

Mr Humayun Abdulali
75 Abdul Rehman Street
Bombay - 400 003. 11th January 1983.

Dear Sir;

I have just returned from a pilgrimage to Bharatpur. I was there for four days (which is not enough!), from the first of this month, to the fifth. I had planned to stay for at least a week, but due to some unforeseen reasons, could not.

I am enclosing a complete list of all the species I listed there, 172 in all, but in this letter I plan to write about some of the interesting birds, interesting from my point of view, which I saw in the sanctuary.

Starting with the grebes, and continuing as your Checklist for the area proceeds; I spotted just one Great Crested Grebe in the Sapanmori area. It was swimming at a little distance from two spotbills, and the ear tufts were not very prominent. But the shape, size and stunted tufts were marking pointers. All the three pelicans were seen. The rosy pelicans were in large numbers, 250-300. A few grey, and one dalmatian were also seen. The number of grey and purple herons is good. The latter are more common and were also in much handsome plumage. Painted Storks were everywhere, but the remarkable point was the number of immature painted storks. I can easily say that of the storks seen, at least 65 to 70 percent were immature. Likewise, the number of Glossy Ibis was very good. In the evening, at a roost I counted roughly about 150 of these birds. They would come in at 6 pm, after all types of egrets had covered the bushes, and find a place for themselves! The Greylag was a new one for me, as were the Common Sheld-duck (I could not confirm this though) and the Falcated Teal. I saw the Teal on the last day, in the late afternoon. I had met a delightful little lady from England; she must have been 70 plus, Elizabeth Forster, and we were walking round the Rambund area, trying to count as many birds possible on that trail - we listed 82 in 2 hours. Miss Korster walked ahead, confused by some warbler, when I was attracted towards a duck about 30 feet away in the water. It flew towards a group of ducks a little further away - but there he stayed. The Falcated Teal. He was unmistakable. The lengthened neck feathers, the cream patch on the side of the rump and the white-black-white necklace. It was very handsome. Both of us had a life bird on our last day in Keoladeo Ghana.

Among the raptors, I saw one Bonelli's Hawk Eagle near the pond, near the nursery. There was an immature imperial eagle in the Rambund area. The Spotted and Lesser Spotted Eagles were life birds for me. Immatures were more often observed, than fully mature birds. The Ring-tailed Fishing Eagle was also new for me - and what a bird it is! Once in Borivili (when you had gone to England last) Noshewan had promised to show me this Eagle, but none was seen. The Siberian Cranes were as beautiful as I had pictured them. Actually here they were more beautiful because they were alive. I always saw them in families of twos or threes. One threesome had an immature tagging along. Their trumpeting still haunts me on foggy days. The Whitetailed Lapwing was new. It is common, but very shy. It also has a very good camouflage. I saw only one Peewit Lapwing - a male with a beautifully curving crest. There were very few waders in any place. Even in the reputed wader-pools, there was hardly anything worth mentioning. Very surprisingly, I did not see any Blackwinged Stilts inside the sanctuary. All were outside in roadside pools! The most common dove was S. decaocto. Both, the Great Horned and the Dusky Horned Owls were heard.

In the multitude of swifts and swallows swarming over the Rambund marsh, after straining for half an hour, I isolated 3 Alpine Swifts. My day was made! The crazy Wryneck was new too, and I saw this bird twice. It takes off with whirrrr like a partridge. Why has the Common Iora not been included in your list, Sir? I heard them quite often. It has been listed on the list sold by the Forest Dept. of Rajasthan. Redbreasted Flycatchers were very common. Two males had a lot of orange still remaining from the breeding season. I saw only one Grey-headed Flycatcher, in a Kadam, busily chipping away. I recognised the call because every evening, a brother of this bird would sing in our garden, when we were in Banjara Hills, last year. The warblers were as confusing as always, but I could isolate an Orphean Warbler once. Whitethroats were quite common. However I did miss the Chee chee chee of the omnipresent Ashy Wren Warbler sometimes - it was heard very rarely. The number of Bluethroats is astounding. When Mr Pushp Kumar mentioned that this bird was seen in the Nehru Zoo here, I remember how I searched in vain - and here, they almost threw themselves in front of you! Another very interesting bird, and a lifer for me, was the Chestnutbellied Nuthatch. Following a feeding party of drongos, common babblers, an iora, a magpie robin pair, a goldenbacked woodpecker, I came across this bird high up in a kadam. The number of sparrows was awesome. Whole fields of them! Though I saw plenty of Spanish Sparrows, no yellow throats were sighted. But obviously, plenty were around, for many people were surprised when I told them the above. Are Passer d. indicus and P. d. parkini distinguishable in the field?

After all is said and done, I feel that I am in love with Bharatpur. I think that the Bharatpur Bug has got under my soul, and I plan to make a trip there every year, at least once. It is nice, isn't it, how small images, pictures, sounds, etc. of the sanctuary, our any place one loves - find a place in your memory! ? I remember so clearly my first sight of the Siberians. Three of them flying low over me. Shining in the morning light. And there was the lapwing in a pool of sunlight, beside a algae covered pool of water, in the middle of a thicket of Kadam - not ten feet away from me. And there was the Mongoose who came waddling along a fallen tree trunk, occupied by some unimaginable thought, when it sensed me - and fled, petrified. And there was a Kadam, beside a village well, overlooking a pond in which two otters played hide and seek, solid with 45 to 50 Whitebacked Vultures. And then there were the jungle cats - two were observed fighting! And the herds of Neelgai. The sight of a fawn following a Cheetal doe is painted on my mind. The wryneck's quizzical look, the soaring pelicans, the arguing geese, the vultures, the power of the eagles -- the glow after sunset -- the call of the Sarus and the trumpet of the Siberians has lodged a germ in me which will be very difficult to eradicate - because I want it to remain. It is the germ of love.

Coming back to a city which has voted a new government into power, and which is now sieged with pointless communal riots, I am yet to meet my friends and relate to them my experiences of Bharatpur. I am forced to stay at home by curfew - though it is being relaxed slowly now. In April I have to go to Delhi again - and maybe then I'll snatch some days and scoot to Bharatpur.

I hope all is well in Bombay, and birdwatching is in top gear. Hope to hear from you - about your Bharatpur experiences....

HUMAYUN ABDULALI

Telegram : FAIZCOY
Telephone : 3 2 1 7 2 4
Res. : 5 3 3 0 0 6

75, Abdul Rehman Street,
BOMBAY-400 003.

25th January, 1983.

29th

Dear Aasheesh,

Thank you for your letter of 11th inst and the long list of birds seen at Bharatpur. Seeing 172 species over four days is certainly good work and I wonder how many I will see when I go there early next month to attend the International Crane Workshop.

As regards your query, I would advise that the Common Iora has not been included in my checklist, for the simple reason that there is no authentic record from that area. The birds you see there are Marshall's Iora which are perhaps difficult to identify. My letters are written from my office where my ornithological literature is not available and I am leaving it to you to look at the books for the differences, and also to see if the calls* are said to be different or not.

It is gratifying to note that more people are getting interested in birds but apart from just listing them, there is a great amount of work to be done and this can only be done if you study the literature available and can then decide immediately what is new in a particular place or not.

I have compared the list with my checklist and I see that everything is included in the latter but you must have such lists for all the places, so that you can immediately tell when you run into something new and then devote a lot of time and attention to the bird to make sure that your identification is correct.

In any case, I was very glad to read your letter and hope that you will have many opportunities of visiting places rich in birds and where there are chances of your running into new items.

About the sparrows I do not think that the three races can be certainly told apart and in any case unless you have had the opportunity of looking at the specimens and actually noting the differences said to occur, it would be impossible

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* wheeti wheeti quili distinct from those of Common Iora (Ind. Hand. 6/5/54)
+ other wheeti

HUMAYUN ABDULALI

Telegram : FAIZCOY
Telephone : 3 2 1 7 2 4
Res. : 5 3 3 0 0 6

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75, Abdul Rehman Street,
BOMBAY-400 003.

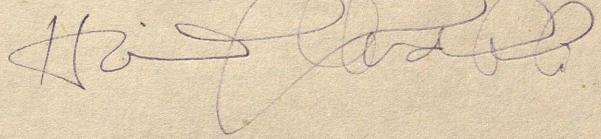
25th January, 1983.

to determine which form you have before you. Incidentally, I cannot help saying that because the number of birds in Hyderabad is smaller, you should have a better opportunity of listing and studying them and adding something new to our knowledge regarding their habits etc.

I hope that you will continue to look at them carefully and find new things.

With all good wishes.

Yours sincerely,



Mr. A. Pittie,
14-7-370 Begum Bazar,
Hyderabad-500 012.
(A.P.).

HUMAYUN ABDULALI

Telegram : FAIZCOY
Telephone : 3 2 1 7 2 4
Res. : 5 3 3 0 0 6

75, Abdul Rehman Street,
BOMBAY-400 003.

13th April, 1983.

Dear Aasheesh,

Thank you for sending me a copy of the last number of Mayura -- I presume that it is sent by you.

I have glanced over it quickly and there are one or two items which may be worth recording in a more permanent form -- say in the Bombay journal:

(1) There is a note by Dr. A. Shiv Raj on "Community preening behaviour in Babblers". This is certainly unusual and difficult to understand but it would be necessary to determine the identity of the babblers and also if possible of the snake." If the latter was a long thin one among trees and bushes, it was almost certainly a Whip Snake for a Green Pit Viper is unlikely to occur in that area. However, if it was found on the ground, it may have been one of several. By implication it appears that the birds pecked at the snake and have almost immediately preened themselves, indicating that they had taken something off the snake and applied it to their feathers.

I am not aware of any secretion between the scales of snakes but in any case if all these points are clarified, it might make a worthwhile note.

(2) In your note on the nesting of birds (p. 18) you refer to the Streaked Bayas nesting activities being in full swing *on 20th March*

Nidification (3:10) says "the breeding season seems to be invariably from the start of the rains i.e. mid-June to middle of September", while the Handbook says that "it is very early July to September in peninsular India and from February in Kerala."

This is a very different breeding season from that recorded and if you are sure of the identity of the bird and can add a few more details regarding the numbers etc., it might make an interesting note.

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HS

HUMAYUN ABDULALI

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75, Abdul Rehman Street,
BOMBAY-400 003.

Telegram : FAIZCOY
Telephone : 3 2 1 7 2 4
Res. : 5 3 3 0 0 6

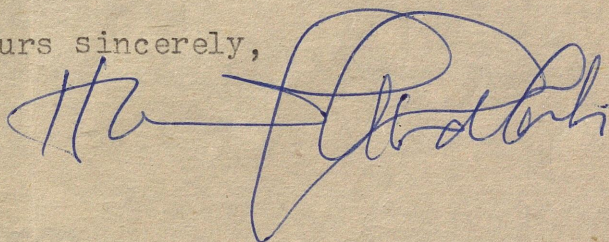
13th April, 1983.

As regards the other lists, I am afraid that it would be necessary to compare them with all the published literature to see if there is anything worth publishing. Some of them certainly would add to what is included in Salim Ali's "Birds of Hyderabad" but the area covered is so large that it does not appear to be worth all this trouble. I would however suggest that you make a list of all the migrants which visit South-West India and then try and find out how many of them pass through Hyderabad. It is generally accepted that they travel down either the Eastern or Western Ghats but it is quite possible that some of them only look for suitable habitats and may then travel over the plains.

Yes, I was at Bharatpur for the Crane Workshop but it was really so cold that one was not inclined to go out early in the mornings or late in the evenings and the rest of the time was spent at the conference! I really did not see anything of particular interest and did not count the total number seen. *Nighth* Incidentally, the reproduction from the Hindu refers to the Heron as a highly migratory bird. So far as I know this is resident in most parts of the world and migration, if any, would be very local. They may possibly roost in one place and nest in another.

With all good wishes.

Yours sincerely,



Mr. A. Pittie,
14-7-370 Begum Bazar,
Hyderabad-500 012.
(A.P.).

On p. 5 reference is made to a (wild) rabbits. We have none in India — they are all hares!

Mr. Humayun Abdulali
75 Abdul Rehman Street
BOMBAY - 400 093.

17th May 1983.

Dear Abdulali Sahab,

Thank you for the kind letter in which you have pointed the plus and minus points of our little newsletter - MAYURA. I have shown the letter to our editorial committee and we would like to print pertinent parts of it in the forthcoming issue. I write to ask permission off you for this.

Coming to the early nesting period of the Streaked Bayas - their identity is correct - nesting activity is still going on. I am afraid that I do not have many details i.e., regarding the number of birds seen (though I do have of the number of nests in construction and already completed) on 20th March. However I do have this information now. I would like to know if their nesting in May would also make as interesting a note. And if I prepare a note for the Journal, may I have the honour of sending it to you for corrections ?

An interesting sighting here was ~~one~~ of the Greater Flamingoes. I had seen 2 with Mr. Taher and Maj. Aziz on the 30th of January, this year on a lake in the ICRISAT complex approx. 35 kms. from the city. On 27-3-1983 we again saw some Flamingoes on Himayat Sagar lake which is about 12 Kms from the city. This time there were ~~more~~ 14 of them! Actually this reservoir has dried up to a great extent due to the meagre rains of last year. The result is that depressions in the terrain still contain water while higher land is cracked and bone dry. Most of these birds were seen on ~~these~~ ^{such} ponds, situated in the backwaters of the Sagar. They were last seen there on the 2nd of May. What could be the reason for their coming here and staying on for more than a month ?

Another interesting record for this area is the presence of Grey-necked Buntings in winter, close to the city, and in at least one flock of 15 birds! We have been seeing this bird for three years now. This I think is an extension of the range of this bird as given in the Handbook. Before I finish, I request you to reply to my query in para. one.

With best wishes and regards.

JR

HUMAYUN ABDULALI

Telegram : FAIZCOY
Telephone : 3 2 1 7 2 4
Res. : 5 3 3 0 0 6

75, Abdul Rehman Street,
BOMBAY-400 003.

31st May, 1983.

My dear Aasheesh,

I have your letter of 17th inst. Yes, I have certainly no objection to your reproducing the pertinent parts of my letter in your Newsletter, but it would avoid a lot of complications if you were to send me a copy of what you propose to say which I would ordinarily send back to you by return post.

Identical remarks apply to your note on the nesting of the Streaked Baya.

The Greynecked Bunting is a regular winter visitor to the Bombay area and has been reported from Aurangabad and Kamnad in April - also Kandahar in Nandur District (Salim Ali, JBNHS 36, p. 903). Butler noted it as far south as Belgaum.

Many of the migrants, as also the resident birds, have not been recorded from each and every district and unless the record actually adds to a checklist which has been properly compiled or adds appreciably to the accepted range of the species, it is hardly worth a note, atleast in the Society's Journal. A series of notes over several areas indicating whether they are regular or sporadic, if the date is more or less constant or absent, the birds stay throughout winter or are passage migrants, what is their food and ~~and~~ if associated with any one or two species, can their movements be linked with the flowering and seeding of the plants? Such information retained over a few years and also if it can be associated with the movements of any other species would be of interest and worth recording.

Salim
animals
Your reference to the Flamingo for instance raises such a point. The bird goes right down to Calimere but if it stays near small ~~hills~~ in Hyderabad, would it not be possible for you to ascertain ~~on~~ what it feeds on? The pools can be examined with small nets as are used in fish tanks and if there is nothing in the water, it is possible that they disturb ~~in~~ the mud which is filtered through their bill. I do not know how tame they are and how close you can

HUMAYUN ABDULALI

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75, Abdul Rehman Street,
BOMBAY-400 003.

Telegram : FAIZCOY
Telephone : 3 2 1 7 2 4
Res. : 5 3 3 0 0 6

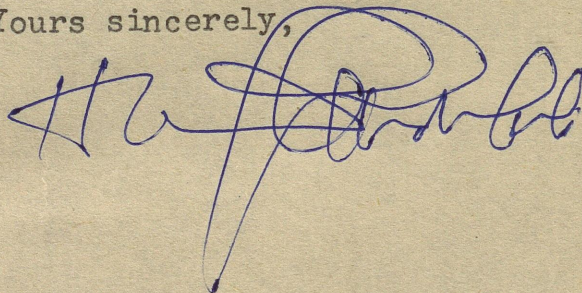
31st May, 1983.

get to them but if it would be possible to localise their feeding areas, it should not be difficult to find out what they feed on. The material could have been preserved in 10% formalin or spirit. Perhaps, there is some university zoological department available nearby where assistance would be available for the identification of material which you net. You no doubt know that both the Large and the Lesser Flamingos have a different kind of bill, the former feeds on animal material and the latter on vegetation. Both must occur in fairly large quantities to permit sustenance of these large birds. The opportunity would be excellent if both the species are feeding side by side.

I hope to hear from you again from time to time.

All the best.

Yours sincerely,



Mr. A. Pittie,
14-7-370 Begum Bazar,
Hyderabad-500 012.
(A.P.).

Mr Humayun Abdulali
75 Abdul Rehman Street
Bombay - 400003.

5th June 1983.

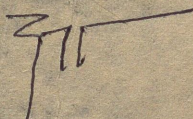
Dear Abdulali Sahab,

I have some good news for you. Today, Maj Aziz, Mr Taher and a couple of friends had gone for birdwatching on a stretch of the Musi River. Actually we had gone in search of the Blackthroated Weaver Bird (Ploceus benghalensis) - flocks of which, we were told by a bird dealer here, occurred in that area. And sure enough, there they were. Quite unmistakable. The males and the females were in full breeding plumage, though no signs of breeding activity were seen. They moved around in small flocks, which if added up, would make a conservative total of 400-450 birds! Both the other bayas, Ploceus philippinus and P. manyar were also seen. The former has commenced breeding activity, though the latter seems hesitant to begin. I say this, because we saw a couple of nests which looked like the ones this bird makes - but which were or seemed to be deserted. I am sure you will hear from Mr. Taher and perhaps from Maj Aziz too - regarding this 'discovery'. Please advise.

Another interesting part of this outing was a Common Swallow (Hirundo rustica). There was one bird, just one bird which we saw under a bridge (which is under construction) - and which kept flying within its vicinity. What was interesting - apart from the fact that it has remained here for the summer (?) - was a nest-like pouch attached to the angle of a pillar and the roof of the bridge. When we descended from the bridge, this bird shot out from this nests' direction - and the dear thing never entered the nest (ie. if it had in the first place flown from it). However, it did approach the nest quite often - while we were there, and also perched on an overhead wire nearby. This bird is in very good plumage and the identity cannot be doubted. I will write you later, when I have checked out the nest-like pouch more thoroughly.

I am very eager to hear your opinion on both these issues.

Yours sincerely



out bank
away

HUMAYUN ABDULALI

Telegram : FAIZCOY

Telephone : 321724

Res. : 533006

75, Abdul Rehman Street,
BOMBAY-400 003.

28th June '83

Dear Ashesh,

I have your letter of the 5th + 23rd June. The enclosed note as a copy of my letter is alright provided you as Editor, think it worth publishing.

As regards the earlier letter, the matter of the Striped Weaver Bird has already been dealt with, and I have also received a long letter from Siraj Tabee in the same connection. I am replying similarly to him and suggesting that you should make up a note for the Bombay journal jointly. In any case you must complete the note yourselves, giving the reasons for your identification. I think I have referred you to Sahin's 1933 (?) note on "doodlip" nests by first year (?) weaver in ♀ phraspe weaver nests which are finally not used at all.

Hirundo rustica in Hyderabad in 8th June is also unlikely and its nesting there more unlikely! What was the shape of the nest and do you know the other swallows - filifera, fluvicola and denudica. All have distinctive nests - and did you see the pair?

I hope this is sufficient for the moment

Yours sincerely,
Humayun Abdulali

Svel.

Mr Humayun Abdulali
75 Abdul Rehman Street
Bombay 400 003.

7th August, 1983.

Dear Abdulali Sahab,

At the outset i would like to apologise for my hasty (?) departure from Bombay, late last month. Actually too many things worked too quickly, the culmination of which was my departure. After i had met you in the Society and later enjoyed the talk by Mr. Hussain, i went home and found that i was running some temperature, which soared at night and the next day found me in bed with a throat infection and ofcourse the fever. I was down for three days. And just when i had recuperated enough to venture out, daddy made a snap decision to go to Brazil - where a stamp exhibiton is taking place, and he is the commissioner for India - and we flew over to Hyderabad on sunday. Even to me ~~it~~ ~~too~~ this reads like a well cooked story... I hope you do not mind. But the silver lining on the cloud is the fact that i may come over to Bombay soon, once again. Then i hope and pray that my visit will be more fruitful. Not to say that this was not, for i still remember the distinguishing feature of young flycatchers!

Coming to the actual reason of this letter, the Borra Cave trip. I have commenced making enquiries and am being told that a one day trip might not be long enough, and it would be better if arrangements are made somewhere nearby there for an overnight stop. I do not think that this should be much of a problem, since the person whom i plan to take with me* is working with the FD and has promised to arrange things there. This trip will be possible only at the end of this month or in early September, after my parents return from abroad. I promise to get in touch with you again when things are more concrete. And it will be soon.

I would be grateful if you would once again write me your comments on the MAYURA which i had given you in Bombay. Regarding the ed. on the state bird, we have received some interesting notes, and i hope you will be able to add your valued opinion towards this end.

The rains came to this city only after i returned from Bombay, and now the city looks so beautiful, garbed with a cloak of lusturous verdure and fresh earth-colours. The Sangai in our zoo look their handsomest now, what with their rust coats contrasting against the greens. Only if they had their antlers now!

Yours sincerely
ZM

* Binod . C. Choudhury; who is doing research on the Myppar Cree .

HUMAYUN ABDULALI

Telegram : FAIZCOY
Telephone 3 2 1 7 2 4
Res. : 5 3 3 0 0 6

75, Abdul Rehman Street,
BOMBAY-400 003.

12th August, 1983.

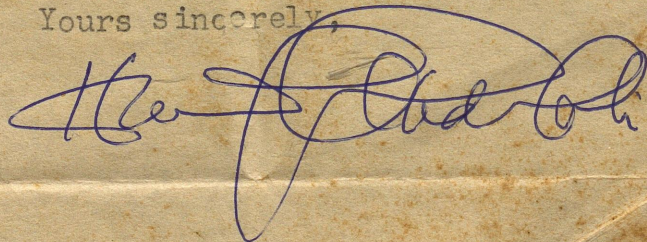
Dear Aasheesh,

I have your letter of 7th inst and note that you are examining possibilities of visiting the Borra Caves with Binod C. Choudhury. The volume of water will probably be considerable in September and you will only be able to get specimens of bats and swifts if any. The whole ~~stream~~^{Cave} at this time of the year will be one stream which otherwise would be broken-up into very small pools all along its length. In any case, I am quite sure that if you go there with somebody who is conducting zoological research in any matter, he will have a thorough look and then consider making another trip, so that the smaller pools can be netted for fish and/or other forms of animal life. I am fairly sure that a reasonably thorough netting will produce more than one species.

I think I told you that I have already made this proposal to the Zoological Survey of India and do not know when they will wake up. I will let you know what they tell me but it would be worthwhile acting quickly, for you may hit on something really interesting for a relatively small effort.

All the best.

Yours sincerely,



Mr. A. Pittie,
14-7-370 Begum Bazar,
Hyderabad-500 012.
(A.P.).