

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

Dodda Gubbi P.O.
Via Vidyanagar
Bangalore 562134.
2-6-1980

The Editor regrets that owing to the fact that he has been out of station for two months on extra curricular activities, which includes earning a living, there will be no issue of the Newsletter in June. A combined issue for June and July will be produced in the first week of July.

Zafar Futehally
Editor



Mr. Aasheesh Pittie,
14-7-370, Begum Bazar,
Hyderabad 500 012.

पिन PIN

Aasheesh Pittie

14 - 7 - 370,
Begum Bazar,
Hyderabad-500 012.

3/VI/1980.

The Editor,
Newsletter for Birdwatchers,
Birdwatcher's Field Club of India,
Dodda Gubbi Post, Via Vidyanagar,
Bangalore - 562 134.

Dear Sir,

I am enclosing some of my observations of the House Crow (*Corvus splendens*) and I hope they are of some value to the Birding world in general and the readers of the Newsletter.

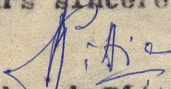
The notes may be scanty but a student like me cannot help it because I have to birdwatch when time permits.

I hope you will go through the notes and let me know of any shortcomings and shortfalls, not only in the written matter, but on birding as a hobby.

Thanking you,

I remain,

Yours sincerely,


(Aasheesh Pittie).

BEHAVIOURAL OBSERVATIONS OF THE HOUSE CROW
(CORVUS SPLENDENS)

The crows in my area started their nesting activity early in May. By now the pairs are well adjusted to each other, and the nests practically completed, though a crow may sometimes be seen strutting around on the garden floor in search of twigs for nesting. It was a nice opportunity for observing these short-tempered scavengers as social aves, though due to delayed exams, I could not observe properly, with some continuity. ~~One or two things struck me as~~

A crow generally abhors to share it's meal with another of it's tribe, but now I observed that one bird shared the kill with the partner. When another crow sneaked up for a bite, all hell broke loose as the master of the kill drove it off with pecking and lashing with the feet. But when the mate came up for a bite, he was obliged, and both ate. Sometimes when one of a pair did not want to share the kill even with his mate, though the mate sidled up continuously for a morsel, he would gently lift up one leg and as gently push that mate away. But persistence made him give up the attempt.

There are two pairs of crows nesting in our garden, lets say 'A and B' and 'C and D'. When the former pair have killed a mouse, they do not let the latter come near it. Once it so happened that after the kill, A and B ate the tasty parts and then flew off. The other pair who were ~~was~~ lurking out of the sphere which when penetrated gives irritation, jumped onto the kill and started scavenging. After a few moments, the former pair came back and the scavengers just walked off as though nothing had happened. This showed that when the original killers of a mouse had flown away, the left overs did not become the property of the other.

I have a small $\frac{1}{2}$ bowl of water kept outside on the roof for thirsty birds, and a pair of crows use it regularly. Generally when they have something to eat with them, they come over to the bowl and hold it with the feet while they drink. Once a morsel fell into the bowl and the crow could not get to it. It did not allow a whole flock of pigeons (*Columba livia*) do venture near the bowl for one and a half hours! Then, unsuccessful, it flew away.

A pair of crows have built a nest in a mast tree, about twenty feet above the ground, in our garden. This tree is about fifty feet from our house, on the outer wall of which is a ledge on which a pair of *Columba livia* have built a nest and laid eggs in. The first two eggs hatched and the chicks were eaten up by the crows. (The chicks were golden down covered and had black beaks). The pair laid another couple of eggs which were taken away by the same crows after four days. The poor mother laid two more eggs, and alas ~~another~~ one of these was again robbed from the nest by the crows, the other is being incubated. I never knew that crows even robbed the eggs of the Blue Rock Pigeon. Has there been any other observations towards the same?



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INDIA



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ZAFAR FUTEHALLY

DODDA GUBBI POST

VIA VIDYANAGAR

BANGALORE-562134.

7-6-1980

Dear Mr. Fittie,

Thank you for your letter of the 3rd June
and for the interesting note on Crows which
I will publish in the July issue.

Yours sincerely,

Zafar Futehally
(Zafar Futehally)

Aasheesh Pittie

14 - 7 - 370,
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Hyderabad-500 012.

15/VI/1980.

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Newsletter For Birdwatchers,
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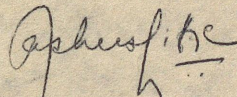
Dear Sir,

Thank you for your letter of 7/6/1980. I enclose another small note on the behavioural patterns of three birds, *Corvus splendens*, *Columba livia*, and *Passer domesticus*, in the first showers of this monsoon.

I hope they are useful.

Thanking You,

Yours sincerely,



(Aasheesh Pittie).

Encl:- A note titled, 'Reactions of the *Corvus Splendens*, *Columba livia*, and *Passer Domesticus* to Prilimmary Monsoon Showers.'

REACTIONS OF THE CORVUS SPLENDENS, COLUMBA LIVIA, AND
PASSER DOMESTICUS TO PRILIMINARY MONSOON SHOWERS.

When the very first shower of rain hesitantly fell on Hyderabad, we breathed a sigh of relief for the summer of 1980 was harsh indeed. I guess the crows (*Corvus splendens*) enjoyed the rains most of all the three. They would just sit out in the open and let the cool water flow over themselves and sometimes even open their wings to allow it to descend into the feathers there - the inner secondaries and the lesser wingcoverts. Their caw caws were filled with pleasure. When the shower passed on, they gave a vigorous shake to their feathers, which removed all the extra water, and commenced the business of preening. Preening started with the wings. The oil was taken and spread on these feathers (the primaries, secondaries and the wing coverts). Then the tail feathers were cleaned. This shows that those feathers which are essential for flying are cleaned foremost. Only after these feathers were cleaned did the crows start on the others.

The *Columba Livia* - being the tender birds they are - all collected on their roosts as soon as the preliminary drops fell. The garden where they had been feeding and the sky where they had been showing off their ability of flight, were cleared almost instantly and all the perches occupied. They sat huddled and with the feathers fluffed, to conserve heat. Only after the last drops had fallen and the clouds passed on, did they come alive and commence preening. They too preened their flying feathers first.

The *Passer domesticus* enjoyed the rain indirectly. As soon as the rain started, they hid in hedgerows and when it passed away, came out to bathe in the little puddles of accumulated water on the garden soil. These sparrows generally enjoy a mud bath, therefore an occasional bath with water must be an exhilarating experience. They move their wings up and down and splash their bodies with the water. They also wet their throats and faces by dipping the beak and vigorously shaking it from side to side. When one sparrow emerges from a puddle, another jumps in. Quite often there are squabbles and sometimes a peaceful 'beeline' is formed for a dip! The preening is commenced, again, with the flying feathers.

14 - 7 - 370,
Begum Bazar,
Hyderabad - 500 012.

11/VII/1980.

The Editor,
Newsletter For Birdwatcher's,
Birdwatcher's Field club of India,
Dodda Gubbi Post, via Vidyanagar,
Bangalore - 562 134.

*Carried in Issue
of Jan 1981 Vol 21 No 1*

Dear Sir,

This is with reference to the article by Shri Prakash Cole and Shri Taej Mundkur, on the 15th page of the No. 6/7 issue of the Newsletter. I too have seen a nest of the lapwing (whether red or yellow wattled was not confirmed) with Shri B.C. Choudhury - a keen birder - which was like the one they saw. This nest was on the ground in the Lion Safari Park of the Nehru Zoological Park of Hyderabad. It was round with a diameter of aprox. 8 inches. The eggs were laid on a platform of small stenes and pebbles which lay strewn all over the place. This platform was extremely neat and flat and almost geometrically round. The four dirty brown eggs with haphazard black blotches all over were arranged in such a way that the tapering end lay in the center (as also observed by Shri V.Santharam in the same newsletter).

This nest had most probably been abandoned because there were no birds around. This nest also was built near a water source - the Miralam tank - very close to the nest.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

Aasheesh Pittie
(Aasheesh Pittie).

Aasheesh Pittie

14-7-370,
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15/VII/1980.

The Editor,
Newsletter for Birdwatchers,
Birdcatcher's Fieldclub of India,
Dodda Cubbi Post, via Vidyanagar,
Bangalore - 562 134.

Dear Sir,

I enclose a small note on the behaviour of the crow, which has built a nest in our garden. It reflects the humorous side of the animal's character. I hope it is of some use.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

Aasheesh Pittie
(Aasheesh Pittie)

Encl:- A note titled, 'The Case of the Frustrated Crow'.

THE CASE OF THE FRUSTRATED CROW

Sometimes the enmity of two animals for each other leads to strange, if funny, actions on their part - to avoid, attract, distract and scare ~~awe~~ the other. The case of a frustrated crow of my garden is very humorous. ~~This-crow~~

Our dog and this crow have an old enmity. The crow generally kills a rat - there are quite a few where cows are kept - and the dog chases it away from its rightful meal. Crows prefer to have a dinner on the lawn with their partners, and more often than not there are many uninvited guests too. This crow has built a nest in one of the mast trees in our garden and does not like any moving thing to venture near that tree - least of ^{all} the dog. Not to be outdone, our dog has taken a fancy to rest and roop right under that tree.

One evening - around 5.30 - our dog ran over to the tree and started sniffing at the lawn under it. Seeing its old enemy, the crow got really worked up and started cawing with all its might. The general result of such action is a swarm of crows collecting out of the blue around the caw-cawing individual. But nothing happened. No crows came! Undaunted and following the old law of survival of the fittest, the solitary crow took ~~it~~ upon itself to chase our dog away.

It started dive bombing onto the back of the inquisitive dog. Jumping off the lowest branch of a nearby tree, the crow swooped down onto the dog and again ~~was~~ to alight on a wall opposite. This continued for quite some time. Sometimes the crow dived and rose only to turn in mid-air and again dived. Once or twice it even brushed the back of the canine. But our dog was bored. It never even looked up at the crow and the racket it was making.

Suddenly the crow alighted on a dry branch and started breaking twigs off it! It was in a tearing rage. All the pent up anger at the intrusion of the dog into its established territory was released on these lifeless twigs. Taking hold of a twig in its beak, the crow gave it a terrific twist and the thing broke off with a loud crack. This the crow did for quite some time. Again the diving started and again it rested on a branch and broke off twigs, dropping them on the ground.

After almost an hour the crow gathered enough courage - ~~or~~ was it a last ditch effort - to tap the canine sharply on the back with its claws. The dog walked away. It was practically dark by now and the crow too settled to roost - no doubt feeling victorious.

Aasheesh Pittie

14 - 7 - 870,
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19/VII/1980.

The Editor,
Newsletter for Birdwatchers,
Birdwatcher's Field Club of India,
Dodda Cubbi Post, via Vidyanagar,
Bangalore - 562 134.

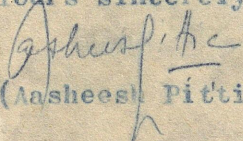
Dear Sir,

I am sending a list of birds which Shri B.C. Choudhury and I saw on a trip to Manjira, a barrage near Hyderabad.

I hope it is of some use and get a chance to be printed in the Newsletter For Birdwatchers.

Thanking You,

Yours sincerely,


(Aasheesh Pittie)

encl:- 'Birding at Manjira'.

BIRDING AT MANJIRA *

I went to Manjira with Shri B. C. Choudhury. He was on one of his many field trips and I just could not afford to miss the opportunity. As a barrage, Manjira was a disappointment - there was very little water - but as a birding spot it was thrilling. To a birder newly won to birding, a congregation of any bird or birds is a sight which he savours all his life, and I do not doubt that Manjira - though it may have had a mediocre collection of birds in the 'bird population' sense - was just that to me. It was

It was my first trip in a jeep into the countryside, and I experienced the joy of passing through endless fields and forlorn villages. Feeling like intruders ~~into~~ when we entered a village - the home of the buffalo and the bullock cart - I could not help thinking of the life of these people. The place which safeguards Indian heritage is the village and I could notice that this may not last long. The art of wooden doors and the joy of a colourful rangoli, the rugged beauty of village jewellery (to which EC drew my attention) was declining. But the birds which inhabited these places were exquisite. So varied were they! The whitebacked munia and the Bengal Vulture, the former feeding in the fields and the later sitting ponderously on the upper most branch of a huge tamarind tree, on the edge of village.

We also found a dead kite on the road side. Blood oozed out of a broken neck - it was warm. Must have been hit by a truck. Now it is resting in the zoo, beautifully stuffed. After a journey which was not unsimilar to that of a boat on a choppy sea, over broken roads and ploughed fields, we traversed to reach the river - Manjira - on which the barrage of the same name is built. From the barrage we went to the river bank, further up, and there saw a wild mugger!

Following is a list of the birds we saw on this journey.

<u>Podicipediformes:</u>	Little Grebe or Dabchick.
<u>Pelecaniformes:</u>	Little Cormorant.
<u>Ciconiiformes:</u>	Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Night Heron, Grey Heron, Purple Heron, Pond Heron, White Ibis and Black Ibis.
<u>Anseriformes:</u>	Common Teal. (More could not be identified)
<u>Falconiformes:</u>	Whitebacked or Bengal Vulture, White Scavenger Vulture, Black-winged Kite, Common Pariah Kite, Brahminy Kite, Shikra, Pale Harrier.
<u>Gruiformes:</u>	Indian Moorhen, Purple Moorhen.
<u>Charadriiformes:</u>	Bronzewinged Jacana, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Stone Plover, Blackwinged Stilt, River Tern, Whiskered Tern, Red Wattled Lapwing and Yellow Wattled Lapwing.
<u>Columbiformes:</u>	Blue Rock Pigeon, Spotted Dove and Ringed Dove.
<u>Pittacidiformes:</u>	Roseringed Parakeet.
<u>Strigiformes:</u>	Indian Great Horned Owl.
<u>Apodiformes:</u>	House Swift.
<u>Coraciiformes:</u>	Pied Kingfisher, Whitebreasted Kingfisher, Small Blue Kingfisher, Indian Roller, Small Green Bee-eater.
<u>Passeriformes:</u>	Crow-pheasant, White Backed Munia, Weaver Bird, Streaked Weaver Bird, Brongo, Brahminy Myna, Indian Myna, Tree Pie, Common Babbler, Indian Robbin, Magpie Robbin, Large Pied Wagtail, Blackheaded Oriole, Grey Shrike, Rufousbacked Shrike, Indian Pipit, Crested Lark and Indian Small Skylark.

This list of birds is not a complete one. It consists only of those birds which we saw in one day. We had gone on this trip last month.

* Manjira Barrage is 65kms from Hyderabad city in a Westerly direction.

8

movement appeared to be due to panic, and was not like the roosting behaviour observed the previous day. No movements in the Whitenecked Storks were noticed.

As the darkness lifted, all the birds which had gone to the shore came back into the middle of the lake. Though the eclipse was not over they started feeding again. Egrets which had flown away into the forest, came back and perched on the same tree which they occupied previously. The behaviour of all the birds was normal once more.

Observations were also made on 17th February, i.e., one day after the Solar Eclipse and no abnormality was recorded.

The total Solar Eclipse was, therefore responsible for bringing about temporary roosting behaviour in certain birds. This abnormal roosting behaviour is attributed to a fear created in them due to the sudden onset of darkness and was not similar to normal roosting observed earlier.

Patiala - A Refuge for Woodland Birds by AK Chakravarthy

A city with woodland areas is uncommon in India, but Patiala in the Punjab is an exception. The vegetation surrounding the palaces of the Maharaja, the gardens and the woods cover a large space. The life styles of people here are interesting and varied and these areas harbour a variety of birds.

As we approached the Biradari Gardens we saw several nests of the White-backed Vultures. In the same garden there were a large number of Large Grey Babblers (*Turdoides malcolmi*) rummaging among the leaves, Woodshrike (*Tephrodornis pondicerianus*) were hawking insects in the air, Grey Hornbills (*Tockus birostris*) were feeding on berries on Moti Bagh, and Brahminy Mynas (*Sturnus pagodarum*) were also present. Pied Kingfishers were seen on the ponds in Sish Mahal.

The most notable feature of the avifauna was that there was no dominant species. We saw a large numbers of Tree Pie, Hoopoe, Coucal, Woodpeckers, Large Grey Babblers, Common Mynas, Sparrows, Pigeons, Roseringed Parakeets as well as Bluewinged Parakeets. Obviously the open and tree covered habitat of Patiala is responsible for its abundant birdlife.

Birding at Manjira by Aasheesh Pittie

I went to Manjira with BC Choudhury. As a barrage Manjira 65 km west of Hyderabad was a disappointment - there was very little water - but as a birding spot it was thrilling.

It was my first trip in a jeep into the countryside and we felt like intruders when we entered the village, the home of the buffalo and the bullock cart. The place which protects the Indian heritage is the

village but I fear that it may not be so for long. The art of the carved wooden doors and the joy of a colourful rangoli, the rugged beauty of village jewellery is declining. But the birds were exquisite and here is a list of what we saw on our journey.

Podicipediformes: Little Grebe or Dabchick

Pelecaniformes: Little Cormorant

Ciconiiformes: Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Night Heron, Grey Heron, Purple Heron, Pond Heron, White Ibis and Black Ibis.

Anseriformes: Common Teal. (More could not be identified)

Falconiformes: Whitebacked or Bengal Vulture, White Scavenger Vulture, Blackwinged Kite, Common Pariah Kite, Brahminy Kite, Shikra, Pale Harrier.

Gruiformes: Indian Moorhen, Purple Moorhen

Charadriiformes: Blackwinged Jacana, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Stone Plover, Blackwinged Stilt, River Tern, Whiskered Tern, Redwattled Lapwing and Yellow-wattled Lapwing.

Columbiformes: Blue Rock Pigeon, Spotted Dove and Ringed Dove.

Psittaciformes: Roseringed Parakeet.

Strigiformes: Indian Great Horned Owl

Apodiformes: House Swift.

Coraciiformes: Pied Kingfisher, Whitebreasted Kingfisher, Small Blue Kingfisher, Indian Roller, Small Green Bee-eater.

Passeriformes: Crow-pheasant, Whitebacked Munia, Weaver Bird, Streaked Weaver Bird, Drongo, Brahminy Myna, Indian Myna, Tree Pie, Common Babbler, Indian Robin, Magpie Robin, Large Pied Wagtail, Blackheaded Oriole, Grey Shrike, Rufousbacked Shrike, Indian Pipit, Crested Lark and Indian Small Skylark.

Unusual nesting site of Redwattled Lapwing by Hari Prasad Patnaik

On August 10, 1980 I saw a couple of nestlings of the redwattled lapwing moving on the roof of a school building. Their parents kept a close watch over the chicks from a short distance and were occasionally indulging in the broken winged technique to draw our attention away from the young birds.

I have a feeling that the lapwing though essentially a ground nesting bird is acclimated to urbanisation. However in the unnatural habitat on the roof of a school building it laid only one or two eggs though the normal clutch consists of four.

Oystercatcher by PS Sivaprasad

On 29-8-1980 while on the look out for migratory birds opposite the All India Radio Station at Calicut we observed a large wader with a striking black and white plumage with an orange bill and reddish legs. This was the Oystercatcher or Sea Pie (*Haematopus ostralogus*).

Aashesh Pittie

14-7-370,
Begum Bazar,
Hyderabad-500012.

18/VIII/1980.

The Editor,
Newsletter for Birdwatchers,
Birdwatcher's Field Club of India,
Dodda Cubbi Post, via Vidyanagar,
Bangalore - 562 134.

Dear Sir,

This letter is to inform you, that I have not received the 'Newsletter for Birdwatchers' of this month.

Kindly send me a copy of the same.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

37121114
(Aashesh Pittie).

November 1980

14

The winter of 1978/79 was an exceptionally good year for Hen Harriers on the North Norfolk coast. It was most enjoyable to sit in one's car, just before sunset, at the edge of one of the local commons, which was covered with heather and a few scattered bushes, and watch the Harriers coming in to roost.

One had to keep a very sharp look-out because the birds usually came in fast and very low and quite suddenly dropped into the Heather. Once they dropped down they were not seen again and no sounds were heard.

In conclusion, one might add that it is very unusual for Harriers to even perch in trees, that is in living trees. They will, of course, perch in the lower branches of dead trees. To find an example of a Harrier perching in a tree, the Handbook of British Birds was obliged to quote Jerdon.*

Harriers usually perch on the ground, mounds of earth, anti-hills, posts, stumps, low bushes, boulders etc.

*T.C. Jerdon, Surgeon-major Madras Army, author of 'The Birds of India' (Two volumes 1862 - the standard work on Indian Ornithology until the arrival nearly forty years later of the four volumes on birds in the 'Fauna of British India' series by W.T. Blandford and Eugene W. Dates.

Reactions of the *Corvus splendens*, *Columba livia*, and *Passer domesticus* to preliminary monsoon showers BY Ashboosh Pittie

When the very first shower of rain hesitantly fell on Hyderabad, we breathed a sigh of relief for the summer of 1980 was harsh indeed. I guess the crows (*Corvus splendens*) enjoyed the rains most of all the three. They would just sit out in the open and let the cool water flow over themselves and sometimes even open their wings to allow it to descend into the feathers there - the inner secondaries and the lesser wing coverts. Their caw caws were filled with pleasure. When the shower passed on, they gave a vigorous shake to their feathers, which removed all the extra water, and commenced the business of preening. Preening started with the wings. The oil was taken and spread on these feathers (the primaries, secondaries and the wing coverts). Then the tail feathers were cleaned. This shows that those feathers which are essential for flying are cleaned first. Only after these feathers were cleaned did the crows start on the others.

The *Columba livia* - being the tender birds they are - all collected on their roosts as soon as the preliminary drops fell. The garden where they had been feeding and the sky where they had been showing off their ability of flight, were cleared almost instantly and all the perches occupied. They sat huddled and with the feathers fluffed, to conserve heat. Only after the last drops had fallen and the clouds passed on, did they come alive and commence preening. They too preened their flying feathers first.

The *Passer domesticus* enjoyed the rain indirectly. As soon as the rain

started, they hid in hedgerows and when it passed away, came out to bathe in the little puddles of accumulated water on the garden soil. These sparrows generally enjoy a mud bath, therefore an occasional bath with water must be an exhilarating experience. They move their wings up and down and splash their bodies with the water. They also wet their throats and faces by dipping the beak and vigorously shaking it from side and side. When one sparrow emerges from a puddle, another jumps in. Quite often there are squabbles and sometimes a peaceful 'beeline' is formed for a dip! The preening is commenced, again, with the flying feathers.

An unusual nest of a pair of Redwattled Lapwing by Prakash Gole and Taji Mundkur

The nest of a pair of redwattled lapwing (Vanellus indicus) is generally 'an unlined scrape on open fallow land or dry tank margin, sometimes bordered with gravel' (Dr. Salim Ali in Birds of Kerala). It is rather unusual to find a nest of redwattled lapwing in the midst of a city, not on terra firma but some 20 m above ground, on the terrace of a big building, albeit not far away from the banks of a river. The nest, a rather roundish platform of loose pebbles and small stones, about 25 cm. in diameter was constructed on the terrace-like roof-slab of a college-building in Poona. This broad roof-like terrace lacks parapet walls and as such no one is normally allowed to go on to the terrace. The birds are thus safe from human interference. Gravel and loose pebbles are spread over the terrace and the birds have taken advantage of this ready-at-hand material. The college-building is about 150 m from the Mutha river of Poona.

When the nest was located on 30th March it contained four eggs. One of the parents was incubating and the other kept a watch from a distance. There was also a third bird and when one of us tried to approach all the three were up in the air giving alarm calls. As we withdrew all the three birds returned to the terrace. If a crow was flying nearby all the three were seen to try to drive it away. But we also observed the parents occasionally trying to drive the third bird away. His presence was however, usually tolerated. Is it possible that this bird belonged to their previous brood?

On 6th April when we ascended the terrace once again, we found all the eggs gone and not even egg-shells could be found. But when we searched around we found four little grey-brown downy balls beautifully camouflaged and concealed among pebbles and gravel. The empty nest and the little ones were duly photographed. All the three birds were there accusing us with their famous 'did you do its'.

On a lower and smaller roof-terrace another lapwing-pair was seen frequently. They might have their nest there. But this terrace has no easy approach and hence could not be climbed.
