original Message-----

From: Aasheesh Pittie [SMTP:aasheesh@hdl.vsnl.net.in]
Sent: Monday, February 16, 1998 12:16 AM
To: Dr Taej Mundkur
Subject: Hi!

Dear Taej,

Just a quick reply to yours. The APFD count date was 20-1-1997. Santharam is not on e-mail and I think his count of 6,000 flamingos would mainly be of the Flamingo. Such large numbers of Lesser would have made 'major' news. Will try and get back with more details about development plans at Pulicat, shortly. About my Index also shortly. You sent something as an attached file. My computer could not access it. I can only download something which has been formatted in MSWord, eg., your paper with the last e-mail.

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Best wishes and regards,

Aasheesh Pittie <aasheesh@hdl.vsnl.net.in>
