Newsletter for Birdwatchers

Vol. 43 No. 1 Jan. – Feb. 2003

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Editorial

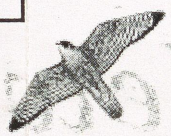
New Year

Let us hope that it will be peaceful and progressive, and let us all play our part towards this goal

Prakash Gole Prize

In the last issue of the Newsletter (Nov/Dec 2002) I had announced the Prakash Gole Prize of Rs.1000/- for the best article in 2002. As I said selecting the best leads to arbitrary decisions specially when there are several excellent pieces. However I am happy to announce that the winner is V. Santharam of Rishi Valley for his article on a trip to the Himalayas in Vol. 42 No. 1 in Jan - Feb. 2002 issue.

The Annual Get together on 19th January 2003



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The morning of 19th January 2003 found us driving along the Bellary road. All of us had started from Bangalore, and some had hit the road as early as 5.30 am so that they would not miss the fun. On reaching Devanahalli located about 35 km north-east of Bangalore, we traveled for another 7 km on Sulibele road to reach the awesome tamarind grove of Nallur village. This outing had been planned as a part of the Annual get together of birdwatchers. We were all to gather later at Mr. Appachu's farm, located close to the former farm-house of our Editor at Dodda Gubbi.

Located in the Devanahalli taluk of Bangalore district, Nallur has been a host for hundreds of these tamarind *Tamarindus indica* trees since ages, some of them dating back to about 800 years and considered to be really the oldest in Karnataka, and perhaps in the entire country too!. Incidentally, Nallur is a place of great antiquity, the Mysore Gazetteer authored by Hayavadana Rao records it as a regional capital of the Chola Empire in the 12th Century, known once for its opulent palaces, gilded temples and cultural richness which, unfortunately due to political rivalry, was razed to the ground by around 15th Century.

We reached Nallur to find these trees everywhere, their canopies fully intact, not even a twig broken by man or even a fruit plucked. The morning sunrays played hide-n-seek in the tree canopies giving a distinct beauty and freshness to the whole area. We didn't know where to turn or which way to go, but by the time the last of the birdwatchers had poured in, quite a few of those who arrived early had already dispersed amidst this vast grove of trees, binoculars in hand or ambling along, simply wonder-struck by the beauty of this place.

By the time breakfast arrived around 9.00 am, we had seen a Brahminy Kite sunning itself on top of a tree and the melodious call of the Magpie Robin emanated from the top of another. Hoopoes were in abundance. For a species which is usually seen singly or a pair occasionally, there were nearly a dozen seen during our visit. The call of the Greenish Leaf Warblers appeared to enliven the canopies of almost every tree around. There were Grey Drongos, Blyth's Reed and Booted Tree warblers, Tailor Birds, Roseringed Parakeets and Pariah Kites. Amidst those who craned their necks or squatted on their toes or even ran towards a recent sighting, there were a few smiling faces too - those lucky ones who had seen a male Black Redstart, a species hard to come by in Bangalore area in recent times – some of them were seeing the species after over five years!

As we ate our breakfast, details of birds seen poured fourth: Brahminy Mynas, Spotted owlets, Coppersmiths, Paradise Flycatcher, White-headed Babblers, Coucals, White-breasted Kingfisher and more were in attendance to add thrill to those who braved the chill of that 19th morning and drove over from Bangalore. Soon after that very welcome breakfast, all of us gathered below an old tamarind tree to listen to Sri Yellappa Reddy, Prof. Madhav Gadgil, Mr. Narayana Swamy and our own publisher, S. Sridhar. The partly horizontal knarled trunk of the tree formed the stage. We were enlightened on the history, importance and the need to conserve further the magnificent tamarind trees of Nallur. The gathering thanked the villagers of Nallur, who were in attendance, for preserving such a magnificent site as a sacred grove.

Amidst us was a very friendly Golden Retriever that went truly social, leading the birdwatchers – skirting bushes and jumping over a few others, trying its best to be one with those who busied themselves trying to watch every bird that was around and catch-up with every bit of birdlore. As we were led by the villagers on a tour of the area to show us those trees that were really very old and the ruins of the Chola capital, among scores of other birds, Treepies, Grey Tits, Small Green-billed Malkoha, Small Minivet, Black-headed Cuckoo-shrikes and Golden Orioles were added to our ever growing list. A sudden shout brought our attention to a pair of Mottled Wood Owls which on being mobbed by Jungle Crows, disappeared into the dense canopy of a huge Banyan tree.

As the Sun went up in the sky, the day became very warm and the birdwatchers had broken-up into small groups and were involved in animated conference trying to get as much from the gathering of birdwatchers – right from tips on birdwatching, field guides, binoculars, birdwatching places in and around Bangalore, to 'can I go with you for birdwatching' requests. Also, new birdwatching acquaintances were forged and many visiting cards, phone numbers and e-mail addresses were exchanged.

Given a choice, birdwatchers would have stayed on for a few more hours, but the Annual get-together of birdwatchers at Dodda Gubbi beckoned everyone to bid adieu to this wonderful Tamarind grove of Nallur. In all, 54 species of birds were sighted in less than four hours and the experience of watching them was truly memorable.

List of Birds seen in and around Nallur Tamarind Grove*:

Ardeidae : Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*
Accipitridae : Black Kite *Milvus migrans,* Brahminy Kite *Haliaster indus,* Shikra *Accipiter badius*
Phasianidae : Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus*
Rallidae: White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*
Charadriidae: Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malabaricu,* Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*
Scolopacidae : Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*
Columbidae : Blue Rock Pigeon *Columba livia,* Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*
Psittacidae : Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*
Cuculidae : Common Hawk Cuckoo *Hierococcyx varius,* Asian Koel *Eudynams scolopacea*, Small Green-billed malkoha *Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*, Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis*
Strigidae : Mottled Wood-Owl *Strix ocellata*,Spotted Owlet *Athene brama*
Apodidae : House Swift *Apus affinis*
Alcedinidae : White-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*
Meropidae : Small Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*
Coraciidae: Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis*
Upupidae : Hoopoe *Upupa epops*
Capitonidae : White-cheeked Barbet *Megalaima viridis,* Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*
Hirundinidae: Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica*
Motacillidae : Large-pied Wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis*
Campephagidae : Black-headed Cuckoo–shrike, *Coracina melanoptera*, Small Minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeous,* Common Wood-shrike *Tephrodornis pondicerianus*
Laniidae : Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*
Turdinae : Magpie Robin *Copsychus saularis,* Indian Robin *Saxicoloides fulicata,* Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*
Timalinae: White-headed Babbler *Turdoides affinis*
Sylvinae : Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis,* Blyth's Reed Warbler Acrocephalus *dumetorum*, Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius,* Booted Warbler *Hippolias caligata,* Greenish Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*
Monarchinae : Asian Paradise Flycatcher Terpsiphone *paradisi*
Paridae : Great Tit *Parus major*
Nectariniidae : Purple-rumped Sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica*
Estrildidae : Spotted Munia *Lonchura punctulata*
Sturnidae : Brahminy Starling *Sturnus pagodarum,* Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis,* Jungle Myna *Acridotheres fuscus*
Oriolidae : Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*
Dicruridae : Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*
Corvidae : Indian Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda,* House Crow *Corvus splendus,* Jungle Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*

* The names and order of listing is as per the Standard Common and Scientific names of the birds of the Indian Subcontinent by Ranjit Manakadan and Aasheesh Pittie (Buceros vol. 6; 2001).

Birding with Salim Ali

PETER JACKSON, 1172, Boughy, Switzerland

Sunday morning, 17 October 1954. My wife, Adrienne, and I were up early and ready for anything. We had been invited by General Sir Harold Williams of the Delhi Birdwatching Society to go birding with India's renowned ornithologist, Salim Ali. Being almost complete beginners, we were rather apprehensive at meeting the famous Indian ornithologist. His name was familiar to us because General Williams had given me a copy of his Indian Hill Birds to take on my trek the year before from Kathmandu to Everest to report on the British attempt to be the first to climb the world's highest mountain. One day during the trek, while I rested briefly on a hillside, a large black bird sailed by. I recognised it as the cover picture on the bird book and I was excited to find that it was a Himalayan black eagle. Later during the two-week trek a flock of birds, some scarlet and some yellow, flew across the track ahead of me. A quick riffle through the book and I found a picture of male and female scarlet minivets. Birds were becoming interesting.

General Williams had betted Salim that we could see 60 species before breakfast at Okhla, a short distance south of Delhi on the right bank of the Yamuna. Ignorant of the rites of birders, Adrienne and I had premonitions of a professorial Salim Ali who would make us lie in silence in the dust and mud with camouflaging leaves in our hair. It was a pleasant surprise to be introduced to a lively, friendly Salim. He was then in his late fifties and did not have the distinctive beard that he grew later. When we reached Okhla, our fears dispersed as we began a walk about, chatting while Salim identified the many birds we came across. I remember him pointing out a spotted sandpiper, and remarking that it must be spotted because we had spotted it.

We spent about two hours wandering around, and by breakfast time General Williams had ticked off the species sighted on the Delhi society's bird list. He announced that we had seen 69 species, comfortably more than he had predicted.

That morning was a watershed in my life; from a suburban Londoner, familiar with sparrows, starlings and crows but few other species, I became hooked on birds. Weekends were now spent visiting birding sites, equipped with Salim's Book of Indian Birds.

In October 1956, Salim visited Delhi on his way to Bharatpur to ring birds in the Ghana. We asked him if we could join the expedition and HH Bharatpur kindly provided accommodation in his guest house, Lal Kothi. Salim was startled when we arrived with a three-month old baby daughter in a carrycot.

We were introduced to the astonishing sight of a vast nesting colony of water birds off Jatoli bund – painted and openbill storks, egrets, cormorants and snakebirds prominent among them - and packed close together on the babul trees. There was a great roar, like that of a football crowd, when a fishing eagle swept above them.

The forest staff warmly greeted their old friend, Salim, and had a boat ready for us to paddle out to the nesting birds. We settled baby Paddy in her carrycot on the bund – at that age she could not get out of it – while we took to the water. Our task was to help Salim ring nestling openbill storks, of which there were many. It proved to be a dirty business, for when we grabbed a stork and held it for Salim to put a ring on its leg it ejected oily black excrement all over us - one of the ringed storks was later found 500 miles away.

The expedition cemented our friendship with Salim, who became fond of Paddy. We also became friends with HH and on many future visits we were his guests in the palace.

Whenever my work took me to Bombay, I always called at the BNHS to see Salim. The first time I went there the BNHS was still in the Phipson's office building in Apollo street. On one occasion, Salim invited me to his home on Pali Hill. I found myself sitting tensely in the sidecar as we roared through the Bombay traffic, with Salim complaining that he had hurt his leg in an accident so that he could not ride his beloved motorcycle without the sidecar.

A birding trip to Borivli was essential whenever I had a weekend in Bombay. Salim drove a hefty four–wheel drive vehicle in which he looked tiny behind the wheel.

Two of the most exciting trips with Salim were in Bhutan. Druk Galpo (King) Jigme Dorji Wangchuk wanted a "Birds of Bhutan" to go alongside Salim's "Birds of Sikkim". But Salim finally decided that Bhutan and Sikkim were similar and he called the publication "Birds of the Eastern Himalayas".

The first camp was in 1965 at Dewangiri, in the eastern Bhutan foothills. Here Salim thought he had discovered a new subspecies of sibia *(Heterophasia spp.)* The many sibias around our camp were distinguished by a white brow. Only after one had been caught did examination reveal that the white was pollen from flowers on whose nectar they had been feeding, and there was no new subspecies.

The second expedition was in 1967 to Shamgong, a district headquarters, at about 3,000 m in central Bhutan. I drove from Delhi and reached there by the then unfinished and very rough road. I was told that mine was the first car ever to complete the journey. It was dark when I arrived and very difficult to locate Salim's camp. Eventually the District Commissioner told me that the "shooting party" was at the Border Roads Organisation camp. Salim was surprised at my arrival. He said the accommodation was terrible and they were living on rice and dal. Fortunately, I had brought bananas, chocolate and oranges, as well as other supplies they had requested. But when supper arrived it was venison – a young Nepali assistant had shot a barking deer and it provided many meals.

Salim was then 70 and said the steep hills made him feel that his expeditions of this type were over. But next day I was puffing alongside him up a steep slope as he complained that he could not go as fast as in the past because he had a hernia. Birds were brought down with dust shot, which does not damage the skins. It was a sad sight to see them strung on a stick on the way back to camp, and when the completed specimens were laid out on a tray it was hard to recognize them as the living birds.

Bed tea arrived at 5.00 a.m. when the sun rose. Breakfast and at 6.30 everyone had a get out to the field. Back at midday for lunch, often rice and dhal, after which Salim might treat himself to a single square from a bar of chocolate. In the afternoon, the teams sat round tables where the morning's bag was laid out for weighing measuring, skinning and stuffing for the BNHS collection. Teatime with biscuits, and Salim was off on his evening "stroll", which most would consider a strenuous walk. It was an immense pleasure to be with him as he chatted away, telling wonderful anecdotes (if only I had a tape recorder). Supper often included flesh from the skinned specimens, such as barbets, which have meaty breast. Then the day's journal had to be written before bed by 9.00 p.m.

I sometimes had the privilege of sharing a tent with Salim having assured him that I didn't snore, an affliction he couldn't abide.

The leading hunter was Jamshed Pande, a slim energetic Parsi. During the Dewangiri expedition he had collected a Ward's trogon *(Harpactes wardi)* which had previously only been recorded several hundred miles to the east. Now he collected three more – two females and a male, thereby proving that the bird had a more extended range than thought.

Salim's great friend Dillon Ripley, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, and his wife, Mary arrived one afternoon. They had two truckloads of boxes and bags that had been flown from Washington to Bagdogra, down on the plains in India. After a meal, they set up their tents the warm sunshine With evening the sun deserted us and then came the chill. Dillon felt it most because he was wearing shorts, in which he had come all the way from the USA. He went to get his own trousers, but could not find them in the huge pile of baggage. Mary came to his aid. She cut the legs off a pair of her own trousers and sewed them on to Dillon's shorts.

Dillon's camping equipment was right up-to-date, but there was a problem. The tents were made of synthetic material, and in the heat of the day they became hot as ovens. Fred Ward, the photographer who had accompanied Dillon from Washington had to move his equipment and films out of the tents to a shady place in order to preserve them.

By mid-April monsoon clouds were drifting in from the plains, and Salim decided to retreat to Galegphug, near the Indian border. But at midday on the day before we were to move, the rains burst over us. The camp and the road became a sea of mud and stones, and the engineers said big landslides were certain to block the road down. The rains continued next morning, but in

the afternoon the clouds cleared and the sun shone again. We had to get out before more rain arrived. The "road" was terrible. At one point, with Salim sitting beside me, I had the brakes full on as the car began slipping down a steep slope on the road. He appeared unperturbed, which I wasn't and the car came to rest on a level area.

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A PERSONAL REQUEST

Dear Member

SEASON'S GREETINGS & BEST WISHES
FOR A
HAPPY & PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR-2003

Kindly renew your membership of the Newsletter for Birdwatchers by paying Rs. 80/- for 1 year or Rs. 200/- for 3 years, If you are paying by Cheque or Draft please add Rs. 15/- towards bank collection charges. The members' list is being updated. Due to high cost of Printing & Postage, I am afraid future issues will be mailed to members who pay by 31st March 2003.

Please treat this as my formal reminder as also my personal request to renew your membership.

With best Wishes

ZAFAR FUTEHALLY
Editor

10-03-2003

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their ranks caused by the sudden appearance of a pair of white-bellied sea eagle. Hills around Vizag are well stocked with vegetation but we had little time to climb and look for birds residing there.

We had planned to go to a place called Arakoo in the hills at an altitude of about 1000 metres again by rail, for the journey affords spectacular views of the forests of Eastern ghats. But as one neared Arakoo, hills became devoid of vegetation as forests seemed to be cleared for jhoom of shifting cultivation. Here and there were eucalyptus, silver oak and pine plantations mocked at you trying to mask the denuded look of the surroundings. Arakoo is a hill station partly hidden in a forest of exotic trees, Eucalyptus, Silver oak and pine. Birds were aplenty, especially the pushing, bullying flocks of house crow, the mildly noisy bevies of pied myna (starling) and two sub-species of white wagtail. A huge colony of fruit bats probably attracted a redhead merlin though the ever alert crows chased him away.

The countryside around Arakoo and beyond on the way to Jagdalpur in Chhattisgarh is immensely interesting for a geologist. The low hills hide in their bowels mysterious caves, dark and deep with imposing formations of stalactites and stalagmites. Here ancient granites and gneisses were overlain by sandstones and limestones which are chiseled by the Indrawati and its tributaries giving rise to innumerable waterfalls and cascades. Here and there a few hills retain a modicum of indigenous forest but most of them now harbour cashew and coffee plantations, the latter under the previous canopy of silver oak, pine, dalbergia, even sal and teak ! The rolling Indrawati plateau is now covered with enormous sprawling plantations of eucalyptus, *Acacia auriculiformis*, pine and *Leucaena leucocephala* interspersed with paddy and sesamum cultivation. The landscape looked very handsome with carpets of yellow (sesamum flowers) and various shades of green but the absence of birds was deeply depressing. Not even a crow or myna enlivened our journey. Skies were empty too! We came across huge numbers of cattle often obstructing the traffic but not a single vulture anywhere looking

The distinguished group was overwhelmed by the bird display at the jheel – flocks of many kinds of ducks, storks, egrets, pelicans soaring overhead and cranes landing. It was unanimously agreed that the jheel should be protected. Letters to the Central and Rajasthan government had no effect, and so I decided to approach Prime Minister Indira Gandhi directly. Seeing such names as Salim Ali and Peter Scott as supporters, she responded quickly, and the reserve was created in 1971.

I left India in 1970, but retuned almost every year from then on because of my position as WWF's project officer for Operation Tiger and later as Chairman of the IUCN Cat Specialist Group. Whenever possible I visited Salim in Bombay and we would go to Borivli. In 1979 and 1982 I took the opportunity to tape long interviews with him. It was in the course of one of them that he remarked that the older and more experienced he got, the less convinced he was of some of his early bird identifications.

"I think that everybody who can manage to survive to my age will realize that this is so. When you are young you are very cocksure of yourself about various things, and also about identification of, for example, birds of prey and leaf warblers *(Phylloscopus spp.)* They are some of the most difficult things and even now I find that what I identified in past bird surveys I cannot really trust 100 per cent because you see how many pitfalls there are and how mistaken you can be".

Salim often talked of Kihim, the village across the bay from Bombay which he loved, but I never managed to go there until, after his death, Zafar Futehally invited me. It was moving to see the seaside cottage where Salim had stayed when carrying out his epoch-making study of the baya weaver birds *(Ploceus philippinus)*, even more so to see the tank where he had seen how the males alone built nests and won the favours of successive females.

A Peep into the Eastern Ghats

, 13, Abhimanshree Coop. Hs. Soceity off Pashan Road, Pune 411 008

the afternoon the clouds cleared and the sun shone again. We had to get out before more rain arrived. The "road" was terrible. At one point, with Salim sitting beside me, I had the brakes full on as the car began slipping down a steep slope on the road. He appeared unperturbed, which I wasn't and the car came to rest on a level area.

There was a landslide, or rather an overhang that collapsed on the road. It took a bulldozer and a team of labourers several hours to clear it sufficiently for us to get past with my outside wheels about three inches from the steep drop. Next day, after the worst of the descent, we decided to stop for a break. I pressed the brake pedal, which went down to the floor without operating the brakes. But we were again on the level. Lucky it hadn't happened higher up! I managed to limp three miles to a motor workshop where mechanics bled the brakes releasing air which had got into the hydraulic system. The brakes did not fail again.

I left Salim at the border and drove to Guwahati (still Gauhati at that time) to meet Adrienne and visit Kaziranga for an elephant ride among the rhinos, buffaloes and deer.

The next big occasion with Salim came in November 1969, when the IUCN held its General Assembly in Delhi. This brought many international ornithologists to the city, including Peter Scott and Dillon Ripley. I had to take them out to my favourite birding spot, Sultanpur jheel. It was then a "normal" jheel, with none of the mounds and trees that are there today. To get there was not so easy because the road had been neglected due to flooding caused by the blockage of the Najafgarh Drain. There was a small hill where the broken surface became just sand and getting the car over it was a challenge. Incidentally, it was when stuck once on that hill that I got the first record of blue-cheeked bee-eaters *(Merops superciliosus)* nesting in the Delhi area.

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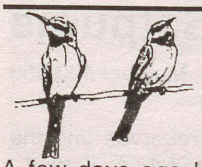


A Peep into the Eastern Ghats

PRAKASH GOLE, 13, Abhimanshree Coop. Hs. Soceity off Pashan Road, Pune 411 008

A few days ago I travelled by rail to Vishakhapatnam from Pune and immensely enjoyed looking out of the window at rich paddy wetlands around Vijayawada, dotted with numerous openbill storks, egrets – cattle and intermediate, glossy ibis, grey herons and even a great bittern! In Vizag, though the beautiful seafront was without the usual assemblage of gulls and terns and sandpipers and sand plovers, one could still enjoy the aerobatics of an army of pariah kites and the consternation in their ranks caused by the sudden appearance of a pair of white-bellied sea eagle. Hills around Vizag are well stocked with vegetation but we had little time to climb and look for birds residing there.

We had planned to go to a place called Arakoo in the hills at an altitude of about 1000 metres again by rail, for the journey affords spectacular views of the forests of Eastern ghats. But as one neared Arakoo, hills became devoid of vegetation as forests seemed to be cleared for jhoom of shifting cultivation. Here and there were eucalyptus, silver oak and pine plantations mocked at you trying to mask the denuded look of the surroundings. Arakoo is a hill station partly hidden in a forest of exotic trees, Eucalyptus, Silver oak and pine. Birds were aplenty, especially the pushing, bullying flocks of house crow, the mildly noisy bevies of pied myna (starling) and two sub-species of white wagtail. A huge colony of fruit bats probably attracted a redhead merlin though the ever alert crows chased him away.

The countryside around Arakoo and beyond on the way to Jagdalpur in Chhattisgarh is immensely interesting for a geologist. The low hills hide in their bowels mysterious caves, dark and deep with imposing formations of stalactites and stalagmites. Here ancient granites and gneisses were overlain by sandstones and limestones which are chiseled by the Indrawati and its tributaries giving rise to innumerable waterfalls and cascades. Here and there a few hills retain a modicum of indigenous forest but most of them now harbour cashew and coffee plantations, the latter under the previous canopy of silver oak, pine, dalbergia, even sal and teak ! The rolling Indrawati plateau is now covered with enormous sprawling plantations of eucalyptus, *Acacia auriculiformis*, pine and *Leucaena leucocephala* interspersed with paddy and sesamum cultivation. The landscape looked very handsome with carpets of yellow (sesamum flowers) and various shades of green but the absence of birds was deeply depressing. Not even a crow or myna enlivened our journey. Skies were empty too! We came across huge numbers of cattle often obstructing the traffic but not a single vulture anywhere looking

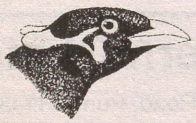
for his meal! Water bodies too presented a desolate look though late in the evening we did see a skein of egrets slowly returning to their roost.

From Jagdalpur moist deciduous forests stretch west and northwest right into Maharashtra's Gadchiroli and Chandrapur districts. The Kanger Valley National Park is supposed to be famous for hill myna. We reached it however, during noon, "a wrong time to see the myna" said our forest guide. We had to be content with the glimpse of a short-toed snake eagle, actually carrying a snake in its talons. The recently discovered limestone caves in this NP were impressive too, the stalactites and stalagmites in them being more varied in sizes and shapes and better preserved than in Borra caves of Andhra Pradesh.

Birds were uncommon in the countryside till we came to a place just 75 km west of Vishakhapatnam. Here, at an altitude of less than 1000 metres we stayed in Eastern Ghats surrounded by forest. The trees around were not unfamiliar : Lannea, Terminalia, Albizzia, Dalbergia, Bauhinia, Gmelina, even evergreens such as Mallotus and Dillenia. It was wonderful to meet the familiar tamarind in a forest! We learned later that these forests are indeed the original home of the tamarind; not only the familiar variety but also its ancestor! And what size they attained in the forest! Not only tamarind but also Albizzias, Dalbergias, Lanneas, Bauhinias all were of gigantic proportions in these hills of Eastern Ghats. The tall Dalbergias with their silvery stems and delicate-looking leaves appeared to me like giants clad in Nehru shirt and pyjamas! Even the climber *Bauhinia vahlii*, favourite of the Gaur, was transformed into a gigantic liana with woody stems more than 40 cm in girth.

Our hut was not far away from a busy road with honking traffic as trucks and buses trudged along the tortuous ghats road. But I soon realized that was the best place to see birds! Morn and eve we zigzagged along the road, avoiding traffic, looking over tree tops and down into ravines, glen and valleys and craning our necks to get a glimpse of a bird perched on the shoulders of a tree giant. Here were black and changeable hawk eagles soaring in a blue sky; raucous bands of leaf birds zipping in the foliage; and garrulous shama swinging on a vine and gracefully vanishing on the other side into thickets along a brook. Here were coveys of quails trying to sneak through a gap between two upcoming vehicles and an emerald dove dropping down quietly on the road during a lull in the traffic. Here was black-crested (yellow) bulbul spreading its joyous notes from a bough and a verditer flycatcher enjoying the warmth of the morning sun on a bamboo and a group of coppersmiths sitting quietly, trying to gather wind to start their treadmill later in the day! White-browed bulbuls gleaning berries, a purple-rumped sunbird probing for nectar in the red Ipomoea flower, greenish warblers noisy and flitting, rufous turtle dove cooing and vanishing, and a majestic looking crested serpent eagle quite oblivious of the traffic were sights difficult to forget. In the evening a giant Dalbergia served as a staging station for an assembly of grey wagtails who gathered there from every direction.

On the first day itself we became familiar with the territory of a greater flameback as he hopped from one tree to another diligently examining branches and stems. A pair of chestnut-headed bee-eaters also was a familiar sight not far from our hut as they sallied after flying insects throughout the day. The usual bird chorus during our stay consisted of the familiar calls of coppersmith, large green barbet, slatyheaded scimitar babbler and spotted (puff-breasted) babbler. Migrants whom we particularly remember in this trip included marsh and pied harrier, blue rock thrush, brown shrike and blyth's pipit. So ended a thoroughly enjoyable trip not far inland from the east coast of India.



Birds of the Satpuras

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The latest National Wildlife Action Plan (NWAP) has outlined various strategies which if implemented would considerably improve the status of wild India. Generous emphasis has been laid on 'conservation awareness and education'. It has been accepted that wildlife conservation is unattainable without peoples' participation and that the need of the hour is to devise education programs for both school students and Forest Staff.

The simple but significant message *Jungle Nadi Ki Maa Hai* (Forest is the mother of rivers) is being spread amidst the students- the next generation of India through 'Kids for Tigers'. This education program has been conceptualized by Bittu Sahgal, Editor, Sanctuary Magazine and is financially supported by Britannia Industries. It is currently being run in 700 schools (one million students from 3rd to 8th standard) across 12 cities in India including Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Amravati, Nagpur, Jabalpur, Patna, Dehradun and Mussoorie. The rationale of the program is simple; impart environment education to the students of today to mold them into conservation oriented decision-makers of tomorrow.

It is during these tiger rallies and nature camps that I catch-up with my feathered friends. In February 2002, I was on one such fun-filled trip to central India trying to muster support for the symbol of Indian wildlife, the tiger. In between the tiger rallies, I managed to spend some days at the nearby wildlife reserves and the following bird-lists are a welcome by - product of these sorties.

Melghat Tiger Reserve (MTR): After the tiger mela and rally at Amravati, I along with other colleagues left for the Melghat tiger reserve (MTR) to participate in a rally on 22nd February at Semadoh village to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the first tiger reserve of Maharashtra. Before the rally, we went for an exciting walk with the Chief Conservator of Forest Mr. Ramanuj Choudhary and his Deputy Mr. Damge around the Kolkaz guesthouse situated on the apex of a hillock overlooking a beautiful stretch of a rivulet. This approximately 1600 sq. km. tiger reserve forms a vital catchment for river Tapi. Many rivulets like Sipna, Khapra, Dolar, Khandu and Gadga that originate from Melghat empty into Tapi.

Although the time spent at the reserve was far from satisfactory, the quality of birding was encouraging. Some of the worthwhile sightings are as follows: Short-toed snake eagle (one bird was sighted above a water body due to incessant cacophony of a flock of jungle babblers in a nearby thicket..Surely, eagles are the tigers of the bird world). Black-lored tit (this exquisite little bird was seen meticulously exploring the underside of leaves on a gigantic mango tree), red-throated flycatcher and grey-headed canary flycatcher (there was a fierce competition between the

two flycatchers for insects). They kept making ariel sorties for hapless arthropods from their favored perches, the canary flycatcher showed more loyalty towards its perch than its smaller, more vociferous cousin) Eurasian blackbird (a fleeting glimpse of the blackbird was more than what we could ask for).

Mahendri Reserve Forest (MRF): After having an electrifying tiger rally with the Korku tribals at Melghat, we had to reach Warud, a small town, for a similar program. En route however, my friend Kishor Rithe from Satpura Foundation suggested that we spend the night at MRF, a tiny jewel about 18 km from Warud. This 100 sq km forest is an important corridor between the Melghat and Pench tiger reserves. Due to its importance as a catchment for the lake that supplies water to Amravati, the local conservation groups are demanding that this reserve forest be upgraded to a Sanctuary or National Park.

A three-hour saunter through this deciduous forest provided enough evidence in support of the above – mentioned demands. Also evident was the lack of protection. The dirt tracks were strewn with cattle dung and the forest was studded with tree stumps. The birdlife of the area, though not as diverse as in more secure reserves, had enough variety to stimulate a birdwatcher.

Some of the interesting sightings : crested bunting (a pair was seen busily searching the leaf litter for grubs, the male seemed more conscious about his looks while the female kept toppling one leaf after the other), southern grey shrike (a solitary bird looked intensely at a shrub and then swooped down to return with young gecko) and a shikra (a mixed flock of brahminy starlings, common mynas, red-vented bulbuls and great tits unanimously advertised their dislike for this avian predator).

Most birds are not as specialized as mammals from the point of view of their food requirements; however, a rapid survey of the avifauna of an area can give an insight on the ecological history of a place. The presence of mynas, starlings, crows, bulbuls, rock pigeons and house sparrows in comparatively large numbers was a definite proof of the troubled past of MRF. If adequate corrective measures are not taken immediately, this jewel will disappear and with it will vanish the only source of fresh air for the people of Warud. Realizing the importance of MRF to Warud, the 'Kids for Tigers' program extended its complete support to the ongoing struggle for upgrading the reserve forest.

Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR): After soaking ourselves with unbridled enthusiasm of the kids of Warud, we left for the PTR, which is situated about 70 km to the north of Nagpur. The idea was to spend a day at the tiger reserve before heading for our next tiger mela at Nagpur. At the Sillari Nature Interpretation Center, we were given a warm welcome by the RFO and his field staff and then escorted to the Totladoh guesthouse for a much-needed meal.

Since birding was on our minds we decided to spend the night at the Saddle Dam guesthouse, a place without electricity and water just right for eccentric wildlifers. That night, we slept listening to the intoxicating lullabies of the jackals residing in the nearby meadows. The following morning, even before the sun peeked from the eastern horizon, we had taken our positions at the Nagdeo pahadi to intercept the feathered bipeds.

PTR has a total area of 955 sq km, of which 255 sq km is in Maharashtra and an additional 700 sq. km. in the adjoining state of Madhya Pradesh. The area is cut north-south by the Pench river. Most of the park is mixed deciduous forest interspersed with open meadows in the valleys. The predominant tree species are *Tectona grandis, Schleichera oleosa, Terminalia tomentosa* and *Madhuca indica*.

Some of the more memorable bird sightings involved white-rumped vulture (three nests were sighted at three different sites along the forest paths, in addition to this, there were reports of at least four other active nests), Eurasian thick-knee (three pairs were seen on the dirt track in the night, the birds, probably under the influence of the blinding headlights, refused to move even when the vehicle was less than 3 meters away), collared scops owl (the inconspicuously conspicuous call of the bird kept us company during our half an hour stint at the guesthouse veranda), white-browed wagtail (a solitary bird searched for insects at the base of a huge boulder in a rapidly drying pool), large grey babblers (a couple of birds seemed intrigued by something in a tree hollow; after a couple of minutes one of the birds emerged with a huge hairy moth caterpillar, which was then banged against a branch before being gobbled up).

Apart from its diverse wildlife, PTR is worth visiting just for its magnificent land formation. The winding Pench river, with its numerous gorges, is one of the most enchanting stretch of wilderness in central India. Completely spellbound by the charisma of the Satpuras, we needed to repeatedly remind ourselves of the next tiger mela. Hesitatingly enough we left for Nagpur to participate in the 'Kids for Tigers' mela, which was also attended by Mr. Majumdar, the Chief Wildlife Warden.

(To be continued)

Death of a Marsh

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My first visit to the Velacherry marsh was on 30 October 1978. It was a memorable day for all those members of the then newly-formed Madras Naturalists' Society who came for the visit. Having been told there was this extensive, undisturbed wild habitat just a few kilometers south of the city limits, we decided to devote an afternoon studying its bird-life. The recent rains had brought not only fresh supply of water to the marsh but also several migratory waterbirds. The first bird we spotted that afternoon was the rare red-necked phalarope, the only record of this species for the city of Chennai so far (to the best of my knowledge). The bird appeared tame and allowed us to approach it close enough to observe its behaviour and to photograph it. It fed by swimming around in circles in the shallow pool of water along the road. We ended up with a list of over 40 bird species for that afternoon.

My association with this marsh thus commenced on an auspicious note. I have visited it over 25 times in the last 24 years. The marsh was quite extensive (some 50 km^2) and was part of a network of over 90 wetlands whose run-off entered it. These waters finally passed through a stream called Okkiyamadavu and joined the Kovalam estuary through the south Buckingham Canal. It had within it some amount of diversity in micro-habitats. The *Typha* reed-beds were the most conspicuous of them. Dense, tall stands of reeds, over three metres in height, stood out in the otherwise flat featureless landscape. There were open patches

of water in the reeds, most of them perennial and some fairly deep. There were open meadows skirting the reeds, which after rains would be under water ranging from a few centimetres to a metre or more. Locating birds in this area was always a challenge because of its expanse, the dense vegetation and its marshy condition.

Apart from the village "buffalo boys", there were occasional sportsmen out on a shoot for their pots over the weekends. Otherwise we used to have the entire marsh and its birds all to ourselves! It was also quite out-of-the-way in the late 70's till about the latter half of the 80's during which time city bus services were extended to this area to meet the demands of the expanding human population that began to colonise the periphery of the marsh. There was this road right from our first visit in 1978 that extended from the Velacherry village to Tambaram cutting across the marsh from north to south. The western part of the road had no reeds but was open with water inundating it in the rainy season and leaving a few deeper pools even in dry seasons.

Looking back through my old notes and recalling the memories of my earlier visits, I feel sad and depressed at the loss of this wetland and also because none of us actually did a serious study of this habitat and its birds. My own notes record a total of 105 bird species here. Some of these birds are not to be found in the neighbourhood of the city other than at a couple of similar such habitats that were much smaller in area and sadly even these sites have now disappeared. Among such species are the streaked weaver, clamorous reed warbler, yellow and chestnut bittern, purple heron, purple moorhen, kora or watercock, large Indian pratincole and the Indian courser. It appears that all these were breeding residents. Up to 15 coursers have been seen here in the early 1980's. Their disappearance coincided with the dumping of garbage along the road and in the marsh in 1982. These birds preferred the dry open area which they used for feeding and perhaps nesting. The Pratincoles similarly have been displaced from the area with the garbage coming in and I have not seen them since 1984. The other species are still surviving in the reeds but their numbers have drastically dwindled with the reduction in the habitat size. Besides, the laying of new roads has increased the access to the marsh for sportsmen armed with guns or traps. The advent of the crows, stray dogs and kites in large numbers, attracted to the garbage dump since 1984 when dumping was in progress also effectively reduced the populations of birds of the marsh.

This marsh perhaps was the best-known roost for thousands of migratory wagtails (mostly yellow and white) and swallows in the neighbourhood of the city. It used to be a memorable sight seeing thousands of birds zeroing in on the reed-beds at sunset from all directions. The marshes also held good populations (in thousands) of ducks and teals besides fairly good populations of waders especially during the winter months. It was too much of a challenge to attempt a count as birds would remain hidden amongst the vegetation and the only indication of their presence would be when they were disturbed by a gunshot or when a raptor flew overhead. As a result this important wetland habitat always got left out in our annual waterfowl counts.

I have seen large congregations of the pheasant-tailed jacanas numbering 500+ birds in February 1981. I also noticed these birds with young ones as recently as in August 1997. The short-toed lark and long-toed stint are among the less common migrants seen at this site. I have also seen the collared sand martin numbering 10-15, in February 1998. White-necked storks have also been recorded here on two occasions in July 1997. The presence of blue-tailed bee-eaters here in summer months and sighting of birds in juvenile plumage had given rise to the speculation that this species could breed in the neighbourhood of the city.

On the morning of 8 September 2002, I made the most recent visit to the marsh. We left fairly early that morning and took a ride along the brand new road that was completed recently. The road was cutting right through the marsh, bisecting it and connected the old Mahabalipuram road with the Velacherry-Tambaram road. A large flock of openbill storks, numbering over 200 (more were following) were seen in flight heading towards east. They were perhaps coming from the I.I.T campus, located to the north of the marsh. The marsh area covered with tall stands of *Typha*, the open water and wet grassy patches of land close to the road was full of activity. There were no less than 200 glossy ibis feeding at the edge of the water. Amongst them were over 50 purple moorhen, 50 coots, over 500 black-winged stilts, about 10-20 common moorhen, a purple heron, a few spotted sandpipers, two bar-tailed godwits, three redshanks, a pond heron and some 100 pheasant-tailed jacanas, some in their resplendent breeding dress. A few whiskered terns were hovering around and a couple of grey herons were noticed in flight. A little beyond in a deeper pool of water were dabchicks, numbering over 100, feeding by diving in the water.

We did not spend much time that morning and did not even get off from the car thanks to the filth and garbage all around. Yet we listed some 25 species of birds. We returned feeling sad despite the diversity and number of birds seen. It is not going to be too long before even these birds are gone. The portion to the north of the road was rapidly getting filled up with garbage and that was a huge chunk of area. The remaining areas were apportioned by residential plots, the suburban railways that was getting extended to the one end of the marsh, the wholesale firewood market and so on, leaving very little of the natural habitat intact. It was a matter of time before the rest of the area would be reclaimed. The southern half of the marsh was also getting affected. There was a huge chunk given away for the National Institute of Ocean Technology, residential colonies etc. More areas are being earmarked for other "developmental" projects.

The reckless and thoughtless development of this marsh for multiple purposes over the years is a reflection of the lack of long-term vision amongst the planners. The marsh has served in replenishing the ground water aquifers of this part of the city. In fact the city depends on groundwater drawn from bore-wells, close to this wetland during periods of water shortage. The garbage dumping has rendered the water in the neighbourhood unfit for consumption with the leaching of pollutants from the wastes. It was a grazing ground for cattle. It also provided natural services by treating the water that entered it with its reed-beds and has acted as a natural drain, preventing floods. It was also a refuge for several birds and wildlife. It could have been better utilized as a recreation site and as a site for studies/education on wetland ecosystem.

Visitors – naturalists and ornithologists from other countries and other parts of the country, who have visited the site even in recent times have remarked about the value of this wetland and were sad that there was no effort on the part of the Government to recognize its importance and afford it some protection. Now the marsh has been fragmented, reduced to about a tenth of its original size and is surrounded by buildings and roads. Conserving the place now is an even greater challenge but whatever remains could still be protected if there is a will. But who is going to take the lead in protecting it?

A Geographical Distribution of Birding areas in India

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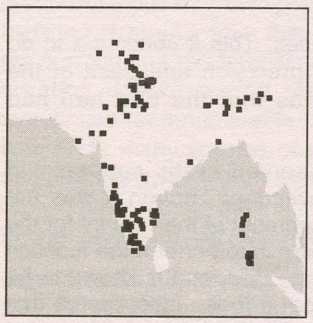

Some years ago Arunachalam Kumar wrote in the Newsletter on the geographic distribution of authors contributing articles to the Newsletter for Birdwatchers. It showed that most of the articles came from peninsular India. I recently started compiling a collection of checklists in tabulated form with locations as columns and rows as species. I used the BNHS – Envis species list for India, but had to add a couple of well-marked subspecies to avoid having to lose information in some of the checklists. In all it now consists of 214 checklists (not necessarily from 214 locations) and 1245 rows (species + subspecies). Of these 1245 forms about 82% of the species have appeared in one or the other checklist. The entire Andaman and Nicobars information comes from just a single publication. Sources of the checklist vary from trip reports available on the internet to those published in the Newsletter for Birdwatchers and a few from recent BNHS Journals. Obviously there are numerous other sources that have not been tapped, but the checklist distribution map shows large unmarked areas in central India, the lower Gangetic plains and the Eastern Ghats.

Not surprisingly many of the locations coincide with areas of tourist interest and major cities. There is however no information available for even the protected areas in the under-represented areas.

I also made an estimate of the time spent in the making of these checklists. This estimate is easy to assign for trip reports made by tourists, but rather difficult to make for long term compilations. I gave a nominal 500 hrs of field time to compilations by multiple authors and 250 hrs to those made over several years by single authors. A conservative estimate of the total time spent in the field is in the vicinity of 1300 hrs. The estimate is very useful in making a judgement on the rarity of the species. It would be even more useful if multiple trip-lists are available for an area, preferably from different people. Such information would obviously be better and can be more regularly obtained by resident birdwatchers, looking around in their own backyards, than by visitors from afar. It is also clear that all species lists made on trips are more useful than stray records of single vagrant species.

With such sparse availabilty of data to the common birdwatcher, it is surprising that many of the newer Feild Guides show unbelievable detail in their distribution maps.

Perhaps this distribution map may be a guide for 'birdwatching evangelists' and those who want to go off the beaten track.

Sightings of Birds in Sandur Hills and Other Places in North Karnataka

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Accompanied by a few members of the North Karnataka Birder's Network (NKBN), I went for a birding trip on the 12th and 13th July last year. The Network intends to gather comprehensive information on several regions of Karnataka.

Before launching on the July trip to the Sandur Hills, a group of 25-30 birders visited some of the wetlands in January 2002. Unbelievably on 6th January, the team noticed a huge gathering of nearly 2000 barheaded geese (*Anser indicus*) roosting in the village tank of Magadi. Since all neighbouring tanks had dried up completely as a result of the poor monsoon, all the birds had congregated at Magadi.

Another surprise was the sighting of the vulnerable Red Data Book species of the lesser adjutant stork (*Leptoptilos javanicus*) that the team spotted at another tank at Devikop 25 km from Dharwad on 10th January 2002.

The bird trip to the Sandur Hills by a few members of the NKBN on 12th and 13th July, commenced from Hospet via Kalhalli route. They stayed at the Gunda Forest Rest House, and the survey on the backwaters of the Tungabadra Reservoir revealed 16 different species of terrestrial and aquatic birds. Among them was Tickell's blue flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae), which* is usually found in the Western Ghats area and not in dry deciduous country. It was noteworthy that no common mynas (*Acridotheres tristis)* was found anywhere in this region. However, there were plenty of house sparrows (*Passer domesticus),* a species that is getting rare in Karnataka.

The team members were happy to find repeatedly the presence of the painted spur fowl (*Galloperdix lunulata)*, and were also happy to discover the endemic yellowthroated bulbul (*Pycnonotus xantholaemus)*. It may be recalled that the "variant" (sub-species?) of the yellowthroated bulbul, was discovered recently in February 2002 by the American tourist Mr. Howard Horvath (NLBW, Vol. 42, No. 4, July-August 2002, page 84-85) was at Hampi, very near to Hospet.

On 13th July, the members were in the Sandur plantation area, and their attention was drawn by a peculiar whistling note. It turned out to be the drongo cuckoo (*Surniculus lugubris).* This is a bird which looking so similar to the black drongo is often not identified correctly.

From the Sandur Medicinal plants conservation area and the Bear Sanctuary adjoining it, nearly 12 different species of birds were listed by the members. A few outstanding ones covered blackheaded munia, white throated munia (*Silverbill),* blue faced malkoha, painted spur fowl, drongo cuckoo, tawny bellied babbler and the painted sandgrouse. The total including those 27 listed at Hospet and Kalhalli stood at 59. Near Sandur forest lodge, the members sighted an accessory event where a lone member of the largetailed nightjar (*Caprimulgus macrurus)*, was found hanging on the electrical pole from where the bird was possibly flitting around the tubelight to capture winged insects drawn to it. Indeed, it was a rare sight.

Unusual foraging behaviour of Pond Heron and Coppersmith

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Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*

Pond herons *Ardeola grayii* are an abundant, breeding, resident bird species in Etawah district, Uttar Pradesh. They are found beside almost every water body, even in very polluted drains inside the town. I observed an individual sitting on a dry branch of a dead tree at a height of about 25 feet, in Etawah town on the evening of 18 Nov 2001 indulging in very strange behaviour. The bird pecked at the bark, broke it and ate, presumably, an arthropod that was present underneath. The bird then slowly walked the entire length of the branch looking for more prey and when it failed to find one, prised out a piece of bark with its beak, and ate some prey which it found there. It then cleaned its beak with a sidewise wiping movement on the branch before flying off. Again, on 12 April 2002, at 1845h, an individual alighted on a branch of the same tree. After perching for a minute, it observed movement on another branch, reached out, snatched off the prey from the bark and swallowed it.

Pecking at bark to get at prey underneath and gleaning prey off a dry branch are very atypical behaviours for a wader that is seldom known to vary its foraging strategy, which is either the sit-and-wait routine, or walking about slowly searching in or around water bodies (Martinez-Vilalta and Motis 1992). Other unusual foraging behaviours that have been previously documented for the pond heron are hovering over water and picking up prey (Krishna 1978), snapping at bees while sitting on a willow tree in bloom (Prasad and Hemanth 1992), aerial flycatching, diving, and swimming-feeding (Martinez-Vilalta and Motis 1992).

Coppersmith *Megalaima haemacephala*

The coppersmith *Megalaima haemacephala* is a common, widely distributed species in India (Ali & Ripley 1970). It is known to be "eminently frugivorous", with its diet including figs, drupes and berries, and occasionally moths and termites (Ali & Ripley 1970). In Etawah district, Uttar Pradesh, the species is a common breeding resident. In June 2002, I observed an individual in Etawah town that had a nest in the hollow of a dead tree, leave the nest for foraging. It stopped on the wall of a building. The bird then, in woodpecker style, hopped on the side of the wall, and commenced to peck at the cement between the bricks, and swallowed several pieces. This it continued to do several times, and going by the precision and ease of the activity performed, it was obvious that the bird had had considerable practice.

This behaviour has not been observed in the coppersmith previously to the best of my knowledge. Though it was not immediately obvious as to the requirement of the cement for the bird, I presume the cement was taken in to perform the function of grit. Grit is a grinding aid in the gizzard, and is known to be most coarse in herbivore birds, and in those insectivores that consume hard–bodied beetles, and grit in frugivores, nectarivores and birds taking in soft-bodied insects may be very reduced and the gizzard may instead hold fine sand (Ehrlich *et al.* 1994). Cement would be very fine, and would be suitable for the known diet of the coppersmith. It will be interesting to list all other such unusual occurrences in birds, and will help us to understand birds and their capabilities to adapt to urbanization better.

Acknowledgements

The observations were made while carrying out field work under the sarus crane project of Wildlife Institute of India and I acknowledge the facilities and infrastructure provided by the Director and B. C. Choudhury. I am grateful to M. B. Krishna for bringing to my notice some of the references in this note.

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The Indian Eagle Owl

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***Bubo bengalensis* (Franklin) in Merveille wasteland area - Pondicherry**

'Project Ecolake', of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Pondicherry, has been engaged in wasteland development and reforestation near Ousteri Lake since 1979. Environment enhancement programmes have had a positive effect in the biota of the area - including the population of the Indian eagle owl. Over the last decade or so, a pair of them and occasionally a third bird have been seen in the ravines, and flanking mango and coconut groves (a fine example of the 'edge-effect'). The amateur naturalists/birders amongst us recorded them photographically over the last couple of years, but a more intensive investigation was instituted by Gratitude Avian Rehabilitation of Auroville when their research associate Mr. M.E. Ramanujan, who has been collecting both ecological and ethological data on this taxon, incorporated our site as part of his study area. On his very first visit on Feb. 2001 he found a sufficient quantity of regurgitate pellets and his third visit coincided with the discovery of a nest containing a chick and egg of this bird. The female parent which was in the close vicinity flew away after only a semblance of intimidatory behaviour. On other occasions later also showed no antagonistic behaviour in spite of the nest

site being approached by 4 or 5 people or the chick being subjected to minute examination. We are herewith appending the report of Mr. Ramanujan.

Ousteri Lake about 10 km west of Pondicherry city, is the wintering ground for thousands of migratory waterfowl. Seasonal monsoonal torrents draining into the lake have cut deep fissures in the surrounding red ferralitic soils (Cuddalore sandstone series) creating deeply scored ravines and gullies which are the storehouse for innumerable plant fossils (59 species have been identified), many species of endangered flora (eg. the endemic and critically endangered 'Derris ovalifolia' liana) and rare faunal forms - among them the Indian eagle owl, variously known as the Bengal eagle owl, rock horned owl and great horned owl.

Considered a sub-species of Eurasian eagle owl 'Bubo bubo' until very recently, Konjetals DNA analysis has given it full species status. This is in keeping with doubts expressed by many concerning morphological characteristic differences (for instance, having the last digit of its toes and undersides of its feet bare, unlike 'Bubo bubo' whose feet are completely covered with feathers), and comparative auditory differences in pitch of timbre of vocalizations.

The species breeds irregularly in the ravines extending north-eastwards towards Auroville in a radius of approximately 5 km. In the Merveille area of Sri Aurobindo Ashram we came across a newly hatched nestling on 3rd March 2001, along with an unhatched egg. The altricial and nidicolous young was covered with light grey downy feathers in patches (the fine, nearly transparent skin was clearly visible) and its eyes were yet to open.

Our next visit on the 20th March found that the chick had more than quadrupled in size, its eyes were open and could focus well on all of us though it perpetually remained in a crouched position in spite of being touched. The downy feathers were of brownish grey hue and dorsal barring was prominent. On the 24th march, both its primary and secondary flight feathers had emerged, barring was more prominent on its back and wings, and it gave its first 'intimidatory display'. Hereafter it began to move away from the nest site and by the 7th of April had reached the highest point of the plateau by clambering over 25 metres of rocks and low scrub. Concealed in a tussock of grass, it was very difficult to spot - its cryptically coloured plumage blended well with its surroundings. It had reached adult size, all its wing feathers had emerged and traces of down existed only on its head and lower under parts. Following the 'intimidatory display', it was observed to run at quite a pace, although in a comical manner. This 'brancher' was not found anywhere on the 10th April, presumably having flown away. It was later sighted in the company of its parents on the 21st April (Juveniles lack 'horns' and are clearly distinguishable from the adults). Since then its growl like hisses were heard throughout the hours of twilight and darkness till the month of October.

A fine story of hope that reflects on the environmental enhancement programmes drawn up for the area. Though everything is not hunky-dory, it is such small scale programmes (relying largely on 'the power of One') that, in the long run could make all the difference - not only to an assured future for 'Bubo bengalensis' and other biotic forms contained within these sadly neglected micro-habitats, but also for man himself.

Harriers in Keoladeo National Park

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Keoladeo National Park (27° 7'- 27° 12 N and 77° 29'- 77° 33' E) is famous all over the world for its large congregation of western palaearctic migratory waterfowl. It is the only known wintering ground of siberian crane *Grus leucogeranus*, in India. Besides it supports a rich diversity of raptors (birds of prey). About 40 species of raptors have been recorded. The total area of the Park is about 29 sq km of which 8.5 sq km is wetland (Ali & Ripley 1986) located centrally and rest is woodland, savanna type grasslands and savanna with thickets.

Of 16 species of harriers worldwide (Simmons 2000) 6 are reported wintering in India (Ali and Ripley 1983) -the greatest diversity (Simmons 2000). They are pallid, *Circus macrourus*; hen, *C. cyaneus*; Montagu's, *C. pygargus*; pied, *C. melanoleucos*; eastern marsh, C. *spilonotus*; and eurasian marsh, *C. aeruginosus* harriers. In Keoladeo National Park all except eastern marsh harrier are recorded wintering (Prakash 1988). Eastern marsh harrier has been recorded from Manipur and Assam and recent record from Corbett, Uttar Pradesh (Ali & Ripley 1995). Montagu's, pallid and hen harriers are generally found together because of similarity in their food habits and habitat.

Harriers are kite – sized birds of prey with long tails, long wings and long legs. They are easily identified by their characteristic flight in which wings are held in a dihedral. Their hunting technique is distinctive in being slow quartering low over the reeds and grass and edges of bushes keeping wings upraised from body in 'V'. They have got acute hearing capability, which probably helps them locate their prey hidden in the long grasses and reeds. Hence, the feathers surrounding its eyes give it an owl like appearance. Harriers breed and roost on the ground except spotted harrier of Australia which roosts and nests in trees.

Harriers are sexually dimorphic birds. Adult females and immatures are mainly brown while males are usually grey or black and white. Males are generally smaller than females and more agile as they hunt birds smaller than females do.

It is really a challenging task to distinguish harrier species in the field especially females and juveniles. If one really wants to gain mastery over identification one has to spend much time with the harriers in the field. Males being colourful and elegant are easy to make out from females and juveniles. Male marsh harrier is a tri-colour bird; black on the wing tips, grey on the wings and tail and with a rufous body. Moreover, It is bigger and slow in flight. Males in the rest of the three species are all greyish with black wingtips. Male pallid harrier possesses black on the middle of the wingtips like a wedge whereas in hen and Montagu's harriers wingtips are completely black. Moreover, the Montagu's harrier is a dark grey bird with a black bar across the full length of the wings.

All females are brown above and orangish below with brown streaks on the body. However, female marsh harrier is the easiest to identify among all with its overall medium brown plumage and prominent creamy wide shoulder patch prominent pale bib and streaked buffish head. Its bulky body and slow wing beat tells them apart from other harriers. The females of rest of the harrier species generally have white rump and bands on the tail (therefore called "Ringtails"). Females of pallid, Montagu's and hen harrier are more difficult to identify owing to their similar in appearance. Perching birds are easier to make out than flying ones. Looking at facial ring and black around eye they can be distinguished from each other. Female pallid harrier has prominent facial ring and has more amount of black between eye and ring than Montagu's harrier while both these features are not prominent in female hen harrier. In flying females one has to look for streaks on the body and white terminal band on the underwing touching the body. Only in Montagu's the white band is thick and touches the body, which in pallid and hen harrier narrows down towards body. The female of pied harrier can be identified by the presence of grey cast on upperwings.

Juveniles of all the species resemble females with little plumage variation. They are darker birds. Juvenile marsh harriers visiting India are generally with white head and all dark birds are rarely sighted. Juveniles of pallid and Montagu's do not have brown streaks on the body like juvenile hen harrier. Unlike in pallid the orangish body in Montagu's is coppery. The juvenile pied harrier is overall a dark bird with prominent white rump.

In Keoladeo National Park harriers arrive by end of August and remain till April. Harriers first congregate over lush green grasslands (Block-G) of the Park where they prey on grasshoppers (specially Montagu's and pallid) and their numbers reduce rapidly by October. Hen and pied harriers arrive a little late by October in the Park. Once their prey population decline with drying up of grasses the number of harriers also decline and almost all leave the area by November. However, they arrive here for roosting regularly. Marsh harriers first arrive in the Ajan bund situated half a kilometer southwest of the Park and their number increases suddenly in the Park by October when Ajan bund— a large temporary water body start drying up. The bund is drained off so the land can be used for cultivation by villagers. During my four years study (1996-2000) on harriers particularly on Marsh harrier and other raptors I counted, marsh harriers were the highest (32) followed by Mongtagu's (12), pallid (7), hen (3) and pied harrier (2) during day time. The scenario changes in the evening at the roost site when lots of harriers suddenly appear in the Park (c 150). They arrive from all the directions after a day long foraging in the crop fields and monsoonal water bodies surrounding the Park.

Marsh harriers, as the name suggests, are confined to wetlands in the Park and the others are occasionally seen hunting over wetlands. They farage in agriculture fields surrounding the Park where they probably hunt small passerines, rodents, lizards and insects. What attracts us about harriers is their foraging style. Unlike other raptors they forage by quartering low over the dense vegetation and marshes searching and researching every inch of the ground so as not to miss any prey. At each sighting of its prey it pounces straight on to it noiselessly and if the prey is missed, it hovers for sometime waiting its reoccurrence. I have observed marsh harriers killing garganey teal *Anas querquedula*, common teal *Anas crecca* white-breasted waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*, common moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, and common coot *Fulica atra* in the Park. It probably selects the weaker one among the flock and chases it till it gets exhausted. Besides birds they prey upon fish, water snakes (immatures), lizards, and rats.

From November onwards the only harrier one can see is the marsh harrier over wetlands except a few pallid harriers along drier part of wetlands.

Harriers are known to roost communally on ground among tall grasses outside their breeding grounds (Newton 1979). Keoladeo National Park is the largest roost of marsh harriers so far known in India (Verma 2002). The roost is located in the grassland of the Park in block-G (locally called Koladehar). One has to be at the roost at least one hour before sunset to enjoy the spectacular sight and to watch the congregation of all five species of harriers. They come either singly or in small groups from all directions from as far as 25 km to roost in the Park, which probably acts as the safest place against predators and cold winter. Marsh harriers outnumber the other harrier species. The maximum population recorded of marsh harrier was 132 followed by Montagu's (n=20), pallid (n= 14), hen (n=6) and pied harrier (n=3). Roost sites have survival values for any birds where they spend considerable time and particularly for those which are communal roosters. Therefore, conservation of communal roosting sites should be given a priority as any kind of disturbance generally anthropogenic can put their future at stake.

The harriers begin return migration from the Keoladeo National Park to their breeding grounds by late February and by the end of March almost all have left the park except for a few juvenile marsh harriers which remain till June.

Acknowledgment:

I thank the Bombay Natural History Society for the opportunity to work on harriers in the Keoladeo National Park and Rajasthan Forest Department for permission. I gratefully acknowledge the Ministry of Environment, Govt. of India, and US Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S.A for sponsoring, and funding the project respectively. Special thanks go to Mr. Brijender Singh, Mr. Randheera Singh, Mr.Brijender Singh (Junior) and Mr. Mahindra Singh for assistance in the field.

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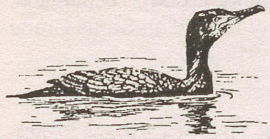

Breeding Activity of the Indian Shag

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In April 1995 during a casual visit to Holenarsipur town (12° 47' N and 76°15' E; Dist: Hassan; State: Karnataka) small groups of the Indian shag (*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*) were noticed frequently flying between the market area and the river Hemavati flowing close to the town on the west. Eventually we could locate a small heronry of this bird on the tall trees of *Eucalyptus* sp. and *Acacia ferruginea* D.C. in the Government Hospital compound of the town. There was a lot of debris in the form of dried leaves, rachis, birds feathers, droppings, broken egg shells, etc forming a soft bed on the ground. Hence some shells dropped from the nests were almost intact but for some cracks from where the liquid content had oozed out.

A two-year study (1995 and 1996) on this heronry revealed the following points:

1. The heronry was a mixed colony comprising the Indian Shag (*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*) (80%) and the pond heron *Ardeola grayii* (20%).
2. The breeding season of the shag was from April to June. Nesting activity commenced in the month of April.
3. During 1995, 21 nests and during 1996, 40 nests of the shag were counted.
4. These nests were constructed at 15 to 20 mts. height on large trees of *Eucalyptus* sp. and *Acacia furruginea* D.C. They were wide, shallow and bowl–like structures constructed with dry thin twigs, sticks and raches and invariably covered on the outer surface by eucalyptus leaves.
5. The eggs were large, oval, pale bluish and chalky on the surface. The average size of 10 eggs was 53mm X 32mm.
6. The nidicolous nestlings were found in the nests from late April while the fledglings from late May; the juveniles fledged off from the nests by the first week of July.
7. There was also considerable egg mortality during development.

Comparing the breeding season of the shag population at Holenarsipur with that elsewhere in India, the points emerging are, that in populations closer to the equator, breeding activity commences in the early part of the year, while in those more distant from the equator, the event is delayed proportionately. (Table 1).

Table 1. The breeding seasons of the Indian shag in India and Ceylon.

Place	Latitude	Longitude	Breeding season
Ceylon	6°00'-10.00'N	80.00'-81.42'E	Dec - May
Vedanthangal	11°00' N	78°15' E	Nov - Feb
Ranganathittu	12°18' N	76°39' E	Jan - Feb
Holenarsipur	12°47' N	76°15' E	Apr - Jun
Bajagoti (S. Kannada)	13°3' N	74°55' E	May - Dec
Machia (Jodhpur.Rajasthan)	26°18' N	73°01' E	Oct. (Nesting)

This data lends strong support to the general concept that commencement of breeding activity in animals is the function of their latitudinal distribution; and this event is modulated to some extent to tune with the premonsoon (either S.W. or N.E.) showers or some local factors as is the case with most of the invertebrates or vertebrates in peninsular India.

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CORRESPONDENCE

WHICH NIGHTJARS COULD THESE BE? *RANJIT MANAKADAN and S. SIVAKUMAR, Bombay Natural History Society, Museum Compound, Salim Ali Chowk, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai 400023*

The BNHS has a 3 year, ISRO funded project on the biodiversity of Sriharikota Island, Nellore District, Andhra Pradesh. Besides mammals, herpetofauna, fish and butterflies, our studies also encompass birds. Three species of nightjars have been recorded from the Island from earlier BNHS studies i.e., Indian jungle nightjar *Caprimulgus indicus,* common indian nightjar *C. asiaticus* and Franklin's nightjar *C. affinis*. During our nocturnal field visits during the past year, we have regularly come across two types of calls, as described below:

A loud quavering *chow-woo,* repeated off and on, which in all probability (though we do not have any sightings of calling birds) is that of a nightjar.

The calls of the Indian Jungle nightjar as described in Ali & Ripley's Handbook are : 1) *Chuck chuck,* 2) Chuk-chuk-chuk; *chuckoo-chuckoo-chucko* (trailing off to a hollow *wowowowow);* 3) Uk-krukroo – a 'common' call reported only in the nominate peninsular race, and 4) A deep hoarse *qor-quor,quor.*

I guess our interpretation of its call as *chow-woo* could tally with the *chuckoo-chuckoo-chucko* (especially since we had heard the trailing *wowowowowow* call once (by the same bird?), or does it? We have not heard the last two calls mentioned above.

The other is a soft, double note, repeated swee-swee, which we are not even certain if it is a nightjar's call – or even a bird's call (again, no sightings of calling birds).

The calls of the Franklin's nightjar as described by Ali & Ripley as a loud, single note and penetrating sweesh, rendered also as chwees and choo-ee. Another rare call attributed to breeding birds is wakh, wakh, wakh, wakhoo. The soft, double note *swee-swee* heard in Sriharikota does not match the loud, single note and penetrating *sweesh* described in the *Handbook*, nor does it agree with *choo-ee.*

How were the calls of nightjars attributed to the different species, especially since many species look alike, which makes it doubly difficult (if not impossible) to separate them out at night? In all probability, they were based on birds shot white calling – not possible nowadays unlike the good old, younger days of Salim Ali when wildlife and birds were plentiful. Even then, the variety of contrasting calls attributed to a species makes one wonder if all these belong to the same species (or are even nightjar calls!). Could anybody help us clear our doubts?

SIGHTING OF SARUS CRANES (GRUS ANTIGONE) IN HIMACHAL PRADESH. *ARUN P. SINGH, 25-D,New Cant. Road, P.O. Hathibarkala, Dehra Dun,Uttranchal,248 001*

During December (26-30) 1994 while touring Balh valley in Sundemagar (Mandii district, Himachal Pradesh) under a UNDP project, I came across a pair of sarus cranes *Grus antigone* along a streamlet flowing through agricultural fields with wheat crop. The location of the sarus crane pair was between Kansa chowk (near Nehar Chawk on the way to Kullu from Surendranagar, approximately 77° E and 31° 30'N and at an attitude of 1,000-1,500 m in a flat and wide valley). When questioned, locals told me that the pair is resident and that people do not harm them.

Recently, touring Haripur area (near Dehra) adjoining Pong Dam on Beas river in Kangra valley in Himachal Pradesh (15 December 2002), two more Sarus cranes were sighted flying over the agricultural fields, where about five individuals are present.

In India the Sarus crane has quite a wide distribution and includes the states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Assam (Sundar *et al.* 2000). However, sightings in Himachal Pradesh have been rare and sarus have been so far been seen only in Pong Dam, where small numbers have been sighted regularly since 1995 (Lopez and Mundkur 1997, K.S.G. Sundar, personal communication), as also small numbers in Kangra and Kullu districts (unspecified locations, Sundar *et al.* 2000). Therefore, my sighting of the sarus is noteworthy in that it is a new location and adds to the meager information available on the distribution of this globally threatened species in Himachal Pradesh.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Gopi Sundar of Wildlife Institute of India for his comments on the draft of this paper.

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NOTES FROM MADHYA PRADESH. *DR. RAJIV SAXENA, M-853, Darpan Colony, Thatipur, Gwalior 474011 (M.P.)*

In the month of November 2001, I happened to visit some districts of north and south-central Madhya Pradesh. My tour included district headquarters as well as many villages situated in all types of topographies like scrubland, grassland, forest and on hilltops and in valleys. I travelled through dry deciduous forest in seven districts of Gwalior and Chambal divisions; forests of Balaghat; open area from Jabalpur to Seoni; on the stony tableland of Chhindwara, and across Satpura hills from Chhindwara to Hoshangabad via Tamia and Pachmarhi. I could not stay at a place for a long time, and therefore, sporadic observations on birds were jotted down.

Paradise flycatcher *[Terpsiphone paradisi]* – A pair was sighted near Kuno river in Sheopur district. Earlier I had seen it in the Dak bungalow compound in Sheopur [Saxena, R. (1994) NLBW: 34(4): 96], and in Madhav National Park, Shivpuri where it is frequently found amongst trees beside the damwall of Sakhya Sagar. Trees here are tall and always remain green due to seepage of water from the lake and they have formed some canopies also.

Spotted dove *[Streptopelia chinensis]* – In Madhya Pradesh, little brown dove is undoubtedly the commonest dove followed by ring dove, spotted dove and red turtle dove – the least common of four. As one goes from Gwalior to Vijaypur via Mohana, there is a tract of dry deciduous forest of about 30 km, and from Morena to Sheopur via Shyampur – Govas a similar tract of 35 km exists. I saw spotted dove in the largest number on these two areas – on roads, on trees and in open areas. These tracts do not have inhabited areas for miles, and one comes across a vehicle not very frequently.

Demoiselle cranes *[Antropoides virgo]* – Twenty-three demoiselle cranes were sighted in Rehale dam reservoir in Katangi Tehsil of Balaghat district. Earlier records do not provide information on its presence deep into Madhya Pradesh. National Chambal Sanctuary, Madhav National Park and Dihaila Jheel – all known destinations – are situated in north western Madhya Pradesh.

Painted sandgrouse *[Pterocles indicus]* – Tamia [Chhindwara] is located at the height of 953 mt. as compared to Pachmarhi [Hoshangabad] 1056 m; and the aerial distance between the two is only 18 km, while to travel between them one has to go more than 100 km on zigzag road through hill forest. In the morning hours, as we drove, painted sandgrouse were continuously sighted in singles and pairs, eating tit-bits along the road. I have never seen so many in the State. Red turtle dove was also sighted intermittently on this road.

Black eagle *[Ictinaetus malayensis]* – Tamia has a rest house overlooking a valley. It is claimed that on a bright day 500 sq km area can be viewed from here. One Black Eagle was sitting on a tree near 'view point' in the afternoon. It sat there for about half-an-hour giving time for its proper identification by "bright yellow cere and legs and wings reaching tip of tail". This was my second sighting of this eagle after the one in Shivpuri three years ago.

Green munia ***[Estrilda formosa]*** – I have already reported the presence of green munia in Orchha in Tikamgarh district [Saxena, R.(1999): NLBW . 39[2]: 28-29]. During the present trip a flock of about 30 birds was seen near Lakhnadon enroute from Jabalpur to Seoni. The area is stony scrubland with sparsely located trees.

Redheaded merlin ***[Falco chicquera]*** – A singleton was seen sitting on a low dry tree branch near Birpur tank in a village of same name in Panihar area of Gwalior district. This is scrubland interspersed by agriculture farms.

Large cuckoo shrike ***[Coracina novaehollandiae]*** – This is not an uncommon bird, and is found in the whole of India except Rajasthan. Its nesting season is mainly May to October. On 29.11.01, I found two breeding pairs and located a nest near Harsi dam in Bhitarwar region of Gwalior district.

Bonelli's hawk eagle ***[Hieraaetus fasciatus*** and **lesser spotted eagle** ***[Aquila pomarina]*** – I did not see these eagles in this tour, but found them to be new incumbents in Gwalior zoo. Some 'unknown' person 'donated' them in sick condition to the zoo [or was it clandestine purchase from poachers by zoo to display rare species?]. The place of capture of these 'sick' birds was claimed to be near Tigra dam in Gwalior district. Aquila eagle was earlier reported from Shivpuri [Saxena, R.(1997) : NLBW. 37(4): 66].

ROSY PASTORS (STURNUS ROSEUS) AND MYNAS (ACRIDOTHERES SP.) HARISH R. BHAT*, MANJUNATH P. *GREEN CROSS #105, Swiss Complex, #33, Race Course Road, Bangalore 560 001.# 105, *Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore 560 012.*

Rosy pastors, also called rosy starlings (*Sturnus roseus)* arrive during winter in large flocks during late October and stay till end of February. It is always interesting to observe them flocking together either on Peepal tree (*Ficus religiosa*), Banyan tree (*Ficus benghalensis*), Jamoon tree (*Syzigium cumini*), Nilgiri tree (*Eucalyptus sp.*) or any tall trees or tall shrubs. We happened to observe these birds since early November 2002, regularly in Bangalore as well as in Tumkur. They flock silently and chatter with low pitch. Interestingly, we could see them associated with Common myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) and Jungle myna (*Acridotheres fuscus)* on the same tree, but always trying to keep some distance from the mynas. Whenever the mynas would hop from one branch to the other on the same tree, rosy pastors would hop to a distant branch and stay away. Sometimes, when the mynas come to a tree where these rosy pastors were perching, the rosy pastors flew to another tree or farther branches. Though they try to keep a distance, they often mix together when not competing in food! It is interesting to know why would the rosy pastors tend to maintain distance but appear at same places, when they do not compete or fight for food or roosting!

NEST OF ASHY CROWN FINCH LARK ***(Eremopteryx grisea*** **Ticeh.) (Scopoli), IN BHACHAU TALUKA, KACHCHH DISTRICT, GUJARAT,** *S. HIREN, J. JOSHUA. and J. PANKAJ, Gujarat Institute of Desert Ecology (GUIDE) Opp. Changleshwar Temple, Mundra Road Bhuj (Kachchh 370 001) Gujarat.*

On 23rd March 2002, as a part of a rapid EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) on the 'Proposed Sardar Sarovar Canal - based drinking water supply pipeline project: (Maliya – Bhachau section) which especially dealt with wildlife, habitats and biota', we were surveying a part of a 58 km long stretch of the proposed pipeline, adjacent to the main highway between Bhachau and Maliya.

At about 10.30 hrs, (JJ) flushed a small dark coloured sparrow sized bird: Ashy crown finch lark (*Eremopteryx grisea*) (Ali 1995) also known as Bhon Chakli in Gujarat.

After a while, a male bird, with grey crown and nape, black breast and brownish underparts, also came and perched near the female on hearing its strong *wheech wheech* calls. The female bird moved some distance and sat nearby a nest, which helped us to locate it. It was just 5 m away from the proposed pipeline route under the shelter of a tiny bush of *Schweinfurthia papillionacea* (Sanepat), a rare and endangered plant species, which belongs to family Scrophulariceae.

The habitat, where the nest was located, was an open scrubland with very sparsely distributed *Prosopis julifeora* (Gando Baval), interspersed with scattered patches of grass species, *Aristida funiculata* (Lambh). The other associated plant species found within 10 m radius, were *Calotropis procera, Aerva persica, Fagonia schweinfurti, Tridax procumbens, Convolvulus auricomus* and *Cymbopogon martinii.*

The associated faunal components present around the nesting site were one mammalian species, *viz.* blue bull *(Boselaphus fragocamelus),* based on an indirect evidence, and four species of reptiles, *viz.* garden lizard (Calotes *versicolor)* (2), fan throated lizard *(Sitana ponticeriana)* (1), small scaled lacertid (*Opisops macrolepis)* (2) and Jerdon's snake eye (*Opisops jerdoni)* (2). The other bird species seen in the vicinity were house sparrow (6), common babbler (2), Indian silverbill (7), tailor bird (2), Indian robin (5), grey necked bunting (3), house crow (8), laughing dove (5), small green bee eater (4), rufous fronted prinia (4), white eared bulbul (2), Eurasian collared dove (2), grey francolin (1) and purple sunbird (3).

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MIGRATION OF DEMOISELLE CRANES. *KAVERI MUTHANNA, 37/9 Convent Road, Madikeri 571201, Kodagu.*

A recent trip to Rajasthan took me by chance to a sleepy hamlet Kheechan, enroute from Jaisalmer/Pokhran, to the ancient temple desert town of Osian.

A lake of not too big an area, have has a population of about 3000 demoiselle cranes. This was the annual migration of the demoiselle cranes from Siberia. Some of them continue on to Kutch till the winter is over. A normal sighting would have been of atleast 15,000 cranes I was told, but due to the scarce rainfall over the last four years, the water in the lake has decreased.

On a crisp December afternoon, over picnic lunch by the lake, the ashgrey cranes against the yellow backdrop of sandbanks and desert were a magnificent sight to witness. The screeching of the cranes were almost continuous, especially as they glided in with their black plumes dangling from the foreneck and breast. I was told that the villagers are very protective about the cranes and also feed them every morning and evening. Indeed an inspiring sight - a "must see" for every bird lover!

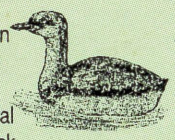
DR. SALIM ALI BIRD COUNT AT HEBBAL AND JAKKUR LAKE OF BANGALORE. *MANJUNATH P. , KIRAN KUMAR H. K., PRASANNA P. M., HARISH BHAT.* Green Cross, # 105, Swiss Complex, # 33, Race Course Road, Bangalore 560 001 * Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore 560 012.

We assembled in Hebbal Lake on 11th November 2002 at 6.30am. It was a sunny day with a little mist. The lake, with an area of 75 hectares, now cleaned up and fenced by the Forest Department appears to be in good condition. To our delight there was plenty of bird activity. There were plenty of pin-tailed ducks, and spot - billed duck paddling in the water The grey herons and egrets were fishing in their usual style, either in groups or individually. In the distance there were two purple herons, and circling above them was a river tern. We had a good view of a small blue kingfisher hovering over the water In the water we counted in all 676 birds belonging to 34 species, and this was very satisfying for just one hour of bird watching On the edge of the lake among the reeds and the Typha grass we heard the calls of several birds, and these proved to be the Blyth's reed warbler and the booted warbler. Nearby there were coots and teals diving in the water for fish.

We then went on to Jakkur lake, which has a spread of about 57 hectares, and here bird life was disappointing. We counted in all only 81 birds belonging to 15 species. We were surprised to see so few birds here inspite of the fact that there was plenty of water here. We must find out why there is so little bird life here as compared to Hebbal which is not too far away.

The list of birds sighted on 11th November at Hebbal lake between 6.45 am and 7.50 am and their number is given below:

Common Name	Scientific Name	No. of Individuals
Little cormorant	*Phalacrocorax niger*	21
Grey heron	*Ardea cinerea*	26
Cattle egret	*Bubulcus ibis*	5
Median egret	*Egretta intermedia*	2
Pintail duck	*Anas acuta*	240
Garganey teal	*Anas querquedula*	11
Shikra	*Accipiter badius*	1
Purple moorhen	*Porphyrio porphyrio*	2
Red wattled lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	3
River tern	*Sterna aurantia*	1
Spotted dove	*Streptopelia orientalis*	2
Pied kingfisher	*Ceryle rudis*	3
Small blue kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*	1
Ashy drongo	*Dicrurus leucophaeus*	5
Jungle crow	*Corvus macrorhynchos*	2
Booted warbler	*Hippolais caligata*	2
Tickell's flowerpecker	*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*	1
Little grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*	4
Purple heron	*Ardea purpurea*	7
Pond heron	*Ardeola grayii*	9
Little egret	*Ardea alba*	33
Common teal	*Anas crecca*	35
Spot bill duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	180
Brahminy kite	*Haliastur indus*	2
Pariah kite	*Milvus migrans*	1
Coot	*Fulica atra*	17
Common sandpiper	*Tringa hypoleucos*	4
Blue rock pigeon	*Columba livia*	8
Rose ringed parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*	18
White breasted kingfisher	*Halcyon smrnensis*	4
Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	14
Indian myna	*Acridotheres tristis*	9
Tailor bird	*Orthotomus sutorius*	1
Blyth's reed warbler	*Acrocephalus dumetorum*	2



List of birds sighted on 11th November 2002 in Jakkur Lake

Dabchick	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*	1
Little cormorant	*Phalacrocorax niger*	22
Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	11
Spot bill	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	13
Pond heron	*Ardeola grayii*	2
Red whiskered bulbul	*Pycnonotus jocosus*	1
White breasted kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*	1
Brahminy kite	*Haliastur Indus*	1
Little egret	*Ardea alba*	7
Coot	*Fulica atra*	9
Grey heron	*Ardea cinerea*	4
Cattle egret	*Bubulcus ibis*	2
White ibis	*Threskiornis aethiopica*	1
Black drongo	*Dicrurus adsimilis*	5
Pariah kite	*Milvus migrans*	1

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Printed and Published bi-monthly by S. Sridhar at Navbharath Enterprises, Seshadripuram, Bangalore - 560 020, India.
☎ : 336 4142 / 336 4682, Email: navbarat@blr.vsnl.net.in

For Private Circulation Only.

Cover: **Yellow-eyed Babbler** (*Chrysomma sinense)* is an elusive bird that forages through thick hedge, bush and tall grass. Now and then it clambers up to exposed reed tops and utters a strong pleasant whistling song *twee-twee-ta-whit-che,* and plunges again to the thicket below to resume its foraging activities. During the monsoon months, the yellow eyed babbler builds a beautiful deep cone shaped nest in an upright fork amid the reeds.

Photo : S. Shreyas