

# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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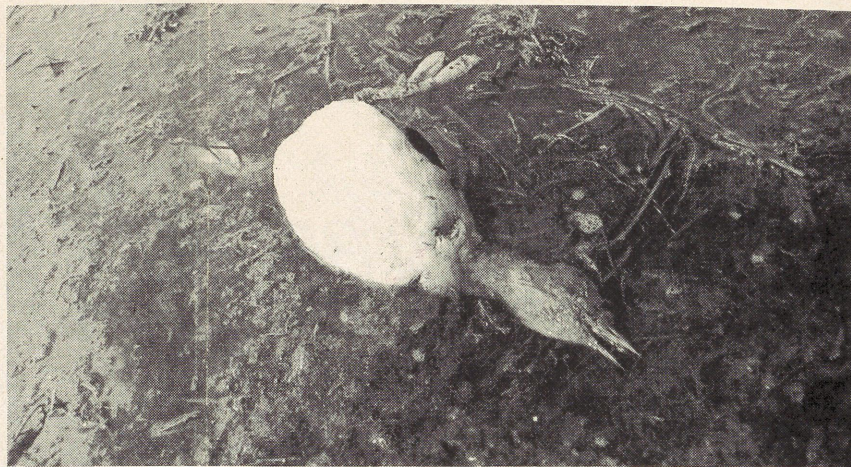


JUNIN GREBE NEWS

A visit by ornithologists to Lake Junin in Peru, only home to one of the most threatened birds in the world, the Junin Grebe *Podiceps taczanowskii*, has not brought encouraging news. Due to terrorist activity, there has been little recent information on this species, making this visit by Thomas Valqui and Javier Barrio, Peruvian ornithologists working for ICBP (funded by the Dillon Ripley Fund) particularly significant.

In 1987, it was estimated that the Junin Grebe population had declined to 200-300 birds, and the species was identified by the 1990 ICBP World Conference as one of 13 birds urgently requiring individual attention.

Although unable to make a population estimate on their short visit, Valqui and Barrio were horrified to find two (possibly three) dead birds on a 2 km stretch of shore in three days. Discussions with a local fisherman revealed



Dead Junin Grebes are washed-up regularly on the shores of the lake (Photo: T. Valqui/ICBP)

that this death toll was not unusual.

The chief cause of the decline of the species is believed to be pollution from mining activities, and changes in the lake's water level due to a hydroelectric plant that supplies the mine. The area is also experiencing an exceptionally dry period and other wildlife of the lake

is also suffering, with dead fish and birds found frequently.

The political situation continues to make any work difficult, but Valqui and Barrio are planning to return to Lake Junin in July to assess the situation fully and determine what can be done to save this species.



Amani Sunbird, one of the threatened species recorded by the team in the Udzungwa Mountains (Painting: N. Arlott)

NEW SPECIES IN TANZANIA

A new species of francolin has been discovered in Tanzania by a team of Danish ornithologists. The new bird, yet to be named, was found in forests on the Udzungwa Mountains, eastern Tanzania. The bird does not appear to be closely related to any other species in the genus, being very distinctive in appearance and the type of habitat in which it was found (montane forest).

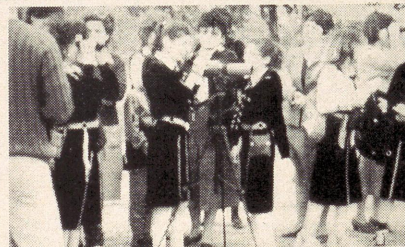
The bird was found during ten months fieldwork by four Danish students, Lars Dinesen, Louis Hansen, Thomas Lehmborg and Jens Otto Svendsen. Their work was part of a Danish research programme on the Eastern Arc Mountains of Tanzania, led by Jon Fjeldsa.

The remote inaccessible Udzungwa Mountains are very little known ornithologically. As well as the new species, the team recorded four threatened endemic species (Iringa Ground Robin *Dryocichloides lowei*, Banded Green Sunbird *Anthreptes rubritorques*, Rufous-winged Sunbird *Nectarinia rufipennis* and Tanzanian Mountain Weaver *Ploceus nicolli*), and three other threatened species (Swynnerton's Forest Robin *Swynnertonia swynnertoni*, Dappled Mountain Robin *Modulatrix orostruthus* and Amani Sunbird *Anthreptes pallidigaster*). This work has served to confirm the importance of the Udzungwa Mountains for endemic and threatened birds, and underlines the significance of the recently gazetted Udzungwa Mountains National Park.

CYPRUS BAN HOLDS FIRM

Last year President Vassiliou of Cyprus took the brave decision, withstanding intensive lobbying by the hunting community, to ban the spring shooting of migratory birds. The ban has also been upheld this year, despite considerable pressure from the hunting associations,

and an approaching general election. President Vassiliou has informed the hunting groups that there is no question of the government changing its mind. At ICBP's European Continental Section Conference it was decided that a strong letter of support should be sent to the President, congratulating him on his government's position.



Cypriot children are encouraged to watch birds rather than shoot them (Photo: ICBP)

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**Editorial****Kihim**

Most readers of this Newsletter must have acquired considerable information about Kihim, the seaside village on the mainland across Bombay harbour, where Salim Ali first discovered the secrets of the nesting habits of the Baya Weaver Bird. During a recent visit to Kihim (3rd to 29th May) I looked over the "AKHBAR BOOK" in which I know that Salim had written many notes relating to the birds of the area. Both for their historical value, and for their intrinsic merit, I thought it would be worthwhile reproducing a few of these in the Newsletter. I do so with a few explanations. I had hoped that it would be possible to reproduce some notes in facsimile because his handwriting is so handsome. Unfortunately, white ants have done considerable damage to the pages—some of the crucial ones—so reproduction is not possible. But a section of one page is reproduced in this issue. I quote :-

"I shall confine myself merely to certain happenings in the sphere of local ornithology. There is nothing unusual in the happenings but they will be interesting records after 50 years. The generation now in the bud, of whom I have high hopes will find them so (- I hope). It is rather early as yet to say how many, and which, of the youngsters who are enthusiastic at the moment will stay the course and grow old with the same keenness for birds. I feel certain, however, that even if most of them fall by the wayside they will at least be able to bequeath to their children and grand-children the correct prescription for telling a woodpecker from a duck. This in itself will be a definite advance...." (Several of the youngsters named by Salim have in fact become keen birdwatchers. Editor.)

"A pair of Honey Buzzards had been nesting between "YALI" and "RETREAT", two houses on the beach, for the last twelve years to my knowledge - but never more than

Arrd <sup>to Nov</sup> 7 Nov leaving "just now" - 9 Nov (2 p.m) 1954  
 A single Desert Chat (Oenanthe deserti) seen yesterday  
 among feeling lost & forlorn in unaccustomed & unusual  
 surroundings - flying along the beach. Has never been  
 seen in his neighbourhood before. Salim Ali

The first attempt to catch birds with a mist net ended  
 empty. Between all yesterday (15 Nov.) & up to 2 p.m. today  
 only 3 birds were caught i.e. 1 Spotted Babbler, 1 Grey  
 Blyth's Reed Warbler. 1st & 3rd were ringed. No. 2 got  
 after much fighting & drawing blood. With a number  
 of enthusiastic netters, I am sure some very useful  
 could be done here in the intervals between eating  
 sleeping.

6/xi/1960

Salim

pair nesting every year in the same place since he was  
 boy - over 50 yrs. ago - Never has he seen more than  
 one pair about, & never have they succeeded in raising

one pair. On 10th May, a 14 day old chick from this year's  
 nest in "Retreat" compound was ringed. If it grows up, it  
 may furnish some clue as regards the nesting pair next year.  
 Does the same pair nest here year after year? Is its place  
 taken in part or wholly by the (new) born youngsters? Or  
 do altogether new birds occupy the place, and what  
 happens to the yearly progeny? The same problem needs  
 solving re the "YALI" pair of Whitebellied Sea Eagles.  
 Rajah, the emeritus "YALI" mali, tells me he has seen "this"  
 pair nesting every year in the same place since he was a boy  
 - over 50 years ago. Never has he seen more than this one  
 pair about, and never have they succeeded in raising a  
 family! "Let the credit rest with the relator" as Babar would  
 have said, but the matter is not without strangeness and  
 certainly worthy of investigation. This season (i.e.  
 December 1942) the Eagles had shifted to a Casuarina in the

S.W. corner of Shahinda's  
 land. There were two eggs  
 in the nest - about 100 ft.  
 up - which vanished after  
 a week or so - rather  
 unaccountably.  
 Thereafter the birds lost  
 interest in the nest but  
 they are still in the same  
 neighbourhood. The  
 desertion by the Eagles of  
 their age-long nest site -  
 the beehive Casuarina  
 above the well N of Yali  
 Bungalow - was  
 undoubtedly due to the  
 large influx of  
 White-backed Vultures  
 that suddenly took a fancy  
 to Yali compound, and  
 cluttered all the fine  
 Casuarinas with their  
 large and filthy nests. The  
 ire of the "Squire" was  
 justly aroused.

He loaded his gun  
 And slew a dozen

which sent the rest  
 a-packing. It is hoped  
 that the Sea Eagles will  
 now return."

All this is getting too  
 long - so here are a few  
 items in brief. 2 flocks  
 Flamingoes (50 and 26)  
 flying N - 23 April. 2 pairs  
 Green Bee-eaters and 1

White-breasted Kingfisher nesting in "Al Murad"  
 compound.

1 Fulvous Fruit Bat (*Rousettus Leschentaulti*) ringed by  
 me in April (43) in an old cave in Elephanta. It was found  
 struggling with black ants by Shamoon in 'Yali' compound  
 on 13th May. Believe it or not. Pitta 1, Blue-cheeked (or  
 Blue-tailed?) Bee-eaters appeared overnight 24th and 19th  
 May respectively, after rainy and stormy nights.

Last Blyth's Reed-Warbler at Bhombar 25 May. 1 pair  
 Quaker Babbler, for first time ever near "Latifia" 12 - 19  
 May

Arr. 23 April  
 Dep. 28 May

Sd/- Salim Ali  
 27 May 1943

### A Vulture Eating Community

The article by K M Rao about vultures being eaten in A.P. shows the strong digestive systems of some people. The vulture is well known for its ability to relish and survive on putrid flesh, but apparently the metabolism of the vulture converts decomposed flesh into palatable meat. It will be a pity if vultures are killed for their meat. Who will then do the scavenging?

### White Winged Wood Duck

In his article B K Talukdar gives cheering news about protective measures for the W W W Duck. He refers to Jerdon's reference to the bird in the *Birds of India* published in 1864. In Jerdon's days the bird was known as *Casarca Leucopters*. I saw a pair of these birds in Slimbridge in 1972 at the Wildfowl Trust. Assamese tropical conditions were beautifully simulated under the direction of Sir Peter Scott who was responsible for the captive breeding project. It would be appreciated if some reader of this Newsletter in England would give us the latest news about this captive breeding effort.

### Captive Breeding of Endangered Birds

Captive breeding of endangered birds with the object of releasing them in the wild is leading to some remarkable successes. Aamir Ali, 14 Ch. de la Tourelle, 1209 Geneva, writes :

"Zafar will be interested to know that last Sunday I went on an outing with the Zoological Society of Geneva to see the Lammergeiers that have been released in the French Alps. We were lucky and saw four. The leader of our outing had been associated with the release of these birds and so not only knew where to look for them but knew the individuals by name. One bird is kept in a cage in an old farmhouse because it seems he refuses to reproduce and shows no interest in females of the species; they think he has got too used to human beings and a quiet life and would not be able to fend for itself in the wild.

We saw one of the birds dropping a bone on stones to break it; all very thrilling."

Many years ago I saw a Lammergeier in Mussoorie carry away and drop a bone. The birds in Mussoorie had better watch out and multiply, otherwise they will be subjected to captive breeding!

### Obituaries

It is with very great regret that we learnt about the death of Prof. K.K. Neelakantan, Prof. Ramesh M. Naik. and Mr. H.B. Papanna. Prof. Neelakantan who retired as professor of English, Kerala University, was the author of a 640 page Malayalam book on 'Birds of Kerala' published by Kerala Sahithya Academi, Trichur in 1958. Earlier it had appeared as a serial in a Malayalam daily and had delighted

numerous readers. Prof. Neelakantan was one of the most competent birdwatchers of Kerala and at the time of his death on the 14th of June, he had just finished his work on the updating of Salim Ali's "Birds of Kerala". I am sure that some of his close associates will have the volume published for it is obviously going to be an important work of reference.

Prof. R.M. Naik who died on 8th December 1991 in Rajkot, had been ailing for some time. At the time of his death he had just retired as the Head of the Department of Biosciences of Saurashtra University.

Mr. H.B. Papanna who died on 2nd July 1992 in Bangalore, was an avid birdwatcher and photographer. His photograph of two poachers carrying away a White Stork shot by them, has appeared in many leading magazines. He had vast field experience and had collected valuable data on the nesting cycles of flycatchers, lapwings and woodpeckers.

These three eminent ornithologists have succeeded in enthusing a number of their young colleagues in birdwatching, and this is the best memorial they leave behind.

### The Ornithological Society of India

In the past issues of the Newsletter, mention has been made of the formation of the Ornithological Society of India mainly due to the determination of Dr. Mrs. Asha Chandola Saklani of Garhwal University. In November 1991, an ad hoc committee was established with Dr. Saklani as Secretary General and Mr. Zafar Futehally as the President. To further this project a meeting was held in Bangalore on 23rd July, where over 30 senior birdwatchers, mainly from Bangalore, assembled to meet Dr. Saklani and to get her views regarding further operations.

It was clear that this Society is meant to act as a coordinating institution to motivate and to get the best out from the many regional birdwatching groups which have come up in the last few years. If the O.S.I. can achieve its objective and stimulate action by its members, it could achieve a great deal.

The O.S.I. would also be interested in hosting the next meeting of the International Ornithological Congress in India. This possibility is still a long way off. The next I.O.C. meeting will be held in Vienna in 1994, and there are many countries who are interested in hosting the one in 1998. If the O.S.I. really performs well on the ground, India could have the pleasure of having an eminent group of ornithologists of the world attending the conference here. The presence of eminent people from abroad will certainly give a great fillip to ornithological studies in India.

## THE STATUS OF THE WHITE WINGED WOOD DUCK IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

*BIBHAB KUMAR TALUKDAR, Ever Green, Samanway Path, Survey Basishta Road, P.O. Beltola, Guwahati 781 028, Assam*

### Introduction

A ghostly wail floating sound was heard in many parts of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh up to 1960s. But at present that ghostly sound is missing gradually from the forests of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. This was the call of the White Winged Wood Duck (*Cairina scutulata*). In Assam this duck is popularly known as Deohah (Spirit Duck).

*Cairina scutulata* was first described by S. Muller in Java in 1839 and the English name, the White Winged Wood Duck was assigned to it by Blyth in 1849 from Burma. T.C. Jerdon in his book "Birds of India" in 1864 recorded the duck as the White Winged Shieldrake but he was not sure if it was found in India or only in Burma. Their range at the past was from western Assam through Burma, Malaysia to Sumatra and Java. Dr. D.R. Wells in his book "Birds of Malaysia" stated that there were no recent records of the duck in Malaysia. Though the situation in Indonesia was uncertain, but a decade ago Mr. Holmes has rediscovered this duck in South-East Sumatra. However according to Dr. Andy Green (1992) the WWWDuck is recorded in Sumatra and Java and reported to be present in six of the eight Sumatran provinces. In Bangladesh, the duck is reported from Northern and Southern Chittagong Hill tracts. In Vietnam only a single duck observed in 1990 mid winter Waterfowl counts in Nam Bai Bet Tien National Park.

### Habit and Habitat

The WWWDuck is a large and comparatively long duck with black body (in case of male) and dark chestnut brown (in case of female), conspicuous white patches on the wings. The eye colour is either red or orange. In N.E. India the WWWDucks live in Tropical wet evergreen forest, Tropical semi-evergreen forest, Montane wet temperate forest, Tropical moist-deciduous forest and nearby forest streams, small sluggish rivers, riverpools amongst forest, swamps, beels and sometimes in Rice fields. This duck is very shy and nocturnal in their habit and it is infact very difficult to locate them due to its nocturnal habit. In N.E. India, the duck is found active from evening to early morning. During the day time the ducks prefer to remain in the dense forest and shady places.

The WWWDuck nests high up in trees. Generally most of their nests were observed in Hollock tree (*Terminalia myriocarpa*). Sometimes the ducks also make their nest on

the holes of Nahar tree (*Mesua ferrea*) and Hollong trees (*Dipterocarpus macrocarpus*) and Teak tree (*Tectona grandis*) in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The ducks rely on their natural camouflage (Mimicry) and it is very difficult to locate them in the gloomy variegated light of the forest. As the ducks fly swiftly along the beels and streams, it is often very difficult to estimate how far they might be or how high they are or at what speed they move. At dawn, when these ducks are ready to fly again towards the dense forest, they use their vibrant wailing call to get the attention of their partners, so that they do not become separated in the gloomy variegated light of the thick jungle.

### Food

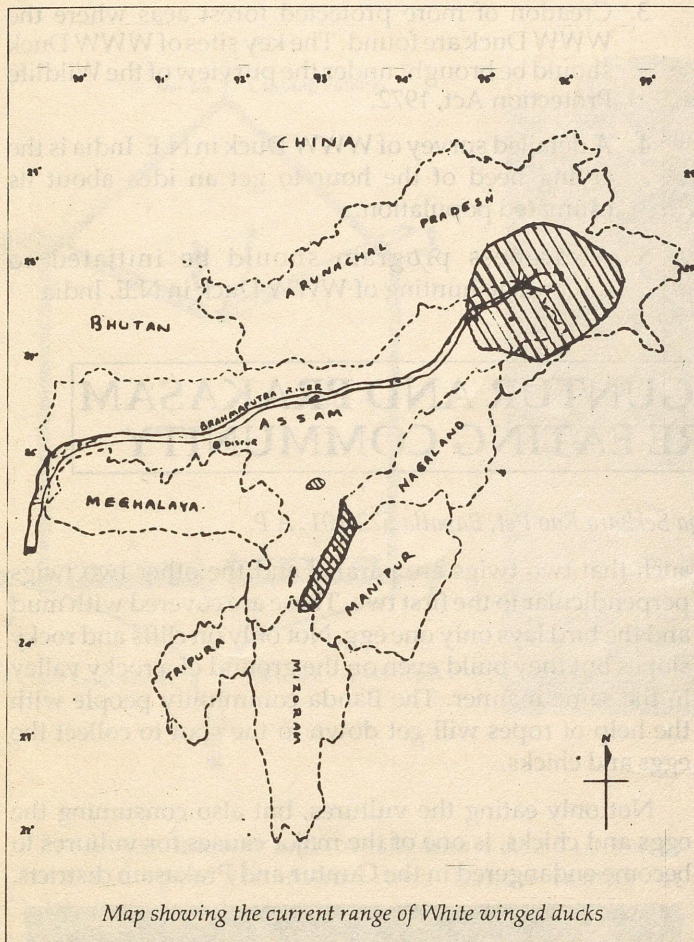
The WWWDuck generally take mollusca, small fish, seeds, insects, Annelids and small snakes as food. WWWDuck is also believed to take rice pest as food as the ducks were found in many occasions in the dried or burnt paddy field of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

### Conservation Measures Taken

In 1937 the Assam Government, realising the reduction in the numbers of WWWDuck banned all shootings of the duck. In 1962 WWF listed WWWDuck as a species in danger of extinction. From 1975 the CCF (Assam) has banned all collection of ducklings and eggs from forests. *Cairina scutulata* is now one of the most endangered species of Anatidae in the world. This duck is also listed on Appendix 1 of the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). WWWDuck is listed in IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals as vulnerable. But the duck should be upgraded to the status of endangered duck in the world as its population is decreasing very rapidly. The WWWDuck is also listed in Schedule I of Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

### Present Status

In Assam, the Dibru-saikhowa Reserved forest was declared as Wildlife Sanctuary in the year 1986 to protect the WWWDuck. Dibru-saikhowa is a primarily riverain area which includes within its limit the merging of lofty Lohit and Debang rivers to form the mighty Brahmaputra. This is truly wild area comprising very dense moist forest formations and large expanses of marshland, with tall reed salix associations making it a safe haven for the extremely endangered WWWDuck.



But in October 1989, in the same Dibru-saikhowa, the WWW Duck was threatened with extinction, as the Assam Government decided to lease out fishery mahals inside this wildlife sanctuary. At this time to rescue the WWW Duck from a possible extinction, Aaranyak Nature Club of Guwahati came forward and filed a writ petition at Gauhati High Court against the decision of the State Government to lease out fishery mahals inside the Dibru-saikhowa wildlife sanctuary. Aaranyak Nature Club accused the State Government of violating the Article 48 (A) and 51A (g) of the Constitution of India, Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, Forest Conservation Act 1980 and Environment Protection Act 1986. Due to the legal cum publicity efforts of the Club, the State Government had to cancel the damaging decision of leasing out fishery mahals in Dibru-saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary with effect from 1st April 1990. Due to the Aaranyak's initiative, the WWW Duck is now safe in Dibru-saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary. In Assam the WWW Duck is confined to Dibrugarh, Tinsukia and Lakhimpur and Dhemaji Districts and may be at Cachar, Hailakandi and North Cachar Districts.

In Arunachal Pradesh the WWW Duck is reported mainly from Siang, Dibang and Tirap Valley. The

Namdapha National Park, Mehao Wildlife Sanctuary and D'Ering Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary of Arunachal Pradesh provide shelters to this retiring species of Anatidae.

Within N.E. India, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh provides shelter to the most endangered WWW Duck. But the strong possibilities to find this bird in other states of N.E. India cannot be ruled out. Mainly the Innerline forest of Assam along the border of Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram, may have the WWW Duck, a controversy which is yet to be solved by detailed field survey. This doubt arose when the author found two WWW Duck in the Jiri Forest of Assam which is situated near the Manipur Border.

Since 1989, the WWW Duck are mainly observed in the following places of N.E. India :

Location	Coordinates	State
Dibru-saikhowa WL Sanct.	27.40N, 95.24E	Assam
Phillobari Reserve Forest	27.31N, 95.42E	Assam
Joypoore Reserve Forest	27.14N, 95.24E	Assam
Bordubi Tea Estate	27.35N, 95.41E	Assam
Jiri Reserve Forest	24.55N, 93.16E	Assam
Doomdooma Reserve Forest	27.36N, 95.42E	Assam
Subansiri River	27.31N, 94.17E	Assam
Dholajan	27.46N, 95.28E	Assam
Namdapha National Park	27.30N, 96.20E	Arunachal Pradesh
Mehao WL Sanctuary	28.15N, 95.42E	Arunachal Pradesh
D'Ering WL Sanctuary	27.55N, 95.25E	Arunachal Pradesh

In addition to the above sites, some unconfirmed report reveals that WWW Duck may also be found in the following places :

1. Innerline Reserved Forest along Manipur, Nagaland & Mizoram
2. Barail and North Cachar Hills Reserved Forest specially in the area known as Bombaithal.
3. River Dhaleswari in Hailakandi District of Assam.
4. Namchick Reserved Forest in Dibrugarh District of Assam.
5. Upper Noa Dihing of Arunachal Pradesh.
6. Pasighat area of Arunachal Pradesh.

#### Measures Needed to Save WWW Duck

The following measures will play important role in the protection and conservation of WWW Duck in N.E. India specially in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

1. WWW Duck should be declared as the State Bird of Assam immediately and this act will help in the conservation awareness to protect and preserve this retiring species of Anatidae.
2. Strict enforcement of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, WWW Duck being included in the Schedule I species.

Unfortunately till date Assam has not made a Wildlife Protection Rule!

3. Creation of more protected forest areas where the WWW Duck are found. The key sites of WWW Duck should be brought under the purview of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
4. A detailed survey of WWW Duck in N.E. India is the crying need of the hour to get an idea about its estimated population.
5. Awareness program should be initiated to discourage hunting of WWW Duck in N.E. India.

## VULTURES ENDANGERED IN GUNTUR AND PRAKASAM DISTRICTS (AP) and VULTURE EATING COMMUNITY

KOKA MRUTYUNJAYA RAO, WB-1-15, Raja Sekhara Rao Pet, Bapatla 522 101, A P

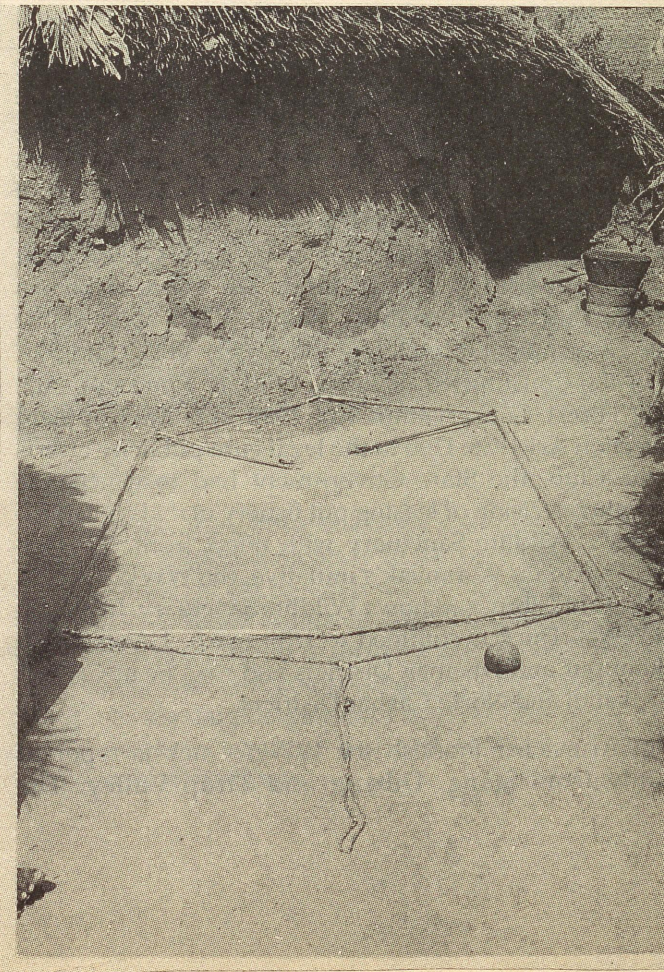
Ever since I came to Bapatla in 1981 I could not see vultures in and around Bapatla and surrounding villages. Bapatla is a town in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh about 80 km from Vijayawada on the Vijayawada-Madras railway line. However, I often found carcasses (with the skin stripped) left for stray dogs and crows. Enquiries revealed that there is a community named "Banda" locally called Bandollu. The banda community eats vultures, crows and other carrion eating birds. They do not catch or hunt other species of birds including waterfowl such as ducks, egrets, storks, etc.

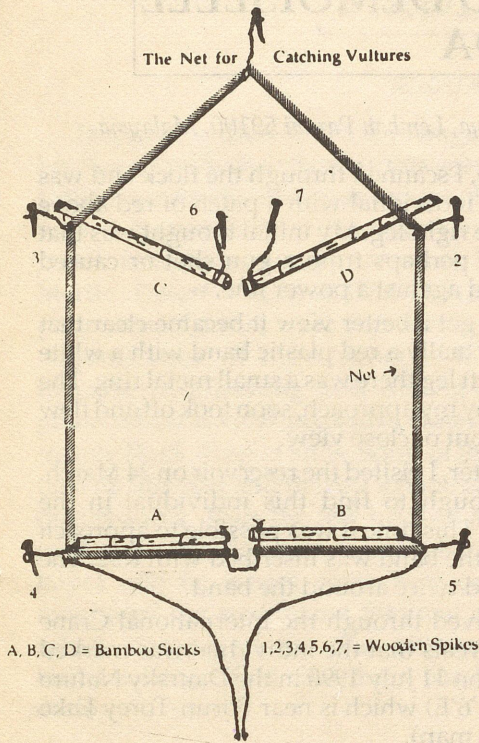
I came to know that at present only a few families are residing at Ammanabrolu in Prakasam district 50 km from Bapatla. I went there on 27.6.90 and 14.7.90 and met an old man named Kathula Venkaiah aged 75 years. He said there are eight families at Ammanabrolu and about 300 families in Guntur and Prakasam districts. He said even at Ammanabrolu and surrounding villages vultures are not seen for the last 10 to 12 years. As the vultures were not available, the vulture catching nets were kept in a corner of the house and the nets were completely worn out. At the time when I met Venkaiah, his grandson, about 10 years old, brought two crow chicks from a crow nest to consume them. Venkaiah along with his other community men used to catch vultures not only at Ammanabrolu and surrounding villages, but also at Konijetikonda, Kodisenakonda and at Boyanakonda far from his place which are near Chilakaluripet and Narasaraopet in Guntur district.

He said the vultures used to nest at Konijetikonda, Kodisenakonda and Boyanakonda hills, and he describes the nesting procedure as follows. In cliffs and rocky slopes wherever they find a little place in between rocks, the vultures gather four twigs and put them in a cross form,

such that two twigs are parallel and the other two twigs perpendicular to the first two. These are covered with mud and the bird lays only one egg. Not only on cliffs and rocky slopes but they build even on the ground of a rocky valley in the same manner. The Banda community people with the help of ropes will get down to the spot to collect the eggs and chicks.

Not only eating the vultures, but also consuming the eggs and chicks, is one of the major causes for vultures to become endangered in the Guntur and Prakasam districts.





For further enquiry and investigation I sent a person to Chilakaluripet. He found one Banda family at Chilakaluripet and learnt the vultures at present are not nesting at Konigetikonda and at Kodisenakonda, and they have not been seen for the last ten years at Chilakaluripeta area. There is a report from the Village Development Officer that she has observed 4 to 5 vultures after a cyclone, eating a buffalo carcass on the outskirts of Bapatla. (The cyclone was on 9.5.90 and 10.5.90). After the cyclone I found several carcasses eaten by stray dogs and crows and decaying by themselves and not eaten by vultures.

Mr Venkaiah has been asked for the species of vultures they caught. He said now and then King Vulture and Scavenger Vultures are also found in the nets.

I took some photographs of the model net utilised for catching small sized prey birds. The photographs show 1) how the net is spread on the ground with wooden spikes, 2) how vultures were seen in the net after being caught. The net utilised for catching the vultures resembles a Badminton net. It is capable of catching at least ten vultures at a time.

#### Procedure for catching the Vultures

The sketch shows the arrangement of the net for catching the vultures. The net consists of 4 bamboo sticks

A, B, C and D. The sticks C and D are 6" longer than A and B. The one end of A and B sticks were tied to net and the other ends will be tied with each other with a rope keeping 3" to 4" gap between the sticks such that they will move easily while pulling the net. One end of C and D sticks tied to 6th and 7th spike. The other 5 corners of the net will be tied to the wooden spikes 1,2,3,4 and 5. There is a rope about 20 meters length continued from the net.

The trapper will sit at the end of the 20 meter rope such that the trapper will not be visible making a bush or other article as a hide. The No.1 spike, the rope and the trapper lie in straight line. A groove about 1" to 2" depth was dug along the net and the net is kept in the groove and covered with sand and soil. The sticks and the spikes are also covered with sand and soil. Big pieces of buffalo meat or small parts of a dead animal are kept in the centre of the net as a bait. Sometimes if the carcass is of sufficient size the net will be spread around it. After arrival or gathering of Vultures, about 10 numbers near the bait, the rope will be pulled. The net will form as a tent shape and vultures will be caught in the net.

Further study is required to get the status and breeding places of vultures in the coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh.

## OBSERVATION OF A COLOUR BANDED DEMOISELLE CRANE IN GUJARAT, INDIA

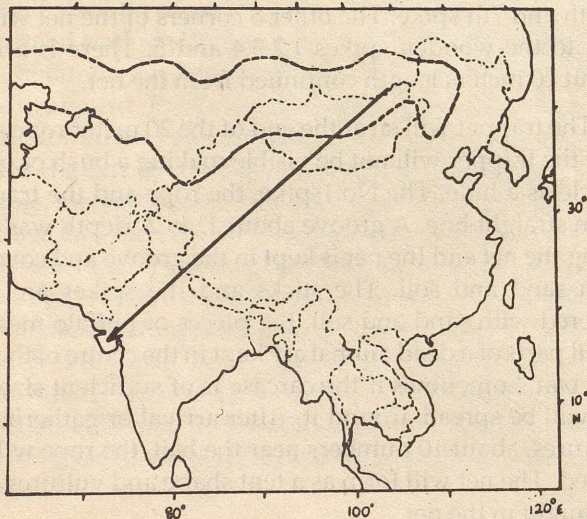
TAEJ MUNDKUR, Waterbird and Flyway Projects Officer, AWB, University of Malaya, Lembah Pantai 59100, Malaysia

The precise origin and migratory routes of cranes in India have always been a mystery. What is known is that Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo* and Common Crane *Gurs grus* migrate southwards into north west India over the mountain passes of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and through Nepal in the east (Ali and Ripley, 1983 Handbook). Cranes migrating north from Gujarat have been observed flying over the Great Rann of Kachchh.

So far, ringing of cranes in India has largely been on an experimental basis, and attempts have recently been made by the Bombay Natural History Society and Saurashtra University in Rajkot. As far as I am aware, there have been no recoveries of ringed cranes in India, and the present note deals with observations made in Gujarat of a juvenile Demoiselle colour banded in east Russia.

On 10 February 1992, I visited the Nyari reservoir (22°15'N, 70°43'E) near Rajkot city, as part of a routine check on the Indian River Terns *Sterna aurantia* that were nesting on small rock islands. Adjacent to the colony was a large flat island where Demoiselle and Common cranes roosted every afternoon during winter.

It was late afternoon and there were about 75 Demoiselle at the roost and several thousand more scattered round the rest of the muddy shores of the reservoir.



Outline map of Asia with the possible direction of movement of a colour banded Demoiselle Crane, banded at Daursky Nature Reserve, Russia and observed in Rajkot, India. The boundary of the breeding range (in bold dashed line) is adapted from Ali and Ripley (1983, Handbook).

Using a telescope, I scanned through the flock and was surprised to see one individual with a patch of red above the tarsal joint on the right leg. My initial thought was that it was fresh blood - perhaps from a gun shot or caused when the bird grazed against a power line.

Moving closer to get a better view it became clear that the red patch was actually a red plastic band with a white inscription. On the left leg there was a small metal ring. The birds were alarmed by my approach, soon took off and flew across the reservoir out of close view.

About a month later, I visited the reservoir on 24 March. I was fortunate enough to find this individual in the roosting flock again. This time it was possible to approach closer and note that the band was inscribed with K32. The number was repeated twice around the band.

Information received through the International Crane Foundation, USA reveals that the individual was marked by Russian workers on 11 July 1990 in the Daursky Nature Reserve (49°9'N, 115°6'E) which is near Borun-Torey Lake in Transbaikalia (see map).

Daursky is considerably further east than we had originally suspected our Demoiselle Cranes in Gujarat to originate from. A single observation such as this only allow us to pinpoint the origin of the individual.

In recent years, ornithological organizations in the region have been using a variety of color marking techniques; dyes, bands, flags, and wingtags for studying migratory routes of birds. For larger species, it is often possible to see the colour mark or flag through a pair of binoculars. For the smaller species it would be necessary to use a telescope. The success of these studies depends completely on the reports of sightings of the birds by observers in the field. I would encourage fellow birdwatchers to keep an eye out for colour marked birds and report these findings, thereby contributing to very important studies. Sightings may be sent to the NLB, the BNHS or me to follow up. Many more such observations will be required before a clearer picture of migration routes emerge.

Of added interest is the fact that three Hooded Crane *Grus monacha*, colour-banded at the Daursky Nature Reserve at the same time, were observed the following January by staff of the Yamashina Institute of ornithology in a famous wintering site near Izumi City in Japan. This species has very rarely been recorded in east India.

I am grateful to Dr George Archibald of the International Crane Foundation in USA and Dr Kiyooki Ozaki of the Yamashina Institute of Ornithology in Japan for providing the relevant information.

## BIRDING AT THE ADAYAR ESTUARY

*B. RAJASEKHAR, Type 5/6A, CLRI Qtrs, Adayar, Madras 600 020*

In sharp contrast to Vedanthangal bird sanctuary, the birding at the Adayar Estuary this year has been pretty bad. One reason for this of course was the absence of Santharam, who is responsible for the over 180 species listed here, which include some very rare ones like the Dusky Crag Martin, Desert Wheatear, Crab Plover, etc. However the poor activity this year has been mainly due to the denotification of the sanctuary, thus allowing for an increase in poaching and fishing activities. I myself observed on several occasions fishermen trapping birds, mainly Black winged Stilts. Some of the usual birds did not turn up this year and the rest left too early due to the heavy disturbances. Thus the few birdwatchers of Madras who until now showed some interest here, have given up all hopes and no longer come here on their weekends. I monitored the area taking frequent counts this year and when compared to the observations of earlier birdwatchers, I find that there has been a considerable decline.

But what most people fail to understand is that, restoring the status of the sanctuary would help little to bring back the activity. This is because, it is not waters of the Estuary alone that contribute to the ecosystem, but the vast open fields or meadows too. These fields which serve as nesting as well as feeding grounds for the birds do not come under the sanctuary, but under private ownership. And with plans to construct a major complex here, all is lost. Already, even before any structures have come up, the mere presence of the workers has degraded the place to such an extent that so far no nesting has been observed. We have to wait and see how the Lapwings fare. This year there were no Oystercatchers, Flamingoes or Curlews and only

about 6 Red Shanks and far too few of the other birds. I have listed below the maximum numbers of birds seen this year at the Estuary.

At the rate at which things are taking place, there is hardly anything one can do but to sit back and envy birdwatchers like Santharam as they narrate their experiences of long ago. Once he had written in a journal."....A cool breeze was blowing from the sea as I walked towards...". Now all that such cool whiffs can cause is a shudder up your spine as the Estuary becomes yet another victim of mankind's greed.

I am grateful to Santharam for having introduced me to the Estuary and will be thankful to all those who can help solve this problem.

Anticipating the death of the sanctuary, I have done some video filming of the birds this year and hope that it will serve as a record of a sanctuary that was.

### MAXIMUM NUMBERS OF THE BIRDS SEEN HERE THIS YEAR (1992)

Golden Plovers	1623	Little Stilts	1826
Little ringed Plover	1263	Black winged stilts	725
Brownheaded Gulls	140	Black tailed Godwits	137
Marsh sandpiper	120	Kentish plover	51
Little Egrets	39	Sand Plover	35
Avocets	35	Wood Sandpiper	7
Redshank	6	Common Sandpiper	5
Pond Heron	3	Median Egret	3
White wagtail	1	Marsh Harrier	1

and other common birds.

## THE LESSER COUCAL —A LESS-KNOWN BIRD

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P.O. NAMEER, 1st M.Sc., (Forestry) College of Forestry, Vellanikkara 680 654, Kerala*

The campus of the Kerala Veterinary College, located at Mannuthy, six kilometers to the east of Trichur town encompasses an area of about 115 ha. Of this, nearly half of the area (55 ha) is under fodder-grass cultivation. About 40 ha are cultivated or under orchards, the principal crops being paddy, banana, coconut, mango etc. The rest of the campus (20 ha) has buildings, roads, scrub, canals and ponds. The terrain is plain to hilly. Though the campus is highly modified by the agricultural and sylvopastoral

systems, there are a number of remnant indigenous moist-deciduous and evergreen tree species. The area surrounding the campus are mainly agricultural lands. Rubber plantations are seen along the eastern and southern boundaries of the campus.

Despite the small area and modified vegetation, this campus is quite rich in birdlife. About 120 species of birds including 27 migrants have been recorded by Nameer. The

family cuculidae is well-represented in the campus. Seven of the fourteen species of cuckoos recorded in "Birds of Kerala" are seen here. They are: Common Koel, Common Hawk-Cuckoo, Indian Cuckoo, Baybanded Cuckoo, Plaintive Cuckoo, Greenbilled Malkoha, Common Crowpheasant or Coucal and Lesser Crowpheasant. Among these, the last mentioned is perhaps the least known and, in our opinion, greatly overlooked over much of its range. In this note, we describe our observations on the Lesser Coucal with the hope that it would also help others in identifying the species.

The descriptions given in the note are based mainly on our observations on 11 October, 1989, 22 August and 15 September 1991.

#### Habitat

The Lesser Coucal (*Centropus toulou*) was observed more often in the grassy habitat provided by the fodder farms. It appeared to prefer areas with grass of about 1 m or so in height and was seldom noticed in fields where grass was sparse or harvested. It was seen, at times, perched on the small shrubs bordering the grass-lands but usually perched on grass stalks and also seen on the ground, moving among the grass. On a few occasions it was also

#### Size and identification

The Lesser Coucal is distinctly smaller and appears to be a "compact edition" of the larger crowpheasant. The proportion of the tail length in relation to the body length appeared smaller in the Lesser Coucal. On one occasion, we were able to judge the size of this coucal with a Spotted Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*) perched next to it and we found the coucal was just about 5 cm (2 in) longer than the dove.

In colouration, the bird resembled the Common Crowpheasant but with the following differences: The chestnut colour appeared to be duller and covered the wings and upper back (intra-scapular areas). We could not see the white tail-tip said to be a diagnostic feature by Dr. Salim Ali in 'Birds of Kerala'. This may be due to the broken tail-tips noticed in some of the individuals. One individual we saw with intact tail feathers had at least two central feathers dark brownish grey with irregular and pale white (not pure white) bands. (Stuart Baker in the "Fauna of British Indian Birds" mentions that the tail is "tipped narrowly with white or rufous and faintly cross-rayed"). The legs and beak were blackish and the iris appeared darkish (and not crimson as publications indicate). This may be due to the light conditions and/or the age of the birds seen.

One individual (in fact the first ever individual seen) by Nameer on 11 October 1989 was distinctly different in colouration and was perhaps a juvenile bird. It was very similar to the one illustrated in 'Birds of Kerala'. The

upperparts were rufous, the ventral region being slightly barred. The tail was black, the beak brownish to flesh-coloured, iris brown to black and legs, black.

#### Calls

The birds were quite vocal, especially in the early morning and late evening period. Calls were uttered from an exposed perch-grass-stalk, bamboo, etc. The common call-note was a series of 5-6 "whoops". Of these, the first two "whoops" were uttered somewhat in a slow tempo and from the third "whoop", the tempo was slightly faster. These calls were rather weak, lacking the deep resonance and volume of the regular call-notes of the common crowpheasant. This call was rendered with the bill closed and the bird would bend down its head while calling.

The second call-note heard less often could be described as "Kurook" (as given in the "Handbook") or as "Kulook" or "kirook". This invariably followed the series of "whoops", but many times was dispensed of. This note was heard in runs of 4,6,7,9 or 10. A complete set of both calls lasted 12 seconds or less in duration. These latter notes were somewhat reminiscent of the "kutroo" calls of the Green Barbet, but ~~not in the wooded habitats~~ calls were rendered with head raised and bill opened. Mr P.S. Sivaprasad successfully recorded both these calls using a parabolic reflector.

#### Other comments

The lesser Coucal was seen spending considerable time inactive, just perched, especially in the late afternoons. The bird was seen jerking up its wings and tail for several (5-10) minutes after landing on a bush and the bamboo stalk. The bird was not too shy and often permitted good observations.

At least five pairs of Lesser Coucals are estimated to be present in the Mannuthy Campus. We have unconfirmed sight records of these birds from Periyar Tiger Reserve (Mangala Devi Temple area) and Silent Valley. The birds are also seen in the Vellanikkara campus of the Kerala Agricultural University, close to Mannuthy.

From our brief observations it appears that the Lesser Coucal prefers grasslands. Because of its superficial resemblance to the common crowpheasant, the bird is perhaps overlooked. The size, calls and, to some extent, the habitat should help in distinguishing the Lesser Coucal.

#### Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Prof. K.K. Neelakantan who gave valuable hints which helped in the critical identification of the Lesser Coucal. We also thank Mr. P.S. Sivaprasad who recorded the calls of the Lesser Coucal and accompanied us in the field.

## DISTRIBUTION OF PAINTED SPURFOWL IN KARNATAKA

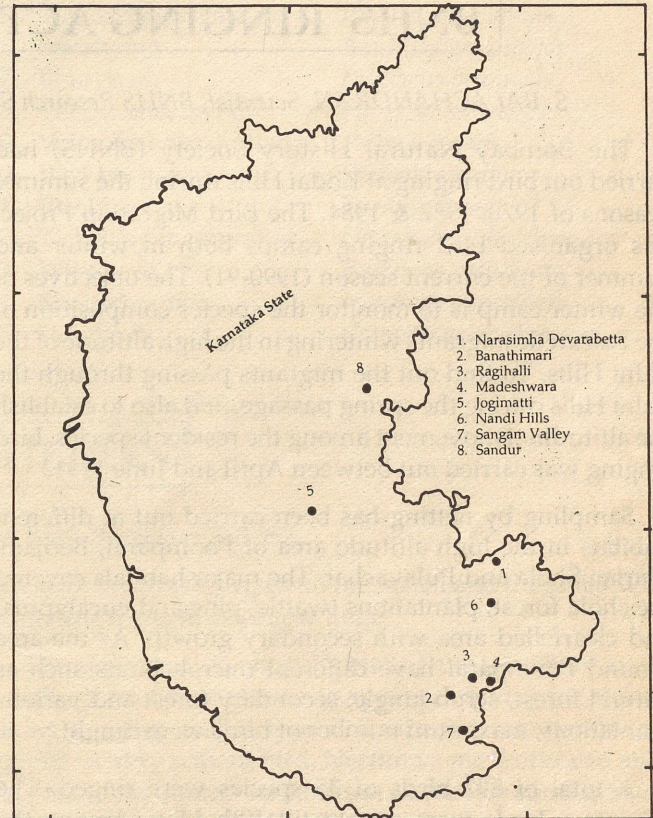
J.N. PRASAD, S. KARTHIKEYAN and T.S. SRINIVASA, C/o. Merlin Nature Club, 13, 8th Cross, 30th Main,  
J.P. Nagar, I Phase, Bangalore 560 078 and  
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GKVK Campus, Bangalore 560 065

The Painted Spurfwowl *Galloperdix lunulata* (Valenciennes) is known to occur in the entire Peninsula south of Ganges (Ripley, 1982), commoner in the central and eastern parts of the Peninsula than western (Ali and Ripley, 1987). Range largely overlaps and jigsaws confusingly with that of the Red Spurfwowl *G. spadicea*, but as a rule Painted Spurfwowl is more addicted to drier, rockier foothills and broken terrain covered with dense impenetrable thorn scrub (dominated by Lantana, Pterelobium, Mimosa, Acacia etc.) and Bamboo jungle (Ali and Ripley, 1987).

During his survey of birds of the erstwhile Mysore State, Salim Ali did not come across the species anywhere in 1939-40. Only known record of the species for present Karnataka State is that of Dr. Kumar D. Ghorpade (1973) at Sandur, Bellary District where he says it is "one of the commonest game birds in the forested parts of the valley and the hills. It often sought refuge in trees while I was pursuing it and I have come across the birds roosting in short trees well after dusk. This Spurfwowl is addicted to gleaning spilt grain on the dusty hill roads, usually in the evenings". However, during visits to various places in Karnataka as a part of our regular birdwatching trips, we have come across the Painted Spurfwowl at many places. Presented below are our observations on the species in these localities.

On 30th September 1990, while surveying the area in Narasimha Devarabetta Range Forest (13°42'N, 77°44'E) about 82 km north of Bangalore, three of us (JNP, SS and TSS) observed a pair of Painted Spurfwowls emerging from between the clumps of Lemon grass *Cymbopogon* sp. The birds perched at the base of a 1.5 m tall boulder in the shade of a tree and started preening. The pair was observed climbing a steep slope of a boulder with effortless ease to get to its top and started preening again. On 2nd December 1990, another pair was flushed by two of us (JNP, SS) from beneath a *Cassia fistula* bush at the Bananthimari State Forest (12°34'N, 77°23'E), about 60 km south of Bangalore.

Further on 18th January 1991, at the Ragihalli State Forest (12°46'N, 77°33'E) about 30 km south of Bangalore, a pair observed (JNP, SK) rummaging leaf litter amongst the *Lantana* undergrowth, flew past and landed close to the edge of a dry stream. Again, on 3rd February 1991 another pair was observed at the Madeshwara State Forest



(12°41'N, 77°39'E). The pair which was foraging beneath a *Lantana* bush, crossed a stretch of open ground and vanished into a dense undergrowth of *Lantana* on seeing us (JNP, SK).

At Jogimatti State Forest (14°13'N, 76°13'E) in Chitradurga district a pair was seen (by SK, TSS) on 29th December 1991, running across a stretch of open grass growth.

On 9th January 1992, a pair was noticed outside the fort in Nandi Hills (13°22'N, 77°41'E) again in the dense scrub on the roadside. This sighting of the species (by SK, JNP) also happens to be the first sighting of the species for this area as the same has not been met with by the earlier bird surveys.

Again a pair of them were sighted (by LS) on 18-19 January 1991 at Sangam Valley (12°17'N, 77°26'E) near the

May

confluence of the rivers Cauvery and Arkavathi in the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary. This also happens to be the first report of the species for the locality.

It will be interesting to know if the species has been sighted in other locations in Karnataka by the readers of the Newsletter.

## BNHS RINGING ACTIVITIES AT KODAI HILLS

S. BALACHANDRAN, Scientist, BNHS Research Station, Vedaranyam, Thanjavur Dt. 614 810, TAMIL NADU

The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) had carried out bird ringing at Kodai Hills during the summer seasons of 1970, 1982 & 1984. The Bird Migration Project has organised bird ringing camps both in winter and summer of the current season (1990-91). The objectives of the winter camp is to monitor the species composition of the Palearctic migrants wintering in the high altitude of the Palni Hills. To find out the migrants passing through the Palni Hills during the spring passage, and also to establish the altitudinal movement among the resident species, bird ringing was carried out between April and June 1991.

Sampling by netting has been carried out at different habitats in the high altitude area of Poomparai, Berijam, Marian Shola and Pulavachar. The major habitats covered are shola forest, plantations (wattle, pine and eucalyptus) and clearfelled area with secondary growth. As the area around Poomparai have different microhabitats such as natural forest, scrub jungle, secondary forest and various plantations, maximum number of birds were caught.

A total of 892 birds of 35 species were ringed. The migratory birds were caught till 10th May. Among the resident species, laughing thrush *Garrulax jerdonii* and white eye *Zosterops palpebrosa* were the abundant species. The other common species are shortwing *Brachyopteryx major*, verditer flycatcher *Muscicapa albicaudata*, black and orange flycatcher *M. nigrorufa*, blackbird *Turdus merula*. All the resident species almost completed their breeding by May. 12 nestlings of four species (*Merops leschenaultii* (4), *Muscicapa albicaudata* (2), *Brachyopteryx major* (4), *Saxicola caprata* (2) were ringed in May. Higher proportion of juvenile laughing thrushes was caught in late May and early June. Most of the resident species have commenced their post-nuptial moult from the first week of May.

The six migratory species caught were blyth's reed warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*, tickell's leaf warbler *Phylloscopus affinis affinis*, greenish leaf warbler *P. trochiloides*, largebilled leaf warbler *P. magnirostris*, rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus* and blue chat *Erithacus brunneus*.

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### Bird ringing at lower elevation

Netting was done at Oothu-Pannaikadu area (1000-1100 above MSL) for three days. The species composition is entirely different from that of high altitude area. Yellow browed bulbul *Hypsipetes indicus*, greyheaded bulbul *Pycnonotus priocephalus*, rubythroated yellow bulbul *P. melanicterus gularis*, spotted babbler *Pellorneum ruficeps* and small green barbet *Megalaima viridis* are commonly seen and caught.

### Recapture

A total of 14 birds of 7 species were recaptured which were ringed in 1982 and 1984 summers. The birds retrapped after 8 years are laughing thrush, blackbird, white eye, shortwing, black and orange flycatcher and redwhiskered bulbul. By ringing and recapture method now it is established that the longevity of smaller hill birds like white eye and black and orange flycatcher is more than eight years.

### Altitudinal movement

Jungle babbler *Turdoides striatus*, spotted dove *Streptopelia chinensis* and redwhiskered bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus* were observed in good numbers at high altitude area (Poomparai). The absence of these species during November indicate their altitudinal movement, probably to the lower elevation area and plains. Among the migratory species too, the blyth's reed warbler and greenish leaf warbler were scarce at Kodai Hills were observed in good number during April (spring passage).

### List of participants

1. Mr S.A. Hussain, Principal investigator, Bird Migration Project. BNHS, Bombay.
2. Admiral M. Awati, Chairman, Project Sub-Committee, BNHS.
3. Dr. Zafar Futehally, Palni Hill Conservation Council.
4. Dr. Rauf Ali, Palni Hill Conservation Council.
5. Mr R. Whitaker, Crocodile Bank, Madras.
6. Mrs. Philippa Mukherjee, Kodai International School.
7. Mr R. Panneer Selvam, Secretary, JCI, Vedaranyam.

No.	Common Name	Scientific name		
1.	Grey Jungle Fowl	<i>Gallus sonneratii</i>	18.	Laughing thrush <i>Garrulax jerdonii</i>
2.	Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	19.	Black and Orange flycatcher <i>Muscicapa nigrorufa</i>
3.	Chestnutheaded bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaultii</i>	20.	Verditer flycatcher <i>Muscicapa albicaudata</i>
4.	Small green barbet	<i>Megalaima viridis</i>	21.	Greyheaded flycatcher <i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>
5.	Larger Golden backed woodpecker	<i>Chrysocolaptes lucidus</i>	22.	Blyth's Reed warbler <i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>
6.	Jungle myna	<i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>	23.	Largebilled leaf warbler <i>Phylloscopus magnirostris</i>
7.	Hill myna	<i>Gracula religiosa</i>	24.	Greenish leaf warbler <i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>
8.	Pied flycatcher shrike	<i>Hemipus picatus</i>	25.	Tickell's leaf warbler <i>Phylloscopus affinis</i>
9.	Rubythroated yellow bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus melanicterus</i> <i>gularis</i>	26.	Shortwing <i>Brachyopteryx major</i>
10.	Redwhiskered bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>	27.	Blue chat <i>Erithacus brunneus</i>
11.	Redvented bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	28.	Yellow cheeked tit <i>Parus xanthogenys</i>
12.	Greyheaded bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus priocephalus</i>	29.	Velvetfronted nuthatch <i>Psitta frontalis</i>
13.	Yellowbrowed bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes indicus</i>	30.	Pied bush chat <i>Saxicola caprata</i>
14.	Black bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes madagascariensis</i>	31.	Blackbird <i>Turdus merula</i>
15.	Spotted babbler	<i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>	32.	Tickell's flowerpecker <i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>
16.	Scimitar babbler	<i>Pomatorhinus schisticeps</i>	33.	White eye <i>Zosterops palpebrosa</i>
17.	Jungle babbler	<i>Turdoides striatus</i>	34.	Spotted munia <i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
			35.	Rosefinch <i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>

## THE NIGHT HERON

THOMAS F MARTIN, 12/16, Edward Road, Bangalore 560 052.

The Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, as its name implies, is a bird that becomes active at sundown when it forages for its daily fare; unlike most other species of heron that are active during the hours of daylight. An exception to this nocturnal behaviour takes place during the breeding season when the demands of the young brood force the parent birds to hunt for food during the hours of daylight.

The species have a somewhat short but dumpy appearance in body and neck structure, and a stumpy dagger-like bill; unlike the characteristic long body, neck and bill of some of its relatives. Both sexes are alike and identified by the three long slender white plumes which emerge from the region of the hindneck, and the grey and buff-white body with the black crest and back which give out a dark bottle green when reflected by the rays of the sun. The pupils are surrounded by a diaphragm of reddish tinge. The colour of the feet range from a pale orange-yellow to a greenish yellow. The bill has a blackish-yellow tinge. When fully matured, the species attain a length of 58 cms and a wing-span of 100 cms. The call of the night heron is a guttural "whark", which the bird repeats at varying intervals when in flight. They may be seen flying singly in succession or in small flocks at a height of 40 metres or thereabout when passing overhead in silhouette. The juvenile birds have a totally different plumage to that of the adult birds, sporting a khaki-brown

hue with brownish stripes on the breast and the facial skin exhibiting a greenish-yellow tinge.

The night heron is not a shy bird at most times, and will usually permit the observer to approach quite near before taking to wing in that typical lumbering manner of the species. A very patient bird, *Nycticorax nycticorax* can and does stand motionless for hours at a time like some graven image in the muddy banks of a river, jheel or swamp, or on a small projecting boulder or stone in the water; during which time it maintains a strict vigil over the movements of the aquatic life around. With the approach of a likely prey, the night heron hurls itself in a fast lunge to impale the victim on its sharp dagger-like bill or clasp it in a scissors like grip.

The species generally nest in small colonies and appear to have a special fancy for building their nests in a peepul or Bo Tree *Ficus religiosa* so sacred to the Hindus and Buddhists, which stand amidst thinly populated hamlets or in small suburban townships. The nest is fashioned in the shape of a crude platform made of twigs and raised a few metres from the ground, on which the hen lays an average of 4 eggs and incubates them for about 21 days. The fledgelings begin to fly at about 6 weeks old, and become fully independent after 2 months when they start to fend for themselves.

When nesting, the night herons can easily be distinguished by the continuous din of confused cries and discordant notes that they give out during their seemingly ceaseless quarrels over territorial rights. I mention this specific behaviour of the species based on my personal observations over a number of years at the staff housing colony of the Serraikeella Glass Works at Kandra, located about 18 kilometres from the steel city of Jamshedpur in Bihar, where *Nycticorax nycticorax* would nidificate and breed regularly in a peepul tree standing amidst the aforesaid staff quarters. As to whether the species still resort for nesting and breeding at such locale I am not aware since arriving in Bangalore at the end of April 1985, but it would be worthwhile and of interest if any reader of the Newsletter who may be residing in Jamshedpur or near about, undertake a birdwatching trip to ascertain if the species still resort for nesting and breeding at the above mentioned place, during the months of July to October, and report their findings and observations in due course.

When I was a resident of Calcutta in West Bengal, my encounters with the night heron were chiefly during the winter months when I would visit the bheris in and around Haroa, an outlying district township located about 60 kilometres from Calcutta. It was in the precincts of Ramjaigherri bheri, about 8 kilometres down the fairweather road which branches off from the main approach road to the township of Haroa, that I was privileged to closely observe the ways and habits of the night heron during its non-breeding period. During my annual visits to Kandra in Bihar, where I was a guest of my close friend Rajan Lantz who has since passed away, I spent much time in viewing and studying the species at close quarters where they would regularly breed and roost in a peepul tree in the area of the staff quarters just three blocks away from where my dear friend was residing.

In Bihar, the locals refer to *Nycticorax nycticorax* as "Whark" - a name obviously derived from its typical call. In West Bengal and Bangladesh, the local inhabitants know the bird by the name "Baigchoo" - a vernacular term for which I am unable to offer an English definition. Perhaps some kind reader of the Newsletter whose mother tongue is Bengali would oblige by intimating the English definition or derivative from which the term 'Baigchoo' stems.

## INTERESTING SIGHTINGS

**OCCURRENCE OF THE HOBBY IN BANGALORE.** M.S. JAYANT, G.S. ADITYA, 488, 'Akshaya', 11th Cross, 8th Main, J.P. Nagar II Phase, Bangalore 560 078, and J. HEMANTH, 55/71, H.B. Samaja Road, Basavanagudi, Bangalore 560 004

On 17 June 1989, we were watching birds in a lightly wooded area with rocky outcrops at Kalkere, a place about

17 km from Bangalore city on the Bannerghatta road. The wooded area consists mainly of Sal (*Shorea talura*) with other trees like Pongam (*Pongamia pinnata*), Tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*), Jack fruit (*Artocarpus integrifolius*), Eucalyptus and *Millingtonia hortensis*.

At 1015 hrs we had just entered the wooded area when a falcon flashed past us, circled overhead and perched on a nearby Jamun tree (*Syzygium* sp.). The falcon remained there for nearly an hour and three quarters and let us approach it as close as 2.5 m. We were able to make a detailed note of its features.

The bird was pigeon-sized with its throat being dirty white which deepened to fulvous, buff and rufous from breast downwards. The vent and thighs were rust red. The underparts were streaked black and being absent on thighs and vent. The black moustachial stripe was very distinct. The white half collar up to the nape and the white forehead were other notable points. The crown was black and it appeared darker than the rest of the upperparts. The colours of the bare parts were in accordance with those mentioned in the Handbook (Ali & Ripley, 1983). In flight, we noted that the rump and the upper tail-coverts were paler than the rest of the upperparts.

Considering the above points, we identified the bird as the Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*). It was an adult bird. The identification was further confirmed with the help of Birds of Western Palearctic (Cramp & Simmons, 1982).

According to Ali & Ripley (1983) the Hobby is found all over India up to Belgaum in the south from about September to March/April. As our sighting of the species was in mid June we think that it could have been a straggler. This is the first ever record of this species for Bangalore and the southern-most one for India.

**KORAS DISPLAY.** C. SUSANTHAKUMAR, Prakrithi, Peroorkada P.O., Thiruvananthapuram 695 005, Kerala

On the morning of 1st May 1992, during a walk on the bank of the Aakkulam Lake (Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala), I observed an interesting display of two 'Koras' (water cock) *Gallicrex cinera*. The Koras were running on an open marsh without being timid or shy. The colour of the two birds was brown. One bird had a yellow comb. This was the non-breeding plumage of the male kora. The birds stopped near a reed thicket and made some harsh sounds. Suddenly one bird jumped up from the ground up to 4 feet and came back quickly with partially spreading wings. The second bird standing near it was watching the display curiously. After a few minutes the second bird also jumped up from the ground up to 4 feet and came back in the same manner. The whole display lasted over 20 minutes and the birds were silent all through.

On the morning of 16th May 1992, I once again saw this display in the same patch of marsh. This time I failed to see the start of the display. On both these days one of the Koras ultimately flew off. According to bird books "the Kora is a very skulking bird, spending most of the day in thick waterside vegetation, venturing out at dusk and dawn to feed on crops, seeds or insects. The Kora is supposed to be timid and shy during the day." But at Akkulam I observed the birds at noon also and they did not appear to be too shy.

**ALPINE SWIFTS OVER MADURAI. KUMARAN SATHASIVAM, 29, Jadamuni Koil Street, Madurai 625001**

Any ornithologist who enjoys making lists will find watching birds from the centre of Madurai city a frustrating experience. In no time at all it seems, practically every species that occurs here has been put down, and the list is depressingly short. The 'regulars' number about half a dozen, and an equal number of species occur seasonally. All others that find themselves on the list are those that have strayed into this airspace purely by chance.

After three years of birding from this ornithological moonscape, one has long since given up waiting for new species, devoting oneself instead, to pursuits like the CBFP (Common Birds Familiarisation Programme). This simply means one spends hours on one's terrace memorizing the field characters of Blue Rock Pigeons, Pariah Kites and other birds one would normally not pay much attention to. So when species Number thirty turns up, one is unprepared.

At the end of February this year, I had a very brief glimpse of a different bird flying near a group of House Swifts. I dismissed this as one of the sporadic Palm Swifts. Even when the same bird turned up at the same time the next morning, I did not realise that a 'new' species was afoot. It was only on the third consecutive morning that I asked myself what sort of Palm Swift it was that was so white below and had such dark wings.

I got several opportunities to see the Alpine Swifts again over the next few weeks, for it was indeed *Apus melba* that came daily in the morning over my house for a month. Apparently moving in a loosely spread out group, the swifts came overhead mostly at 8 'O' clock, sometimes as early as 7.20, at other times as late as 8.20. There were days when I did not make it upstairs at the right time and missed seeing them. Invariably they were heading east. The greatest number of Alpines I saw on any one day was five, but it is very likely there were more in the group as my view was restricted by buildings. In spite of the slow beating of the long, swept back wings (rather different from the rapid fluttering of the House Swifts) the birds went past very

quickly. I had to be content with observations lasting just a few seconds each of a species which was 'new' to me. The Alpine Swifts seem to have stopped flying over here now in April.

A series of near-daily sightings over a month in a period of three years makes it difficult to assign any status to the species.

District" (JBNHS Vol.XLIV) is the only work I know of its type dealing with the region, and Nichols' records of the Alpine Swift in the district ("uncommon, sometimes solitary, sometimes as many as 20 together") all fall between January 27 and September 10. Nichols says that "in August Jerdon observed near Madura flocks apparently migrating eastward". Interestingly, birds taken here seem to belong to the race *bakeri* resident in Sri Lanka.

I feel that there is a good case here for pooling of records of the Alpine Swift through the NLBW. Of this species the Handbook says: "Our knowledge of the spatial foraging movements of these wide-ranging swifts is as yet too nebulous for a satisfactory evaluation of the races and their status within our limits". Every observation would help in piecing together the jigsaw-puzzle.

**THE ORANGE BILLED JUNGLE MYNA IN PLAINS OF UPPER ASSAM. DR. D. BAROOAH, Dass Pharmacy, Sibsagar 785 640, Assam.**

A small number of Orangebilled Jungle Myna are observed in the town of Sibsagar since 1990 specially around the tank of Sibsagar. The bird is also present in quiet residential areas of the town but not in the central bazar area. "A Pictorial Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent" by Ali and Ripley describes the geographical location as 'Nagaland, South through Manipur and Mizoram to the Chittagang hill tracts'. But the town of Sibsagar is situated in the plains of Assam, at least 20 km from the hills of Nagaland.

Though much alike to the Jungle Myna (*Acridotheres fuscus*) in size and shape, the Orangebilled Jungle Myna (*Acridotheres javanicus*) can be differentiated from the former by (1) Crome yellow coloured bill, (2) Tougher and larger tufts of hair of the forehead and (3) Dark grey, often shining body feathers. The overall picture is a more robust looking bird than the Jungle Myna. Moreover Orangebilled Jungle Myna is mostly a solitary bird, sometimes also seen in pairs, whereas the Jungle Myna is usually seen in small groups of 6-10 individuals.

Nest building material was seen carried to the orchard of the Baptist Church Compound situated in the side of the tank of Sibsagar, but no attempt was made to locate the nest fearing the possibility of exposing the nest to unsympathetic persons.

**THE JUNGLE MYNA WITH BLUISH IRIS, SIGHTED IN DHARWAD URBAN.** DR.J.C. UTTANGI, 36, Mission Compound, Dharwad 580 001, India

The city of Dharwad still has a green and shady appearance although, during the last few decades of urbanization it has lost quite a few orchards and many of its old forest trees, scrub and underwood trees have been cut to build houses in their place. To add to the greenery, other trees like Eucalyptus and Coconut are being planted around houses, along roads and open areas. Birds passing by this forested city cannot go without being attracted by a few fruit and shady trees which have remained due to controlling influence. Necessity knows no law but, preservation of sanctity must be recognised by every citizen as binding.

On 30th April 1992, it drizzled over Dharwad city for a while in the evening and stopped. It was 5.30 p.m. when the evening sun came out to shine again. I was standing at the door of our house in the Mission compound and looking on towards the still overcast eastern sky. As I stood there looking, I noticed a small flock of six birds approaching me directly. Suddenly checking their speed the birds came down to perch on the electric wires just 40 feet away from our house. Four of them sat on the upper wire line and the other two below it. It was interesting to notice that while perching the flock had managed to occupy a place on the wires where the five porcelain cup-like knobs were set on the shoulders of the pole. The birds looked as though they were imitating these knobs. Perhaps a hawk on top would mistake them for knobs.

Thinking they were common Mynas, I reluctantly turned to glance at the birds but, my curiosity was aroused when I perceived a tuft of feathers behind their beaks. Having been caught in the recent drizzle the funky looking birds had come out to bask in the open sun. As they fell busy preening and pecking I got time to go inside and fetch my 8 x 40 Super Zenith Binocular. What a fascination it was to see the birds sitting in that position with a dark sky background behind the birds and the bright sun shining from in front. I could clearly see their orange yellow beaks and legs and the tuft of feathers not very bushy. What was most fascinating to see was their bluish iris which the birds kept gently moving over their eye balls. It did not take time to identify the species. The ashy grey body and the bluish iris proclaimed that they were the Southern Jungle Myna, *mahrattensis* considered conspecific to *Acridotheres fuscus*. This is the first time I have seen this race within the urban limits of Dharwad. The Northern race has a bright yellow iris. The group of Jungle Mynas need a review study through a survey.

**RANGE EXTENSION OF THE RUBYTHROAT IN SOUTH INDIA.** K.K. MOHAPATRA and PRAKASH RAO, Bird Migration Project, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Shahid Bhagat Singh Road, Bombay 400 023

During the course of the BNHS Bird Migration study carried out in the Eastern ghat ranges of Southern Andhra Pradesh, three Rubythroats *Erithacus calliope*, a male (BNHS Ring A-218432 on 21.11.89) and two females (BNHS Ring A-237005 and A-237007 on 2.2.91) were ringed and released in the scrub forests around Tirumala Hills (13 14' 30" N, 79 21' 30"E).

The male had a distinct scarlet chin and throat bordered by a black line on the sides of chin, while the females had white supercilium and a white throat with traces of pink. The fulvous brown breast and buffish belly readily differentiated them from the similar looking Himalayan Rubythroat *Erithacus pectoralis* which has a grayish breast, white belly and white tipped tail. The measurements were well within the known range of the bird.

The male was ringed in early winter (Nov-1989) while the females towards the latter half (Feb-1991). Ali and Ripley (1987) restrict its range to NE Andhra Pradesh in the Visakhapatnam Hill ranges which are approximately 600 km north. The present record extends the range of the bird suggesting that the birds may find their way to similar biotopes in southern India.

**Reference**

Ali S.A. and Ripley S.D. (1987): Compact Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan. Second Edition, Oxford University Press.

**NESTING OF THE WHITE EYED BUZZARD-EAGLE IN PUDUKUDI, THANJAVUR DISTRICT.** P. GNANASELVAN, President, Nature Conservation and Education Council, Nature Home, 47-A, Main Road, Pudukudi, P.O., Thanjavur District 613 402

On 17th April, 1992 a friendly villager informed me about a Varichali (Shikra) nest with two eggs in a Tamarind tree. I was slightly confused at first, because I have been watching the local raptors and their nests in our area. A quick scan of my field note book revealed that, all the seven Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) nests under my observation had their eggs up to 28th March, and now all the seven nests are having half grown nestlings.

On 18th early morning I visited the nest site and to my pleasant surprise I was able to identify the raptor as a White Eyed Buzzard-Eagle (*Butastur teesa*). This is my second personal sighting of this bird. (Last sighting in March 1990 near Karavetti lake of Tiruchirapalli district).

The eggs measured 33 x 45 mm and 34 x 45 mm. One egg was hatched on 20th and another on 22nd. The fledglings are red mixed orange coloured and not creamy white as Shikra and Laggar falcon.

Regarding this White Eyed Buzzard, I would like to hear more from your readers about its distribution and breeding status in South India.

(Editor's Note: Saw one many years ago near our house in Dodda-Gubbi in Bangalore and recall seeing one in Aurangabad thirty years ago. It seems to be getting a 'rare' bird).

### SIGHTING OF SKIMMER AT NAJAFGARH, DELHI. VIVEK MENON and TARA GANDHI

The Indian skimmer *Rhynchops albicollis* Swainson was a common bird on the Yamuna in the early parts of the century. Major-General Hutson (1943-45) lists the species as frequenting rivers near Delhi (probably the Yamuna). Usha Ganguly (1955) notes it only once near Dasna Jheel and terms it resident but not too common. The Skimmer has since then been comparatively overlooked or has seen a drastic reduction in population finding no mention in bird counts over the last decade (Kalpavriksh 1987, Shrishti 1990). It is thought that the peculiar feeding habit of the bird, which involves utilising the top few centimeters for fishing has made it particularly susceptible to water pollution. It has been proved time and again that the water is becoming rapidly and extensively polluted and at certain stretches along the Yamuna have zero oxygen levels. The skimmer had therefore been often quoted as being a reliable pollution indicator for the region.

A pair of skimmers were seen by a bird watching group of Shrishti during a visit to the Najafgarh drain on the 21st. of July 1991. They were sitting on a sand spit surrounded by water and were occasionally fishing and re-lighting on the sand spit. The disappearances of the sand spits in many wetlands, mainly owing to dredging practices could very well be another important reason for the disappearance of the species from the region. Other birds such as the pratincole have also shown corresponding declines in and around Delhi giving further credence to such a hypotheses.

Apart from these plausible reasons for their disappearance, a further cause for their overlooking may be the scanty data available for wetlands during the summers. It is believed that most wetland counts, censuses and birdwatching outings are conducted during winter months and that the habitat remains largely unvisited during summer. The sighting of these birds for perhaps the first time in a decade in the summers, is a pointer towards surveying our wetlands in the hotter months as well.

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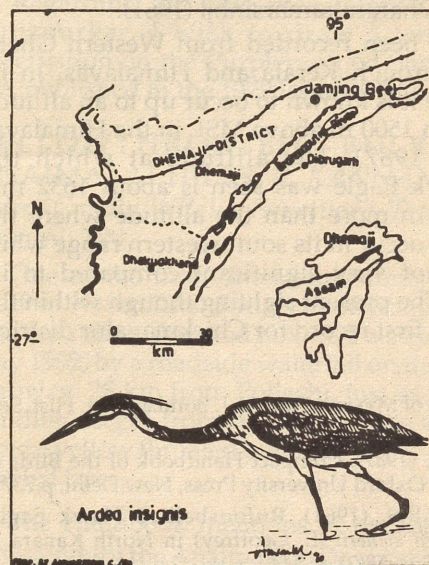
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Hutson, H.W. (1950). The Birds about Delhi.

### SIGHTING OF THE GREAT WHITEBELLIED HERON IN JAMJING RESERVE FOREST, ASSAM, ANWARUDDIN CHOUDHURY, Addl. District Magistrate, Karbi Anglong, For. Corr. Near Gate No.1 of Nehru Stadium, Islampur Road, Guwahati 781 007, Assam

The Great Whitebellied Heron *Ardea insignis* (Hume, 1878) is a very rare bird and its sighting records are also few and far between. Hence, any sighting of this bird is quite significant.

On 17 January, 1990 while surveying the Jamjing beel in the Jamjing Reserve Forest of Dhemaji district in Upper Assam I spotted a larger heron in a secluded area with tall *Arundo donax* grasses around. It was alert with head and neck fully stretched. It differed from the commoner

grey heron (*Ardea cinerea*) by having slate-grey upperparts (v. ashy grey), lacking black crest and the black patch on shoulder (conspicuous on standing grey heron). It was very shy unlike the grey and purple herons (*A. purpurea*). I observed over the years. It was a great whitebellied



heron, my first sighting of the species. Later on perhaps one more (may be the same one) seen. The birds took to flight at my sight and prolonged observation was not possible.

Some other birds seen in the Jamjing beel included many purple herons (all singly), spotted billed pelicans (*Pelecanus philippensis*), Openbill stork (*Anastomus oscitans*), darter (*Anhinga rufa*), cattle egret (*Bubulcus ibis*), pond heron (*Ardeola grayii*), and lesser adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus*. Jamjing RF (area, 91 km<sup>2</sup>) with wet savannah grassland, marshes and a number of beels is one of the largest unprotected wetlands of Assam.

**SIGHTING OF RUFOSBELLED HAWK-EAGLE AT KAVIKALGANDI, CHICKMAGALUR DISTRICT. S. KARTHIKEYAN, 24, Opp. Banashankari Temple, 8th Block, Jayanagar P.O., Bangalore 560 082**

Kavikalgandi (13 24' N, 75 44' E) is about 14 km from Chickmagalur, Karnataka and at a height of about 1632 m above MSL. The habitat of this place is typical of the Western Ghats with grasslands and sholas interspersed with coffee plantation. It is also very close to the highest peak in Karnataka - Mulaianagiri (1918 m above MSL).

During a visit to this place along with T.S. Srinivasa, D.V. Girish and T.V.N. Murthy, also birdwatchers on 8 October 1991, my attention was drawn towards a raptor with falcon-like rapid wing beats below us as it flew over the valley. It gradually gained height, thus affording an excellent view of its upper and underparts. The rusty brown underparts with a contrasting white throat were very distinct and was immediately identified as the Rufousbellied Hawk Eagle *Hieraetus kienerii* (E. Geoffrey).

The present sighting is the only third time the species is being reported from Karnataka. The two previous ones are that of Salim Ali (1943) during his visit to Settihalli, Shimoga District, between 25 January and 2 February 1940 as part of his survey of erstwhile Mysore, the second is of an individual seen at Dandeli Game Sanctuary on 19 December 1955 by Dharamkumarsinhji (1961).

The species has been recorded from Western Ghats, north Karnataka through Kerala and Himalayas. In its southwestern range it is known to occur up to an altitude of 1200 m and up to 1500 m above MSL in the Himalayas (Ali and Ripley, 1987). The altitude at which the Rufousbellied Hawk Eagle was seen is about 1632 m - approximately 400 m more than the altitude where the species is known to occur in its southwestern range while the difference is not very significant compared to its Himalayan range. The present sighting though within the known range, is the first record for Chickmagalur district.

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#### CORRESPONDENCE

**THE BLUEHEADED ROCK THRUSH. DR. PAMELA C. RASMUSSEN, (Scientific Assistant to DR S DILLON RIPLEY, Smithsonian, Washington D.C. In camp Bombay), and, J.S. SERRAO, c/o Bombay Natural History Society**

Mrs Geeta Iyer and Mr Karthik Shankar's reporting of the Blueheaded Rock Thrush (*Monticolus cinclorhynchus* in Newsletter 32(5/6) : 15 is the second record for Andhra

Pradesh. The credit for the first record should go to Mr Trevor Price, who came across: a single bird in the last week of November, two each in January and February and five in March the following year, two males were met with in November and in February in the subsequent year at Lammasinghi in the Eastern Ghats (J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. Vol.76, 417). Readers will find this information included in the 2nd revised edition of Vol.9 of the Handbook of Birds of India and Pakistan on which we are presently working.

Incidentally, the compact edition of the Handbook marked as '2nd edition' contains only up to Vol.4 revised.

**AGONOSTIC BEHAVIOUR OF THE BLACKNECKED CRANE IN CHUSHUL, LADAKH, INDIA. S. ASAD AKHTAR, Scientist, Bird Migration Project, BNHS, Hornbill House, Bombay 400 023**

On 22nd July 1987, at about 1600 hrs, I was watching through a telescope (magnification 29x), a family of the Blacknecked Crane *Grus nigricollis*, with two downy chicks, about three weeks old. They were foraging in a marsh with a few patches of deepwater. This marsh locally known as 'Dimik' is located approximately four km North east of Chushul 34 35' N; 78 43' E, elevation, 4328 m), (For details see Blacknecked Crane in Ladakh, second Annual report 1987). The adult cranes were foraging at some distance from each other, while the juveniles were resting together in a grassy patch, their heads barely visible above the grass. Few ducks were swimming around in the water patch, while the adult cranes foraged at the edge. Suddenly, one of the cranes rushed forward and grabbed a duck after chasing it around for sometime. It jerked the victim violently for a while and later released it. No attempt was made to smother it on the ground. This aggressive behaviour on the part of the cranes, was observed on two more occasions. On one occasion, it was Garganey teal *Anas querquedula*, while on the other it was a juvenile Brahminy duck *Tadorna ferruginea*. On both the occasions, the ducks did not show any aggressive behaviour towards the cranes or their chicks, except that they had strayed close to the chicks. This probably provoked the cranes to chase and attack them. S.A. Hussain (pers. comm.) reported similar behaviour from Hanle (32 47' N; 79 04' E; elevation 4340 m) when the adult cranes chased the Brahminy ducks which strayed close to their nest. He also reported that the ravens *Corvus corax*, in Hanle would mob the cranes on the nest which would chase them away. The cranes might be attempting to swallow the duckling, as some *Grus* species are known to prey upon young birds (Irene 1981, Walkinshaw, 1981). Since the cranes were nesting and as the breeding birds requirements of protein is high (Wallace, 1955) the cranes might be attempting to prey on the ducks, as a source of protein.

The above mentioned aggressive behavior of the cranes, is probably a reflection of competition for scarce food. Cranes are known to be intolerant of other birds near the nest or near chicks (Masatomi and Kitagawa, 1974; Zongao, et al. 1974; Sergi 1981; Guo 1981) and their aggressive behaviour could also be related to the defense of nestlings.

**USE OF DROPPINGS OF INDIAN HARE FOR NEST MAKING BY REDWATTLED LAPWING.**  
SATISH KUMAR SHARMA, *Arboriculturist, World Forestry Arboretum, Jhalana Dungri, Jaipur 302 004*

On 1st June 1992, I located a nest of Redwattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus* on one of the lawns of World Forestry Arboretum, Jaipur. After hatching of all the four eggs, parent deserted the nest on 9th June 1992. After departure of inmates from the nest, all the nest building materials used by the birds were collected, enumerated and weighed. The findings are given in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Nest building material collected by Redwattled Lapwing

Sl. No.	Items	nos.	% Nos.	Weight (gms)	% Weight
1	Droppings of Indian Hare	138	40.35	20.00	17.24
2	Pieces of bricks	77	22.51	25.00	21.55
3	Pieces of stones	107	31.28	7.00	60.34
4	Pieces of straws	20	5.84	1.00	0.86

It is evident from Table 1 that droppings of Indian Hare (*Lepus nigricollis*) may be used for making the nest by Redwattled Lapwing. Use of droppings of Indian Hare for making a nest by Redwattled Lapwing is not cited in Handbook, however it is mentioned that mud pellets, goat droppings, cowdung and pebbles are utilized for making the nest. Material like droppings of Indian Hare are easily available for that part of population of Redwattled Lapwing which lives in agricultural fields, fringes of forests, wastelands etc. i.e. away from human habitations.

**Reference**

Ali, S. and Ripley, S.D. (1983). Handbook of Birds of India and Pakistan (compact edition)

**COMMENTS ON RECENT ISSUES OF THE 'NEWSLETTER'. V. SANTHARAM, C/o DR P.S. Easa, Kerala Forest Research Institute, Peechi 680 653, Kerala**

First of all, I would like to point out a typographical error in the article on Vedanthangal Sanctuary written by myself and Mr Menon [NLBW XXXI (11 & 12) p.7]. In the 'Methods and Materials' section, the last paragraph has a sentence which should read "The Little Cormorants, shags and large Little, Median, Large and Cattle Egrets were grouped as cormorants were counted as 'cormorants' while 'Egrets'" and not as published.

In this article on the spotbilled Pelican [NLBW 32 (1&2)], Shri S. Sridhar refers to the Aredu-Sarapalle pelicanry of Andhra Pradesh. This pelicanry, discovered by Prof K.K. Neelakantan in the late 1940's was found abandoned over two decades ago. Nelapattu, in the Nellore district, 100 km north of Madras is the largest pelicanry in Andhra at present with approximately 200 nesting pairs.

On the observation of Shri K. Karthikeyan on a Magpie Robin preying on a leech [NLBW, 32-3-4:10], I wish to point out that the orange-headed ground thrush (*Zoothera citrina citrina*) has been known to take leeches. On the food of this species, the *Handbook* Vol.8, pp.88, says "...also leeches locally, but in spite of their great abundance these taken by a few individuals only..."

In the same issue, M/s J.N. Prasad and U. Harish Kumar write about Jerdon's Chloropsis feeding on the flowers of *Pithecellobium dulce*. I have also seen, in Peechi, in November 1991-January 1992, on quite a few occasions, at least four species of birds feeding on the flowers of *Clitoria ternatea* Linn., a common climber with blue flowers. The species involved were Koel, Small Green Barbet, Fairy Bluebird and Redvented Bulbul. Perhaps more species were also feeding on these flowers but I did not concentrate much on this behaviour as I was busy with my woodpeckers.

Regarding the note on Sunbird's bath by Dr Vijay Tuljapurkar, I wish to draw attention to a similar observation on the Purplerumped Sunbird in Madras by me, published in the 1979 issue of 'Newsletter'.

**YELLOWTHROATED BULBUL IN THE ANAIMALAI HILLS. R. KANNAN, Hornbill Project, Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary, Top Slip 642 141 (via) Pollachi, T.N.**

One of the more interesting finds during the recent Madras Naturalists' Society expedition to the Anaimalais was the Yellow throated bulbul. Two birds were seen on 12 May 1992, by a roadside waterfall on the Pollachi-Valparai highway, 28 km from Pollachi, just as the road begins its winding ascent from the Aliyar dam area. The area was typical yellow throated bulbul country - hillside scrub with stunted trees.

The Handbook mentions of one old record from the Kerala side of the Anaimalais (Davison, 1886, Ibis: 146). The specimen could occur in the Sethumalai side of the foothills, i.e. the entrance to the Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary (Top Slip range). I plan to survey this area for the bird shortly. The habitat here looks ideal for the species.

The bird, with its extremely restricted distribution in S.India, is causing concern amongst conservationists. Most of its range falls outside protected areas and its habitat is constantly disturbed by encroachment, grazing and firewood collection. It has reportedly disappeared from certain areas. I have spoken to the Director of the newly formed Salim Ali Centre (SACON) to initiate an intensive status survey of this species.

**SCIENTIFIC NOTES.** T.V. JOSE, Flat No.8, Reena Apartments, Chincholi Bunder Road, Malad (W), Bombay 400 064

The following has reference to NLBW (1&2), Jan-Feb 1992, p.1, "Scientific Notes" featured in the Editorial.

There is no doubt that ornithology got too scientific for Salim Ali and no less so to most of us readers of N.L. But the mention that ornithology is "infested" with graphs, etc. is bad in taste.

We are interested in birds and their activities not fully knowing that such interest is the basic motivation to understand what they are. It is this innocent interest that grows into insights, and scientific studies based on them unfold physiological and psychological aspects of a bird. The sense of wonder and curiosity to know more (and the enjoyment one gets in knowing a bird closer and closer) inherent in the initial interest often innate among us, must be allowed to grow, and N.L. has a vital role to play here.

Please do not encourage readers of N.L. to write notes meant mainly for enjoyment.

### Crisis Facing the World's Freshwater Resources

"Global water withdrawals are believed to have grown more than 35-fold during the past three decades, and are projected to increase by 30-35% by 2000. Current patterns of freshwater use cannot be sustained if human populations reach 10 billion by 2050".

With this striking analysis "Caring for the Earth : a strategy for sustainable living" highlights the crisis facing the world's freshwater resources. Similarly, as the UN meets for the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro this month, water management is viewed by many as being of more immediate concern than the higher profile issues of climate change and sea-level rise. In simple terms, our planet does not have enough freshwater for human society to continue to use these resources as we have done for much of our past. We need to change the way in which we use and manage the world's freshwater, and to do so now.

But freshwater is uneven in its distribution in both time and space. Years of drought are frequently followed by floods, while in any given year some countries suffer devastating drought, while only a few hundred kilometres away others have abundant supplies of freshwater. For much of the past, governments have responded to this variability in the availability of freshwater by seeking to control the rivers and their water, storing it in dams for redistribution during the dry season and in times of drought, and building canals and dykes designed to prevent flooding during the rains and in exceptionally wet years.

Most readers will be familiar with the environmental effects of many of these water projects, and with the long-running opposition of many conservation bodies to such structural approaches to managing the world's water resources. Today however these voices have been joined by an increasingly vocal constituency of development professionals who argue that not only do many of these projects fail to generate the benefits intended, but that the majority of those that do, benefit only the urban and industrial sector, while leading to a further decline in the well-being of the rural poor. In their place, a fully integrated approach to the management of water resources and the natural ecosystems which

support them is being called for, one which looks at the needs of all water users.

This holistic approach to water management was one of the central themes of the UN Conference on Water and the Environment which was held in Dublin, Ireland from 26-31 January 1992. Drawing attention to the severity of the water crisis, the Dublin Statement highlights the importance of water in sustaining natural ecosystems and calls for integrated management of river basins in order to safeguard aquatic ecosystems. In doing so the Conference has thrown down a challenge to the conservation movement. Now, instead of simply calling for an alternative approach to water management, we need to provide detailed technical guidance showing how natural aquatic ecosystems can be managed for long-term benefits. In short, we need to move beyond the rhetoric of conservation theory and demonstrate that it works.

Following only ten days after the Dublin Conference, the World Parks Congress in Caracas, Venezuela from 10-21 February, took an important step in this direction by holding as one of the conference workshops, a debate on Protected Areas and the Hydrological Cycle. By bringing together examples of how protected areas can both protect freshwater resources and provide a frame work for sustainable use of ecosystems dependent upon a regular flow of freshwater, this workshop took an important step towards strengthening efforts by the conservation community to respond to the Dublin challenge. This however is but a tiny step in the right direction, and the coming years will need to see a substantial increase in the attention given by the conservation community to demonstrating that the maintenance of natural hydrological regimes can indeed yield substantially greater benefits for human society than continued large-scale investment in altering riverflow. Integrated wetland management is central to this response and the wetland conservation community will need to play a central role in addressing this challenge.

by Patrick Dugan, Wetlands Programme Coordinator, IUCN

Courtesy : IUCN Wetlands Programme Newsletter, June 1992

### Threatened Waterfowl Species Working Group Recommendations for Action on Threatened Waterfowl Species in South and West Asia

#### Threatened Anatidae

1. Implementation of the international action plan recently prepared for the White-winged Wood Duck is urgently required. This includes a thorough survey of the protected areas of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh for the White-winged Wood Duck, to establish the distribution of the species and whether or not it is adequately protected. An immediate survey is also required of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh where the species is present but under extreme threat from hunting and habitat destruction.
2. Adequate protection should be given to the White-headed Duck population wintering in Punjab Province, Pakistan, and its habitat. Ucchali, Jahlar, Khabbekki, Nammal and Kalar Kahar lakes should all be strictly protected.
3. The Right Bank Outfall Drain Project as currently designed will change the ecology of Hamal Katchri and other wetlands in Sindh of great importance to the Marbled Teal. The Project should therefore be reviewed and alternative solutions found.

Regular surveys should be conducted of all Sindh wetlands to clarify the distribution, movements and breeding sites of this population of Marbled Teal to assess the impacts of the RBOD Project.

#### Other Threatened Waterbirds

1. Owing to their great importance for threatened species such as Spoon-billed Sandpiper and Indian Skimmer, the following wetlands in Bangladesh should be granted immediate protection: Nijhum Dweep, Ghasiar Char, Sonar Char, east Dhal Char, Char Dhigal, Urir Char and key wetlands in the Haor Basin (particularly Pingla and Chatla beels at Hakaluki Haor and part of Hail Haor).
2. Research into the distribution, breeding biology and causes of decline of the Black-bellied Tern is required in eastern Pakistan, India and Nepal. Important breeding areas should be protected.
3. Research is needed into the breeding success of Greater Adjutants, especially concerning the possible effects of human fishing in reducing the food supply during the period of chick development. Studies should also be carried out on possible competitive exclusion of Greater Adjutants by Lesser Adjutants.

4. Greater Adjutants and Bar-headed Geese should be included in Schedule I of the Protection Act in India.
5. Black-bellied Tern, Indian Skimmer and Oriental Darter should be assigned to the "Indeterminate" category in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals.
6. Loss of nesting trees at the major Kokkare Bellur Pelicanry in Karnataka has contributed to the decline of the Spot-billed Pelican in India. Provision of artificial nest platforms should be attempted on an experimental basis.
7. Attempts should be made to improve the design of artificial nest baskets provided for Oriental Darters at Tekkadi Reservoir, Kerala, and to monitor their effectiveness.
8. Surveys should be undertaken to establish the status of the Andaman Teal and Andaman Rail.
9. Education programmes are required to raise awareness of threatened species in areas where they concentrate and so may seem common and therefore under no threat.
10. Ecological research (followed by conservation action) on all of the following scarce and threatened waterfowl of South and West Asia should be of high priority in research programmes undertaken by research institutes (universities etc.) in the region:

Spot-billed Pelican

Dalmatian Pelican

Pygmy Cormorant

African Darter\*

Oriental Darter

White-bellied Heron

Lesser Adjutant

Greater Adjutant

Black-necked Stork\*

Lesser White-fronted Goose

Bar-headed Goose

Red-breasted Goose

White-winged  
Wood-Duck

Marbled Teal

Baer's Pochard

Ferruginous Duck

White-headed Duck

Black-headed Duck

Siberian Crane

Watercock\*

Masked Finfoot

Sociable Plover

Slender-billed Curlew

**Cover:** Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*). Always alert and curious, this bright coloured bird of the "Jewel-Thrush" family, moves swiftly over the tangled roots of the forest floor in long and easy hops. This uncanny ventriloquist gives out a loud melodious double whistle "wheet-piyou", that makes it difficult to locate. Being shy by nature, it takes off at once with a swift direct flight, through the forest canopy.

Photo: S. Sridhar, ARPS

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## Red Data Bird

# Lesser Kestrel

by Jean-Pierre Biber

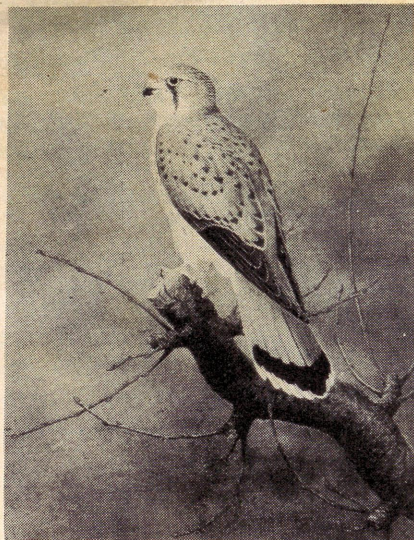


Lesser Kestrel (Photo: A. Robles/SEO)

The Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* is a bird of open areas, avoiding closed forest, wetlands, and farmland with tall crops. In the Western Palearctic, it is found in continental and forest steppes and semi-desertic land, foraging in meadows, pastures, steppe-like habitat, non-intensively cultivated land and occasionally in scrub (garrigue) and open woodland. It prefers warm or hot areas with short vegetation and patches of bare ground, where it can easily find its prey.

In its North African breeding areas and its winter quarters, it forages in savanna, steppe, thornbush vegetation, and on open grassland or farmland. The main food consists of invertebrates, chiefly larger Orthoptera. In winter the Lesser Kestrel relies largely on swarms of locusts.

(Painting: N. Arlott)



Most Lesser Kestrels winter in Africa. Information on wintering numbers in West Africa is limited, but it is likely that this region holds relatively low numbers. The main wintering areas lie in eastern Africa, from Kenya south to Botswana, and especially South Africa.

The Lesser Kestrel has a Palearctic breeding distribution, south of 55°N latitude. Relatively little is known about the exact breeding range of the species in Asia. In Europe and northern Africa, the Lesser Kestrel has a mainly Mediterranean distribution, but it is also known to breed in large parts of the former USSR.

The Lesser Kestrel normally breeds in monospecific colonies of 120-250 pairs. With the decline of the species, small colonies of less than 10 pairs and single pairs have become more and more common. They nest in holes in walls of old houses, stables, barns, castles or churches or under their roofs, usually under the tiles of the lower edge of the roof. They also breed in tree holes, in earth cliffs, and sometimes in rocks, quarries or heaps of stones. In Europe, they used to be common in many towns and villages of the Mediterranean Basin.

The Lesser Kestrel has shown major population declines in large parts of its western Palearctic breeding range and has disappeared from many countries where it bred until recently. The main reason for this decline is thought to be the loss of hunting habitat due to urbanisation, agricultural intensification and the abandonment of traditional

pastoral activities. The large scale application of pesticides in modern agriculture reduces food availability and seems to be partly to blame for the decline of the species. This holds both for the West Palearctic breeding area and the African winter quarters. Many nest sites in older building have been eliminated during renovation, or such buildings have been removed and replaced with modern ones no longer providing nesting niches. This seems to affect the species in many regions where it used to be commonly linked to human settlements. Competition for nest sites with other bird species, mainly the Jackdaw, and kleptoparasitism by the same species, may have a serious impact in mixed colonies. Pesticides are also known to have reduced breeding success in some areas, but it is not clear whether this is due to intake in breeding areas or in the winter quarters. Human persecution and disturbance may locally affect breeding birds.

In planning action for the protection of the Lesser Kestrel, the conservation of suitable foraging habitat around existing breeding colonies should receive highest priority. To this end, careful land-use planning to avoid development of such areas is essential. The use of pesticides should be regulated and alternative pest control techniques should be applied. It is worth noting that conservation measures for the Lesser Kestrel are likely to have positive effects for other threatened grassland bird species (such as White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* and Great Bustard *Otis tarda*).