

7 February, 1998

Mr Zafar Futehally
Editor
Newsletter for Birdwatchers
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Dear Mr Futehally,

The latest *Newsletter* (vol. 37 No 6, Nov/Dec 1997) arrived yesterday and I was thrilled by the wonderful cover photograph of the Great Horned Owl at its nest! Such few photographs of Indian birds are published, that it might be a useful exercise if someone compiles a database of these photographs and the media they were published in. The uses of such a venture are many but one which strikes the mind immediately is for identification.

Like the brainfever bird's *ad nauseum* call, I must once again repeat my perhaps 'emotional' protest against publishing *culled* checklists. The purpose and the substance of any paper is taken away when this is done. I refer to C Susanthkumar's article in the above *Newsletter*. Do we have enough detailed distribution records to warrant this? I would rather prefer a reduction of articles or increase in the number of pages to accommodate checklists. I am not aware of a published checklist of the birds of Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary. Imagine a scenario where scientific data is required for an environmental assessment survey of this sanctuary as it is on the anvil for development projects. Will not a checklist of birds, or for that matter, any other life form, comprise baseline data for such an assessment? If it is not published in the only widely read media dedicated to birds, making it a permanent record, how will it be available for future use? You cannot allow "lack of space" to over-ride this argument. This denial of information results in 3 different 'injured' parties. The readers, the author/s and the future generations. Readers should respond to the act. I already have a letter from a very disappointed contributor who sent a note for the last issue, *upon request*, and found that the checklist was not published at all. He wrote, "I think it a great shame not to include full checklists which give us a more complete picture of the state of the avifauna of a particular area and helps show us which area are in more need of protection. Part of the idea of having a publication like this is to disseminate information to as many interested parties as possible and not have to send out checklists individually."

Some other comments on the contents of the *Newsletter*.

1. Maan Barua's note (p. 99-100), regarding mis-identification of the Oriental White Stork *Ciconia boyciana* in an earlier issue of the *Newsletter* brings up another such instance. A note by Kaushik Deuti [NLBW 37(5): back cover] identifying Large Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* in breeding plumage as Japanese Cormorants *Phalacrocorax capillatus*. Krys Kazmierczak wrote "I was flabbergasted! Of course the birds are *Phalacrocorax carbo* and the amount of white on the head is within the range of variation found in that species."
2. The article by S Thirumurthi, *et al.*, entitled 'Avian predators of honey bees and their management' would have been more interesting had some information been given on the effect of avian depredations on the bee-population and whether there was a change in the quantity of honey produced. Did avian predators hit the bottom-line of the apiary industry and how badly?
3. R Suresh Kumar's note on Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* is of interest. First I must get the meaning of "over-wintering" correctly. I presume that the term mean the birds remain in an area through out the winter and are not seen just when they arrive into the country and leave it (on passage). Identification of the male is easy but that of the female (or immature!) is difficult. From the meager description of this bird, we cannot pin down the species. The Hen Harrier is the largest of the four *Circus* harriers which visit our sub-continent and their staple diet comprises more of larger prey than grasshoppers e.g., larks (Alaudidae). Why would grasshoppers be abundant in Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary when the author records the valley "remained snow bound from middle of January to late March," and most vegetation as withered away and dried, during the observation period? Was there an abundance of small birds which was overlooked?
4. To close with a tongue-in-cheek quote from page 109. "...a pitta smacked onto the wall of my grandfather's house,...the house still exists." Wow!

Thanking You

Yours sincerely



With best wishes & regards,