

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDPWATCHERS

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BIRDPATCHERS

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BIRDPATCHING ON A TREK TO PINDARI GLACIER

N. M. Mistry

The trek to Pindari Glacier at the foot of Mount Nandakot in the Western Himalayas starts from a pretty little village called Kapkote (3750 ft) on the banks of the Saryuganga river. When I reached Kapkote on a May afternoon Koels were calling from the trees and Magpie Robins were lustily whistling their mating songs from exposed perches. On the spacious lawn of the dak bungalow, Spotted- and Ring Doves, along with Hoopoes and Mynas were searching for tit bits, while Blyth's Large Whiterumped Swift's (Micropus pacificus leuconyx) zoomed overhead, braking and wheeling sharply from time to time. A noisy party of Blossomheaded Parakeets flew in and out of the branches of a huge pipal tree which was growing round a jamun tree. Redvented and Redwhiskered Bulbuls, Black Drongos, Golden Orioles, Blue Jays, Rufousbacked Shrikes, and Large Green Barbets were the other frequent visitors to the tree. On the river could be seen Plumbeous Redstarts, Grey Wagtails and the Common and Whitefronted Kingfishers. I also saw a solitary male specimen of a Large Himalayan Pied Kingfisher (Ceryle lugubris) sitting on a rock which was half-submerged in the river. Late in the evening Black Partridges (Francolinus francolinus) started calling from the wheat fields while a solitary Redwattled Lapwing plaintively complained Did he do it? Pity to do it. Before I retired into the bungalow I heard the bird call that has thrilled me most on Himalayan treks -- the first call of the Common Cuckoo.

Next morning we set out for Loharkhet (5750 ft). The trek followed the course of the Saryuganga river for about eight miles and then swerved away to the left and went steeply up into the hills. The

Himalayan Whistling Thrush (Myiophoneus caeruleus) was now quite often seen on the river while Streaked Laughing Thrushes (Garrulax lineatum) hopped across the path and disappeared into the bushes by the side. Amongst the smaller birds Tickell's Willow Warbler (Phylloscopus affinis), the Dark-grey Bush-chat (Saxicola ferrea), and the Grey Tit were commonly seen. I also saw a male Verditer Flycatcher (Muscicapa thalassina) and a Goldfronted Chloropses (Chloropsis aurifrons). As we neared Loharkhet the Common Cuckoo was heard more and more often while on two occasions I heard the kaphael pakoe (Cuculus canorus).

Beyond Loharkhet there was a steep climb to Dhakuri pass (9500 ft) through a mixed jungle of spruce, deodars, rhododendron, oak, bamboo, and what the locals called Bhanjh and Telang trees. The cuckoos were noisy that morning. The Brain-fever scream of the Large Hawk-Cuckoo (Hierococcyx sparveroides) and the pleasanter call of the Kaphael pakoe resounded through the woods. The twofold call of the male Common Cuckoo and the water burbling call of the female were also very common, while the Himalayan Cuckoo (Cuculus saturasis) occasionally called from the dark recesses of the jungle. The vocal supremacy of the cuckoos was, however, not altogether unchallenged. The Blackheaded Sibia (Heterophasia capistrata), the Great Himalayan Barbet (Megalaima virens marshallorum) and the Himalayan Whistling Thrush were all very vociferous. In these jungles I saw two varieties of Woodpeckers -- the Brownfronted Pied (Dendrocopos auriceps) and the West Himalayan Pied (Dendrocopos himalayensis), and two varieties of Jays -- the Black-throated (Garrulus lanceolatus) and the Himalayan Redcrowned (Garrulus hispecularis). The Simla Coal Tits (Parus rufonuchalis) were very commonly seen while Scarlet Minivets, Yellowbilled Blue Magpies and West Himalayan Spotted Forktails (Enicurus maculatus) were occasionally seen.

After crossing the Dhakuri Pass we descended into the valley of the river Pinder. Near the dak bungalow at Dhakuri (8600 ft) I saw a party of Whitethroated Laughing Thrushes (Garrulax albogularis) and some Rufoustailed Flycatchers (Muscicapa ruficauda). I also saw a bird which I was not able to identify but later Zafar Futehally identified it for me as the male specimen of the Whitecollared Blackbird (Turdus albocinctus). Near Khati (7500 ft) I saw some Whitecheeked Bulbuls (Pycnonotus leucogenys).

I had not seen any Whitecapped Redstarts (Chaimarrornis leucocephalus) on the Saryuganga river but now on the Pinder river they were as plentiful as the Plumbeous Redstarts. At Dwali (8000 ft) I saw some Indian Rosefinch (Carpodacus roseatus), an Upland Pipit (Anthus sylvanus) and a Greyheaded Flycatcher (Culicicapa ceylonensis).

From Dwali the track climbed up steeply to Furkia (10,700 ft) through a thick jungle. We had to cross a number of frozen trees. I was accompanied by the chowkidar of the dak bungalow at Furkia who carried a loaded muzzle-loader with him. He said he would shoot some 'Munyals' on the way. I was a little apprehensive at the way he carried the loaded gun on his back. As we neared the snows the jungles thinned away and the hillsides were mostly covered by tall grass and some stunted rhododendron trees. Presently, a fine male specimen of a 'Monal Pheasant' (the chowkidar's Muniyal) rose into the air from our right and uttering a frantic alarm call passed over our heads to the safety of the opposite hill. He was followed by a number of hens at regular intervals. The chowkidar just watched them sail across the valley to safety. We also saw flocks of Snow Pigeons (Columba leuconota), some Alpine Choughs, Jackdaws and Rosefinch.

Between Furkia and the snout of the Pindari Glacier (13,000 ft) there was no vegetation except some small patches of grass. The landscape consisted of mostly rock and snow. Here the Whitecapped Redstarts, the Snow Pigeons, the Monal Pheasants and the Alpine Choughs were the only birds to be seen.

AMATEURS AT LARGE

A. Mangalik

During the Christmas recess last year, we visited the Corbett National Park. We had 'visited' the park in the first week of November 1967, but were unable to go beyond one mile of the gate (the park does not open to visitors till late November) mainly because of the damage to roads during the monsoon.

My wife, our 9 months old 'birdwatcher' (sparrows and crows) son and I left Delhi in the morning. After going through the apparently unending traffic congestion between Delhi and Ghaziabad, we reached the relatively open road to Hapur and went on to Muradabad. The new bridge at Muradabad has made the crossing of the Ganges much simpler now, but till the new approach bridge is ready in about three years, driving is still fairly tedious. From Muradabad one leaves the main road and proceeds towards Kashipur. The road here is narrow and full of a large number of potholes. This was the sugarcane harvesting season and we came across large convoys of loaded bullock carts which had made the journey a little slower than expected.

We finally reached Ramnagar around four in the evening. One of our friends was hunting in a forest block near the park and we decided to spend a day with him. The dirty road leading to the resthouse was winding and we were driving into the sun. We still managed to spot a large number of Whitecheeked Bulbuls on the way and while crossing a dry river, my wife spotted a peacock.

At dusk we finally managed to reach the Phanto resthouse. This was our first and probably the last experience with hunting. The next day, our friends shot some cheetal and partridges and missed some wildfowl. We spent a lot of time following the trails of a tiger. All in all, it left us with a bad taste. We did see some Large Pied Wagtails near the river bed while trying to follow the path taken by the tiger the previous night.

We left the hunting party after lunch and proceeded to the Dhikala resthouse, after having come back to Ramnagar. Between Ramnagar and the entrance to the park we saw number of myna-sized greyish birds with a fluffy white head. They intrigued and puzzled us till three days later, when Mr Negi, the Chief Park Ranger, was able to identify them for us, from our description, as the Western Himalayan Whitecrested Laughing Thrush. We spotted them at the same spot on our return also.

We spent the next threedays at the Dhikala resthouse in Corbett Park. Dhikala is situated at the western boundary of the park. It is at the end of a large silt deposit plain and at a bend in the Ramganga. There is a good view of the river and of the hills beyond. The resthouse provides all modern amenities. We had gone to Corbett mainly to see wildlife, particularly the tiger, and the next morning we set off by elephants towards a machan. We, however, were not able to see the tiger though the kill -- the bait -- had been reported the previous night. We did see some cheetal, blackbuck and wild boar. I was able to hike up beyond Buxar in the southwest corner of the park and saw a herd of wild elephants.

We spent the rest of the time taking short hikes or walks, and watching birds. We are real beginners and thus had fourteen species to add to our 'life list'. Collard Bush-chats were most abundant. We had seen these in Delhi but never in such numbers. We saw Spurwinged Flovers, Black Redstarts, Whitecapped Redstart, and Pied- and White-breasted Kingfishers near the river bed. A number of Grey Tits, Cuckoo-Shrikes could be seen in the trees around our room along with Red Munias. We spotted a Blackwinged Kite sitting on a lone tree in a meadow, and saw a Green Woodpecker and a Pied Woodpecker, and a Red-breasted Flycatcher in dry forest near the river. We were proud of

ourselves because the identification was made by thumbing through the pages of Salim Ali's book. We of course saw a large number of birds that Dr Padley and I called ' little brown ones '. Dr Richard Padley is a statistician working with the WHO in New Delhi. He has spent many years in Burma and Ceylon and is well versed with the birds of this part of the world.

During our stay we were repeatedly told of the Blue Magpie and the Scarlet Minivet, and were feeling slightly discouraged at not having spotted them, but on our way out of the park we saw both.

I would take this opportunity to state some of my observations regarding our national parks and sanctuaries and seek the advice and help of the other readers of the Newsletter. We had visited the Shivpuri national park in Madhya Pradesh in December 1966. This is a small park with a man-made lake and has a large number of deer. The lake attracts great numbers of birds. The park, however, is located in the midst of ' dacoit country '. It has been spared encroachment by industry and habitation but poaching is a serious problem, in this park on account of the bandits who camp in surrounding forests and who shoot animals with impunity. The Bandipur Sanctuary in Mysore has the same sad tale. The major highway to Coonoor in the Nilgiris runs through it and there is a fair amount of habitation within the park with a large population of domestic cattle. During the time that we had visited this park in September 1968, there had been an epidemic of rinderpest amongst the bison, probably spread through the domestic cattle. Bharatpur serves a special purpose and serves it well and I would be the last person to tell the readers of this Newsletter about Bharatpur. However, the water supply to the bunds seems to be at the mercy of the canals department of the Rajasthan Government and fluctuates considerably with detriment to the bird life.

Corbett, which is publicised as one of our greatest natural showpieces, is also having a large number of problems and a sad tale. The size of the park is fairly small and too small to really protect the tiger. There is a lot of habitation within the park consisting mainly of various woodcutters. These people work for the various licences who obtain wood from the forests. The road running through the park serves not only the visitors but also serves as a forest road to carry wood from the forests. The woodcutters with their frequent trips to the interior, their activities, and the movement of trucks are not compatible with the growth of wild life. The effective area for the roaming of the larger animals is cut down considerably by this heavily travelled road. Further with the proposed new dam, it will be still more reduced. For some reason, the policy of deforestation to ' save the wood ' has been started. This seems to be absurd from the point of view of the animals as well as from the point of view of soil preservation after the dam is built. We have to resign ourselves to the existence of this dam since it is now at an advanced stage of construction. Efforts, however, must be made to prevent in the future any such major constructions in the vicinity of national parks or sanctuaries. Information on such proposals must be made available to all those who are interested in conservation and a joint effort with maximum possible public support must be undertaken so that such projects could be stopped before it is too late. The example of Glenn Canyon dam in the State of Utah in the U. S. A. should be remembered. Glenn Canyon is one of the most beautiful canyons on the Colorado river. It was, however, relatively unknown outside the State and a dam was constructed before even nature lovers knew about it. Subsequently when dams were planned in relation to the Grand Canyon National Park, the public voice was raised very early and the construction of these dams shelved. I hope that despite all our needs for electricity, irrigation, etc., we will not lose sight of the importance of our natural resources.

For the last $2\frac{1}{2}$ years since my return to India, I have noted a considerable increase in the publicity for family planning. However, I feel this is still far from adequate. The reason I mentioned this here is that I feel family planning and conservation are intimately linked together. One of the main reasons why our sanctuaries are not able to

fulfil their function is that they are usually close to habitations and often have habitations within them. This is unavoidable when the pressure on the land is so great. As individuals interested in conservation, I feel we must publicise this aspect of the matter to the best of our ability and use the maximum possible pressures and actually attempt to reduce the population of our country rather than just slow down its rate of increase. Until then, we will not have truly worthwhile natural sanctuaries.

LATE STAY OF BLYTH'S REED WARBLER ACROCEPHALUS DUMETORUM IN THE PENINSULIA

J. S. Serrao

It was interesting to read from the June issue of the Newsletter [Vol. 9(6): 9] Mr Futehally's meeting with Blyth's Reed Warbler in Mr Melluish's garden in Madras as late as 16th May, 1969. The one which was being constantly heard and seen in Dr Salim Ali's Pali Hill garden since about November 1968 completely disappeared after 17th April 1969.

A still later record than Mr Futehally's for South India is Terry's published in 1882 in Stray Feathers 10: 476. Terry claimed having collected one at Pittur in the Palni Hills on 16th June, and ' afterwards ' having shot in the same hills one of a pair which he could not retrieve, the specimen having fallen in tall grass, seemingly implying that the birds bred in the Palnis. Terry's record has been discredited by the late Mr Hugh Whistler in his report on the Eastern Ghats Ornithological Survey when he reviewed the status of the bird in the then Madras Presidency.

As field observations on Blyth's Reed Warbler are often confusable with those on the Booted Warbler (Hippolais caligata) except when done by seasoned experts, a few last dates on which the birds were encountered from Cape Comorin to Bombay, may help birdwatchers active in this part of India.

During the Travancore/Cochin Ornithological Survey, Dr Salim Ali found that their numbers decreased from the beginning of April. His last specimen was collected at Cape Comorin on 11th April 1933. A post-mortem thereon showed that it was excessively fat, a prerequisite in migrants about to emigrate.

In the Nilgiris, William Davison found the bird abundant from mid December to late March. In the Wynaad his last specimen was collected on 12th April 1881 at Manantoddy.

During the Mysore Ornithological Survey, Dr Salim Ali found that the birds left the area from 5th March.

A large series of these Reed Warblers collected by the Eastern Ghats Survey in the Vizagapatam Ghats in March/April led Mr Whistler to the conclusion that they were getting ready for their outward migration.

During the Bombay and Salsette Ornithological Survey, Dr Salim Ali and Mr Humayun Abdulali came upon one across the harbour on 9th May, a date which they thought was exceptionally late.

Mr Futehally's encounter with the bird points out to the fact that in certain years an odd individual of this Reed Warbler overstays the prescribed dates in some parts of its peninsular winter range.

NESTING OF THE WIRETAILED SWALLOW (HIRUNDO SMITHII) IN KERALA

K. K. Neelakantan

During the period November 1968 to March 1969 I happened to visit four spots where there were recently constructed concrete bridges. All four bridges are in Cannanore district, North Kerala. At each there was a pair of Wiretailed Swallows. Under three of these the birds had nests. On 21.xii.1968 a female was busy laying the foundation of a nest under the bridge-cum-lock at Kattampalli, not far from Cannanore; on 3.i.1969 and 8.ii.1969 a female was seen collecting mud from low silt-banks near the Cheeku bridge (a few kilometres north-east of Tellicherry) under which were the remnants or the beginnings of three nests, though only one pair of swallows was seen there. On 8.ii.1969 at Mambram bridge we found a nest which had been completed and furnished with feather-lining, and the owners anxiously flying round and round.

Dr Salim Ali did not come across the wiretailed swallow anywhere in Travancore-Cochin. Though the SYNOPSIS OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN includes northern Kerala in the range of the wiretailed swallow, it is not known whether breeding has been recorded from this area.

BIRDWATCHING AT HARSIL

Dinesh Mohan

Recently I had the pleasure of visiting the beautiful valley of Harsil situated at a height of 8400 ft, on way to Gangotri. The valley abounds in a large number of hill streams apart from the main river Ganga which flows over a fairly broad plane. It has also a large variety of birds and I am giving below a list of a few uncommon birds seen by me.

Black tit; Snow pigeon; Indian rose finch; Eastern meadow bunting; Himalayan gold finch; Himalayan whistling thrush; Yellow wagtail; White wagtail; Rufousbacked shrike; Himalayan green finch; Plumbeous redstart; Whitecapped redstart.

The tits are very common and are constantly flittering about in the pine trees. The snow pigeons were only seen in flight but I had a good look at a group sitting on a rock in the higher up regions at Gangotri (10,500 ft). The Green finch fly in flocks and sometimes the whole tree gets filled up with these beautiful birds. The whistling thrush is very prominent everywhere with its beautiful song and care-free movement.

Harsil is a lovely valley indeed and is now connected by a motor road. It lies at a distance of about 140 miles from Rishikesh. One could make this trip at one stretch but it is good to break at Uttarkashi (3500 ft) which is again a beautiful valley and has the famous Nehru Institute of Mountaineering.

A GREAT GREY SHRIKE IN A SORRY STATE

K. S. Iyankumar

I was very interested to read in the July issue of the Newsletter an account of the feeding habits of a Baybacked Shrike. I had wanted to write about a Great Grey Shrike, something nice for a change, for several months now.

Last September a Grey Shrike was found by us while returning from Hingolghadh. It was in a sorry state with one of its wings totally lacking flight feathers! How it had survived in the first place was a mystery only explained by the fact that it lived in thorn scrub where it could get ample shelter from its enemies, while food was had without difficulty even for a handicapped bird which at best could only flutter a few feet off the ground. Anyway, the subject of this note came finally to grief apparently while trying to fly across the road just when some vehicle passed and we came by to find the poor creature completely dazed. A night's rest however soon got it back to its shrikian form and after a few initial forced feedings when the patient ungratefully used its beak to advantage, it started to take food proffered by hand. Meat very soon got it tamed and it speaks volumes for the bird's intelligence that it realised the advantageous circumstances it had found itself in, fluttering its wings and uttering soft throaty sounds at my approach. Nor did it batter itself against the bars of its cage as most newly caught birds do.

It was during the months that this shrike was my patient, that I got to admire the bird. What we call cruelty is the ingrained grit to survive in harsh and often remorseless environments. The habit of storing larders is not a pernicious quality, but an intelligent response to the realities of its habitat. Shrikes often must be going without food for long periods, and so when they come across a bonanza, they capture the prey in blind urgency, acquiring more than can be held in the beak, nor can the shrike eat its prey rapidly as often as not this is some hard shelled insect, and so these are deposited on sharp objects, thorns, barbed wires, etc. leaving the nimrod to hasten to capture more. Quite often it finds it cannot eat all it has caught and so the larder awaiting to be eaten at leisure. Shrikes are courageous birds for they frequently tackle prey quite out of proportion to their size -- small birds and mammals, frogs and reptiles. These cannot be dispatched efficiently more eaten at one sitting, and so again the reason for the larder, a necessity and not a symptom of cruelty. Also, the fierce dash with which a shrike attacks its living food is a result of its small size and inefficient claws and bills for killing, so what it lacks in physical attributes it amply compensates in a temperament which at a casual glance seem ingrained cruelty. Shrikes are neither cruel, nor are they wanton killers; they are what Nature has compelled them to be, highly intelligent creatures making the most of their meager resources to live successfully in a world which by all standards is exacting.

Man has got into the habit of seeing his own weaknesses in animals, he should thus also see the brighter sides of their make-ups.

Incidentally this shrike died of overfeeding.

CHILKA LAKE AFTER THE FLOODS

R. N. Mukherjee & K. N. Nair

Recently we had a chance to visit Chilka Lake and we enjoyed the beauty of the area and its fauna. However, it would be nice if somebody like Dr Helen Spurway, at Bhubaneswar* would contact the Government of Orissa to stop the mass killing of ducks on the lake, which is a source of earning for many people. These ducks locally known as Genda hans are sold in the market and also in the ghats of Chilka Lake at Gangrapur, Bhusandapur and Balugan, both alive and dead, at a price varying from Rs 2/- to Rs 5/-.

We had gone for a faunistic survey of the brackish water especially protozoans. We saw thousands of ducks and most of them appeared to be wigeons. There were plenty of cormorants and also fishing eagles and gulls. In the marshy land adjoining the banks there were storks, jacanas and others. Most of the time the ducks remained in shallow water

*Dr Spurway has now gone away from Bhubaneswar as her letter will indicate. Some other resident of Bhubaneswar should take up the cause of protecting the waders and ducks - Ed.

but during midday when the sun is high they assembled in the middle of the lake. A small rocky projection near Kalijaya Island, about 10 km from Balugan Ghat and a hillock at Rambha, 3 km from Subolai village are covered with their eggs. They have selected a good undisturbed locality for breeding.

As we were curious about their feeding habits we dissected two specimens of each sex and examined the alimentary canal. It was full of partly digested weed and algal mass along with some broken shell of crustacea. To our surprise we could not locate a single helminth in their body. We did however find three species of mallophaga from among their feathers.

EXTRACT FROM News Bulletin of Nature Study Club, VISAKHAPATNAM,
Vol. 1(2), April-June 1969 - Nests of Common Mynas

We have noted ten nests of Common Mynas during this breeding season, and inspected only four nests closely for their contents. Other six nests were simply noted down to avoid any sort of misunderstanding on the part of the birds. In all the four cases, we found eggs (1 or 2 in each) and the uppermost layer of the bed was green neem leaves. Even after two eggs in two cases, the leaves were fresh and what puzzles us most is regarding the special and particular collection of them in the nests. In all the cases the neem trees were at least 100 yards away, and in the presence of other leaves nearby what is the special affinity towards these neem leaves? Whether they have anything to do with maintaining the temperature in the absence of the parent birds -- or any sort of protection for the eggs from fungus or virus infections! Similar incidents of neem leaves in one or two nests was reported from N. S. C. Guntur in response to our enquiry.

Further studies may prove useful in this connection.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

The International Council for Bird Preservation, whose President at the moment is Dr S. Dillon Ripley, Secretary, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, brings out the The President's Letter from time to time, and the following is reproduced from letter No. 16 of March 1969.

Some of our readers might want to become members of the I. C. B. P., and they should write to their Central Secretariat, c/o British Museum (Natural History), Cromwell Road, London, S. W. 7.

'It is particularly interesting to members of the International Council for Bird Preservation to note the increase by careful management and control of two species of birds, one of which has now been removed from the endangered bird list, namely the Trumpeter Swan of North America, and the second which seems to be on the way to a remarkable recovery, namely the Whooping Crane, also of North America. In the first case, the population of Trumpeter Swan has reached the level at which it cannot appropriately be listed in the ICBP sponsored volumes on birds of the IUCN Red Book. In the second place, the remarkable population total of 68 birds of the Whooping Crane is an earnest of things to come. It is interesting to note that in the case of the Trumpeter Swans, the population had shrunk to 69 in 1932 and now numbers something over 3700 all told. Let us hope that in another thirty years, the population of Whooping Cranes may increase at a similar rate!

One of the interesting characteristics of the IUCN volumes called the Red Book on mammals and birds is the fact that this is a flexible, indeed a dynamic book. It is to be interpreted not as a bible and not as static. Rather populations of all animals endangered or not, tend to ebb and flow at various rates. In the same way, the endangered animals may decrease precariously, or may by contrast

increase encouragingly. One of the purposes of the Red Book scheme is to emphasize this by the colour of the pages on which the species are entered and by the characteristic rating system.'

The Smithsonian Institution, Washington, has established a Centre for Short-lived Phenomena. The idea is to get immediate information of ecological and geographical disturbances in any part of the world. A circular from them dated 16 June 1969 is reproduced below to give readers an indication of the type of work which is done by this Institution. Anyone interested in establishing contact with them would write to:

Smithsonian Institution
Centre for Short-lived Phenomena
60 Garden Street, Cambridge, Mass. 02138
United States of America

1.) The heaviest concentration of dead birds has been coming in just south of Oregon Inlet. There were over 200 on Ocracoke Island Sunday. The southeast wind during the last two days should bring the birds north -- they can be expected all the way up to Virginia line with the kind of a drift that's on the water. They are verging out to sea past Diamond Shoales, so they come ashore more slowly in the north.

2.) The kill is confined to just the majority of this one species. The dead birds are of the species Shearwater, the ratio of dead found is 50 : 1 Greater Shearwaters to Sooty Shearwaters. They apparently died offshore in the Gulf Stream and are washing on-shore from Beaufort to as far north as Oregon Inlet. A charter boat from Morehead City reported seeing more than an acre of floating dead birds. There seems to be a fairly good number still offshore. The birds were noticed Friday, but some of them were pretty badly decomposed, which would indicate that they were dead before Friday. One bird was cut open and apparently had internal digestive track hemorrhaging and one died of nervous convulsions -- frightened to death. The sick ones, before dying, just sit there as if in a fog, their only movement is to shake their heads as if aggravated, and when touched, they have no spirit anymore.'

CORRESPONDENCE

July issue of the Newsletter

May I congratulate you on the very interesting July issue of the Newsletter? There are so many new names which only your persuasive and persistent qualities must have brought out. I greatly enjoyed reading Sydney Reeves's account from far away Tunisia. How nostalgic he sounds of India, and how very like a birdwatching trip to this part of the country this seems! It is quite obvious that our birds are better at winning friends for India than all our Tourist Officers and publicity men. I would like to express many thanks to Mr Reeves for all the very nice things he had to say about some of his 'Indian friends' he met there.

I wonder if Mr Stairmand would mind birdwatchers like myself visiting him for a spot of birding on the Marve island wherever this may be. It was indeed interesting reading all he had to say about common place birds which are never really common place to birdwatchers: 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever' (I hope I have quoted this right). Thanks to Mr Stairmand for sharing his pleasant week-end with all of us.

I always thought that the swinging set did not care much for birds, nor did they have an ear for bird song, but either I am totally wrong or Winston Creado is a notable exception. But then I think he lets the cat out of the bag by mentioning the two crows listening to Bach. Anyone who can get the Common House Crow (Corvus splendens) interested in

culture must be a person not quite of the swinging set, but if he typifies the swinging set, then let all of us swing more vigorously!

The monsoon here is once again stalling and there has been no rain after the very early and not asked for showers in early June. Things however seem to be building up as the usual wind is missing, it is horribly humid and hot and there are great masses of clouds all over the sky, some of them flickering away with lightening. All very hopeful signs, but one cannot trust even Nature now-a-days.

May I ask where Dharmadam Island is? It sounds an exciting locale for a week-end. If it is near Bombay, why can it not be popularised and the Government impressed on to make it a sanctuary? Of course it may be asking for too much after the liberation of the few wild animals in the Borivili National Park. But a large and wealthy city like Bombay can afford many, many recreation spots.

The single line from Joseph George hides modesty which is complete. I have had the pleasure of going out birding with him in Dehra Dun years ago. Please Mr George give us the joy of taking us out birdwatching occasionally with you.

K. S. Lavkumar
Rajkumar College, Rajkot

A Request

There is often supposed to be an antagonism between birdwatchers and aviary keepers. If an individual is one, he is not expected to be the other. I suspect that this is not completely true. Therefore I would be extremely grateful if any of my fellow birdwatchers could help me obtain living specimens of both species of Indian junglefowl, of either sex or any age. The more life history and locality data that accompanies any individual the better. I will of course pay capture and transport charges.

There is widespread experience that these birds pine to death quickly after capture. I have so far only two males, one of each species. Both have been exposed to somewhat rough transport, the sonneratii was bleeding from his neck and head, when he came to me, but I have been lucky, and they have been satisfactory and gratifying in the various conditions I have been able to offer them

H. Spurway
Habshiguda 16, Hyderabad 7, AP

The Purple Sunbird

As I was reading through our May 1969 Newsletter I came across three or four lines in K. P. Singh's article on 'Birds of Barh' relating to the Purple Sunbird, that they live in non-breeding plumage maybe less than two months. He also states they are 'very commonly seen throughout the year.'

I wonder whether Mr Singh has an accurate record of the presence of these sunbirds for the twelve months.

This species arrives in Kathmandu, north of the Bihar border close to the 1st of June as Mrs Desire Proud pointed out several years ago in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society. For three years they came on that date. Next year I recorded the 25th of May and this year a pair were on the fence above our wall on the 30th of May.

The male arrives in full nuptial plumage but within a week, begins to lose his purple feathers. By the first of July you would never know he was the same bird!

Here is a species which enjoys a long holiday after raising its young. Up to Kathmandu Valley the parents come to probe into the bases of cana flowers, only recently opened. They like honeysuckle flowers too. So for the next five months they are with us, then flock together as they descend to the plains. One male appeared the middle of January and still had his green, yellow and black plumage.

It would be interesting to know how general this northern movement

at the end of May is. Do birds from farther south come into Bihar and Bihar birds visit Kathmandu? Or is it a small portion of the more affluent population which spend the summer and fall with us??

I have discovered that North Nepalis living on the northern slopes of Dhaulagiri look for the arrival of the hoopoe in July. They say it is the only species which appears at that time.

R. L. Fleming
United Mission to Nepal

Random Notes

- 1) Two years back I wrote to you about a House Crow's pranks in digging and hiding a cigarette butt in the ground. It did one better this time. It neatly removed the soap case from a transparent soap dish, kept in our outside wash basin and lifting the soap dish in its beak flew away. I wonder what it could have done with it?
- 2) Sparrows. A pair of sparrows started building a nest behind the chair in our front verandah. Every evening I lifted the grass, sticks and other odds and collected and weighed them up. They are persistent builders and this process continued for full 18 days, after which they gave up. I wonder if anybody else has done this before? The weight of grass, sticks, etc. collected everyday was approximately 1 kg, i. e. approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ rd. in 18 days. Amazing isn't it? Considering the small size of the bird.
- 3) Two breeding seasons have been observed in sparrows.
 - a) ~~February-May~~, when the male is aggressive, keen and active to build nest
 - b) ~~September-October~~, when reverse is the case. The female coos and sits near the male and demonstrates: shivering, sputtering in and out of anal opening, etc. The male mounts but only reluctantly and half heartedly and this abortive honeymoon seldom results in proper nesting and breeding activities.

Lt Col. A. David
Delhi

Appearance of the Blackheaded (or Brahminy) Myna in Bombay City

At some time after 8 a. m. on 5th June 1969, a Brahminy Myna (Sturnus pagodarum) was drying itself out, after a heavy shower, in the top of a Coral tree (Erythrina) close to Colaba Reclamation.

This follows my sighting of a Brahminy Myna at Vihar Lake on 17th May 1969, reported in Newsletter June 1969.

In April and May the Brahminy Myna became quite common around Khandala and I wonder whether there is a local migratory influx of these birds into this area during the summer months.

D. A. Stairmand
Bombay

Mr Stairmand in Vol. 9, June 1969 issue, p. 6, refers to a sighting of a Brahminy Myna (Sturnus pagodarum) near Vihar Lake on 17th May. It is our impression that the Brahminy Myna arrives in Bombay and Salsette about September/October, and leaves in March/April. When they first arrive they are usually in flocks or family parties and a great many birds in juvenile plumage are noted at this time. Mr Stairmand's recording of the bird on 17th May is rather unusual for Bombay for there is no evidence of the birds breeding here, the nearest known breeding localities are Panchgani and Khandala. His reference to a Brahminy Myna on 5th June in Bombay City suggests that this individual had escaped from its cage. - Ed./

Birdwatching in Mussoorie

Here at Mussoorie I have seen a few birds which I am not able to identify conclusively. Would anyone please identify them for me?

1. A sparrow-sized bird closely resembling both in shape and size, the rufousbellied babbler. The face and underparts are the same colour as the belly of the rufousbellied babbler, i. e. rather bright ferruginous. The crown, back, wings and tail are olive-brown. A conspicuous black patch in front of the eye and a black chin, as in the Cinnamon Sparrow. It was seen both at Rajpur (near Dehra Dun) and at Mussoorie in the end of May and the beginning of June on bush-covered hillsides. If seen in the open, it would dive into the bushes and skulk away. It uttered a call similar to the 'water bubbling' of the female cuckoo. When uttering this call, it stretched out its neck and shivered its tail. It was solitary.

2. A flycatcher, which at the first glance I took to be the Rufous-tailed Flycatcher. It was similar to that shown on plate 33 of Dr Salim Ali's INDIAN HILL BIRDS, except for a very conspicuous broad whitish eyebrow, and a rather browner tail. It kept to the undergrowth and not to the crowns of trees as the book suggests. Its actions reminded one of Tickell's Blue Flycatcher. It was completely silent, and kept to open hill forest with plenty of twiggy undergrowth.

3) A bird similar to the Plaintive Cuckoo with blackish wings and tail. The tail was tipped with white. Beak and legs black. The body was deep grey like the cuckoo's but its actions were very different. It moved about on tree-tops warily and occasionally made fly-catching sallies into the air. It was silent and often associated with Shrike-babblers, Drongos, and Minivets. It was usually solitary. Could it be a Dark-grey Cuckoo Shrike.

Sudhir Vyas
Hillside, Mussoorie

[No. 2 could be Orangeorgetted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa strophciata*). In its description (p. 75 of INDIAN HILL BIRDS) curiously enough the chief diagnostic points have got left out! It has a prominent white eyebrow and forehead. No. 3, is a Dark-grey Cuckoo-Shrike. - Eds.]

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