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*Spotted Sandpiper
6/10/1969*

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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NEWS LETTER FOR
BIR DWATCHERS

Volume 9, Number 9

September 1969

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AVIFAUNA OF SINGHBHUM

Jamal Ara

The avifauna of Singhbhum is interesting because of the combination of geographical, vegetative, and historical reasons.

Singhbhum is a northeastern extension of the Peninsular Zoogeographical Subregion, and here that region meets the Central Indian and Indo-Gangetic Subregions. This results in the presence of many strictly peninsular forms, or such forms which are patchily distributed over the peninsula in forested mountains and make their appearance in the Himalayas.

The Himalayan Tree Pie (Dendrocitta formosae) is an instance of such discontinuous occurrence. The race himalayensis occurs in the eastern Himalayas and the race sarkari occupies a restricted area in the Eastern Ghats near Vizagapatam. The Eastern Ghats form extends into Singhbhum and occurs as far north as Patung in the Kolahan. It is a bird like the ordinary tree pie but greyish brown with black crown.

The Grackle (Gracula religiosa) occurs in the Himalayas and again in Singhbhum and a small area to the south of it. There are several flocks of this Hill Myna (a favourite cage bird) southwards from Kendabai in the Kolahan and its chatter forces its way into one's notice anywhere in Saranda. It is a jet black myna with a orange-red bill and orange-yellow ear-coverts.

Two Central Indian forms also extend into Singhbhum, though these birds are rare. The Whitecheeked Bulbul (Pycnonotus leucogenys leucotis), has not been reported from any place south and east of Jhansi but has been seen at Patung. The general colour of the plumage is earthy brown, with white cheeks (ear-coverts) and brilliant yellow vent (under the tail). The Grey Junglefowl (Gallus sonneratii) is a rare bird in Singhbhum but does occur, surprisingly in the Kolahan. It is speckled and grey where the Red Junglefowl is red and black.

The richness of bird life in Singhbhum is almost entirely due to its large area under heavy forests. The beautiful Greater Racket-tailed Drongo (Dicrurus paradiseus), which is more typical of the heavy forests of Assam is found along the valley of the Karo between Goilker and Poseita. Another such bird is the Blackheaded or Blackcrested Yellow Bulbul (Pycnonotus melanicterus), a very beautiful yellow and black bird, which is plentiful in the forests above Jate in the Porahat.

The pride of the place among Singhbhum's forest birds of course belongs to the Pied Hornbill (Anthracoceros coronatus). It is too big and slow in flight to be able to find shelter in open country and from Malabar to the Himalayas and beyond to Burma everywhere it frequents thick forest country. It is a much persecuted bird for there is a superstition that its oil is a specific for rheumatic pains and it is doubtful if this bird will survive such commercially-inspired extermination.



The Pied Hornbill is quite three feet in length. The head, neck, back and wings are black, so too are the two central tail feathers. The remainder of the plumage is a pure white, including the tips of the primaries and secondaries. There is a bare yellowish patch on the chin and in the female a white ring round the eye. The bill is a waxy yellow, as is the base of the casque for one-third of its length. The remainder of the casque which has a total length of eight inches, is black. These birds have eye-lashes, an unusual feature in a bird's make-up.

They feed in parties in the non-breeding season and from six to a dozen can be seen early morning and again in the evening flying one

after the other, from one banyan or pipal tree to another. A beautiful picture the birds present in their pied plumage winging with noisy alternate flappings and glidings.

The most curious fact about the Hornbills is their nesting. The female hornbill when the time comes for her to nest, enters a natural cavity in the trunk or a large branch of some tree, and there, without any further attempt at nest construction, proceeds to lay her egg or eggs. Her first egg laid, or even earlier, she sets about enclosing herself in the chamber by applying her droppings to the sides of the entrance hole until only a narrow vertical slit is left, through which the male feeds his mate regularly and devotedly until sometime after the young have hatched, whereafter she breaks down the side walls, these in the meanwhile having become so hard that no natural enemy such as a monkey or cat can have access to the inside of the nest.

The Nightjars force themselves on one's attention anywhere in Singhbhum by their calls at dusk. One rarely sees these birds unless driving at night when large-eyed birds squatting on the dirt-track are commonly met. These birds seem legless for they never sit or stand on the ground but just collapse on it and because of their brown and black speckling merge with it. So good is the protective colouring that the sight of a nightjar in the day is a rare experience. The birds can, however, be identified by their calls and in summer if one listens at dusk near a patch of forest one may distinguish the calling birds, as one does with the cuckoos, by their distinctive calls. The Longtailed Nightjar (Caprimulgus macrurus) says a chouk-chouk-chouk repeated up to fifty times at intervals of one second. The Indian Jungly Nightjar (C. indicus) utters a loud penetrating wak-kuhroo. Sykes's Nightjar (C. rahrattensis) has soft continuous purring note. Franklin's Nightjar (C. affinis) has a loud penetrating chwees-chwees. Common Indian Nightjar (C. asiaticus) has a scuttling south took-took-took-took-tukru.

The district of Singhbhum has 1678 square miles of its total 4500 square miles covered by forests, and the main two habitats in the district are: (1) Forests of the Western part — Kolahan, Porahat and Saranda — and Southeastern part — Dublabera area. (2) Open country mainly in the north, centre and east.

In the open country there is only one large built-up area, that of Tatanagar but it is well-provided with gardens and trees and being near to the Dalma Hills has a bird population very nearly the same as that of village scrub and fringing jungles. Of course the built-up area casts its influence in the abundance of species which do well in human habitations: crows, mynas, bulbuls, sparrows, kites and vultures.

There are few large stretches of water. The only big one is the Dalma reservoir and its influence on bird life is largely indirect. It induces humidity and the surrounding forest has a bird population approximating that of evergreen patches along major streams in the main forest area. A noticeable bird of the Dalma area is the large Greenbilled Malkoha (Rhopodytes tristis), a shy long-tailed member of the cuckoo family. This bird which can be recognised easily because of the poor light in which it is generally seen.

Other stretches of water are the large tanks near Chaibasa on which swallows and occasionally a few teals can be seen during winter. Deep down in the forest where the Karo is the boundary between the Kolahan and Saranda forest divisions, River Terns are quite common.

The cultivated area lacks in cover and shelter. Most of the birds nest in trees in the villages and such birds of course are only the crows, bulbuls, mynas, drongos, sparrows, kites, vultures, herons and storks. Occasionally a pair of Jerdon's Chloropsis or Leaf Bird or Oriole may be found.

The typical birds of the cultivated area, that is those which live and nest in the fields, are the larks, wagtails, pipits and bee-eaters. Strikingly noticeable in the open country of Dolbhum is the Ashycrowned Finch-lark (Eremopterix grisea), which often flits above the fields by

the side of one's car. It is much like the sparrow but has a black underside which cannot be missed. In rocky areas Indian Robin (Saxicoloides fulicata) and the Black Redstart (Phoenicurus ochruros) are quite many.

The scrub and village fringing is the belt where the open country and the forest meet. The bird population of this belt is largely of the leafy village but a few more typically forest forms are met with. For example the chloropsids, woodpeckers, lapwings and shrikes. Typical birds of the scrub and fringing are the magpie-robin (Copsychus saularis) and the crow-pheasant (Centropus sinensis). The magpie-robin is a black and white robin-like bird which is one of our best songsters.

The forests fall into four broad biotypes or habitats - the dense valley sal, the lighter hill sal, the dense evergreen associations along major streams, terminalia associations and the rather open miscellaneous woods on dry hill aspects. The bird population varies a great deal from one part of the forest to another, but that is a detailed study beyond the scope of the present essay.

The birds of the forest are generally more gorgeously plumed and longer-tailed than those of the open country, that is a function of the covers. Among the beautiful birds of the forest are the green ones - the Goldmantled (Chloropsis cochinchinensis) and Jerdon's Chloropsis. The two birds are so green that they are often described as leafbirds. One is wholly green while the other has a golden forehead.

The minivets are the striking red birds but only as far as the males are concerned; the females are as brilliantly yellow as the males are red. The smaller type (Pericrocotus cinnamomeus) is often in flocks but the larger, or scarlet minivet (P. flammeus), is more often seen in pairs -- red and yellow birds together. The Malabar Trogon (Harpactes fasciatus) is another red bird and is seen in deep forest.

In the forests birds get distributed not only horizontally with variations in vegetation but are vertically zoned too. The zoning is as follows: (1) tree-tops - chloropsis, blackcrested yellow bulbuls, minivets, large racket-tailed drongo, orioles, grackle, hornbills, green pigeon (Treron phoenicoptera) and purple wood pigeon (Columba punicea); (2) lower canopy - grey tit (Parus major), common iora (Aegithina tiphia), bulbuls, whitethroated fantail flycatcher (Rhipidura albicollis), yellowthroated sparrow (Petronia xanthocollis), yellowbacked sunbird (Aethopyga siparaja), purplerumped sunbird (Nectarinia zeylonica), and woodpeckers; (3) tree-trunks - chestnutbellied and velvetfronted nuthatches (Sitta castanea and S. frontalis), spotted grey creeper (Salpornis pilonotus), and Pygmy Woodpecker (Dendrocopos vauus); (4) undergrowth - babblers, bulbuls, magpie-robins, shama (Copsychus malabaricus) and thrushes; (5) ground - wag-tails, pitta, sirkeer cuckoo (Taccocua leschenaultii), nightjars, peafowl (Pavo cristatus), junglefowl, red spurfowl (Galliperdix spadicca), partridges, Indian courser (Cursorius coromandelicus), and lapwings.

Another aspect of the forest bird population is their banding together in mixed hunting parties or localised forest associations. The parties move in more or less daily circuits and are representative of the population at all levels - babblers on the ground, bulbuls in the undergrowth, nuthatches on tree-trunks, tits and ioras in the lower canopy and minivets and chloropsis in the tree-tops. The composition of the mixed hunting parties varies from one place to another and as a general feature it may be indicated that in the scrub and the more open forest types the redvented bulbuls (Pycnonotus cafer) are the most numerous of any mixed hunting party; in dense jungle their place is taken by the the redwhiskered bulbul (P. jocosus).

The historical interest of the Singhbhum area in ornithology is the fact that it was one of those areas studied in detail very early, between 1833 and 40 by Tickell. Many species not known before were

described by Tickell and so far many species the type-locality is Dholbhum or Chaibassa. Three of these might be mentioned here: the Longtailed Nightjar (Caprimulgus macrurus), the Brown Hawk-Owl (Ninox scutulata) and Purple Wood Pigeon.

The Purple Wood Pigeon was described by Tickell from Chaibassa but is no longer found there. Deforestation has destroyed its habitat there and the nearest place where it can be seen is in the Ramiaburu Sanctuary, and there too neither frequently nor abundantly.

Apart from the birds indicated as rare in the body of this essay above, the following birds are definitely uncommon: Ashy Swallow-shrike (Artamus fuscus), Black and Redheaded Buntings (Emberiza melanocephala and E. bruniceps), Yellowbacked Sunbird, Greenbreasted Pitta (Pitta sordida), Forest Eagle Owl (Bubo nipalensis), Green Imperial Pigeon (Ducula aenea) and Indian Courser.

The status of the following birds is problematic. The Yellowbreasted Babbler (Macronous gularis) was reported by Ball but has not been seen again and may, therefore, be presumed as extinct unless fresh evidence of its existence in the district is forthcoming. Similarly the last specimen of the Whitewinged Wood Duck (Cairina scutulata) was shot at Sini over 65 years ago. There is no recent evidence about the existence of Singhbhum of the Jungle Owlet (Glaucidium radiatum). Of a nature different from these presumably extinct birds is the evidence about the Rosy Pastor (Sturnus roseus) which Ball reported as occurring in Saranda. This bird has not been reported from Singhbhum during the last 89 years but each year it visits other parts of India and as it breeds in the Middle East its disappearance from Singhbhum as a winter migrant does not amount to extinction but an unexplained change in migratory habit.

It is easy to assume that a bird is extinct if it has not been recorded in an area for a long time, but Singhbhum is a heavily forested area with few bird observers. The possibility of a bird existing but not being seen is always there. And there is at least one instance of a species reported extinct but re-establishing itself. The Green Imperial Pigeon had not been seen in the district for a number of years but since 1934 has been often met with in the Saranda forest division.

The other birds mentioned in the systematic check-list (unpublished) are generally common though their population varies greatly from one place to another.

It may be pointed out that according to Ripley (Synopsis) the Gold-mantled Chloropses, race cochinsinensis, does not occur in Bihar. Will the author confirm that she has definitely come across both the races in Singhbhum - Ed.

A MURDER OF CROWS

A. Navarro, S. J.

One of the few birds found the world over is the Crow. With the exception of the Antarctica and New Zealand and some of the Oceanic Islands we find the common crow fairly well distributed on the surface of the earth. The main characteristic of most crows is their ability to co-exist with man. Their boldness and sagacity seems to be as much a part of the crow's nature in as much as they have been able to thrive and adapt themselves in country or territory conquered by man's activities.

The crow enjoys the reputation of being considered the most intelligent of birds. The fact is that the pet crow has shown a great imitative skill and is capable of learning all kinds of tricks even to go so far as to learn a few words, though certainly not up to the standard of the parrot and the myna.

Like the crow, many other birds, too, have followed the trail of man; as examples we may cite the sparrow, the kite, the myna, and others. They may like associating with man for motives which are identical with those which the crow has, to follow in man's wake. But these others, unlike the crow, have kept very much aloof from man's affairs. It is only the crow that seems to claim certain rights and liberties entering man's dwelling, meddling with and upsetting whatever pleases it, and going so far as to challenge man with its impertinent and persistent, vociferous, harsh voices.

The Indian House Crow is the commonest of the Indian Crow family, a family, which boasts of forty-eight varieties grouped into eleven genera; but for our purpose we shall divide the crow into two groups; the THOROUGH CROW and the MAGPIES, TREEPIES and JAYS.

The crow is usually large, with more sombre colour patterns. The Raven and Carrion Crow are Crows of a high altitude, distributed along the Himalayan regions. The Jungle Crow is confined to the lower hills and plains of India. The Rook and the Jackdaw are, like the Raven, confined to the high hills of North India and as far out as Persia, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Ladakh and Tibet.

The Indian House Crow is the typical Indian Crow, seen anywhere and everywhere throughout the lower hills and plains of the Indian peninsula. The Magpie is a bird with a great variety of colour patterns. The two more outstanding birds of this group that have the richer and the most conspicuous are the Green Magpie and the Kashmir Magpie. The former, the Green Magpie ranges in colour from pale green to a dark green, with white tips to the tail feathers and red on the outer side of the primary feathers and the inner secondaries tipped with pale blue, the bill and legs, coral red. No doubt the Green Magpie is exceptionally beautiful; it is only when it talks that, with its harsh and sudden shrill sounds, it betrays itself and gives away the secret that it belongs to the large family of scavengers and carrion eaters.

The latter, the Kashmir Magpie is one of the most attractive members of the crow family. It is rather uncommon in India, but found in Kashmir, the Kumaon and the Simla Hills; it moves in pairs or small parties. The head, neck and most of the upper plumage is glossy with blue, green, lilac and purple shades. The rest of the plumage is white; it is a conspicuous bird when on the wing, with its black and white plumage, long wavy tail and undulating flight. Feeding mostly on insects, fruits and grain, it is not a scavenger.

The Tree-Pie and the Magpie have, in common, the large and handsome tail; some of the Red and Yellow Bill Magpies have tails measuring from 400 mm to 470 mm.

The Jay, too, is a high altitude bird, much smaller than the crow, always moving in small noisy and active parties in a manner much like the seven sisters. Most of them are a vinous brown colour, barred or banded here and there with black, whitish, lilac and blue shades.

In habit, the whole crow family is gregarious, noisy and social. Some gather together in large numbers, others in small parties. At the time of the breeding season they scatter all over the country in pairs and at times form small colonies. Once the breeding season is over, they join back into their communal gathering. They are all arboreal in their habits, even when some of them with their scavenging instincts, like the Common House Crow, feed much of the time on the ground, moving around garbage and rubbish heaps to satisfy their voracious appetite or actually scavenge around slaughter houses, markets and dirty localities. They also have many features in common in spite of the fact that some are so different in shape and colour as has already been pointed out. Nevertheless the Common Indian House Crow (doubtless) is the one that has developed the most gregarious and social instinct. It is curious to observe that its behaviour somehow will differ in large cities and towns, not forming a single huge unit or colony as will be the case in small villages and settlements.

By way of example, the whole crow population of Bombay is divided into units or colonies, the size of these units depending entirely on

the locality where each unit has been originated. Let us select as type for the formation of these units the localities of the markets of Bombay, scattered over the city area and we will find that each market has its units. The size and strength of these units depends on the food supply that each locality can afford. This clearly reveals to us the standard of cleanliness and hygiene of each locality. Between these large market units, there are smaller groups. The best example that can be cited here of this small group is taken from the compound of St Xavier's High School as the centre for the two large neighbouring institutions, the Cama Hospital and the Elphinston Technical High School. We have a small unit whose strength is round fifty in all; all day long they scavenge over this area, and at night they roost in the trees around the school compound.

In small villages and country settlements the job of the Common House Crow as scavenger may be good and useful, but certainly not the ideal for large towns and cities. The crow may be a carrier of infection and thus become a menace to health. The gregarious instinct of the crow's nature is so well developed that even at night they gather in large numbers in the company of mynas and other birds, at a selected spot, to roost. Some of these roosting grounds have been in use for many years and for generations of crows. These roosting spots sometimes are situated miles away from the village or town where the crows have spent the day. Some of the units in large towns where there are plenty of trees, will adopt these trees as their roosting grounds. There is an originality in the manner in which the Common Indian Crow takes to its roosting ground. Apparently the labours of the crow are over late in the evening, when to all appearances, it enters into a playful and restful mood, at times a group coming to the ground not in search of food, but for sheer amusement, bullying and chasing each other but not quarrelling, making all kinds of harsh noises, all of a sudden flying off to the top of a tree or roof in the same mood and attitude, some others making short aimless flights to the sky and returning to the same spot; all this frolicking goes on till dark, when suddenly a whole group will make a dash for the roosting place and a quiet stillness will prevail for the rest of the night, except on an occasion when the strong light of the full moon may disturb their sleep and a chorus of harsh noises will fill the air, as a sign of protest.

PINKHEADED DUCK

J. Jameson

During the cold weather of 1939/40, I camped for a night on the bank of the Chhora beel*(jheel) along with two friends, Mr and Mrs Webb. (Bill Webb was later to build the famous swing railway bridge across the Suez Canal.) This beel had fairly dense sal jungle on three sides and lies about a mile or a little less, south of the Ajai river. The beel was rather shallow, with dense grass and reeds all round the comparatively small areas of clear water near the middle, and was infested with the largest buffalo leeches I have ever seen. In those days, the beel was extremely difficult to reach, and the duck on it could hardly have been disturbed at all.

*Chhora beel is in the Galsi Police Station area of Burdwan district in West Bengal, a mile or less, south of the Ajai river. The Ajai is on the border between Burdwan and Bhirbhum districts in West Bengal. The Ajai flows into the Bhagirathi, which in turn flows into the Hooghly. The beel is roughly 50 miles east of Asansol.

My friends and I hoped to get a shot at the duck on it by forcing our way through the grass and reeds, but without success; the leeches finally forced us to beat a retreat! One of us fired a shot in the air to get the birds to rise. Quite a number of them got up, amongst which I think I remember teal, pochard and mallard. A section of the birds flew fairly low over us and in the good afternoon light, I saw a bird of roughly mallard size which had a dark body and a bright pink head and neck. The view I got was partly from underneath and partly from the side as the bird wheeled. I called out to my friends that I thought I had seen a Pinkheaded Duck which I knew to be rare. A few minutes later, as the birds wheeled again, we all saw this bird, and we agreed that it was almost certainly a Pinkheaded Duck. I used to be fond of shooting, and knew the commoner varieties of duck very well. I certainly know the Redcrested Pochard of which I have shot a number in the past, and the pink-headed bird I saw was certainly not the Redcrested Pochard.

EARLY WINTER VISITORS ALONG THE BOMBAY SEASHORE

D. A. Stairmand

On 15th August 1969, I recognised the following birds at Marve, Bombay

Common Sandpiper (Tringa hypoleucos)
 Little Ringed Plover (Charadrius dubius)

On a further visit to Marve on 17 August 1969, I was able to recognize the following

Common Sandpiper (Tringa hypoleucos)
 Turnstone (Arenaria interpres)
 Lesser Sand Plover (Charadrius mongolus)
 Little Stint (Caladris minutus)

On 15th August there were only a handful of common sandpipers along the rocks and sandy beach at Erangal, Marve, whereas by the 17th their numbers had increased by about fivefold. The Little Ringed Plovers I saw on the 15th August were in partially inundated fields about 300 yards behind the beach with paddy fields (and paddy birds!) intervening. I did not see any Little Ringed Plovers on the 17th August although I looked in the same area where I had seen some 7-8 two days earlier. I also did not encounter any of these birds on the seashore, although that is where I could always find them last winter. If partially inundated fields are available, the birds evidently prefer these to the seashore.

The birds I saw on the wonderfully sunny 17th August were, with the exception of the common sandpipers, all in one party of about 50 on the very rock section of the beach at Erangal. Besides those I could identify, there were possibly other species of plovers and sandpipers in the party.

The most striking birds in the party were 10 Turnstones (Arenaria interpres) in summer plumage with a mixture of rufous, black and white all beautifully accentuated by their red legs and feet.

There was a Sand Plover in summer dress and I took this to have been the Pamirs Lesser Sand Plover (Charadrius mongolus) described as follows in Volume 2 of the Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan by Salim Ali and Ripley

' Summer (breeding) Above: forehead and sides of head black; crown and hindneck rust coloured or pale chestnut. Rest of upperparts sandy brown. Below: upper breast and flanks pale chestnut, separated from glistening white throat by a blackish half collar. '

My notebook contains all these details with the exception of the

blackish half collar. There were two other birds fairly similar to this one but in more faded plumage. I have been studying Plate 27 in Volume 2 of the Handbook in which figure 11 is the Large Sand Plover (Charadrius leschenaultii) but consider that I probably saw Charadrius mongolus although I did not note the black half-collar. There were a few amusing 'Territorial skirmishes' between the plovers!

None of the above mentioned birds had been seen in this area by me since before the monsoon. My last visit to Marve had been on 29th June.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Nature Conservation

Conservationists in India are greatly encouraged by the fact that Dr Karan Singh, the Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism has been appointed the new Chairman of the Indian Board for Wild Life. The last meeting of the Board was held at Dhikala in Corbett National Park in June 1965. Since then there was no meeting held even of the Standing Committee, and in view of this the resolutions passed by the Board remained a dead letter.

Dr Karan Singh insisted in his opening speech that the Board should meet at least once a year. Also an Executive Committee has been constituted, the first meeting of which was planned to be held on 29th August.

The Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi spoke with a great deal of feeling in her inaugural speech, and what is more satisfying is that she followed up the meeting with a letter to the Chief Ministers, which is reproduced below:

' I have been greatly concerned at the increasing decimation of our wild life. The recent meeting of the reconstituted Indian Board for Wild Life has confirmed my impression that the situation is far more serious than official circles are sometimes prepared to admit. Although wild life and forests are State subjects, they are an Indian national heritage, and what we do in the next five or two years will determine the future and how the future will judge us. I am writing to enlist your active cooperation, because it is only when leaders take a personal interest that things get done.

The proceedings and recommendations of the Indian Board for Wild Life will soon be circulated to all States. I hope you will ensure that they are implemented as early as possible. The carnage of the recent past can be ended only with wild life legislation, on the pattern of the Maharashtra Wild Birds and Animals Protection Act, is passed in each State, and lacunae within this Act for each State's peculiar wild life problems are plugged. To implement this legislation, and to enforce it in the field, each State Forest Department should have within it, a Wild Life Department which might be strengthened where it exists already, and made to function effectively. Specialists should be trained and retained by the Wild Life Departments to give them expertise.

I think it would be useful for a State Wild Life (Advisory) Board to be constituted on the pattern of the Indian Board for Wild Life, with official and non-official members, which should meet regularly at least once a year, with more frequent meetings of its Executive Committee. The State Wild Life Boards could, among other things, consider the recommendations of the Indian Board for Wild Life and with their own special knowledge, recommend what needs to be done to the Forest and Wild Life Departments.

Poaching has become a lucrative profession in many areas. To curb this, all commercial transactions in game meat, the netting and snaring of birds and the poaching of animals for furs, meat and skins must be stopped. The immediate need is to prohibit, under threat of severe penalties, the sale or service in shops and restaurants of game meat. I would also suggest that the somewhat liberal grant of crop protection licences, especially within the vicinity of sanctuaries and parks, should be reviewed.

A Special Committee of the Indian Board for Wild Life will soon conduct a survey of national parks and sanctuaries. It would be helpful if the States could, on their own, conduct surveys of their wild life resources and increase the area under sanctuaries. Grazing and forestry operations should be minimised, if not altogether eliminated, in sanctuaries and parks.

A heavy toll has already been taken of wild life outside the forest areas and many species are under grave threat of extinction. You might like to consider issuing instructions to all District Magistrates and Superintendents of Police to organise Wild Life Boards at district level, and enforce wild life legislation in non-forest areas, preferably under a system of honorary Wild Life Wardens which has already been worked with some success in a few States.

I have written to you at some length, not only because I love animals, but also because our parks and sanctuaries could, in the long run, become great tourist attractions and thus more than repay the care and investment which they now demand.

Yours sincerely

Sd/- (Indira Gandhi)

It will be seen that almost all the important points are covered in this letter and it is now for the States to ensure that this direction from the Prime Minister is put into effect.

Newsletter Book by National Book Trust

The Editor has signed a contract with the National Book Trust to publish a book on birdwatching in India consisting of some articles published in the Newsletter over the last ten years. The selections have been done partly with the assistance of Mr R. A. Stewart Melluish who has unfortunately left India and whose present address is: 1 Woodlands, Woodfield Lane, Ashted, Surrey, England.

Mrs Laeeq Futehally has taken the trouble to organise the material on the basis of articles pertaining to the North, South, East and West regions of the country. The many excellent articles received from Pakistan have not been included as we wanted this book to refer only to the present political geographical limits of India.

Mr Peter Jackson had generously given a few of his excellent photographs of common Indian birds for inclusion in this publication. The royalties received from the sales of the book will be credited to the Birdwatchers' Club of India and will partly, we hope, cover the cost of producing the Newsletter. We hope that contributors will not be startled by this first announcement about using signed material in the Newsletter for a book. A formal letter will of course be sent in due course to everyone whose articles are being used in the book.

CORRESPONDENCE

Birding in Upper Coonoor, Nilgiris

While I was at Upper Coonoor last May, every morning I used to take the road beyond Darlington bridge leading to the Tea estates circling Underfell in the hope of spotting the Nilgiri Thrush. I did eventually one morning. But the more rewarding experience was watching a pair of Black-and-Orange Flycatchers (Ochromela nigrorufa).

The brightly coloured male was announcing its presence from a Eucalyptus sapling, 30 feet from the road on a slope. I settled down on a culvert nearby and trained the field glasses on him. Soon he was joined by his mate, a very similar bird, but slightly pale in colour. While the male went on calling chik-kii, the female kept inspecting a small casuarina tree, right beneath the culvert on which I was sitting. Closer inspection revealed a neatly built cup-shaped nest, wedged between two branches. The nest was built mostly of dried casuarina leaves and grass. There were no eggs.

I saw them at the same place in the subsequent mornings. Other birds I watched on that road were the Scimitar Babbler, that unflinching entertainer the Fantailed Flycatcher, the scintillating singer Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, chestnut-headed bee-eater, scores of white-eyes and alone Blackbacked Pied Flycatcher-Shrike (Hemipus picatus).

S. Theodore Baskaran
Poothicote, Vellore 2

Pheasant-tailed Jacana in Kerala

In Keralathile Pakshikal by Sri K. K. Neelakantan, Pheasant-tailed Jacana is described as a very rare bird of Kerala. It is also seen that no one has recorded its nesting from Kerala so far. Therefore Dr Salim Ali in his second edition of Birds of Travancore and Cochin published recently as Birds of Kerala, under status and habitat of this bird has stated as 'presumably resident' (p. 103).

I have seen quite a large number of these birds on either side of the railway line south of Kanhangad Railway Station (Southern Railway) in Cannanore District. A visit to this place during SW. monsoon months will definitely show that the bird is not rare at least in this part of Kerala. All the birds seen by me during August 1965 (2.viii.1965) were in breeding plumage. Therefore I presume that the birds must be breeding here. These low-lying marshy areas on either side of the railway line will have water only during SW. monsoon months. During summer it will be completely dry. From this it can be inferred that the birds are subject to some local migration also because all the surrounding areas to a radius of several miles will be completely dry till the commencement of the next SW. monsoon.

Since its breeding has not been recorded in Kerala so far except the record of the presence of an oviduct egg in a specimen collected at Alwaye during SW. monsoon, a visit to this place during the months of July-August is likely to throw some light on its breeding in Kerala.

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Newsletter for August 1969

Just a few comments on the August issue of the Newsletter.

If there is need for a comment on the sighting of a Brahminy Myna (Sturnus pagodarum) in Bombay, what may be the comments on my seeing a pair of these little mynas at Manali in cultivation at about 7000

feet in the last week of May this summer?

I have a little secret to let out of the bag: Dr A. Manglik who has written of his visit to the Corbett National Park has this summer been on a very profitable birdwatching excursion to Sikkim. I hope he will write something on this visit, for I am made to understand that he saw many interesting birds.

I was complaining about the rains last month. Well the great season has at last arrived, there is a continual drip, drip, drip and nothing else. It just does not decide to collect itself together and start pouring! Fortunately in the surrounding districts there has been heavy rain but we here are yet waiting for the shower of the year. Unless there is a heavy downpour, our water reserves will be sadly depleted next summer and this will mean the death of a number of old trees. A fine peepal which attracted many birds each March has barely seen the hot season through. Another will surely seal its fate if the roots are not drenched.

R. N. Mukherjee and K. N. Nair would like to have some one do something about the birds being killed in the Chilka Lake area. This appeal need to be made for all regions of the country and one sometimes wonders where to start and where to stop and this also not only regards birds, but also insects, mammals, vegetation and in fact all forms of life. I would say, can we not all request the Bombay Natural History Society to ask Government to appoint a person to draw up a report on the situation as it is today. From this report, a comprehensive set of suggestions could be drawn up, keeping in view the fact that India is a Democracy and no legislation will be of any avail unless there is a linking of the local population with the endeavour. The local people must be made aware of the value of the vegetation and the animal life of their region and each National Park must be closely linked with the local development, so that the people concerned the most, the local people, will help in preserving their natural wealth. Unless this is done, we can as well whistle for the wind, or pray for the rain.

As far as the vegetation is concerned, we are now in a position to bring the facts forcibly home to people suffering from floods and recurring droughts that they can most effectively halt these scourges by caring for the plant life of their area. Once they realise the link, they themselves will see that things improve. This will be the first and very important step in the right direction. After it is taken, the others will follow most logically.

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