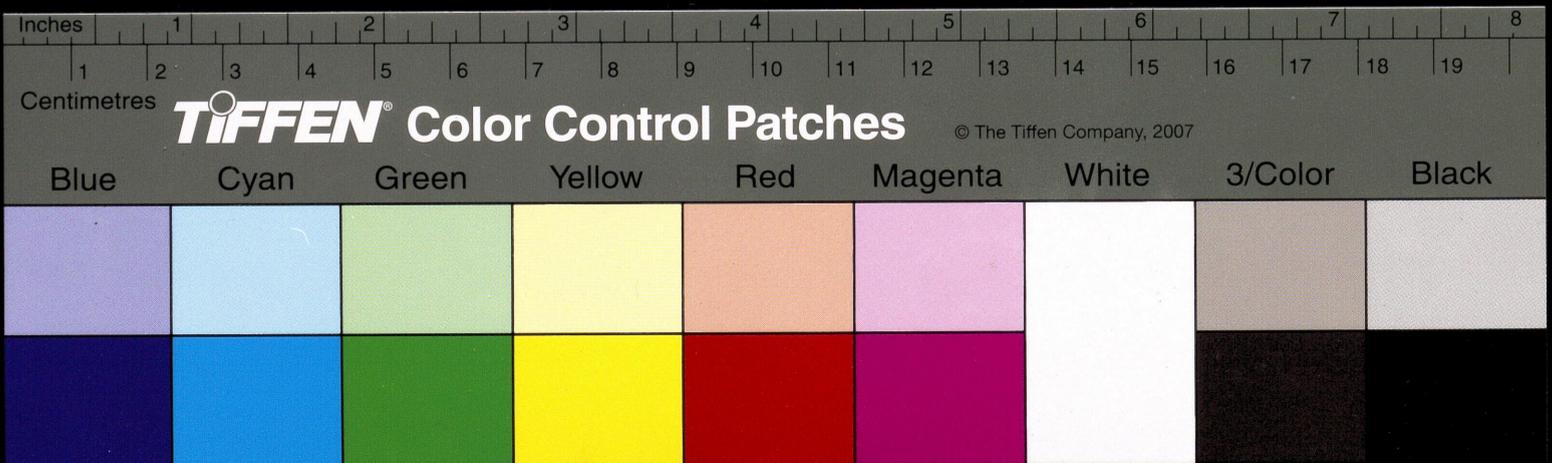


NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

VOL XV NO. 6 JULY 1975

Article: Sultanpaw Bird Sanctuary
on Summers M.S.B.



NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDPATCHERS

Volume 15, Number 6.

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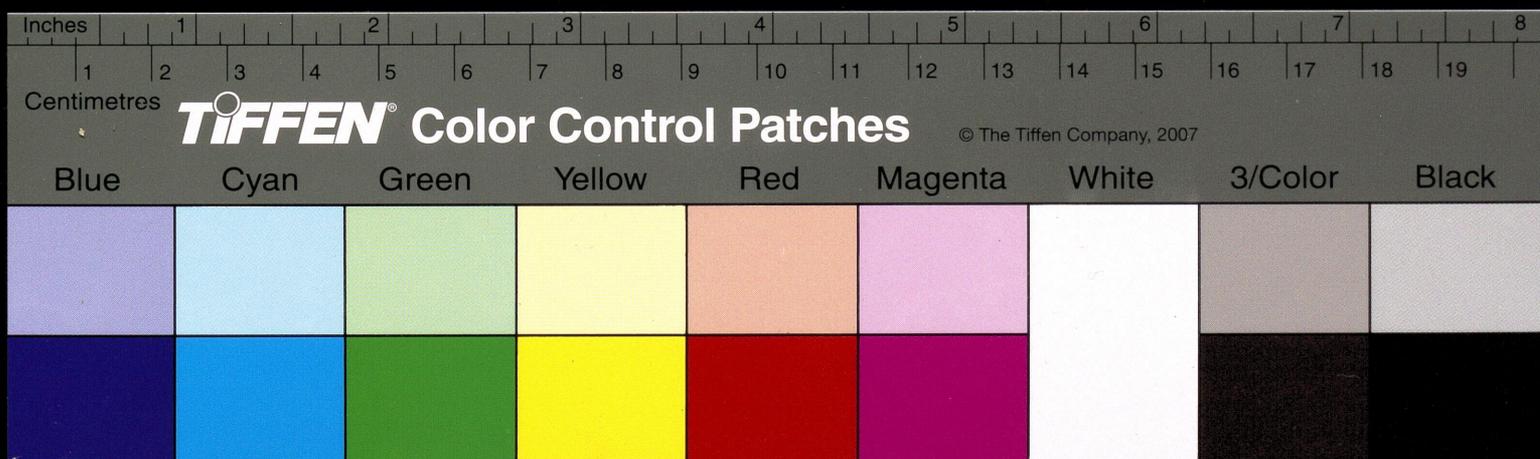
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THE PIED CRESTED CUCKOO

J.S. Serrao.

It is interesting to note from the Editorial in the Newsletter 15(5): 8-9 that Mr. S.V. Nilakanta came across the Pied Crested Cuckoo (Clamator jacobinus) on 31st May 1975. I myself came across it on 1st June morning in the Borivli National Park. The bird's settled behaviour made me to think at the time that it had arrived in Bombay much earlier than I had met it that morning. In 1974 I stumbled on the bird on the morning of 16th June; 18 birds seemingly making for shelter inside of a mile along the Park road pointed out that they were just pouring into Bombay.

Mr. Nilakanta gives the wing of his bird as 150 mm and suggests it to be of African origin, Clamator jacobinus serratus. But wing measurements alone are very indistinct in determining the races of the Pied Crested Cuckoo. An accepted formula prescribes an average wing of 144 mm and over for the race serratus, and 144 mm and under for jacobinus. A look at this prescription shows that there should be individuals in both the races whose wings range from 132 to 156 mm. That such a variation in the wing measurement exists could be made out from the detailed wing lengths given by C.B. Ticehurst in The Ibis 1923: 38.



INDIAN GREAT REED WARBLER (ACROCEPHALUS STENTOREUS)

K.S. Lavkumar.

David Fernandes and I visited the mangrove swamp between the National Highway and the Western Railway bridge across the Mahim Creek. It was a morning's walk through heavily polluted tidal mangrove thickets. With handkerchieves to keep off the stench we wanted to know how best the pollution sources might be diverted because the area is now marked to be a bird sanctuary.

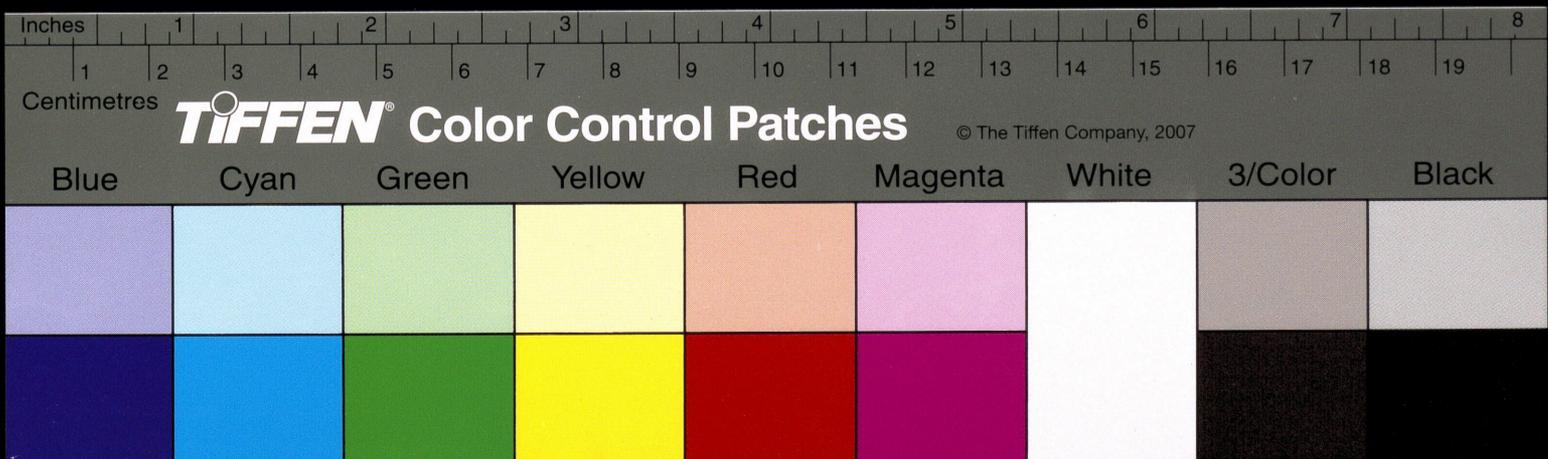
5th June is mid-summer and as such the gulls and waders were totally absent, and the high level of pollution seemed to have reduced the Paddy Birds, Egrets and Whiskered Terns which are quite plentiful on marshy tracts close by. We were, however, impressed by the numbers of Reed Warblers flying around and singing; in fact, their presence was intrusive. Quite obviously the density of the birds and their vigorous song suggest that this is a residential and breeding population. Location of a nest or sighting of birds carrying nesting material, feed for nestlings or faecal packets would clinch the issue.

Besides the Reed Warblers we were impressed by the plentitude of Ashy Wren-Warblers (Prinia socialis) in the mangroves. Three Fantail Flycatchers (Rhipidura albicollis) caught me quite by surprise. Their presence was proclaimed by melodious ditties so characteristic of the species and confirmed by sighting a bird flitting, prancing, pirouetting and flaunting its fanned tail among the shrubs, at times in branches overhanging the filthy creek water and dirt impregnated soil.

It is quite apparent that once the mangrove forest grows tall with the stopping of seasonal cutting, many more resident species would breed regularly and a reduction of pollution would increase waterside species to augment the flocks of waders which throng the mudflats in the cold season.

Since 1930 Dr. Salim Ali has suspected the Reed Warbler breeding in similar habitats around Bombay, vide Hugh Whistler, J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 35: 450-54. Members living close to Mahim Creek or other similar areas around Bombay could help find nests of this warbler in the Bombay area.

* * * * *



TEREK SANDPIPER

Ananta Mitra, Calcutta.

It was the morning on 4.11.74. I was at the seashore at Digha, West Bengal. The vast beach with the sea to its south spreads east and west for miles.

A mixed flock of about 40 waders were hunting on the shore. There were little stints (Calidris minutus), Common Sandpipers (Tringa hypoleucos) and others.

Waves were breaking on the shore, spreading themselves and were receding back to the sea. The birds were moving back and forth with the waves. They were quickly picking up minute marine bodies with their agile beaks.

Among the picking beaks I located a pair of beaks behaving in a peculiar way.

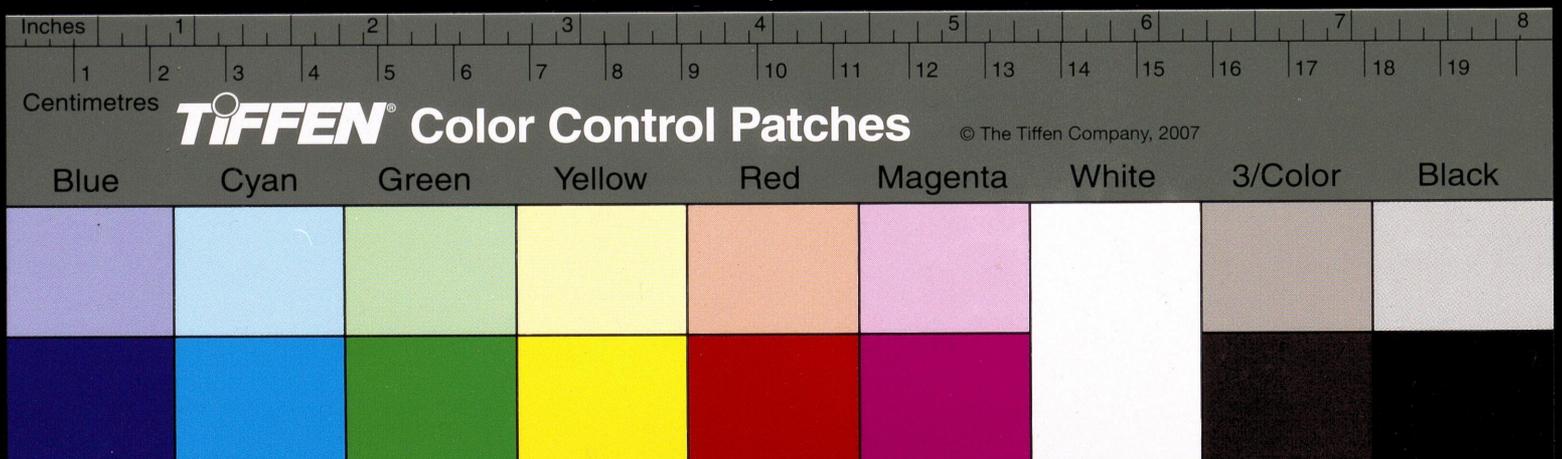
On close observation I identified them to be Terek Sandpipers (Tringa terek). The birds with orange-coloured legs and upcurved beaks.

The particular contrivance of the beak was being utilised by the birds with masterly efficiency.

I briefly give below their mode of operation.

The seemingly level Digha beach has small undulations on its floor creating long furrows running perpendicular to the sea. When dashing waves recede from the shore they leave behind in these furrows long patches of water which take a little time to seep into the sand.

On the floor of these furrows Tringa Terek rests its upcurved beak and with mandibles slightly open glides through at considerable speed (See figure).



At about 10 a.m. we heard the churring distress calls of the parent birds, soon followed by the disorderly melee of distress calls of various other birds including the Purplerumped Sunbird, Common Babblers, Tailor Bird, Black Drongo, Common Myna, Red-vented Bulbul, Blackheaded Oriole and Spotted Dove. On closer approach, it was observed that a 2-foot long snake (unidentified) was proceeding close to the fledglings of the Indian Robin, then perched on some low bushes. Uttering churring calls both the parent birds and two Black Drongos could be seen darting over the head of the snake from one side to the other, while the other birds flitted from one branch of the Cashew tree to the other uttering their respective calls, probably in their effort to thwart the attempt of the snake to reach the fledglings. It is also likely that the distress calls of the parent Robins made the other birds go to the help of the Robins. And probably as a result of the concerted attack by the assembly of birds, the snake retreated from the scene.

The same scene was again witnessed the same day at about 3.30 p.m. But this time, for fear that the snake might kill the Robin fledglings, we threw stones at the snake and drove it away.

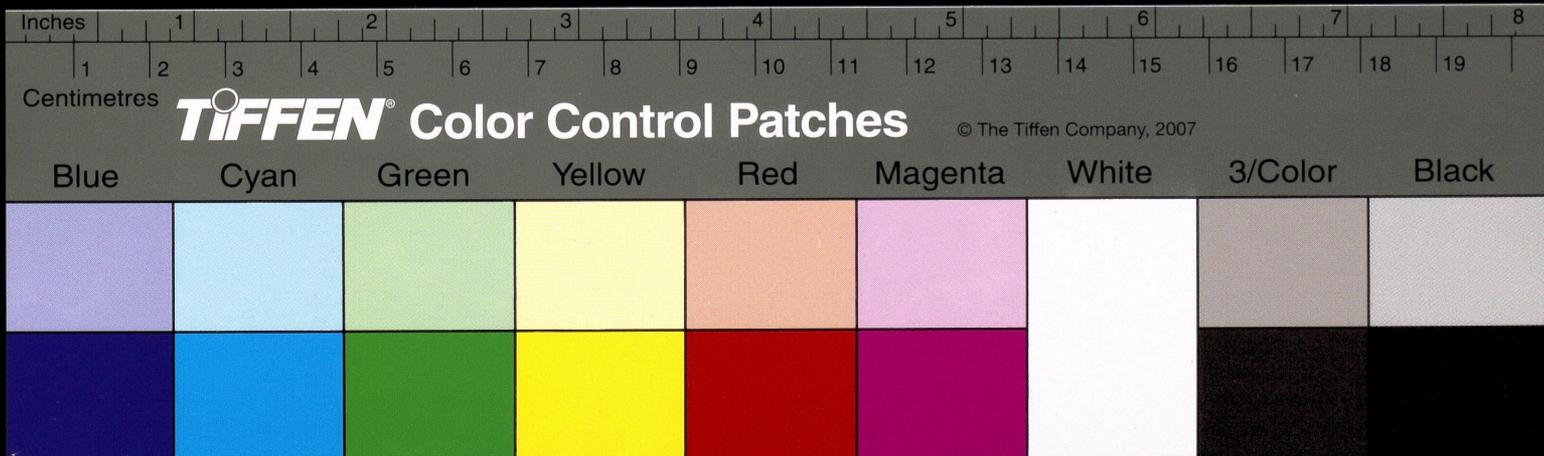
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EDITORIAL NOTE:

Readers of the Newsletter may be aware that a city known popularly as New Bombay is being built across the harbour. This is to cater for the expanding population of Bombay and for which there is no place in the limited confines of Bombay island and the existing suburbs.

The surroundings of New Bombay are to be planted with some millions of trees and the work seems to be progressing as shown in the photographs accompanying the news reports. The trees are to be fast growing trees. Furthermore, some fruit trees specially attractive to birds will be included.

One of the objects of growing trees is to retain moisture in the ground and to prevent soil erosion. For serving all these functions few trees can excel the great Pipul tree (Ficus religiosa) whose wide spreading roots can hold tenaciously even our river banks. The figs of this tree are greatly relished by orioles, barbets and a variety of birds. There are few living things in the world whose life spans can be measured in centuries and millenniums - the Pipul tree being one of them.



The tree planting at New Bombay is going to work out at Rs.5/= per per person who is to live in New Bombay. This is a very small expenditure in a lifetime investment to ensure the neutralisation of the polluting effects of man - his breath and his cooking fires. In fact plants need the waste products of men provided the same are made available in continuous small quantities.

Even more praiseworthy is the action taken by the Government in stopping the construction of a road connecting the western suburbs to the eastern. The road making was well under way - several trees having been felled in the wooded area of the Aarey and National Park foot hills.

We owe much to the unceasing efforts of those few enlightened people who have fought for this cause and all praise is due to the authorities who have abandoned the project even after spending a considerable sum of money.

* * * *

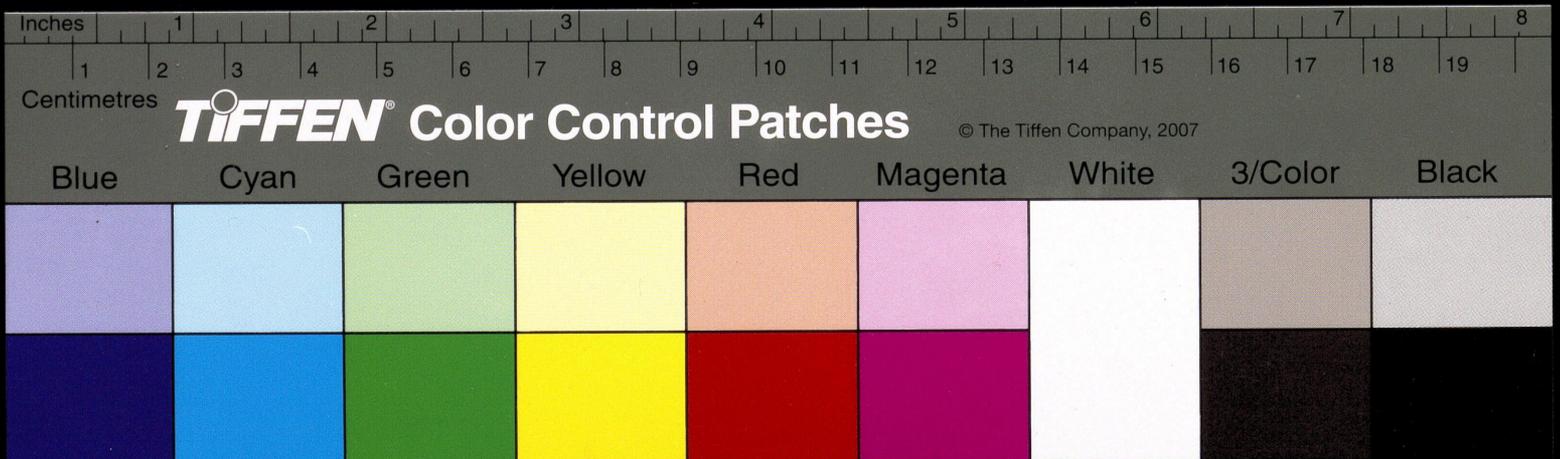
CORRESPONDENCE:

Just a few observations I have made recently. The Koel's distinctive call of kuoo-kuoo-kuoo starts around the 23rd to 25th of March. But this year it started much earlier, I think I heard it the first time on the 7th or 8th of March. I thought this very unusual.

Another interesting fact is about babblers. I have been seeing the common babbler off and on in Poona. But this past year, I have heard and seen them in our own compound continuously from November last year, upto now. At first I thought may be they are migratory over short distances. But they seem to have come here to stay.

Dr. Miss G.D. Coyaji.

S.V. Nilakanta,
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