

Zafar Futehally

2205 Oakwood, 8th Main,
3rd Block, Koramangala,
BANGALORE - 560 034

Tele.No: 5533684

1st June 2000

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12000

Mr. Asheesh Pittie,
8-2-545 "Prem Parvat",
Road No.7,
Banjara Hills,
HYDERABAD - 500 034

Dear Asheesh,

I was away from Bangalore for the past 2½ months and returned only yesterday. Among the pile of letters I have just glanced through yours quickly. Please feel free to deal as you like with the material of the interview which you had with me. Frankly I do not think I said anything very startling or new, and I have no objection to your dropping it. But if you think otherwise, use it in any manner you like.

I see that you are taking a serious interest in the important bird programme of the BNHS, and I am sure that your careful recording of facts will come in very handy.

Yours sincerely,

[Handwritten signature]
Zafar Futehally

Aasheesh Pittie

8-2-545 Road No. 7, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034. India.

Phone: Off : 040-3352269 Fax : 040-3356064 Res: 040-3350683 E-mail: aasheesh@hd1.vsnl.net.in

July 24, 2000

Mr Zafar Futehally
Editor
Newsletter for Birdwatchers
2205 Oakwood Apartment
Jakkasandra Layout
Koramangala
3rd Block 8th Main
BANGALORE 500034

Dear Mr Futehally,

I have taken the liberty of asking a friend of mine, Nitin Jamdar, to write the article on Birds and the Law, which task you had given me. Nitin has agreed to 'do' the article. I hope you don't mind for Nitin will do a better job than me for reasons given below. I am sure you've heard of Nitin, if not met him in person. Anyway, he knows his birds as well, if not better, as I do and above all, he's an advocate by profession.

I have briefed him about our tele-conversation. If you'd like to give him some more ideas about what you want from the article, please write to him at the address given below.

Thanking You,

With best wishes and regards,

Yours truly,



C/c: Mr Nitin Jamdar, 5-A "Samata", Gen. Bhosale Road, Near Sachivalaya Gymkhana, Mumbai 400021.

ZAFAR FUTEHALLY

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27-7-2000

J.F.
31/vii

2000

Dear Mr. Nitin Jamdar,

I have just received a letter from Aasheesh Pittie dated 24th July, from which I learn that he has requested you to write an article on Birds and the Law, for the Newsletter for Birdwatchers. I understand that you know your birds, and being a lawyer you are sure to produce something worthwhile.

I would like to have an entirely factual article of about 1200 words, and I trust you can cover the relevant aspects of some of our National and State Laws, and International Conventions relating to Migratory Birds and others if birds come within their scope. Quite a tall order - for which I hope I am forgiven.

If you wish you may take another approach - just write about some of the leading features of the laws, and comment on their ineffectiveness, and suggestions for making them more practical. When I was a Game Warden in Bombay, I was frustrated to find that none of the police officers before whom I produced some timid offenders knew anything about the laws. Quite often I was looked upon with suspicion as a possible charlatan.

Finally, do write only if you feel like it. I enclose the latest Newsletter

with gratitude
Zafar Futehally
Zafar Futehally

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Copy: Aasheesh Pittie

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September 8, 2000

Mr Zafar Futehally
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Dear Mr Futehally,

The July-August 2000 *Newsletter* arrived a couple of days ago with Sridhar's fabulous photograph of a Mottled Wood Owl on its cover. What an interesting mix of articles it contains! Below are some observations.

1. Dr Uttangi's piece on his visit to the Biligiri Ranganathaswami Hills Wildlife Sanctuary in the present issue, (Pp. 45-47), contains one mystery. He mentions the suspicion of a "racket-tailed drongo, *Dicrurus remifer*," though it turns out to be an Indian Treepie (new name Rufous Treepie). The drongo is obviously an error. I think he meant the Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus*. His sighting of a Rosy Minivet *Pericrocotus roseus* is noteworthy and important, as there are very few from the region.
2. Mr Anish Andheria's informative and comprehensive report on Ranthambhore National Park, (Pp. 51-53), contains a checklist of the birds he saw during his stay at the park. His record of the "Eastern marsh harrier *Circus spilonotus*," (serial # 72) requires re-examination. I suspect that it may have been the Eurasian Marsh Harrier *C. aeruginosus* rather than this rare eastern race.
3. I hope someone monitors the population of White-backed *Gyps bengalensis* and Long-billed Vultures *G. indicus* of Ranthambhore for reports of this genus are woeful from other parts of the country. Perhaps Mr Andheria could write to Mr G.V. Reddy (D.F.O. Ranthambhore), about this matter.
4. The page numbering requires a little fine-tuning. Slight inconsistencies creep in making the task of a bibliographer difficult. Vol. 40 No 3 did not have a page number on the last page (back cover). Neither does the present issue. But there is a page number in perception as the following issue begins after leaving out a number in the serial. The front inside cover never carries a page number though the Editorial begins on it. Why not number all the pages starting from the front inside-cover and ending with the back cover?

Hoping to speak with you in Bangalore, on our way to Kodaikanal, in late September.

With best wishes and regards,

Yours truly,



September 15, 2000

Mr Zafar Futehally
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Dear Mr Futehally,

I received an e-mail from Ranjit Manakadan of the BNHS with a request to send a Xerox copy of Messers Serrao & Sekhar's note on the Pheasant-tailed Jacana, published in 1962 in the *Newsletter* 2(1): ?. I'm afraid that I don't have this particular issue in my collection.

However, below is a complete (as far as I know) listing of the papers / notes published by Mr Serrao. Perhaps it will be of use to you. I heard of his death while in Mumbai last. He had a prodigious memory, didn't he?

Current Search: a="Serrao,JS"

Contains 54 references

Listing Created 15 Sep 2000, at 6:50

- (1962): Ringing migratory Wagtails in Kerala. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 2(7): 7-11.
(1962): The Swallow roost at Mahim Causeway, Bombay. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 2(12): 13-14.
(1964): Swallows bathing. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 4(3): 6.
(1964): Koels and Crows. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 4(3): 12.
(1964): Tickell's Blue Flycatcher feeding on crawling prey. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 4(3): 12.
(1964): Arrival of Wagtails in South India. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 4(10): 12.
(1965): 'Curious play', or food-getting? *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 5(1): 14.
(1968): Blyth's Reed Warbler v. Tailor Bird. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 8(5): 7-8.
(1968): The Grey Wagtail *Motacilla caspica* is back in Bombay. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 8(10): 9.
(1968): House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* nesting in trees. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 8(12): 11.
(1969): Late stay of Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* in the peninsula. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 9(8): 5.
(1969): A curious play of Rufousbacked Shrikes. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 9(11): 9.
(1970): Arrival of the Pied Crested Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus* in Bombay. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 10(8): 8.
(1970): Paucity of migratory waders and waterbirds in the south during 1969-70 cold season. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 10(9): 7-8.
(1970): Coconut and its pests. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 10(11): 7-9.
(1971): Black Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis* fishing. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 11(7): 10.
(1971): The rains and birdlife around Bombay. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 11(8): 9-10.
(1971): Nesting of the Baya Weaver Bird *Ploceus philippinus*. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 11(10): 11.
(1971): Arrival of Blyth's Reed Warbler. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 11(12): 12.
(1972): Blackbacked Woodpeckers. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 12(7): 8-9.
(1972): Arrival of the Pitta in Bombay. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 12(7): 10-11.
(1972): Breeding Purplerumped Sunbirds. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 12(8): 9.
(1972): Does the Greyheaded Myna breed in Salsette? *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 12(9): 14.

Aasheesh Pittie

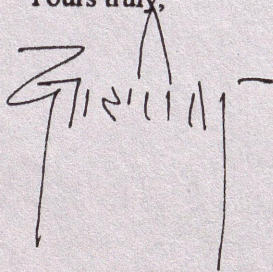
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- (1972): Variant plumages in birds. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 12(11): 9-10.
(1972): Forest Wagtail *Motacilla indica* in Bombay. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 12(11): 12.
(1973): Isabelline or Pale Brown Shrike in Bombay. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 13(3): 10.
(1973): Blackheaded Bunting in Salsette, Bombay. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 13(5): 10.
(1973): Mahim Creek as a waterbird sanctuary. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 13(6): 7-8.
(1973): Joys of the monsoon. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 13(7): 9-11.
(1973): Whiskered Terns feeding. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 13(8): 8-9.
(1973): Grey Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus* in Bombay on 14th October. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 13(11): 6-7.
(1973): Adult birds' concern for young of other birds. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 13(12): 9-10.
(1974): Whitebellied Sea Eagles of Karwar. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 14(1): 8.
(1974): Grey Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus* in Bombay area. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 14(12):
(1975): Behaviour-pattern mimicry by a Goldfronted Chloropsis, and some thoughts on it. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 15(3): 4-5.
(1975): The pied crested cuckoo. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 15(6): 1-2.
(1975): Warding off danger. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 15(9): 5-6.
(1976): Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 16(3): 14-15.
(1976): Birding in the Andamans. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 16(12): 7-8.
(1977): Comments on book review. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 17(2): 7.
(1978): Spread of the Collared or Indian Ring Dove. *Hornbill*. 1978(3): 36-38.
(1978): Correspondence. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 18(2): 10-11.
(1978): Ashy Drongo in Bandipur. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 18(10): 13.
(1979): Honeyguides. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 19(6): 15.
(1981): Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* (Linnaeus) breeding in sub-adult plumage. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*. 78(1): 166-167.
(1986): The white stork (*C. Ciconia*). *Hornbill* 1986(2): 21.
(1988): Feeding pattern of an Egret. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*. 85(2): 414.
(1989): Pied crested cuckoos. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 29(9-10): 9-10.
(1990): Feedback. *Wetlands & Waterfowl Newsletter*. 2(): 3.
(1992): Letters. *Hornbill*. 1992(1): 13.
(1993): Scavenging by cattle egret. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 33(3): 55-56.
(1995): His legacy to India. *Hornbill*. 1995(4): 12-13.
(1995): Ringed birds. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 35(1): 20-21.
(1996): Snakes and Rollers. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 36(5): 95-96.

With best wishes and regards,

Yours truly,



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October 14, 2000

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Dear Mr Futehally,

Further to our conversation in Bangalore, I enclose a manuscript of the review of Krys Kazmierczak's book and hope you will consider it for publication in the *Newsletter*. If you would like to edit / change parts of it, I'd be grateful if you could tell me about it in advance.

I'm sorry that we were not able to meet you and Mrs Futehally in Bangalore. I hope you understand.

Thanking You,

With best wishes and regards,

Yours truly,



I have emailed the same document to Sidhar as an attachment so that he will not have to get it re-typed if you accept it. I've requested him to do ~~so~~ as you instruct in the matter.

Encl.: 4 page of manuscript a/a.

REVIEW

A FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF INDIA, SRI LANKA, PAKISTAN, NEPAL, BHUTAN, BANGLADESH AND THE MALDIVES (Hardcover: 21.5 x 15.5 cm x 2 cm) By Krys Kazmierczak with illustrations by Ber van Perlo (2000). Pp 352. With 96 colour plates, 3 plates of line drawings and a map and, 1,302 colour distribution maps. Published by Om Book Service, New Delhi (ISBN 81-87107-04-9); Pica Press, UK. (ISBN 1-873403-79-8) and Yale University Press, New Haven (ISBN 0300079214). Price Rs. 795/-, £25.00 & \$32.50 respectively.

By

Aasheesh Pittie

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The mandate of a 'field guide' is to facilitate users in identifying birds in the field quickly and easily. The fact that it has to be physically carried around by a user, often for hours at a time, demands that it be of a suitable size and weight. To attempt a field guide to the birds of the Indian region is a mammoth task requiring a comprehensive knowledge of the subject that can be acquired only by putting in many hours in the pursuit of living the bird.

Sálim Ali's *Book of Indian Birds* (first published in 1941) was written at a time when the art of birdwatching was in such infancy in India that he had to devise a method of highlighting aspects of the bird—behavioural, physical, vocal, *etc.*—to enable users to identify the feathered creature before them. His book held the fort alone, for many years.

The birding scene changed for the better with the publication of Grimmett, Inskipp and Inskipp's *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent* (1998: Hardcover). Subsequently, the "Grimmskipps" brought out a *Pocket Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent* (1999: Soft cover) containing illustrations, distribution maps and short descriptive texts from their earlier, larger work.

Kazmierczak's field guide is similar to the *Pocket Guide* and caters to a market that is able to place birds *at least* within families.

The book under review is divided into 12 chapters including one of acknowledgements.

The Introduction has brief sections on the political regions covered and, the number of species illustrated (over 1,330, with a mention of those that could not be graphically depicted due to late or unpublished records by the time the book went to press).

A short section on "Taxonomy, systematic order and nomenclature," informs that the book broadly follows the taxonomy and scientific nomenclature of Inskipp, Lindsey & Duckworth's path-breaking 1996 publication, *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region*. However, minor subsequent changes have been incorporated in the present work.

The Systematic Order followed in the book is similar to Ali & Ripley's monumental *Handbook* and Ripley's (1982) *Synopsis*, rather than Sibley & Monroe's Order, followed by the *Annotated Checklist*. This is a relief for Indian birders who are used to the Systematic Order of the *Synopsis*.

Common English Names follow the *Annotated Checklist*, though alternate names are listed in the detailed "Index of English names," towards the end of the book. This however does not settle the

upheaval that Indian birdwatchers find themselves in due to recent changes in the vulgar English names of birds. The issue does not seem headed towards resolution for Bombay Natural History Society, India's premier ornithological body, may very well continue using the older (more popular in India) names in its forthcoming publications and scientific journal.

The chapter on "How to use this book," should be read a couple of times if you plan to use the book regularly. This is essential, for the book depends heavily on abbreviations and a telegraphic text—dictated by the need to fit maximum information within the restrictive dimensions of a field guide. Among other things you will realize that the red symbol of a flying bird depicts a species that is globally threatened or near-threatened (206 in all). Giving the serial numbers from the *Synopsis* against the relevant species has provided cross-referencing with an earlier standard work. Other symbols and/or abbreviations used in the text, like identification notes, altitudinal range, habitat and behaviour, voice and status, are explained here in detail. A sub-section gives explanatory notes on the species distribution maps used in the body of the text.

The chapter on "Family introductions" that follows gives brief insights into the characteristics, jizz, status and identification of each of the 96 Families illustrated in the plates. Beginners would do well to read this section and veterans to refresh their memory by dipping in occasionally. Useful hints in differentiating similar looking families (e.g. larks and pipits) can be picked up from this chapter e.g., larks have the "habit of crouching down when approached before taking flight if the intruder comes too near," (page 25).

The main section is followed by a useful glossary of ornithological terms and some native words used commonly on the subcontinent during birding e.g. "Deodhar, Duar, Ghat, Jheel, *etc.*"

The section on "Useful organizations" lists international (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) and national, organizations involved with birdwatching and/or working for bird conservation in the region. Brief information is given about each organization.

A section on "References and further reading" contains an eclectic bibliography on the ornithology of the region, including family monographs and a list of sound guides.

The final set of 3 sections contains a comprehensive "Index of English names," containing both 'old' and 'new' names for easy use. An "Index of scientific names," indexed according to the binomial names i.e., *Corvus splendens* and not *splendens, Corvus*. The last section is a "Quick index to plate numbers." This last is a very useful tool for the field. To get to a Family you have to scan just 2 pages, indexed alphabetically by the commonest name for a species, e.g., "Coucal, Harrier, Heron," *etc.*

The main section of the book comprises of "Colour plates and maps." I would like to dwell on this section in some detail. As a rule, illustrations and text face one another throughout the book. The related distribution maps are a page-flip away, either behind the pertinent text or the plate. There are some exceptions where all three, pictures, text and maps are on the same two-page spread. The layouts of Plate #13, 14, 20 are bliss and future editions should view such a layout seriously for as many plates as possible even if it means a slightly thicker book. There are quite a few blank half-pages that could perhaps be put to good use. But one cannot wish for everything!

PLATES: The use of a pictorial index to the plates, on the double-page spread of the front inside covers, using a common species from each Family to guide the user to the relevant plate is a great idea and is being used for the first time in a book on Indian birds. It helps users to zero in on the plates of closely related species when a quick reference is required.

It is surprising that the artist for the covers and spine is John Cox and not Ber van Perlo. The cover of a book is a showcase for art that transcends the genre of field-guide illustration. In all fairness to van Perlo's work, the publishers should have allowed him to do the covers.

Birds are generally not identified by the spoor they leave, the food they eat or the homes they make. They are identified by illustrations of their likeness or photographs in field guides. Therefore "the illustrations are the most important part of any field guide," and are scrutinized critically by users. My comments however are of a general nature. I have not scrutinized each species in detail though I am sure inputs from users will help the author update future editions of the book for everybody's benefit.

My greatest grouse about the plates is the overlap of birds. In trying to fit all species of a Family on a single plate, or as few plates as possible, the artist has in many instances, crowded the birds onto one page. In so doing he has painted birds overlapping each other as a result of which their colours inadvertently merge or are barely separable. This requires some getting used to, especially when a quick 'ID' is required. This could however very well be a limitation of my personal perspective! Some examples are: Pl 20 #1, 2, 4; Pl 23 #3; Pl 29 #10 (clash between flying and standing birds!); Pl 45 #1, 2; Pl 50 # 6, 15; Pl 60 # 2, 11, 14; Pl 64 #10, 13; Pl 81 most of the redstarts; Pl 89 #4 (#5 is fine as the outline of the birds is quite distinct, unlike #4 where the faces of many are painted against a background of another bird's body); Pl., 94 # 9; 95 #14, 15, 16.

Besides the plumage I feel the head and its markings are a major identification feature of a bird. It is that portion of its body that is viewed by a birdwatcher *first* if one is given the chance by the bird! It therefore helps to have a clear profile of the head of the bird and not merge it into the body of another when illustrating a field guide.

Using a white background is fine as it contrasts well with the colours of the bird, but becomes problematic when parts of the bird are also white. The result of this is that the background and the plumage merge as is visible on plates 6 #2, 3, 4 (in flight); 10 #11; 11 #4 (in flight). Also in reality one seldom sees birds against a white background. The landscape they inhabit is multicoloured, thank goodness! The exception, of course, is birds in snow.

The illustrations, when compared with the Grimmskipp's book, have a spontaneity that makes them seem like deft field paintings by a remarkably adept and accomplished craftsman, plying his art for the specific job of bird identification. The more I use this guide, the more I am astonished at how well this style works. It complements admirably the amount of detail my eye can absorb in the quick back-and-forth between binocs and bird guide that often takes place in a field-oriented crunch situation. This is the intrinsic strength of the pictures. Often the utility of intricate details is useful only during leisurely field conditions or desk-bound reference work.

MAPS & TEXT: The two great strengths of this field guide are the species distribution maps ("compiled from information available up to mid-1999") and the telegraphic texts accompanying the

plates. The inside back cover has a double-page “Key to distribution maps,” that is simple to digest and makes the maps easy to follow and decipher. The colour coding is clear and distinctive. The light brownish colour that appears in maps on page 33 (Pl. 1, #4, 5 & 6); p. 40 (Pl. 3 #6) and p. 125 (Pl. 36 #4) is actually a wash of red dots suffering from the vagaries of the printing world! Maps are located easily and quickly as they are subtitled by the English name of the species they represent.

The author has given great importance to birdcalls in the text, and rightly so. This most definitely pegs the book a notch higher in the field guide market for the region. I had a rather graphic example of the utility of this feature recently when I used the book to positively identify a Besra (*Accipiter virgatus*) by its call, as opposed to a Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) in Kodaikanal.

The Indian region is large enough to accommodate many books on birds, the recent spate of field guides notwithstanding! I think that this is just the prelude to books on regional and biogeographical avifaunas for our region.

In the final analysis the utility of a field-guide is its facility and usefulness in the field. I've used this one extensively for more than a month and have found it a quick and reliable companion. I cannot recommend it enough.

Words: 1897.

Zafar Futehally

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24th November 2000

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[Handwritten signature]
30/XI
2000

My dear Aasheesh,

Thank you for your letter of 14th October, which I have seen only today after returning from Bombay.

I am sure your article is very worthwhile and if there are any changes I want to make I will let you know in advance of publication.

Thank you also for the Report of a Field Camp at Rollapadu Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary, Kurnool District, Andhra Pradesh.

With best regards.

Yours sincerely,

Zafar

Zafar Futehally

P.S. I have now read your article. I want to add only one line about the INDEX of COMMON names. J.C.D also has it in the latest Edition of SA/BOI.