

# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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VOL. XXIV NO. 3 & 4 MAY - JUNE 1984



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NEWSLETTER  
FOR BIRDPWATCHERS

Vol. XXIV

May-June, 1984

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Polygamy and polygyny in Tengmalm's owl *Aegolius funereus*:

The latest issue of *Ornis Fennica*, Vol.60 No.3, 1983, contains a report on Polygamy in these owls. This is a species which has been occasionally found in India, during the migratory season. Apparently, there are 2 kinds of polygamy, viz, Harem polygamy and successive polygamy, which is sometimes known as restricted monogamy. By marking the pair of birds on the nest, it was found that the interval between the first and second clutches was about 20 days, so that this was probably a case of successive polygyny. In another case, a male was tempted into a trap at a distance of 900 metres from the nest, and since the 2 nests were at a distance of 3 km from each other, it was clear that polyterritorial polygyny was involved.

Such interesting data can, unfortunately, only be obtained by the marking and trapping of birds - something which is beyond the scope of the ordinary birdwatcher.

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Expanding Bangalore city pushes out its birds by S.Subramanya, Entomology Division, University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore 24:

Bangalore, with a growth rate of 72 percent is India's fastest growing city. Because of the pleasant weather and business opportunities it offers, people from all over the country are flocking into this much famed 'Garden city'. The population which was about 25 lakhs in 1978 has increased to over 32 lakhs in a span of six years. Faced with the problem of housing the ever-growing population, the Bangalore Development Authority has acquired most of the cultivated lands on the outskirts of the city and converted them into building sites for distribution among the public. Today, the terrain which once was a rolling stretch of green fields interspersed with trees and shrubs has a barren look and thousands of houses are being built in these denuded areas.

The outskirts of Rajajinagar is one such area, which once abounded in *Acacia*, *Tamarind*, *Pongamia* and *Erythrina* trees hedgerows and bushes. Where a morning walk would once yield to an observer not less than 50 species of birds, one can now find hardly a dozen. Till 1980 one could see the shrikes (the Grey, *Lanius excubitor*; Rufous backed, *L.schach* and Baybacked, *L.vittatus*) almost throughout the year with the grey species being somewhat less common. The trees and bushes from which they surveyed the surroundings for food have disappeared and all the three species of shrikes have become very rare. In 1983 the rufous backed shrike was seen only for about a fortnight in early October.



The growth of Bangalore city has also removed a pair of Redheaded merlins (Falco chicquera) from Rajajinagar, where they had nested for three successive seasons from 1978-1981. The merlins had appropriated crows nests on a tall casuarina tree. In the 1979-80 season a nest under construction by jungle crows was in fact misappropriated. The nest tree was situated in a densely populated residential locality but the falcons roamed the surrounding expanse of open cultivated fields hunting for their food. Their main prey was house sparrows but they were seen feeding on a small green bee-eater (Merops orientalis, a redrumped swallow (Hirundo daurica), a warbler (Acrocephalus sp.) a bat and on a few occasions the male returned from foraging with pipits (Anthus novaeseelandiae) found in the grass meadows and uncultivated fields.

The pair raised a brood of three during 1978-79 and of four during 1979-80 season. The number of young in the 1980-81 brood is not known, but the pair had one young bird with them when I returned to Rajajinagar after an years' absence. During 1981-82 the pair did not breed at the site, even though they kept visiting it occasionally. They were last seen at the tree in October 1982. By late 1980, a number of houses started coming up in all the five large open areas which the merlins frequented to gather their food. With these foraging areas being broken up, the merlins must have decided to abandon the nest site.

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Some observations on the apparent decrease in numbers of the Northern Roller or Blue Jay (Coracias benghalensis benghalensis)  
By Dr. (Miss) Hamida Saiduzzafar, Gul-e-Rana, Aligarh: Over the last twenty years I have been travelling by car from Aligarh to Delhi and back by the Grand Trunk Road (G.T.Road) fairly often, and usually in the mornings between 6 to 10 a.m. Apart from crows and mynahs, the parakeets, drongoes, doves, white-breasted kingfishers, and blue jays are the birds most commonly seen and identified, sitting on telegraph poles or wires running parallel to the road for about 85 miles. From among these the blue jays (Coracias benghalensis benghalensis) are by far the most colourful and spectacular in flight, and catch the eye as they fly up or down to catch their morning breakfast! Around 1965-66, to amuse my young nephew (who was getting interested in bird-watching), he and I used to count these blue jays and I remember noting down our tally, which varied between 60 to 80 birds between Aligarh and Delhi.

About a decade later around 1976 I once idly did a count again and was surprised that I couldn't see more than 30; I reported this to Salim Ali the same year, but he didn't give it much importance, because he said their numbers would vary depending on the seasons and the time of day, and had I taken these factors into account? The time of day was mostly the same, but I had not paid attention to the seasons and couldn't find my old notes at that time: so I thought that my observations were probably fallacious, and that I was just chasing a 'red herring' rather than blue jay!

Around 1980-82 I again travelled many times to Delhi by car, and this time I did the counts again, carefully noting the seasons as well as time of day. The count remained between 25 to 35, so I began to look around more carefully also on other routes, e.g. to Narora and back. The impression persisted that these birds were on the decrease. June of 1982 brought a devastating tornado-like storm in this region, which swept across the belt between Khurja and Ghaziabad, bringing down a great number of old and very big trees. The absence of these big old trees have left large gaps on the roadside, and many trees have dried up. All new roadside plantation by the Forest Department is of Eucalyptus only, and I cannot see any of the shady trees being replaced as such.

It is also a fact that the density and noise of traffic on this highway has increased at least three - or four-fold since 1965. So, this year, 1984, when I again remembered to count my blue jays, travelling to Delhi on three occasions within two weeks I was quite shocked to find my count was down to 6, 10, and 12, respectively on these 3 morning journeys.

Whatever other reasons there may be, I am now quite convinced that this bird is decreasing in numbers in this region. However, this impression needs systematic and accurate verification, because the blue jay is said to be a useful bird from the agriculturist's point of view on account of the large number of insect-pests which it consumes. I sincerely hope that my idea is incorrect, and that the birds have simply changed their perches, and gone further afield, away from the roadside noise and telegraph wires.

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Spoonbills in the Poona district by Taej Mundkur,  
124/9. Brandavana. Poona 411004: The NPB Jan./Feb.1984,  
 carried a note by Mr.Anil Mahabal on the record of  
 Spoonbills in the Poona district. This prompted me  
 to check out my notes and I found the following two  
 notes.

On 25th Jan.1981, Dr.Vivek Paranjape and I visited  
 Matoba lake, about 6 km after Yavat on the left, the  
 latter which is around 45 km from Poona on the highway  
 to Sholapur.

We saw a fairly large number of birds in and around  
 the lake. The first birds to catch our attention were  
 flocks of common sandgrouse that landed at the waters  
 edge, drank water and took off, to be replaced by the next  
 in the line. The ducks seen included spotbill, nukta,  
 pintail, shovellor, common pochard, tufted pochard, a single  
 painted stork with a broken leg, white necked stork(2),  
 openbill stork(29), white ibis, black winged stilts, large  
 egrets, little egrets, cattle egrets, pond herons, green-  
 shank, little ringed plovers, common sandpipers, green sand-  
 piper, little grebes and coots. The terns sighted included  
 the river tern, Indian whiskered tern and the gullbilled  
 tern. On the shores we saw yellow wattled lapwings, red  
 wattled lapwings and Indian coursers.

Three birds of interest include the curlew, which  
 we saw a pair of; three flamingos (*Phoenicopterus roseus* )  
 one adult and two smaller birds, presumably juveniles and  
 spoonbill(10). This record of the flamingos joins the list  
 of earlier reports. Recently Mr.Mahabal in NPB Sept/Oct.1983  
 covered this bird at length.

On 20th Feb.1982, Mr.Avadhut Bapat and I visited three  
 lakes on the Sholapur highway and the following is  
 what we saw.

1. Patas lake: grey herons (3), Shovellors, pintail, white-  
 eyed pochard, garganey, common teal, coots in the lake,  
 along the shores there were a few black winged stilts,  
 little ringed plovers, a single greenshank, and a single  
 desert wheatear (*Oenanthe deserti*), the last bird I believe,  
 is not encountered with too often in these parts.
2. Patas village lake: Brahminy duck (4), white necked  
 stork(7) river terns (2), greenshank and redshank were  
 not counted.
3. Matoba lake: openbill stork(29), brahminy duck(30),  
 pintail, shovellor, spotbill duck, wigeon(8), a single  
 juvenile painted stork that kept in close company with



7 white necked storks (Please refer to A. Bapat in NFB March-April 1982) and finally spoonbills, a group of seven individuals which fed about the openbill storks.

So, apparently these spoonbills have been seen in the Poona district as early as 1981, and there seems to be no reason why they needn't have been there earlier too, the conditions of the lake remaining the same.

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'No habitat' and 'Single habitat' preference in some birds in Mudigere by A.K. Chakravarthy. 509, Shri Lakshmi Nalayam, II Stage, Rajajinagar, Bangalore 560 055:

Consideration of habitat preference is of great importance in bird conservation. Percent sightings of birds in different areas over a long period may indicate their preference for different habitats. However, if birds are regularly monitored at a place with different habitats, species frequenting all habitats ('no habitat' preference) or a habitat ('single habitat' preference) may be located. Such habitat preference in some birds, in Mudigere is shown in Table, -1.

Table 1: Habitat preference in some birds, in Mudigere as indicated by 30 outings from Nov.'83 to Mar.1984.

Birds frequenting all habitats	Birds frequenting a single habitat
1. Red whiskered bulbul	1) Fairy blue bird
2. Jungle crow	2) Paradise flycatcher
	3) Nilgiri verditer flycatcher
	4) Black naped blue flycatcher
	5) Large wood shrike
	6) Green billed Malkhowah
	7) Chesnut headed bee-eater
	8) Blackheaded bulbul

Red whiskered bulbul and jungle crow frequented all habitats, viz. well wooded areas, lightly wooded areas.

scrub, coffee plantations and paddy fields. Eight others (table 1) frequented a single habitat in the presence of other habitats. Any change/disturbance to habitat is therefore likely to drastically affect 'single habitat' birds. This is because 'single habitat' species tend to be selective in choosing a habitat. Consequently, red whiskered bulbul and jungle crow will not be so much affected, because of their adaptability to a wide range of habitats.

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The Simpson Estate Heronry - by a member: The Simpson Estate Heronry has been in existence since the early 1960's. It is located at Sembiam, in North Madras and is about 6 km from the Perambur Railway Station. The approach is through the main gate of this industrial estate.

The nesting area is roughly a square piece of flat ground, about 400' x 400'. Two fair-sized tamarind trees and over 30-40 neem trees form the core of the heronry. It is protected on 3 sides by a stockade of thornbushes which offer a second line of nest platform, used by late-breeding egrets. The trees lining the roads inside the estate are not favoured nest-sites. They provide nest materials such as twigs, leaves etc.

The night heron (*N nycticorax*) has been the earliest coloniser. From about 30 pairs in early sixties, their population had touched the 1000+ mark in early 1984. It is perhaps the most prolific breeder in the heronry.

The little cormorant (*P. niger*) has been a recent addition. About 100 pairs colonised the heronry in late 1982 and commenced breeding. In early 1984 about 1000 birds were counted while returning to roost. A 30 percent dip in the population was noticed in mid-February. After some fluctuation, the population seems to have levelled at 600+ in late March 1984. The reason for the fluctuation in the population is not clear. The breeding behaviour of the birds is conditioned by the monsoon rains and the cormorants are known to wander a great deal locally, influenced by the availability of large reservoirs of water. Their wanderings could perhaps account for the fluctuation.

The arrival, breeding and fluctuation pattern of the Shag (*P. fuscicollis*) parallels that of the cormorant. About 50-60 birds could be a fair assessment of their present population in the heronry. As most of the birds have come to the end of their nesting season, these birds are presumably roosting in the estate.

About 10 pairs of large egrets (*E.alba*) were observed nesting in November, 1983. In early January about 200 birds were to be seen. At present about 50-60 of them return regularly to roost.

The little egret (*E.garzetta*) has been another new addition to the heronry. About 10 breeding pairs were observed in September, having colonised the estate since August, 1983. There was a spectacular increase in their numbers and in early January '84, there were 800+ of these beautiful birds. Currently, there are about 450-500 birds, few of them still nesting.

Critical identification of the median egret (*E.intermedia*) as a nesting bird was possible only in mid March '84. Two pairs were noticed breeding with little egrets.

Apart from these birds, known to nest at the heronry, there have been some visitors, which might settle down to breed in the near future. They are: The Grey heron, white ibis-four birds had visited the estate on 11.1.84 and the pond heron.

The main feeding grounds of these nesting waterbirds appear to be located well outside the estate. There are several lakes in the near vicinity such as Manali, Madhavaram, Rettai eri, Red hills etc., which could be utilised by the birds.

A large lily pond, about 10 feet deep, attracts a large number (70-80) Pond herons. A large number of immature night herons, little and large egrets and a few cormorants congregate here daily for feeding. The pond also provides an ideal habitat for a pair of white-breasted waterhen, which have raised a brood here in 1983. Since early Feb. this year, a pair of Dabchicks (*P.ruficollis*) have been observed regularly. They have successfully nested and raised a family of 3 young ones. The pheasant-tailed jacana used to be seen at the pond. Three species of king fishers the pied, small blue and the white-breasted are regular inhabitants.

There is not, apparently, much predation at the heronry. Predation, if any, could be from pariah and brahminy kites, seen hovering about, during the peak of the breeding season. A few feral cats seen in the neighbourhood may also pose some hazard. Human predation is nil. (??? - Editors).



The heronry owes its existence to the keen interest in wildlife and conservation evinced by the Vice-Chairman of the Simpson Group Companies, Mr.A.Krishnamurthy, Mr.T.A. Gwynne and Mr.Ratnam of the Sembiam Estate are also deeply committed to the protection of these birds. The vigilance of the security staff ensures protection from human predation.

The credit for discovering the site goes to the Night herons, the cormorants and the egrets which cashed in on the security and privacy available in the estate and settled to breed.

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### Correspondence

Birds and Bees by Ranjit R.J.Daniels, Centre for Ecological Sciences, Sirsi 581 402: An often reported observation is that the small green bee-eater, wherever they are common, are a nuisance to bee-keepers. Though I have never seen these bee-eaters in action, in a bee-farm, I have heard people say that the birds perch conveniently on posts near the hives and destroy all bees flying in and out. This seems true as I have seen chestnut-headed bee-eaters and other birds take the wild honey bees from their hives in the forests here.

The wild rock bees (*Apis dorsata*) are probably the most ferocious of all Indian bees. Its quite common to see large hives hanging down from tall buildings, rocks or trees not only in forests, but in urban areas too. An American friend, who was working on these bees, for his thesis, in Sirsi, often told me that the chestnut-headed bee-eaters regularly feast on these bees. According to him a bird deliberately flies to the hive flushing the resting bees and flies back with at least a few angry bees following it. The flying bees then fall prey to the rest, of the flock. I could not fully accept his account on bee-eater behaviour till I could see it myself. On a few occasions in places around Sirsi, I have seen chestnut-headed bee-eaters and grey drongos collect in large flocks around these rock bee-hives and from morning till evening feast on the bees. Once a pair of hill mynas were at it too. Each bird flies to the hive and comes back to post with a bee in its beak. I did not actually see the 'Leader bird' flushing bees and the rest snapping away in the air. Still, since my friend has spent a much longer time than I ever can with the bees and bee-eaters, his

observations cannot be ruled out totally. Such behaviour is understandable as the bees definitely will get provoked by a bird ramming into the hive or flying too close to it and, chase the bird, only to their doom. However this need not straight away be called a deliberate action on the birds part.

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Bamboo nestboxes by Dr. Joseph George, 189 First Cross Rd., Mahalakshmi Layout, Bangalore 560 086: The Editor has drawn attention in the April-May 1984 Newsletter for Birdwatchers to the suitability of bamboo for artificial nesting sites for hole-nesting birds.

An important precaution to take with bamboo is not to use nestboxes that have split down the entrance hole. Birds may get caught by the leg in the split.

Freshly cut green bamboo can easily be treated with a preservative consisting of copper sulphate and sodium dichromate so that the treated nestboxes will last several years.

Convert the freshly cut green bamboo into short lengths of 150 centimetres or less and let them stand on end in a trough containing a solution of the preservative to a depth of say 25 cm. After seven days, remove the bamboo from the trough and let them dry in the shade. The preservative solution is prepared by dissolving 5 kg copper sulphate and 5 kg sodium dichromate in 100 litres of water to which 250 grams glacial acetic acid had been added.

It may once again be emphasised that this method of preservative treatment is effective only for freshly cut green bamboo.

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Miscellaneous observations by Harkirat S. Sangha, C/o S.P. Residence, Sikar-332001, Rajasthan:

Birding in Tripura: I got the opportunity of visiting Tripura when my father was the Commanding Officer of the Rajasthan Armed Constabulary posted at various places in the State. I stayed there for a month (January 14 - February 13, 1982). I visited not only the important towns but also inaccessible places where the jawans were posted. What struck me was the absence of house crows (*Corvus splendens*). Except at Agartala, the largest town in the

State, where I counted 10 one afternoon, they are absent around cities, towns, and villages. Perhaps the good sanitation of the state is responsible for it. The scavenger thus finds it unsuitable to live there. However, jungle crows are common.

Eucalyptus and birds: Since January 1984, I have been observing the utility of this tree for birds without bothering about studying other ecological factors. In my bungalow compound there are five eucalyptus trees. Among the birds which use them for perching are redvented bulbul, common mynah, ring dove (also during courtship once), purple sunbird, green bee-eater, house crow, copper-smith, and robin. During February, white eyes hunted energetically among their foliage.

In western Delhi, I once saw more than 15 cattle egrets on one eucalyptus tree. Here I might also mention that baya has been reported to have selected eucalyptus for nesting (Newsletter, April 1980).

In April, I was in Meerut and had the opportunity of visiting Bisola Village where Sondhi brothers own a 200 acre farm. Their 'forest' has more than 2 lakh trees of eucalyptus and subabul. There, at dusk, I found king crows very active. I was told that the birds are increasing on the farm.

Black partridge in Ganganagar district, Rajasthan: Today, in the irrigated areas of Ganganagar district, black partridge (*Francolinus francolinus*) is a common game bird. This was not so in 1920. The early settlers, including my grandfather, who came from the Punjab, where this game bird is common, did not find it in the district. With the coming of the Ganga Canal, in the late twenties, the landscape completely changed. During the thirties and forties, the presence of this bird was felt, but it was not common. Today, it affects well-watered tracts of the district and possibly it is spreading southwards.

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Occurrence of the glossy ibis at Bedanthangal by  
Gift Siromoney, Madras Christian College, Tambaram 600059:  
 In the January-February issue of the Newsletter (1984) Mr. R. Kannan reported having seen a pair of glossy ibises on a Barringtonia tree in Vedanthangal, and asked the readers whether the birds had been seen before at Vedanthangal. He also mentioned that the checklist



prepared by the Forest Department contains the black ibis but not the glossy ibis. In February 1968 Mr. R.A. Stewart Melluish had seen more than twenty glossy ibises in the Madurantakam tank which is very close to Vedanthangal. His letter to the editor was published in the March issue of the Newsletter for Birdwatchers. In the June issue of the same year Mr. S.K. Reeves sent his comments on the glossy ibis, which according to Baker and Inglis (Birds of Southern India) is a permanent resident in the well-watered districts and found near large tanks.

On February 23, 1979 I visited Vedanthangal and saw three glossy ibises dipping themselves in the water near the far end of the tank. It was about 2 pm and the birds were gone after a short while. When I visited Vedanthangal again a few weeks later I did not see them.

The glossy ibis can easily be mistaken for the better known black ibis which generally does not occur in Tamil Nadu. However Badsha in his Checklist of birds of Tamil Nadu has recorded the black ibis (at Cuddalore) but not the glossy ibis. We have to keep a close watch for these fascinating birds at Madurantakam and Vedanthangal.

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Courtship display in Gadwall, (Anas strepera) by Arun Kumar Banerjee, Research Fellow, Wildlife Project Gir, Department of Biosciences, Saurashtra University, Rajkot-360005, Gujarat:

On 25.1.84 in the bright sunlight of a cold winter day while I was observing the Demoiselle and Common cranes gathering on the shore of the Nyari Dam reservoir, situated on the outskirts of the Rajkot city in the rural habitat, for roosting, I came across a flock of active gadwalls. Suddenly some reared up out of the water and some appeared to be charging others. These are one of our commonest wintering ducks. Both Pakistan, Nepal, all India, lessening progressively southwards. Affects reedy marshes and jheels, large and small with plenty of cover; open-water spread of dammed reservoirs only occasionally as daytime refuges (Salim Ali 1968). To have a closer observation I focussed my telescope (45 x) on them. Five males were swimming with their heads drawn in, the feathers ruffed, the body shaking repeatedly. As the tension increases, two of the drakes rear up, arch this heads forward, and rake their bill across the water. Then with the bill pressed to their breast, slowly sink back to the water. This display was accompanied with a low courtship call and was followed by still another display, in which the male throws his head back in an arched position and jerks it abruptly upward.

Erecting and spreading the tail feathers vertically and lifting the wing coverts exposing the black and white speculum the drakes turn towards the two females which were a little far from the group of males. Then the drakes lowering their heads and stretching their heads and necks forward just above the surface of the water swim in rapid circles around the females. The brown feathered hens with necks arched and heads pointed towards the water move their heads back and forth, from front to side. This display was often accompanied by short spurts of attack. This courtship display was similar to that of mallards. Other surface feeding ducks have a similar behaviour pattern but with a number of variations.

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Birds of Sili Forest , Solan, H.P. by Rathin Mukherjee and Mahesh Chandra, High Altitude Zoology Field Station, Zoological Survey of India, Solan, Himachal Pradesh 173212: The old Bhagat State, on Simla-Kalka Road, is Solan today. In fact Solan is the name of a small village, with a few huts, around the temple of Durga, locally known as Solan Debi. Sili forest begins from this village, extending over 20 km, upto a hill stream named Ashwani Khud - the main water source of the present township. Though Kalaghat is the nuclear point of the forest, with the Forest Department Institute, offices, nursery, etc., the name of the forest is after a small village, Sili.

This forest is rich in primary growth of chil, kail, birch, fir, and spruce. Lately, secondary plantations of ash, varieties of oak, Quercus incana, Fraxinus lanceolata, Pinus roxburghii, Shorea robusta, Sexeius sp. etc., on an experimental, trial basis, have been initiated by the State Forest Department, along with willow and fir.

During the early summer of 1970, when I settled here, I used to have my morning and afternoon strolls in this forest, upto Sili village. I enjoyed every footstep. The jeepable tract in the forest was used only by the Forest Department, and, sometimes, by the P.W.D. Water supply department. However, once heavy trucks started using this semi-metalled road, the entire biosphere was faced with disaster.

The species Pyrrhocorax P. himalayanus are still found in this forest. During the summer of 1979, when Grestner was at Chail for field training, the occurrence of this species was pointed out to him, because it never

frequented such low elevations. Similarly, when Dr. Biswamoy Biswas and Dr. B.S. Lamba were present here, for a workshop, they were informed about this occurrence. But, due to radical changes in the existing ecology because of the construction of new roads, I could not locate the flock, to prove to them that my report was authentic.

When Mr. K.L. Mehta was the State Wildlife Warden, in 1970, game birds were strictly protected. The old jeepable road winding through the forest, with tall lofty trees with thick and dense undergrowth of fern and shady moist bushes, were ideal shelter for the kalij, cheer pheasant, catreus wallichi, even koklas; while occasionally, chukur were also observed in the upper ranges of Chail.

The veteran and seasoned naturalist and taxidermist, Mr. C.L. Hitehsi, still remembers some unique birds which he had collected from this region.

Previously, this region was under U.P., in Mahashu district. In 1971, Himachal Pradesh received Statehood, and new districts were created, of which one was Solan district, with its headquarters in this town. As a result of this, road construction, increase of population, and setting up of new establishments, became the major factors for the disbalancing of the topography.

It is now very rare to see hoopoes, redbilled magpies, pekin robins or the great himalayan barbet in this region; species which were so plentiful before. The only find worth mentioning, was collected and recorded in this decade, from Happy Valley, about 2 furlongs from my laboratory, by Drs. Raj Tilak and A. Tyagi, in November 1975. It was a really lovely specimen of the Cushat or the eastern woodpigeon (Colimba palumbris casiotis (Bonaparte)). It was a really remarkable collection, considering the fact that this is only the second recorded collection from the Simla Hills region, the other being in 1880 when one was recorded by Hume. We are still in quest of another specimen.

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Re-formation of Delhi Birdwatching Society by Raj Kumar Bhutani. C/o. DAB's Office, 468 Bankener, Narela, Delhi-40:  
You might be aware of the Delhi Birdwatching Society, It stopped functioning in 1971. However, now, some young enthusiastic persons of Delhi have reformed it. It is now known as the Delhi Area Birdwatching Society (DABS).



It also has released its first quarterly newsletter - DABCHICK. I shall be grateful if you kindly publish this piece of information in your Newsletter.

Those who are deeply concerned with birdwatching, might be aware of the Delhi Birdwatching Society which existed since the second half of this century. It was founded, in 1950, by Mr. Horace Alexander and Lt. Gen. Harold Williams. Mrs. Usha Ganguli was an active member in the late sixties. But after her death, in 1970, it started defuncting and ultimately stopped completely.

It was strongly felt by the active birdwatchers of Delhi, to have a birdwatchers club or some such thing. Mr. Suresh C. Sharma, an active birdwatcher and nature lover, had studied a lot about the Delhi Birdwatching Society. He was very interested in the formation of a Birdwatchers Club. In course of time, he decided to rejuvenate the defunct society. Ever since 1979, he had approached top officials for information about the Society, but did not get any response. After long and strenuous efforts, his perseverance bore fruit and in June 1982, Suresh announced the formation of the Delhi Birdwatching Club though the actual inauguration of the same took place only on 18th December 1983.

Initially the membership was only 8 or 9, who were keen birdwatchers, but slowly the number swelled, and today stands at 50. There are 8 members on the Editorial Board of the Newsletter. Mr. Suresh C. Sharma is the Editor of the Society (DABS), which, I think is most appropriate. He is a clerk in the Sena Bhavan in Delhi, and resides in a small town in Sonipat. He has devoted a good part of his life and earnings to his hobby and to the Society. I, on behalf of DABS, request all birdwatchers to become members of this Society and share their knowledge with us.

The DABS has been organising short trips, ever since its inception, to nearby ponds or rivers, like Drain No. 8 (Sonipat), Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary, Delhi Zoo, Hindon River (Gaziabad), Badkal Lake (Faridabad), etc. More trips will be organized in the near future. The quarterly publication of DABS, viz. DABCHICK, has an annual membership fee of Rs. 10/- only, which includes 4 free issues to new subscribers. For detailed information about it, please contact Mr. Suresh C. Sharma, Old Rohtak Road, Gokal Nagar, Sonipat, or Mr. Gulshan Arora, DABS Office, 468, Bankener, Narela, Delhi - 40.

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Painted sandgrouse at Katraj Ghat, Pune by Taji Mundkur,  
124/9, Erandavana, Pune 411004: The heat has nearly  
 brought all birding to a halt. But I was able to go  
 to the Katraj Ghat, where we watched 7 painted  
 sandgrouse come to a waterhole, to drink water, just  
 after dusk.

=====

Problems of a birdwatcher in Punjab by Sukhdershan Kumar,  
C/o Dr.K.K.Sharma, P.O. Talwandi, Sabo district 151302,  
(Bhatinda district), Punjab: I have received a copy of  
 'Sadey Panechi' your book on birds, in Punjabi. Thanks  
 for sending it to me because it will help my friends who  
 are interested in birds and birdwatching. Could you  
 please provide me with some advice. As you know, the  
 situation in Punjab is grave. The police always stop  
 me whenever I am on my way to watch birds. They enquire  
 about my identity card for birdwatching. In fact they  
 do not believe that I am after such an innocent pursuit.  
 Please tell me what I should do. Once, a policeman even  
 relieved me of my minolta camera and binoculars. Could  
 there be provision for the issuance of an identity  
 card for Birdwatchers? Particularly in view of the  
 fact that I intend to publish a book on birds! Please  
 do the needful, so that I can wander freely in the fields  
 of the Punjab in pursuit of my task, without the  
 intervention of the police.

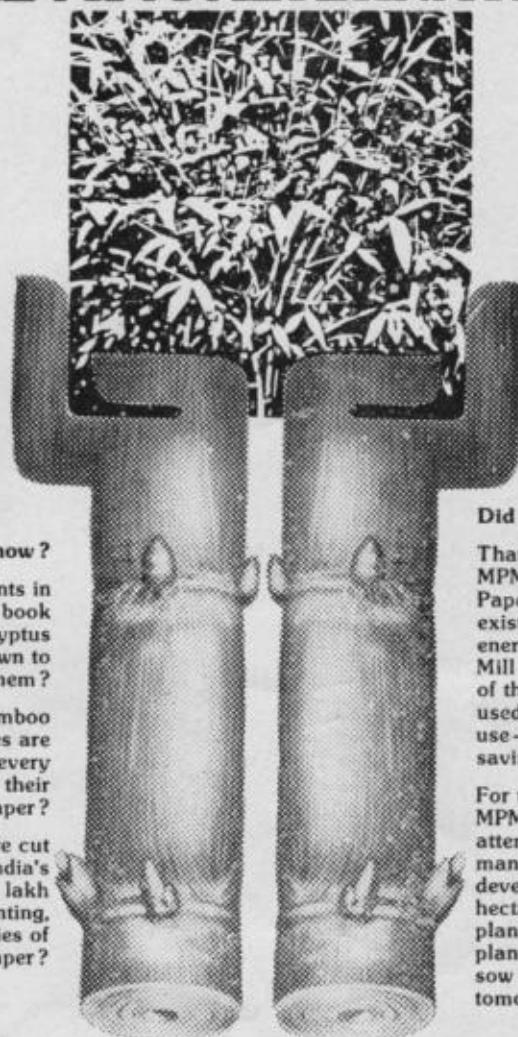
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*Cover Picture:* SPOONBILLS (Platelea Leucorodia) — Courtesy E. HANUMANTHA RAO

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# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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VOL. XXIV NO. 5 & 6 MAY - JUNE 1984



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NEWSLETTER  
FOR BIRDPWATCHERS

Vol. XXIV

May-June, 1984

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## Editorial

25 years of the Newsletter: At the end of this year the Newsletter for Birdwatchers will have been in existence for 25 years. It has become customary to celebrate such events and perhaps we can start thinking about the kind of leap forward we should take, in the interests of the Birdwatchers' of this country. One of the ideas which comes to mind is that we should have a rotating Executive Editor for each year. This mechanism might help to introduce fresh ideas and generally make the publication livelier and more useful. I am sure that there are a number of people within the circle of our readers and subscribers who would fulfill the task very creditably. The Founder Editor would continue to look after the financial aspects such as securing advertisements, and having the paper produced and distributed. I would greatly appreciate any comments on this proposal.

=====

No crows in Kodaikanal: During a recent visit to Kodaikanal (May 2-8), I was anxious to find out whether Kodaikanal was still free from crows, as had been stated by a number of birdwatchers in recent years. I saw none, though Romulus Whitaker pointed out a few, flying in the distance. I hope this happy state will remain. The few remaining sholas of Kodaikanal abound with bird life, and there are a large number of raptors seen on this hill station, including the Black eagle, the crested serpent eagle, and the kestrel. The well wooded gardens have plenty of white-eyes, and the calls of jungle fowl from within city limits was surprising. I also had a good look at a scimitar babbler which called vigorously every morning.

=====

Urban sanctuaries: It is encouraging to note that if birds are assured of security, they are prepared to co-exist in close proximity to humanity. There is no reason, therefore, to create sanctuaries only in far away places. Every bit of open land, suitably planted and landscaped, can become the abode of interesting avians. In the March-April issue, K.K. Neelakantan wrote about the heronry in Trivandrum. The Bulletin of the Madras Naturalists Society of May '84 describes the Simpson Estate Heronry, and this is reproduced in this issue.

=====

Polygamy and polygyny in Tengmalm's owl *Aegolius funereus*:  
 The latest issue of *Ornis Fennica*, Vol. 60 No. 3, 1983, contains a report on Polygamy in these owls. This is a species which has been occasionally found in India, during the migratory season. Apparently, there are 2 kinds of polygamy, viz. Harem polygamy and successive polygamy, which is sometimes known as restricted monogamy. By marking the pair of birds on the nest, it was found that the interval between the first and second clutches was about 20 days, so that this was probably a case of successive polygyny. In another case, a male was tempted into a trap at a distance of 900 metres from the nest, and since the 2 nests were at a distance of 3 km from each other, it was clear that polyterritorial polygyny was involved.

Such interesting data can, unfortunately, only be obtained by the marking and trapping of birds - something which is beyond the scope of the ordinary birdwatcher.

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Expanding Bangalore city pushes out its birds by S. Subramanya, Entomology Division, University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore 24: Bangalore, with a growth rate of 72 percent is India's fastest growing city. Because of the pleasant weather and business opportunities it offers, people from all over the country are flocking into this much famed 'Garden city'. The population which was about 25 lakhs in 1978 has increased to over 32 lakhs in a span of six years. Faced with the problem of housing the ever-growing population, the Bangalore Development Authority has acquired most of the cultivated lands on the outskirts of the city and converted them into building sites for distribution among the public. Today, the terrain which once was a rolling stretch of green fields interspersed with trees and shrubs has a barren look and thousands of houses are being built in these denuded areas.

The outskirts of Rajajinagar is one such area, which once abounded in *Acacia*, *Tamarind*, *Pongamia* and *Erythrina* trees hedgerows and bushes. Where a morning walk would once yield to an observer not less than 50 species of birds, one can now find hardly a dozen. Till 1980 one could see the shrikes (the Grey, *Lanius excubitor*; Rufous backed, *L. schach* and Baybacked, *L. vittatus*) almost throughout the year with the grey species being somewhat less common. The trees and bushes from which they surveyed the surroundings for food have disappeared and all the three species of shrikes have become very rare. In 1983 the rufous backed shrike was seen only for about a fortnight in early October.



The growth of Bangalore city has also removed a pair of Redheaded merlins (Falco chicquera) from Rajajinagar, where they had nested for three successive seasons from 1978-1981. The merlins had appropriated crows nests on a tall casuarina tree. In the 1979-80 season a nest under construction by jungle crows was in fact misappropriated. The nest tree was situated in a densely populated residential locality but the falcons roamed the surrounding expanse of open cultivated fields hunting for their food. Their main prey was house sparrows but they were seen feeding on a small green bee-eater (Merops orientalis, a redrumped swallow (Hirundo daurica), a warbler (Acrocephalus sp.) a bat and on a few occasions the male returned from foraging with pipits (Anthus novaeseelandiae) found in the grass meadows and uncultivated fields.

The pair raised a brood of three during 1978-79 and of four during 1979-80 season. The number of young in the 1980-81 brood is not known, but the pair had one young bird with them when I returned to Rajajinagar after an years' absence. During 1981-82 the pair did not breed at the site, even though they kept visiting it occasionally. They were last seen at the tree in October 1982. By late 1980, a number of houses started coming up in all the five large open areas which the merlins frequented to gather their food. With these foraging areas being broken up, the merlins must have decided to abandon the nest site.

=====

Some observations on the apparent decrease in numbers of the Northern Roller or Blue Jay (Coracias benghalensis benghalensis)  
By Dr. (Miss) Hamida Saiduzzafar, Gul-e-Rana, Aligarh: Over the last twenty years I have been travelling by car from Aligarh to Delhi and back by the Grand Trunk Road (G.T. Road) fairly often, and usually in the mornings between 6 to 10 a.m. Apart from crows and mynahs, the parakeets, drongoes, doves, white-breasted kingfishers, and blue jays are the birds most commonly seen and identified, sitting on telegraph poles or wires running parallel to the road for about 85 miles. From among these the blue jays (Coracias benghalensis benghalensis) are by far the most colourful and spectacular in flight, and catch the eye as they fly up or down to catch their morning breakfast! Around 1965-66, to amuse my young nephew (who was getting interested in bird-watching), he and I used to count these blue jays and I remember noting down our tally, which varied between 60 to 80 birds between Aligarh and Delhi.

About a decade later around 1976 I once idly did a count again and was surprised that I couldn't see more than 30: I reported this to Salim Ali the same year, but he didn't give it much importance, because he said their numbers would vary depending on the seasons and the time of day, and had I taken these factors into account? The time of day was mostly the same, but I had not paid attention to the seasons and couldn't find my old notes at that time: so I thought that my observations were probably fallacious, and that I was just chasing a 'red herring' rather than blue jay!

Around 1980-82 I again travelled many times to Delhi by car, and this time I did the counts again, carefully noting the seasons as well as time of day. The count remained between 25 to 35, so I began to look around more carefully also on other routes, e.g. to Narora and back. The impression persisted that these birds were on the decrease. June of 1982 brought a devastating tornado-like storm in this region, which swept across the belt between Khurja and Ghaziabad, bringing down a great number of old and very big trees. The absence of these big old trees have left large gaps on the roadside, and many trees have dried up. All new roadside plantation by the Forest Department is of Eucalyptus only, and I cannot see any of the shady trees being replaced as such.

It is also a fact that the density and noise of traffic on this highway has increased at least three - or four-fold since 1965. So, this year, 1984, when I again remembered to count my blue jays, travelling to Delhi on three occasions within two weeks I was quite shocked to find my count was down to 6, 10, and 12, respectively on these 3 morning journeys.

Whatever other reasons there may be, I am now quite convinced that this bird is decreasing in numbers in this region. However, this impression needs systematic and accurate verification, because the blue jay is said to be a useful bird from the agriculturist's point of view on account of the large number of insect-pests which it consumes. I sincerely hope that my idea is incorrect, and that the birds have simply changed their perches, and gone further afield, away from the roadside noise and telegraph wires.

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Spoonbills in the Poona district by Taej Mundkur,  
124/9, Erandavana, Poona 411004: The NPB Jan./Feb.1984,  
 carried a note by Mr. Anil Mahabal on the record of  
 Spoonbills in the Poona district. This prompted me  
 to check out my notes and I found the following two  
 notes.

On 25th Jan.1981, Dr. Vivek Paranjape and I visited  
 Matoba lake, about 6 km after Yavat on the left, the  
 latter which is around 45 km from Poona on the highway  
 to Sholapur.

We saw a fairly large number of birds in and around  
 the lake. The first birds to catch our attention were  
 flocks of common sandgrouse that landed at the waters  
 edge, drank water and took off, to be replaced by the next  
 in the line. The ducks seen included spotbill, nukta,  
 pintail, shovellor, common pochard, tufted pochard, a single  
 painted stork with a broken leg, white necked stork(2),  
 openbill stork(29), white ibis, black winged stilts, large  
 egrets, little egrets, cattle egrets, pond herons, green-  
 shank, little ringed plovers, common sandpipers, green sand-  
 piper, little grebes and coots. The terns sighted included  
 the river tern, Indian whiskered tern and the gullbilled  
 tern. On the shores we saw yellow wattled lapwings, red  
 wattled lapwings and Indian coursers.

Three birds of interest include the curlew, which  
 we saw a pair of; three flamingos (*Phoenicopterus roseus*)  
 one adult and two smaller birds, presumably juveniles and  
 spoonbill(10). This record of the flamingos joins the list  
 of earlier reports. Recently Mr. Mahabal in NPB Sept/Oct.1983  
 covered this bird at length.

On 20th Feb.1982, Mr. Avadhut Bapat and I visited three  
 lakes on the Sholapur highway and the following is  
 what we saw.

1. Patas lake: grey herons (3), Shovellors, pintail, white-  
 eyed pochard, garganey, common teal, coots in the lake,  
 along the shores there were a few black winged stilts,  
 little ringed plovers, a single greenshank, and a single  
 desert wheatear (*Oenanthe deserti*), the last bird I believe,  
 is not encountered with too often in these parts.
2. Patas village lake: Brahminy duck (4), white necked  
 stork(7) river terns (2), greenshank and redshank were  
 not counted.
3. Matoba lake: openbill stork(29), brahminy duck(30),  
 pintail, shovellor, spotbill duck, wigeon(8), a single  
 juvenile painted stork that kept in close company with



7 white necked storks (Please refer to A. Bapat in NFB March-April 1982) and finally spoonbills, a group of seven individuals which fed about the openbill storks.

So, apparently these spoonbills have been seen in the Poona district as early as 1981, and there seems to be no reason why they needn't have been there earlier too, the conditions of the lake remaining the same.

=====

'No habitat' and 'Single habitat' preference in some birds in Mudigere by A.K. Chakravarthy. 509, Shri Lakshmi Nalayam, II Stage, Rajajinagar, Bangalore 560 055:

Consideration of habitat preference is of great importance in bird conservation. Percent sightings of birds in different areas over a long period may indicate their preference for different habitats. However, if birds are regularly monitored at a place with different habitats, species frequenting all habitats ('no habitat' preference) or a habitat ('single habitat' preference) may be located. Such habitat preference in some birds, in Mudigere is shown in Table -1.

Table 1: Habitat preference in some birds, in Mudigere as indicated by 30 outings from Nov. '83 to Mar.1984.

Birds frequenting all habitats	Birds frequenting a single habitat
1. Red whiskered bulbul	1) Fairy blue bird
2. Jungle crow	2) Paradise flycatcher
	3) Nilgiri verditer flycatcher
	4) Black naped blue flycatcher
	5) Large wood shrike
	6) Green billed Malkhowah
	7) Chesnut headed bee-eater
	8) Blackheaded bulbul

Red whiskered bulbul and jungle crow frequented all habitats, viz. well wooded areas, lightly wooded areas,

scrub, coffee plantations and paddy fields. Eight others (table 1) frequented a single habitat in the presence of other habitats. Any change/disturbance to habitat is therefore likely to drastically affect 'single habitat' birds. This is because 'single habitat' species tend to be selective in choosing a habitat. Consequently, red whiskered bulbul and jungle crow will not be so much affected, because of their adaptability to a wide range of habitats.

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The Simpson Estate Heronry - by a member: The Simpson Estate Heronry has been in existence since the early 1960's. It is located at Sembiam, in North Madras and is about 6 km from the Perambur Railway Station. The approach is through the main gate of this industrial estate.

The nesting area is roughly a square piece of flat ground, about 400' x 400'. Two fair-sized tamarind trees and over 30-40 neem trees form the core of the heronry. It is protected on 3 sides by a stockade of thornbushes which offer a second line of nest platform, used by late-breeding egrets. The trees lining the roads inside the estate are not favoured nest-sites. They provide nest materials such as twigs, leaves etc.

The night heron (*N nycticorax*) has been the earliest coloniser. From about 30 pairs in early sixties, their population had touched the 1000+ mark in early 1984. It is perhaps the most prolific breeder in the heronry.

The little cormorant (*P. niger*) has been a recent addition. About 100 pairs colonised the heronry in late 1982 and commenced breeding. In early 1984 about 1000 birds were counted while returning to roost. A 30 percent dip in the population was noticed in mid-February. After some fluctuation, the population seems to have levelled at 600+ in late March 1984. The reason for the fluctuation in the population is not clear. The breeding behaviour of the birds is conditioned by the monsoon rains and the cormorants are known to wander a great deal locally, influenced by the availability of large reservoirs of water. Their wanderings could perhaps account for the fluctuation.

The arrival, breeding and fluctuation pattern of the Shag (*P. fuscicollis*) parallels that of the cormorant. About 50-60 birds could be a fair assessment of their present population in the heronry. As most of the birds have come to the end of their nesting season, these birds are presumably roosting in the estate.

About 10 pairs of large egrets (*E.alba*) were observed nesting in November, 1983. In early January about 200 birds were to be seen. At present about 50-60 of them return regularly to roost.

The little egret (*E.garzetta*) has been another new addition to the heronry. About 10 breeding pairs were observed in September, having colonised the estate since August, 1983. There was a spectacular increase in their numbers and in early January '84, there were 800+ of these beautiful birds. Currently, there are about 450-500 birds, few of them still nesting.

Critical identification of the median egret (*E.intermedia*) as a nesting bird was possible only in mid March '84. Two pairs were noticed breeding with little egrets.

Apart from these birds, known to nest at the heronry, there have been some visitors, which might settle down to breed in the near future. They are: The Grey heron, white ibis-four birds had visited the estate on 11.1.84 and the pond heron.

The main feeding grounds of these nesting waterbirds appear to be located well outside the estate. There are several lakes in the near vicinity such as Manali, Madhavaram, Rettai eri, Red hills etc., which could be utilised by the birds.

A large lily pond, about 10 feet deep, attracts a large number (70-80) Pond herons. A large number of immature night herons, little and large egrets and a few cormorants congregate here daily for feeding. The pond also provides an ideal habitat for a pair of white-breasted waterhen, which have raised a brood here in 1983. Since early Feb. this year, a pair of Dabchicks (*P.ruficollis*) have been observed regularly. They have successfully nested and raised a family of 3 young ones. The pheasant-tailed jacana used to be seen at the pond. Three species of king fishers the pied, small blue and the white-breasted are regular inhabitants.

There is not, apparently, much predation at the heronry. Predation, if any, could be from pariah and brahminy kites, seen hovering about, during the peak of the breeding season. A few feral cats seen in the neighbourhood may also pose some hazard. Human predation is nil. (??? - Editors).



The heronry owes its existence to the keen interest in wildlife and conservation evinced by the Vice-Chairman of the Simpson Group Companies, Mr. A. Krishnamurthy, Mr. T. A. Gwynne and Mr. Ratnam of the Sembiam Estate are also deeply committed to the protection of these birds. The vigilance of the security staff ensures protection from human predation.

The credit for discovering the site goes to the Night herons, the cormorants and the egrets which cashed in on the security and privacy available in the estate and settled to breed.

=====

### Correspondence

Birds and Bees by Ranjit R. J. Daniels, Centre for Ecological Sciences, Sirsi 581 402: An often reported observation is that the small green bee-eater, wherever they are common, are a nuisance to bee-keepers. Though I have never seen these bee-eaters in action, in a bee-farm, I have heard people say that the birds perch conveniently on posts near the hives and destroy all bees flying in and out. This seems true as I have seen chestnut-headed bee-eaters and other birds take the wild honey bees from their hives in the forests here.

The wild rock bees (*Apis dorsata*) are probably the most ferocious of all Indian bees. It's quite common to see large hives hanging down from tall buildings, rocks or trees not only in forests, but in urban areas too. An American friend, who was working on these bees, for his thesis, in Sirsi, often told me that the chestnut-headed bee-eaters regularly feast on these bees. According to him a bird deliberately flies to the hive flushing the resting bees and flies back with at least a few angry bees following it. The flying bees then fall prey to the rest of the flock. I could not fully accept his account on bee-eater behaviour till I could see it myself. On a few occasions in places around Sirsi, I have seen chestnut-headed bee-eaters and grey drongos collect in large flocks around these rock bee-hives and from morning till evening feast on the bees. Once a pair of hill mynas were at it too. Each bird flies to the hive and comes back to post with a bee in its beak. I did not actually see the 'Leader bird' flushing bees and the rest snapping away in the air. Still, since my friend has spent a much longer time than I ever can with the bees and bee-eaters, his

observations cannot be ruled out totally. Such behaviour is understandable as the bees definitely will get provoked by a bird ramming into the hive or flying too close to it and, chase the bird, only to their doom. However this need not straight away be called a deliberate action on the birds part.

=====

Bamboo nestboxes by Dr. Joseph George, 189 First Cross Rd., Mahalakshmi Layout, Bangalore 560 086: The Editor has drawn attention in the April-May 1984 Newsletter for Birdwatchers to the suitability of bamboo for artificial nesting sites for hole-nesting birds.

An important precaution to take with bamboo is not to use nestboxes that have split down the entrance hole. Birds may get caught by the leg in the split.

Freshly cut green bamboo can easily be treated with a preservative consisting of copper sulphate and sodium dichromate so that the treated nestboxes will last several years.

Convert the freshly cut green bamboo into short lengths of 150 centimetres or less and let them stand on end in a trough containing a solution of the preservative to a depth of say 25 cm. After seven days, remove the bamboo from the trough and let them dry in the shade. The preservative solution is prepared by dissolving 5 kg copper sulphate and 5 kg sodium dichromate in 100 litres of water to which 250 grams glacial acetic acid had been added.

It may once again be emphasised that this method of preservative treatment is effective only for freshly cut green bamboo.

=====

Miscellaneous observations by Harkirat S. Sangha, C/o S.P. Residence, Sikar-332001, Rajasthan:

Birding in Tripura: I got the opportunity of visiting Tripura when my father was the Commanding Officer of the Rajasthan Armed Constabulary posted at various places in the State. I stayed there for a month (January 14 - February 13, 1982). I visited not only the important towns but also inaccessible places where the jawans were posted. What struck me was the absence of house crows (Corvus splendens). Except at Agartala, the largest town in the

observations cannot be ruled out totally. Such behaviour is understandable as the bees definitely will get provoked by a bird ramming into the hive or flying too close to it and, chase the bird, only to their doom. However this need not straight away be called a deliberate action on the birds part.

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Bamboo nestboxes by Dr. Joseph George, 189 First Cross Rd., Mahalakshmi Layout, Bangalore 560 086: The Editor has drawn attention in the April-May 1984 Newsletter for Birdwatchers to the suitability of bamboo for artificial nesting sites for hole-nesting birds.

An important precaution to take with bamboo is not to use nestboxes that have split down the entrance hole. Birds may get caught by the leg in the split.

Freshly cut green bamboo can easily be treated with a preservative consisting of copper sulphate and sodium dichromate so that the treated nestboxes will last several years.

Convert the freshly cut green bamboo into short lengths of 150 centimetres or less and let them stand on end in a trough containing a solution of the preservative to a depth of say 25 cm. After seven days, remove the bamboo from the trough and let them dry in the shade. The preservative solution is prepared by dissolving 5 kg copper sulphate and 5 kg sodium dichromate in 100 litres of water to which 250 grams glacial acetic acid had been added.

It may once again be emphasised that this method of preservative treatment is effective only for freshly cut green bamboo.

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Miscellaneous observations by Harkirat S. Sangha, C/o S.P. Residence, Sikar-332001, Rajasthan:

Birding in Tripura: I got the opportunity of visiting Tripura when my father was the Commanding Officer of the Rajasthan Armed Constabulary posted at various places in the State. I stayed there for a month (January 14 - February 13, 1982). I visited not only the important towns but also inaccessible places where the jawans were posted. What struck me was the absence of house crows (*Corvus splendens*). Except at Agartala, the largest town in the



State, where I counted 10 one afternoon, they are absent around cities, towns, and villages. Perhaps the good sanitation of the state is responsible for it. The scavenger thus finds it unsuitable to live there. However, jungle crows are common.

Eucalyptus and birds: Since January 1984, I have been observing the utility of this tree for birds without bothering about studying other ecological factors. In my bungalow compound there are five eucalyptus trees. Among the birds which use them for perching are redvented bulbul, common mynah, ring dove (also during courtship once), purple sunbird, green bee-eater, house crow, coppermith, and robin. During February, white eyes hunted energetically among their foliage.

In western Delhi, I once saw more than 15 cattle egrets on one eucalyptus tree. Here I might also mention that baya has been reported to have selected eucalyptus for nesting (Newsletter, April 1980).

In April, I was in Meerut and had the opportunity of visiting Bisola Village where Sondhi brothers own a 200 acre farm. Their 'forest' has more than 2 lakh trees of eucalyptus and subabul. There, at dusk, I found king crows very active. I was told that the birds are increasing on the farm.

Black partridge in Ganganagar district, Rajasthan: Today, in the irrigated areas of Ganganagar district, black partridge (*Francolinus francolinus*) is a common game bird. This was not so in 1920. The early settlers, including my grandfather, who came from the Punjab, where this game bird is common, did not find it in the district. With the coming of the Ganga Canal, in the late twenties, the landscape completely changed. During the thirties and forties, the presence of this bird was felt, but it was not common. Today, it affects well-watered tracts of the district and possibly it is spreading southwards.

=====

Occurrence of the glossy ibis at Bedanthangal by Gift Siromoney, Madras Christian College, Tambaram 600059:  
In the January-February issue of the Newsletter (1984) Mr. R. Kannan reported having seen a pair of glossy ibises on a Barringtonia tree in Vedanthangal, and asked the readers whether the birds had been seen before at Vedanthangal. He also mentioned that the checklist

prepared by the Forest Department contains the black ibis but not the glossy ibis. In February 1968 Mr. R.A. Stewart Melliush had seen more than twenty glossy ibises in the Madurantakam tank which is very close to Vedanthangal. His letter to the editor was published in the March issue of the Newsletter for Birdwatchers. In the June issue of the same year Mr. S.K. Reeves sent his comments on the glossy ibis, which according to Baker and Inglis (Birds of Southern India) is a permanent resident in the well-watered districts and found near large tanks.

On February 23, 1979 I visited Vedanthangal and saw three glossy ibises dipping themselves in the water near the far end of the tank. It was about 2 pm and the birds were gone after a short while. When I visited Vedanthangal again a few weeks later I did not see them.

The glossy ibis can easily be mistaken for the better known black ibis which generally does not occur in Tamil Nadu. However Badsha in his Checklist of birds of Tamil Nadu has recorded the black ibis (at Cuddalore) but not the glossy ibis. We have to keep a close watch for these fascinating birds at Madurantakam and Vedanthangal.

=====

Courtship display in Gadwall, (Anas strepera) by Arun Kumar Banerjee, Research Fellow, Wildlife Project Gir, Department of Biosciences, Saurashtra University, Rajkot-360005, Gujarat:  
On 25.1.84 in the bright sunlight of a cold winter day while I was observing the Demoiselle and Common cranes gathering on the shore of the Nyari Dam reservoir, situated on the outskirts of the Rajkot city in the rural habitat, for roosting, I came across a flock of active gadwalls. Suddenly some reared up out of the water and some appeared to be charging others. These are one of our commonest wintering ducks. Both Pakistan, Nepal, all India, lessening progressively southwards. Affects reedy marshes and jheels, large and small with plenty of cover; open-water spread of dammed reservoirs only occasionally as daytime refuges (Salim Ali 1968). To have a closer observation I focussed my telescope (45 x) on them. Five males were swimming with their heads drawn in, the feathers ruffed, the body shaking repeatedly. As the tension increases, two of the drakes rear up, arch this heads forward, and rake their bill across the water. Then with the bill pressed to their breast, slowly sink back to the water. This display was accompanied with a low courtship call and was followed by still another display, in which the male throws his head back in an arched position and jerks it abruptly upward.

Erecting and spreading the tail feathers vertically and lifting the wing coverts exposing the black and white speculum the drakes turn towards the two females which were a little far from the group of males. Then the drakes lowering their heads and stretching their heads and necks forward just above the surface of the water swim in rapid circles around the females. The brown feathered hens with necks arched and heads pointed towards the water move their heads back and forth, from front to side. This display was often accompanied by short spurts of attack. This courtship display was similar to that of mallards. Other surface feeding ducks have a similar behaviour pattern but with a number of variations.

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Birds of Sili Forest , Solan, H.P. by Rathin Mukherjee and Mahesh Chandra, High Altitude Zoology Field Station, Zoological Survey of India, Solan, Himachal Pradesh 173212: The old Bhagat State, on Simla-Kalka Road, is Solan today. In fact Solan is the name of a small village, with a few huts, around the temple of Durga, locally known as Solan Debi. Sili forest begins from this village, extending over 20 km, upto a hill stream named Ashwani Khud - the main water source of the present township. Though Kalaghat is the nuclear point of the forest, with the Forest Department Institute, offices, nursery, etc., the name of the forest is after a small village, Sili.

This forest is rich in primary growth of chil, kail, birch, fir, and spruce. Lately, secondary plantations of ash, varieties of oak, Quercus incana, Fraxinus lanceolata, Pinus roxburghii, Shorea robusta, Sexeius sp. etc., on an experimental, trial basis, have been initiated by the State Forest Department, along with willow and fir.

During the early summer of 1970, when I settled here, I used to have my morning and afternoon strolls in this forest, upto Sili village. I enjoyed every footstep. The jeepable tract in the forest was used only by the Forest Department, and, sometimes, by the P.W.D. Water supply department. However, once heavy trucks started using this semi-metalled road, the entire biosphere was faced with disaster.

The species Pyrrhocorax P. himalayanus are still found in this forest. During the summer of 1970, when Grestner was at Chail for field training, the occurrence of this species was pointed out to him, because it never



frequented such low elevations. Similarly, when Dr. Biswamoy Biswas and Dr. B.S. Lamba were present here, for a workshop, they were informed about this occurrence. But, due to radical changes in the existing ecology because of the construction of new roads, I could not locate the flock, to prove to them that my report was authentic.

When Mr. K.L. Mehta was the State Wildlife Warden, in 1970, game birds were strictly protected. The old jeepable road winding through the forest, with tall lofty trees with thick and dense undergrowth of fern and shady moist bushes, were ideal shelter for the kalij, cheer pheasant, catreus wallichi, even koklas; while occasionally, chukur were also observed in the upper ranges of Chail.

The veteran and seasoned naturalist and taxidermist, Mr. C.L. Hitehsi, still remembers some unique birds which he had collected from this region.

Previously, this region was under U.P., in Mahashu district. In 1971, Himachal Pradesh received Statehood, and new districts were created, of which one was Solan district, with its headquarters in this town. As a result of this, road construction, increase of population, and setting up of new establishments, became the major factors for the disbalancing of the topography.

It is now very rare to see hoopoes, redbilled magpies, pekin robins or the great himalayan barbet in this region; species which were so plentiful before. The only find worth mentioning, was collected and recorded in this decade, from Happy Valley, about 2 furlongs from my laboratory, by Drs. Raj Tilak and A. Tyagi, in November 1975. It was a really lovely specimen of the Cushat or the eastern woodpigeon (Colimba palumbris casiotis (Bonaparte)). It was a really remarkable collection, considering the fact that this is only the second recorded collection from the Simla Hills region, the other being in 1880 when one was recorded by Hume. We are still in quest of another specimen.

=====

Re-formation of Delhi Birdwatching Society by Raj Kumar Bhutani, C/o. DAB's Office, 468 Bankener, Narela, Delhi-40:  
You might be aware of the Delhi Birdwatching Society, It stopped functioning in 1971. However, now, some young enthusiastic persons of Delhi have reformed it. It is now known as the Delhi Area Birdwatching Society (DABS).

It also has released its first quarterly newsletter - DABCHICK. I shall be grateful if you kindly publish this piece of information in your Newsletter.

Those who are deeply concerned with birdwatching, might be aware of the Delhi Birdwatching Society which existed since the second half of this century. It was founded, in 1950, by Mr. Horace Alexander and Lt. Gen. Harold Williams. Mrs. Usha Ganguli was an active member in the late sixties. But after her death, in 1970, it started defuncting and ultimately stopped completely.

It was strongly felt by the active birdwatchers of Delhi, to have a birdwatchers club or some such thing. Mr. Suresh C. Sharma, an active birdwatcher and nature lover, had studied a lot about the Delhi Birdwatching Society. He was very interested in the formation of a Birdwatchers Club. In course of time, he decided to rejuvenate the defunct society. Ever since 1979, he had approached top officials for information about the Society, but did not get any response. After long and strenuous efforts, his perseverance bore fruit and in June 1982, Suresh announced the formation of the Delhi Birdwatching Club though the actual inauguration of the same took place only on 18th December 1983.

Initially the membership was only 8 or 9, who were keen birdwatchers, but slowly the number swelled, and today stands at 50. There are 8 members on the Editorial Board of the Newsletter. Mr. Suresh C. Sharma is the Editor of the Society (DABS), which, I think is most appropriate. He is a clerk in the Sena Bhavan in Delhi, and resides in a small town in Sonipat. He has devoted a good part of his life and earnings to his hobby and to the Society. I, on behalf of DABS, request all birdwatchers to become members of this Society and share their knowledge with us.

The DABS has been organising short trips, ever since its inception, to nearby ponds or rivers, like Drain No. 8 (Sonipat), Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary, Delhi Zoo, Hindon River (Gaziabad), Badkal Lake (Faridabad), etc. More trips will be organized in the near future. The quarterly publication of DABS, viz. DABCHICK, has an annual membership fee of Rs. 10/- only, which includes 4 free issues to new subscribers. For detailed information about it, please contact Mr. Suresh C. Sharma, Old Rohtak Road, Gokal Nagar, Sonipat, or Mr. Gulshan Arora, DABS Office, 468, Bankener, Narela, Delhi - 40.

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Painted sandgrouse at Katraj Ghat, Pune by Taei Mundkur,  
124/9, Erandavana, Pune 411004: The heat has nearly  
 brought all birding to a halt. But I was able to go  
 to the Katraj Ghat, where we watched 7 painted  
 sandgrouse come to a waterhole, to drink water, just  
 after dusk.

=====

Problems of a birdwatcher in Punjab by Sukhdershan Kumar,  
C/o Dr.K.K.Sharma, P.O. Talwandi, Sabo district 151302,  
(Bhatinda district), Punjab: I have received a copy of  
 'Sadey Panechi' your book on birds, in Punjabi. Thanks  
 for sending it to me because it will help my friends who  
 are interested in birds and birdwatching. Could you  
 please provide me with some advice. As you know, the  
 situation in Punjab is grave. The police always stop  
 me whenever I am on my way to watch birds. They enquire  
 about my identity card for birdwatching. In fact they  
 do not believe that I am after such an innocent pursuit.  
 Please tell me what I should do. Once, a policeman even  
 relieved me of my minolta camera and binoculars. Could  
 there be provision for the issuance of an identity  
 card for Birdwatchers? Particularly in view of the  
 fact that I intend to publish a book on birds! Please  
 do the needful, so that I can wander freely in the fields  
 of the Punjab in pursuit of my task, without the  
 intervention of the police.

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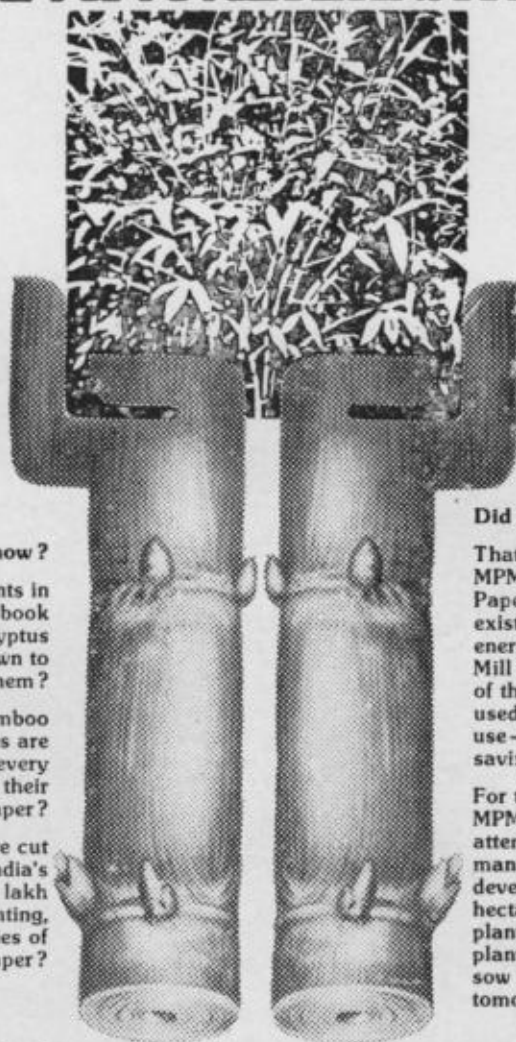
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*Cover Picture:* SPOONBILLS (Platalea Leucorodia) — Courtesy E. HANUMANTHA RAO

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# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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NEWSLETTER  
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July-August, 1984

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A Plea for some birds of Kerala by K.K. Neelakantan,  
25/825 'Kumaramangalam', Thampanoor, Trivandrum 695 001:  
With the inane optimism of the mouse that proposed to move a mountain, I return to the theme of saving some spots in Kerala from the destructive projects of Development Corporations and the indomitable indifference of the departments nominally in charge of the environment.

At some time in the distant past (for that is all one without access to government records can say), a major portion of the land between Nedumangad (c.20 km to the NE of Trivandrum) and the Ghats was a continuous stretch of evergreen forest. Part of the surviving evidence for this is a string of place-names such as 'Pach-cha' and those with 'pach-cha' suffixed to some other word. 'Pach-cha' is Malayalam for evergreen forest. Another, more tangible piece of evidence is a small plot of evergreen forest called 'Ammayambalam Pach-cha' on the side of the motor road from Trivandrum to Shencotta.

Ammayambalam Pach-cha must have been part of a large forest once; but a few decades ago parts of this forest were cleared in order to raise a plantation of Hopea trees. Then, a few years ago, a much larger portion was turned into a eucalyptus/albizia plantation. So that the top brass of the Forest Dept. on their visits to this plantation could stay in comfort, some gigantic trees were felled and a structure (aptly named Vana-Jyolsna meaning 'Jasmine of the Jungle') was put up utilising only bamboo, cane and grass, a delightful but not enduring edifice. At that time the land between this Forest Rest House and Ammayambalam Pach-cha was full of huge trees, all native to the soil. When the Forest Research Institute needed some land for an experiment in teak-growing it was this part of the Pach-cha which got chosen. It is now a teak nursery. A new Forest School has also been established close to Ammayambalam Pach-cha, and in due course, by a variant of Parkinson's Law, its campus is bound to expand and encroach upon the only 'useless' patch of forest in the neighbourhood.

It may be that the few hectares of forest that survive at Ammayambalam were saved from the axe because they were regarded as an essential adjunct to the ancient temple on the forest edge. This temple still exists, but the traditional awe which had deterred the local people from cutting the sacred trees has weakened so much that saplings and even fair-sized trees are being cut regularly. If the forest and the scrub all around had not been wiped out by the plantations,



the fuel needs of the locals would have been met by gathering the broken branches and dry bushes. Defying the deity and his devils, the locals invade the Pac-cha in groups and cut branches, bushes and trees. As the little patch of forest contains no hopea, eucalyptus or albizzia, the Forest Dept. staff appear to shut their eyes to this regular degradation. Nor would we have complained if we had not been birdwatchers.

In March 1977 some members of the KNHS 'discovered' this splendid place, and they have been visiting it from time to time. In 1977, when many of the surrounding hills were covered by forest, in this patch of forest, within an hour or two, one could come across more than 60 species of birds without going more than 30 meters from the main road. These included the Malabar Trogon, the Malabar Grey Hornbill, Jerdon's Imperial Pigeon, the Malabar whistling thrush, the fairynblue bird, the small sunbird, white throated ground thrush, black capped and quaker babblers, 5 kinds of woodpecker, and 3 kinds of drongo. The calls of the jungle fowl from the thick undergrowth of the forest edges and those of the crested serpent eagle from the skies reverberated frequently.

But more remarkable was the fact that every visit to the Pach-cha produced one or more thrilling surprises. The most unexpected and memorable of these was the sighting of that rare little jewel, the three toed forest kingfisher which some of us had been searching for in vain for years in the most likely spots. On 31.i.82 a single, sluggish specimen was found perched on a low branch just a stone's throw from the busy motor road! It allowed close approach, and photography too. On 16-viii-'81 we watched a pair of the equally elusive grey headed bulbul to our hearts' content and, a little later, came across a juvenile(?) crow-pheasant which had pale orange-brown wings and greyish head, neck and underparts, all covered by a profusion of short, thin, black bars. On 27.xi.81 a pair of common wood shrikes were seen building a nest (although they are supposed to do so only between March and May). It was a black crested baza which made our trip of 18.xii.83 unforgettable.

On our most recent visit, on 27.v.84 we were greeted by two birds which appeared to be as much out of place in this miniscule jungle as the three toed kingfisher of 31.i.82. These were a male great black wood pecker and two pairs of the shama! The little patch of wood resounded with the hammering of the former and the loud fluty challenges of the latter. We had seen and heard a single male shama on

17.xiii.83, but had explained away its presence as 'on passage' from remote bamboo forest to another. But our experience of the 27th May suggests that, although there isn't a single clump of bamboo left in Ammayambalam Pach-cha, two pairs of shama have settled down there.

The appearance of the Forest Kingfisher, the black woodpecker and the shama in this pocket-size patch of wood may well be due to the fact that vast stretches of virgin forest have been cleared all round this in the course of some ten years. Ammayambalam Pach-cha is the last resort of these homeless refugees.

This little storehouse of surprises is at present nobody's concern. We have been unable to find out whether it is the KFDC or the Trivandrum DFO who is supposed to be the custodian of this clump of trees. The former cannot be expected to weep over the loss of saplings and trees from a place they would gladly take over and turn into a 'plantation'; the latter is too far away even to be aware of the existence of this little remnant of natural forest.

The pity of it is that although it can be protected without any special effort, this ideal birdwatching spot, so close to the motor road and not far from Trivandrum, is now being subjected to so much disturbance and despoliation that it may cease to exist by 1990 or even earlier. All that is now required is for this patch of forest to be patrolled everyday by small batches of the trainees at the Forest School. This will check the ravage now going on and, incidentally, enable future foresters to see and learn some basic facts about forest trees.

Since the temporary success of the Save Silent Valley campaign, there has been a spurt of interest in woods, beasts and birds among the younger people. Many nature clubs have come into existence. But few youngsters get a chance to see some wild trees and the birds and butterflies that enliven them. For such people, if only to listen to the strident droning of the cicadas and the bell-like notes of the Bronzed drongo and his larger racket tailed cousin, Ammayambalam Pach-cha is an ideal spot.

Repeated appeals to the high-ups in the State Forest Department to give this little forest the same status and treatment as are given by the Tamil Nadu Forest Department to Karian Shola at Top Slip have fallen on deaf ears. Perhaps a number of letters from birdwatchers all over India may make the authorities wake up. Will you help by writing a letter to the Chief Conservator, Wildlife, Trivandrum?

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Birding in Panchgani and Mahabaleshwar by Taej Mundkur,  
124/9 Erandavana, Poona 411004: A WWF-India Nature camp was organized in Panchgani from the 6th to the 9th of May at the Sanjeevan Vidhyalaya. The whole school campus is full of trees and shrubs as was this sceneric hill station till a few years ago.

On the first day, we found the nest of a white eye in a Bougainvillea bush with a single chick that had just left the nest. Within fifty feet of this nest we found another nest of a white eye, this time in a mango tree. The nest was empty at first, but by the time we left it contained two pale blue eggs.

Once a crested serpent eagle sat near the top of a Terminalia tree and called out and was answered by a bird out of view. Suddenly a bird dived out of the sky and to our surprise landed within inches of the seated bird. It looked much like a heavy crested hawk eagle because of its brown breast and belly marks. What surprised us even further was that this bird reached out with its beak, wings held back, almost as if to be fed. The first bird then flew off without feeding it. We later confirmed the bird to be a juvenile of the crested serpent eagle.

In the days that followed we couldn't spot a single house crow though their absence was fully compensated by the number of jungle crows. The number of house sparrows seemed limited, restricted mainly to the market area. Red vented bulbuls were very common as were the number of their nests. One nesting bird even allowed some campers to come within touching distance without budging. Two pairs of white spotted fantail flycatchers danced in the trees and undergrowth but no nest were found. Just minutes before we left we found one, the typical tail of the nest was complete and the pair laboured with the part above the branch.

Blackbirds were quite common and could always be seen in the under growth around the school drain that ran down the hill. Occasionally a pair of Malabar whistling thrushes were also seen in the area. Jungle bush quail were common in the adjoining grass patches, a pair of pied bushchats and Indian robins flew about looking for insects and the latter were once seen feeding at an ant-hill.

Honey buzzards were seen on a number of occasions around the campus and near the table top. The latter is a large rock to the east of the town extending for atleast a kilometre.



On its north western face is a forest where we saw the beautiful yellow backed sunbird, yellow eyed babbler, green barbet, red whiskered bulbul, scimitar babbler, with two young and a bird of prey that flew off too quickly to be identified. One evening, a strong wind blew up this forest, from the valley below and four or five large birds of prey were seen playing about in the wind. Three were honey buzzards but the rest remained unidentified. They seemed to be having a great time and often streaked across the sky at impossible speeds.

On a morning trail along the Mahableshtar road we found the almost complete nest of a white spotted fantail fly-catcher. The parents allowed close approach and so we were able to get some good pictures of them. In the vicinity of this was probably a nest of the tickell's blue fly catcher but we never found it. While in Mahableshtar, on a quick afternoon trip on the Lingamala trail we were able to watch some quaker babblers; spotted babblers on the ground checking the underneath of the fallen leaves for food; black bulbuls, black capped blackbirds, a red breasted fly catcher, in addition to a few unidentified warblers. The most interesting of all were a group of seven small yellow naped woodpeckers. (*Picus chlorophus chlorigaster*) which fascinated us by their camouflage and style of running about the short trees. Another point of interest is about the bulbuls, where in Mahableshtar they are mainly the redwhiskered variety and only some twenty kilometres away in Panchgani they are mainly the red vented variety.

Back in Panchgani we found the nest of a brahminy myna in a silver Oak tree, twenty feet up in a six inch oblique slit in the main trunk. Both parents were seen to bring grass bits to the nest and once chased away an inquisitive squirrel. Fairly close by two more nests were seen. One of the green barbet, in the dead stump of a Eucalyptus tree, some twenty five feet up. The other was that of a red whiskered bulbul in a croton bush, with two eggs that seemed more reddish brown as compared to that of the red vented ones. A pair of yellow legged green pigeons were seen feeding in a Jamun tree and keeping track was quite difficult.

A pair of pied bushchats had built their nest in an old trench probably dug for planting a sapling. The trench was now full of grasses and the birds had cleverly concealed their nest in the bottom corner.

On this trip it was very clear that when the birds were not harmed they became quite tame and nested close to even a populated school. Unless strict measures are taken against the immense tree cutting operations in that area coupled with restricted building and tourism this beautiful place will soon follow the unfortunate fate of Mahableshwar.

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Hornbills of the Western Ghats by Ranjit Daniels, CES, Sirsi 581402: Horn bills are a unique group of birds related to the kingfishers, bee-eaters and hoopoe. With the vanishing forests hornbills, too have become rare or extinct in most areas where they once flew, and today a regular feature in the list of endangered species.

The hornbills are limited to the old world tropics i.e., the tropics of Africa and Asia. Our country has a fairly rich representation of these birds. Along the western ghats three species of horn bills are occurring and they are the malabar grey horn bill (Tockus griseus), malabar pied horn bill (Anthracoceros coronatus) and the large pied horn bill (Buceros bicornis) in the order of abundance. All the three species feed on fruits, insects and smaller vertebrates viz., lizards. They are hole-nesters and the fact that the female is made to stay inside the hole (brooding the eggs) with the entrance plastered with mud, is well-known. The male feeds the female during this period.

The malabar grey hornbill is the commonest of the three and can be seen in fairly thin forests also. It lacks the casque on the beak and in size, its the smallest. Large flocks with as many as twenty birds is not a rare sight to see in the forests of N.Kanara. During the winter months and early summer the birds are very noisy. Their call is a characteristic raucous laughter. The birds either quietly rest during the warmer parts of the day or make a few abrupt 'coughs' now and then. To watch a bird fly is rather interesting as it appears as if the bird is desperately trying to keep its chin up while the heavy lips pull it down. Hence the flight is undulating.

The malabar pied hornbill is less common and often seen in better forests than the former. In N.Kanara I have seen small flocks of 4 or 5 birds, twice in Kumta and once in Sirsi. The call of this species is rather similar to an yelping puppy dog.

The rarest of the 3 and the one that now is absent in several parts of the W.ghats is the large pied horn bill; the bird immortalised by the Bombay Natural History Society. I have seen this bird only twice till now. The first sighting was really thrilling as, I was only a boy of five or six then. With my parents, brothers and sisters, I was staying in an old bungalow in one of the hill resorts near my home town Nagercoil. The W.ghats ends here and even today there are a few patches of good forests not far from my home. We heard what seemed like the trumpeting of an elephant and rushed out only to see a pair of large hornbills flying over the hill across. It indeed was a sight. I can still picture that in my mind. Later after about 20 years I saw a pair in the forest of Yan in N.Kanara. In many areas here, where one would expect to see this bird, it is either extremely rare or absent. I once collected a fallen wing feather in a forest of Kumta and that was a welcome betrayal of the bird's presence there too.

Its sad that these birds are becoming rare rapidly. The built-in magnificance and dignity of these birds can only be preserved by protecting their home, the humid forests of the country.

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A Novel nest of the ashy swallow-shrike by V.Santharam, 68, (I floor), Santhome High Road, Madras 600 028: Since the second week of April, this year, I had been noticing an ashy swallow shrike (*Artamus fuscus*), every day, near a crowded and busy area, in South Madras. I used to pass that way every morning at 8.45 or so and invariably I used to see it hawking insects or perched on a lamp post.

One morning, much to my surprise, I noticed the bird landing on the lamp post with, what appeared to be a feather, to the naked eye. It deposited the material in the<sup>+</sup> the developments that were to follow, since this was rather unusual. If my guess was correct, the bird was nesting or at least attempting to nest.

My brief observations were limited to about a minute or two, each day, as I passed that way. I noticed nothing of interest for the next few days. On 13th May I noticed this plucky little bird challenging a pariah kite that happened to fly past and dived at it threateningly. A careful look at the nest revealed a head peeping out. For the whole of next week, the adult and the young (I was later able to confirm the presence of two chicks) were seen at the nest

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<sup>+</sup>hollow atop the post. <sup>++</sup> I became interested in...



and on certain occasions, the adult was seen passing a morsel to its young. On 18th and 19th, one of the young was seen perched on the rim of the hollow. It was fully feathered and resembled the adult. The other was still inside and I could notice its head sticking out. I could not watch their progress during the next couple of days. On 22nd, I could not see any bird at the nest. The next day I saw four of them on a transformer on the other side of the road. On 27th May an adult bird landed next to a chick and fed it with some insect it had brought in its beak. I used to observe up to five birds on the transformer till about the first week of June, after which they disappeared from the locality.

The ashy swallow-shrike is known to nest on Palmyra, Coconut or other palms and the nest is usually placed on a crotch or elbow of some horizontal bough, at considerable heights. The nest is a 'loosely put together shallow cup of fine grass, roots and fibres with few feathers but no definite lining.' But the choice of a hollow of a metal post, at an height of about 20 feet or so, in a crowded, urban locality is puzzling when there were three palmyra trees just about 100 yards away. It is surprising how the birds managed to incubate and raise the family in the height of summer with no shade anywhere near the site.

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The avifauna of two waterbodies near Pune by Dr.D.F.Singh,  
Zoological Survey of India, Western Regional Station,  
1182/2, Fergusson College Road, Pune 411005: Pune and its  
environs have a appreciably large number of water bodies  
where a variety of birds make their abode. A year round  
ecological study was made on Pashan and Katraj lakes. The  
bird survey formed a part of such study.

Katraj tank is situated about 9 km from Pune city on Pune-Satara road. The lake is oblong in shape and has an area of about 20 hectares. A dam is situated on its north side while a municipal garden adjoins its west bank. The south side is marshy with sparse squatic vegetation. Pashan tank is situated on Pune-Paud road. The lake is oval in shape with an embankment running on its North-East side. A waste weir is also present on its southern side. The entire west side is muddy with a lot of grass and aquatic vegetation like Nymphoides, Hydrilla, Ceratophyllum, Potamogeton, etc. which form an ideal shelter for the water birds.

The following are some of the important birds observed during field study:

Species	Abundance	
	Pashan	Katraj
Dabchick( <u>Podiceps ruficollis</u> )	++	++
Little cormorant ( <u>Phalacrocorax niger</u> )	++	+
Darter ( <u>Anhinga rufa</u> )	++	+
Pond Heron( <u>Ardeola grayii</u> )	+++	+++
Cattle egret( <u>Bubulcus ibis</u> )	+++	+++
Little egret( <u>Egretta garzetta</u> )	++	+++
Openbill stork( <u>Anastomus oscitans</u> )	+	-
Purple moorhen ( <u>P.porphyrus</u> )	+++	+
White breasted waterhen( <u>Amouornis phoenicurus</u> )	++	+
Common teal( <u>Anas crecca</u> )	+	-
Pheasant tailed jacana( <u>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</u> )	+++	-
Bronzewinged jacana( <u>Metopidius indicus</u> )	+++	+
Pied kingfisher( <u>Ceryle rudis</u> )	+	+
White breasted kingfisher ( <u>Halcyon smyrnensis</u> )	+	+
Blackwinged stilt( <u>H.himantopus</u> )	++	+
Redwattled lapwing( <u>Vanellus indicus</u> )	++	++
Coot( <u>Fulica atra</u> )	+++	++

+++ Abundant      ++ Common    + Rare    - Absent

It will be seen from the above that the water bird fauna is not well represented in Katraj. Probably sparse aquatic vegetation and lack of cover may be discouraging the birds from coming here in large numbers. Moreover the presence of local people who use the water for bathing, washing cloths, etc. may be disturbing the birds. In Pashan, although the water is similarly utilised by the local population, the entire west side of the lake, which has a lot vegetation, offer the birds a place of undisturbed tranquility.

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The great pied hornbill in the Nilgiris by S.Theodore Baskaran, 55, Sivasami Road, Coimbatore 641009: Birdwatchers have been lamenting the disappearance of the Great Pied hornbill (Buceros bicornis) from the Nilgiris, where it has not been sighted in the recent years. Recently I sighted some, on my way to Ooty. I also got news of its sighting elsewhere in these hills.

On 16.6.84 while driving from Mettupalayam to Ooty at 6.10pm., I sighted six birds. To the left of the fifth hairpin bend, which is at a height of 1,000 metres, there is a deep valley. The slope on the other side of the valley is clothed with thick semi-evergreen forest. It is not due to any ecological considerations that this stretch of forest remains untouched, but merely because it is too slopy for tea gardens. Parellel to the spot where I was, I noticed six birds flying over this slope, close to the forest. They flew up and down the valley before settling down on a tree. I have been driving up in this route for the past four years, and this is the first time I have noticed these birds.

When I visited Devarshola near Gudalur I was informed by Shri Palaniappan, Honarary Game Warden of Mudumalai Sanctuary that these birds can still be seen in the forest adjoining the tea estate, though not in such large numbers as in the years past.

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### Correspondence

No crows in Kodaikanal by K.K.Surendran, Cloth Merchant, Market Road, Mulanthuruthy Post, Kerala 682 314: The question of crows in Kodaikanal, Palani range, Tamilnadu was first published in Newsletter by Br.A.Navarro, S.J. (Newsletter May 1973). My reply to his article was published in the 1973 August issue of the Newsletter stating the occurrence of crows in certain parts of Kodaikanal. During April-May in 1971 we (myself and P.B. Shekar, B.N.H.S.) have seen jungle crows (*Corvus macrorhynchos*) at Kookal and Vayalakadu areas in Kodaikanal.

Extinction of white cheeked bulbul *pycnonotus leucogenys* (Grey) in Punjab by V.Sherman, C/O.Dr.K.K.Sharma, Talwandi, Sabo 151302, Punjab: My careful study about the general behaviour of birds, their habits and habitat in Punjab state revealed that white cheeked bulbuls are decreasing in number from Punjab from the last five years. Only before 8 years ago I used to see these birds making their nests and chiriping happily near the village residences. But now in these days no one can observe even a single pair near the village residences. Six months ago I saw a pair crossing a village



accompanied by a nestling. The trio family rested a while on a tall building and then flew away. Even in the areas where there are green small bushes Malah (thorny bushes) one could hardly see a pair. These birds were so common in 1972-74 as if they were house sparrows. The reason is yet to be studied. It is very important to note that the pesticides have very much adverse reactions to the breeding of these birds. My pursuit shows that their clutches first reduced to only one. And in April, May, June 1980, I could see very rare nests. Further in 1982 I could observe only 2 or three nests at well suited places where these birds could breed freely. I want other birdwatchers to notice this fact as to whether their number is reducing in the other states too?.

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Errata by Dr.A.K.Chakravathy, 2359, II floor, Rajajinagar II state, Bangalore 560010: In the May-June issue of Newsletter, my article, the Blackheaded Bulbul has appeared. In fact, it is Black Bulbul. The error is regretted.

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Books available

on loan from Acharya Dwaraknath, Udupi:

1. Birds of town and village paintings by Basil Eds  
Text by W.D. Campbell, Forward by H.R.H, The Prince Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh
2. A guide to field Identification-Birds of North-America by Chandler S.Robbins, Bertel Bruun, and Herbert S.Zim-Illustrated by Arthur Singer. Golden Press-New York, Western Publishing Company Inc. Racine, Wisconsin. This book has Sonagrams for the first time.
3. Audubon Water Bird Guide (Water, game, and large land birds of Eastern and Central North America) by Richard H. Pough-Illustrations : Colour Don Eckelberry Black and White by Earl L.Pools.
4. Audubon Land bird guide (birds of Eastern and Central North America from Southern Texas to Central Greenland) by Richard H.Pough-Illustrations by Don Eckelberry.
5. The Bird Watcher's Bible-George Laycock. Doubleday and Combay, Inc. Garden city, Newyork.

6. The Audubon Society - Field Guide to North American Birds Eastern Region-John Bull and John Farrand, Jr. The American Museum of Natural History Visual Key developed by Susan Rayfield, Associate Editor, Audubon Magazine.
7. The Peterson Field Guide Series - A field guide to the Birds - A completely New Guide to all the Birds of Eastern and Central North America.
8. Harper and Row's complete Field Guide to North American Wildlife-eastern edition, 1981.
9. The Wading Birds of North America (North of Mexico) Text by Allan W. Eckert-Paintings and Drawings by Karl E. Karalus. - Doubleday and Company, Inc. Garden city, New York 1981.

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Pied crested cuckoo 'Chatak' by Shivraj Kumar Khachar, Jasdan 360 050 (Gujarat): Many migrator birds come to Gujarat, and it is always thrilling to see the skeins of Demoiselle Cranes and other birds in our skies. However even as a young boy just starting bird watching as a hobby I have been attracted to the migratory pied crested cuckoo, the harbinger of the monsoon after the dry heat of summer. Few birds come from Africa to India and this is one of them. How it crosses the Indian ocean with the monsoon current and return when the winds start blowing from the north to the west in October-November is a saga of a long and hazardous journey over a stormy sea.

I have usually heard the pied crested cuckoo for the first time at night while sleeping on my terrace. The following short notes will be of interest.

- 18.6.81 Seasons first pied crested cuckoo at Hingolghadh.
- 5.6.82 Seasons first pied crested cuckoo passing over at night and calling. Full moonlight. Time 11 pm.
- 7.6.82 and
- 8.6.82 pied crested cuckoo flying overhead and calling at night. Moonlight and clear sky. Time 11 pm Monsoon current steady at Karwar-Madras.
- 9.6.83 Heard pied crested cuckoo for the first time at night. Flying high overhead. Time 12.20 pm

- 2.6.84 Seasons first pied crested cuckoo heard calling while flying high overhead. 3.15 am . Weak monsoon current in Kerala since 31st May 1984.
- 3.6.84 Pied crested cuckoo calling at night flying high overhead time 11.30 pm.

Over the years I have noticed a decline in the numbers of pied crested cuckoos in the Jasdan area. The Hingolgadh forest is thinning out and constant disturbance by cattle, goats, and wood grass cutters has disturbed the bird life. The groves of babools and other brush bush cover with numbers of common babblers the main host of this parasitic cuckoo are also only a remnant of the past growth stands. This seems to be the reason for the decline in numbers of the pied crested cuckoo; the harbinger of the monsoon in the Jasdan area and India.

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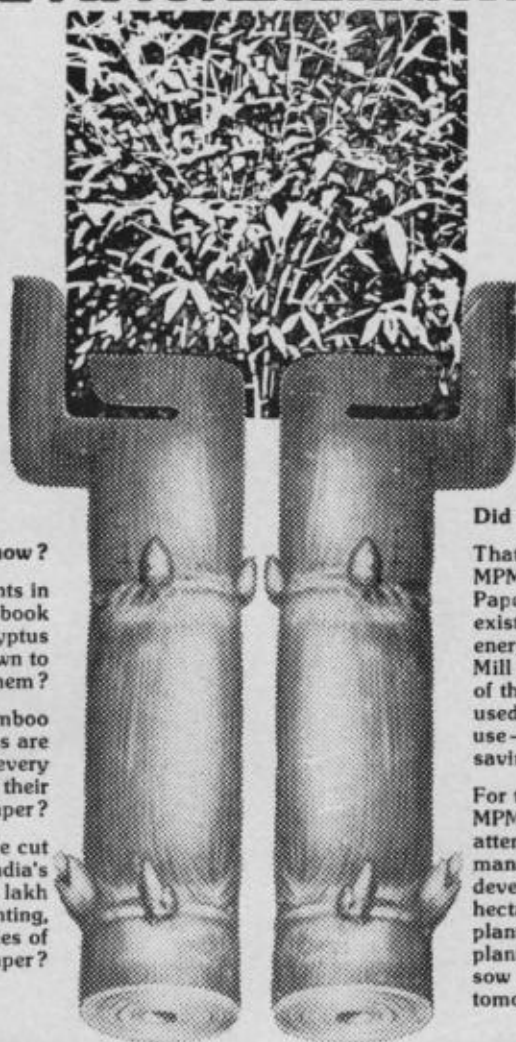
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*Cover Picture:* SPOONBILLS (Platalea Leucorodia) — Courtesy E. HANUMANTHA RAO

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# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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NEWSLETTER  
FOR BIRDPWATCHERS

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September-October, 1984

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Among the Chinkara by Taej Mundkur, Jr. Research Scholar, (WWF Project), Dept. of Biosciences, Saurashtra University, Rajkot-360005: The heading may sound a little odd for this newsletter, but after spending four interesting days at Hingolgadh from the 10th to the 14th of August 1984, I think the name is fine. Mr. Lavkumar Khacher, Mr. Narendrasinh Jhala and I went from Rajkot to Hingolgadh. Enroute we saw beside the innumerable ring doves (*Streptopelia decaocto*); peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*), a red headed merlin (*Falco chicquera*) and a pair of blackwinged kites (*Elanus caeruleus*) on a pole.

At Sardhar, two tamarind trees were packed with cattle egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*), both adults and juveniles; their nesting nearly over. Green fields and open grazed grasslands, with a few hillocks constituted the main landscape. Just after Jasdan, we saw a marked difference in our surroundings. The land abounded with small and large bushes, some trees interspersed with grass breaks. This area was fenced out by a rock wall breached at intervals by herdsmen. A jackal (*Canis aureus*) ran off the road on our approach and to our right a Chinkara (*Gazella gazella*) disappeared. Ahead of us in the distance loomed a beautiful castle on the top of a hill - a medieval one straight out of Austria, I thought. Close to it, we branched off the main road, the car strained in second gear and hidden peafowl called as we drove to the top.

Once there we were greeted by Mr. Lalsinhbhai Raol, a friend who I had made at Jammagar on a visit to Pirotan Island and Khijadia. Mr. J. Tolia of the Forest Dept. and his son Nitin were also there. Nitin and I soon left for a reccy of the place before it became dark.

Around the castle flew a number of house swifts (*Apus affinus*) that nested and roosted in groups under the ceiling in a side gate of the castle as we later found out. Red vented bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*) were everywhere. A tree pie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*) called, hidden from view and later we saw two of them. Overlooking the valley to the west of the castle, on a high tension wire were a pair of drongos and well spaced out were a pair of Indian rollers, or so we thought. Light was fading and we wanted to go closer. The unmistakable call of the blackheaded cuckoo-shrike (*Coracina melanoptera*) announced its presence at the top of a neem tree. Suddenly a bonell's eagle (*Hieraetus fasciatus*) swooped down from behind us into a bush and out flew some mynas. The raptor having missed its catch disappeared over the ridge.



Going close to the rollers, we saw that one slimmer, had a blue head and nape. It was the Kashmir or European roller (Coracias garrulus) - a new species for me and a very early record for Hingolghadh. The other was the Indian roller (Coracias benghalensis), a resident of the area. A call much like the common iora (Aegithina tiphina) came from the bush nearby, which Mitin pointed out to be that of the marshall's iora (Aegithina nigrolutea). A pair turned up in a bush, the female intent on yanking out a piece of vine, presumably for her nest. So, we followed the pair as they flew off. Unfortunately, we never located the nest because there were other distractions.

The familiar call of the common wood shrike (Tephrodornis pondicerianus) preceeded the arrival of a pair as they flew into view, from my left, a female shikra (Accipiter badius) alarmed me flying out suddenly from a low branch, causing a commotion among the birds in the vicinity.

On our way back, we saw a beautiful chinkara - again my very first. It sneezed its alarm as it watched us, alert for danger. It is this sound which gave this gazelle its name 'chink' meaning sneeze in Hindi or Gujarati. We saw two more feeding on the green grass. On seeing us, they bounded away, effortless springs. In the distance, some dense growth of shrubs hid a neelgai male (Boselaphus tragocamelus) so only his head and neck could be seen. Finally at dusk we ascended the castle disturbing a hare. The castle lights flickered rhythmically to the chug of the generator - a pleasant reassuring sound.

11th August 1984: The morning dawned wet and from 6.00 am onwards we heard the calls of peafowl, jungle babbler (Turdoides striatus), and common hawk-cuckoo (Cuculus varius). As we had our morning coffee, a house swift flew into the landing wall. Mr. Khacher picked it up, to let it fly off. But, it flew straight into the wall again and so we took it down to the nests and placed it on a pigeon nest-box. Two hours later when I checked out, it had gone.

The rain dissuaded us going out too far, so before breakfast we circled around the castle. Near the generator room were two rusted water tanks on the ground. In the second one, hidden out of view, was the nest of a peafowl with five eggs in it. The bird flew out as we approached the room. It rained nonstop all day and a short evening walk gave us only three neelgais.

12th August 1984: The peahen was seen guarding her nest at 0700 hrs. very alert. Lalsinhbhai and I saw a single Kashmir roller, the head being a dull blue this time. On an acacia tree sat two pied crested cuckoos (Clamator jacobinus). One gave the other some bit of food, mounted her for a few seconds and flew off. The female finished the offering and also flew away. Calls of the marshall's iora were heard often, the birds were seen fluttering about among the leaves of bushes. A bulbul sat on a rock eating a painted grasshopper. Two male golden orioles (Oriolus oriolus) chased each other. The drumming call of the yellow legged button quail (Turnix tanki) was heard often. Little green bee-eater (Merops orientalis) flew about the place hawking insects off the grass. On the roadside a peacock displayed its train to a peahen who sat in a nearby tree.

The cloudy weather and pleasant breeze made birding a real pleasure. The birds too seemed to enjoy the weather if the measure of their calls was any indication. Grey partridge (Francolinus pondicerianus) and common hawk-cuckoo were calling all the time. A redwinged bush-lark (Mirafra erythroptera) repeatedly parachuted down with fluttering wings uttering its 'se-se-se-se' call. Even, the Kashmir roller sounded, a 'krr krr krr' drawing our attention to two adults and presumably a juvenile with a dull-coloured head. When I spoke to Mr. Khacher later, he said that this roller was an autumn passage migrant in these parts, usually passing through in September on its passage to East Africa where it winters. Presumably, returning in spring to its nesting grounds by an alternate route.

After breakfast, we climbed the ridge to the west, beyond which was 'Bhimkui', a campsite. Here we saw a hoopee (Upupa epops), a baybacked shrike (Lanius vittatus) a flock of large grey babblers (Turdoides malcolmi), several yellow throated sparrow (Passer hispaniolensis) and some bayas (Ploceus philippinus). At the tiny stream near the campsite, a juvenile white breasted kingfisher (Halycon smyrensis) ate a small fish, it had just snapped up. Here, we saw a checkered keelback (Xenochropis piscator) which kept out of view except for its head which it peeked out for an occasional breadth of air.

On our way home, we came across a pair of chinkaras, the male recognized by its longer, graceful horns. I do apologize for refering to these dainty mammals so often, in a note for a bird newsletter, but they captured my

heart and I really enjoyed every minute. I watched them. We saw two hares and I am definite they are not the blacknaped hares (Lepus nigricollis nigricollis). Since they didn't have a black nape, but had a brownish black on their tails they probably were Desert hares (L.n. davanus).

In the evening we climbed the large plateau, south of the castle which had indications of fortifications. Here a bonelli's eagle, probably a first year bird glided against the updraft, stay in one position for as long as a minute at a time. While we were admiring the aerial mastery of the raptor and the swarms of fluttering house swifts, our breadth was taken away by the sudden appearance of the alpine swift (Apus melba) racing past at tremendous speeds. We then sat down to enjoy the setting sun, when a pair of tree pies and sirkeer cuckoos (Taccocua leschenaultii) came closeby foraging for a last meal.

13th August 1984: Got up early and went out for a walk along the eastern base of the plateau. On the rocky ground with sparse growth of grass, a redwinged bush-lark was feeding next to the path. It was joined by another which alighted on a small stone, uttering a 'tirr tirr'. The newcomer held out its wings slightly, tail cocked and the vent feathers fluffed out. The first bird rotated so as to present its rear continuously. After a minute or so both birds flew off. Further along, I spied a rufousbacked shrike (Lanius schach) fly very suspiciously into a leafy tree with something tiny clamped in its bill. After it flew out, I climbed up to find a complete but empty nest.

Later that morning I accompanied Lalsinhbhai to Bileshwar, a Shiva temple nearby and on the way we saw two grey shrikes (Lanius excubitor), an Ashy crowned finch-lark (Eremopterix grisea) and a rufoustailed finch-lark (Ammomanes phoenicurus). We returned via a Bhimkui campsite and Lalsinhbhai was sure that he heard the call of the blue checked bee-eater (Merops superciliosus) but the birds flew away before we could get a good look. A small bird with a lot of white in the tail then caught our attention. It was the rufous fronted wren-warbler (Prinia buchanani) and it was quite common in the area, but here I got to see it well, food in the bill. As we watched the bird flew from tree to tree around us calling agitatedly. So, we retraced our steps and sat down to observe the bird land in the very bush near which we had disturbed it. Investigating we found a well hidden nest of dry grass, a mere foot off the ground containing three bald chicks.



A great horned owl (Bubo bubo) flew out of a dry stream and landed on an open rock giving a wonderful view. After a patch devoid of birds, there was a lot of noise from the bushy tangle ahead of us. Two male nilgais were sparring not head on, but with their heads side by side, horns locked and tails held erect, their white rumps standing out like flags in the under bush. They reared to and fro a number of times till they spied us. And then they galloped off in the direction of herd of females and calves. As we proceeded, we chanced upon a pitta (Pitta brachyura) whose bill seemed quite orange at the bill base and must have been a juvenile.

In the evening, my last, I set off in the hope of being able to photograph the chinks; I walked south west towards 'Narali', a conical hillock. After a quick climb up, I took some snaps of the castle and began descending the west slope. Suddenly, from under me something large flew out - a peahen from incubating seven eggs. In her haste she had kicked one egg which had hit a rock and developed a small contact crack on it. In comparison to the description (Ali 1983) of the nest of the peafowl being a scrape in the ground, sometimes unlined, at others roughly so with sticks, grass and leaves usually well concealed in thorny undergrowth both the nests I found were interestingly different. The first nest in the water tank was concealed, lined with pieces or chips of rusted metal, a fragment of paper and a piece of a creeper. While the second nest was out on the open hill side, well lined with green grass, some of which had turned dry, upslope to the nest was a rock and a dry thorny bush that afforded a little protection. With a pair of vernier calipers I found the mean of the 12 eggs to be 70.63 x 52.85 mm. The measurements of 100 eggs are 69.7 x 52.1 mm (Ali 1983).

As I retraced my steps I came across a group of five male whitebellied minivets (Pericrocotus erythropus) chasing one another. In an acacia tree close by, a rufous-backed shrike sat on its nest and was not too keen to leave it even on my close approach. At a picturesque pond by the road, ringed by large tamarinds and acacia, I heard the trill of a dubchick (Podiceps ruficollis). The bird elluded me, but instead I surprised two peahens roosting on the tamarinds.

It was getting to be quite dark when I saw the display of the redwinged bush-lark again. Checking out some literature, I find no mention of this display behaviour. Back in the castle, the 'quick quik quik quik' call of the stone curlew (Burhinus oedionemus) came up clearly and from the

opposite side the harsh chatter of the spotted owlet (Athene brama) thus ended a memorable three days of birding in a lovely area. Next morning I caught a very crowded bus back to reality and normal life.

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The lesser florican by A.P.Gupte, C/o. Eklavya, 293, Vivekanand Colony, Ujjain 456 001 and Shri B.K. Poorey, F-14 Civil Lines, Dhar 454 001: Come September and the lesser florican (Sypheotides indica) appears in the headlines of newspapers in western Madhya Pradesh because of Dr. Salim Ali's annual visit to observe it. The BNHS has initiated a project in this region to study the bird which is threatened with extinction owing to two factors. Firstly, during the breeding season, both male and female birds are easy targets for poachers. Second, the type of habitat required by the LF for nesting (plains with knee-high grass) is fast disappearing. Two LF sanctuaries have been set up in M.P. One near Sailana in Ratlam district and the other at Paanpura in Dhar district.

We decided to take a look at this famous bird and set out from Dhar in the morning of 4.9.83 for Paanpura, about 60 km away. There are reported to be atleast 40 pairs of LF in this sanctuary. However, three hours of trudging through knee-deep grass proved fruitless and no LF obliged us. Bitterly disappointed, we returned to Dhar. As the presence of the LF has also been reported at Jaitpura grassland (5 km from Dhar) we decided to take a chance there. It was 6 pm by the time we reached Jaitpura and light was failing rapidly. As we reached the edge of the grassland, a lovely full rainbow appeared and lifted our spirits considerably. Many people regard a rainbow as a lucky omen and, sure enough, we soon spotted a male LF rise to a height of about 2 meters and settle again in the grass in its typical nuptial display. The jump was accompanied by a loud croaking somewhat similar to that of a frog. The performance was being repeated at regular intervals. As we started advancing towards the bird a passing crow spotted it and attacked. The LF flew around in a circle and settled again, affording us an excellent view through the binoculars. As the crow attacked again, the LF once more circled and settled. The crow was apparently satisfied at this and flew on towards its destination. As we approached, the cock flew out once more; but this time, after landing it managed to disappear in the grass. Darkness closed in and we had to give up the ideas of looking for the (presumably) brooding hen. Within a week of this, a

search with the help of a group of students in this area revealed the presence of one more male. No females were seen this time also-perhaps because of their obliterative colouration.

Our enquiries with the tribals have shown that quite a few of them are familiar with the bird and that, atleast in the Dhar district, it is seen in many areas during the breeding season. One of us (B.K.P) has met a person who claims to have seen the LF near Mhow in Indore district and at some places in Khargone (West Nimar) district. The breeding period of the LF coincides with the SW Monsoon and it is during this period that the birds are seen in the above areas. Where do they go after the breeding is a mystery which, hopefully, will be solved by the BNHS study.

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Eagles on an Ant-hill by Ranjit R.J.Daniels, Centre for Ecological Sciences, Sirsi 581 402: It was a rainy day in August when I was in a forest off Kumta. I was alone, watching birds on an opened up strip of rocks in the forest, while from the far background came a high-pitched whistle. I knew it was a bird calling out yet, could not very well make out what kind of bird it was. I was only hoping that the bird showed up some time during the day.

The bird went on calling and I tried to analyse the call. It was a long-drawn whistle, sustaining for a period of about four seconds. After a while I heard the call very near me. It was now like a loud 'gurkha' whistle. The bird was quite close to me. I could guess it was a bird of prey but still could not see the bird before it flew out of the tree I had been staring at. It was an eagle about the size of the lesser serpent eagle (*Spilornis cheela*). I could not identify the bird!

I am poor at identifying birds of prey and so had to follow it to get a closer look. Fortunately, it sat on a tree close by and in full view. With my binoculars I tried my best and succeeded in seeing the barred tail, the bare yellow legs, the brown back and the pale brown or buff underside of the bird. The head however, was hidden by some leaves. Later I again saw the bird sitting and this time could see the head as well. The crest was rather indistinct. Still, back in office, with the colour details, call and habitat, I identified the bird as the crested honey buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchos*) using the Handbook.



On that day I had been following the bird wherever it went. Once I heard the bird calling out quite differently. I worked my way through dense bushes of thorn and scrub towards the bird. A swarm of winged termites (white-ants) was flying out and several birds including a few grey jungle hens were at it. I was quite close to the bird which then was yelling out like an irritated broody hen. I was surprised when I saw through the mesh of stems and branches, three eagles on an ant-hill, under a thick bush, devouring the flying termites. Though I tried my best to stay hidden, I could not escape the 'eagle-eyes' and hence, all three flew out. Two of them were definitely the buzzards and the third was a serpent eagle. I believe that the peculiar call the buzzards uttered was to keep away the intruding serpent eagle, as during that brief encounter. I witnessed the two buzzards smack on the ant-hill while the serpent eagle was a little distance away. In all it was an interesting experience.

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Development and its impact on birds by A.K.Chakravathy and S.Subramanya, Regional Research Station, Mudigere-577 132:  
A ten year study between 1974 and 1984 at the outskirts of Bangalore West revealed the following:

1. The maximum bird species in a two-hour outing during evenings, from 57 in 1975-76 to 41 in 1978-79 dwindled to 8 in 1983-84 in the study area. The annual bird species number for the above periods in the area were 102, 85 and 24, respectively.
2. The maximum bird density excluding House crow, common myna, house sparrow and rose ringed parakeet reduced from about 457 in 1975-76 to Ca 322 in 1978-79 to about 50 in 1983-84.
3. These changes in bird populations have been attributed to-  
(i) the reduction in habitat types from 10 (1975-76) to 8 (1979-80) to only 2 in 1984. (ii) the transformation from wooded to sparsely-wooded to barren land in 1984 and (iii) the human activities increasing from 'no activity' (excepting cultivation) to a human pressure of 100 to 180 men + use by 6, four-wheelers; 2, three-wheelers; 26, two-wheelers/5 min/km. during evening.
4. The destruction of a marsh (Ca 0.5 ac) and an acre of wooded area in planning a landscape of about 500 acres for residential locality by the Bangalore Development Authority (B.D.A.) is questionable from environmental standpoint.

5. The marsh and the woodland have been found critical to the sustenance of evolved patterns of inter-relationships between the birds and the living and non-living components in the ecosystem.
  6. Development of a 'green belt' and roadside planting of trees are no replacement to the virgin vestiges of such vegetation - patches, at the outskirts of Bangalore.
  7. It is concluded that no proper environmental planning is involved in the development of residential locality by the B.D.A.
  8. It may be suggested that discussion among the environmentalists, the public and the B.D.A. will help in conserving prime wildlife habitats vis-a-vis in providing a healthier living for the public.
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#### Correspondence

Comments on the Newsletter by Taei Mundkur, Jr. Research Fellow, (WWF Project), Dept. of Biosciences, Saurashtra Univ. Rajkot-36005: 1. The Nov./Dec. 1983 issue, had a note by Mr. Dwarkanath on the spotted owlet attacking him. The following NKB had an explanation by Dr. Sharma that it was probably due to a nearby nest. This afternoon I found a report by Mr. K.K. Gupta in Assam, way back in 1966 (JBNHS 63:443) on similar attacks by an owlet, one of a pair that repeatedly attacked people. The old forest guard there and almost everybody in his family had been attacked, once or twice inflicting bleeding wounds. So, he believed that the Saitan (Devil) had a special liking for him. Mr. Gupta was certain that there was no nest about.

In my own experiences with owlets, I have never been attacked near their nests at any time of day or night. Even, when I once climbed the roof of a shack that housed one nest and three eggs, both parents just flew off into a nearby neem tree.

2. Mr. Ranjit Daniels writes in the May/June 1984, issue that small green bee-eaters and chestnut-headed bee-eaters were seen eating rock bees. This February I watched a pair of black drongos hunt down and eat a dozen ferocious rock bees in half an hour. The source of their treasure was a large hive that hung under the cement ledge of my old college roof. Here one bird followed the other - the first disturbing a few bees as it flapped past close to the hive,

the follower quickly snapped up one. The leader casually circled back to catch one for itself. Sitting on the roof edge they battered their prey before swallowing them. Blue rock pigeons that roosted under the roof also shook up a few bees by their activities adding to the drongos appetite.

3. The July/August 1984 issue carried an article by Dr.D.F.Singh, on a year round survey of two waterbodies around Poona. The table of some of the important birds observed seems surprisingly short, with no basis provided as to the reasons of choice. He refers to only the common teal, with no mention of the other ten odd species seen in varying numbers at Pashan lake. The bronzewing jacana was seen along the receding edges of the lake five years ago or so. But, in the last three years I haven't seen even a single one, yet this bird has been marked as abundant. It would have been useful if the year of study had been given and the scale of numbers had accompanied the abundance scale.

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Black partridge in Ganganagar, Rajasthan by Dr.K.B.S. Dhillon, S.G.N.Khalss College, Sri Ganganagar(Rajasthan) 335001: In the Newsletter Vol.XXIV No.3 and 4, after going through the account of miscellaneous observations by Harkirat S.Sanga, I feel impelled to comment, that before irrigation was introduced in this district in 1927 by the Gang Canal, the area was all desert and constituted part of the Thar. At that time, only birds inhabiting the desert could be seen here. So much so even common house crow was uncommon those days. In early fifties Bhakra Canal and subsequently Rajasthan Canal systems were introduced in the southern part of the district.

With the introduction of canal irrigation, the entire ecology of the district has been altered and as a result, there has been a complete change in the biota of the area, including its Avifauna. Since then the biotope of the area has been transformed from that of a desert to a highly developed, canal irrigation area, with a vast belt of green fields all round the year, trees along the canals, roads, irrigation rest houses, along the boundaries of farms; citrus, grape and mango orchards. It was but natural that the birds from the adjoining Punjab irrigated area, migrated and in course of time got established, in the district. The post-graduate departments of Zoology and Botany of this college have worked out the flora of the district and have currently under taken the study of the Fauna of the major



groups, like insects and birds. Already we have listed about 120 birds for the area out of which about 90 species are associated directly or indirectly, with irrigation canals or agriculture and were obviously absent before the introduction of irrigation. Keeping in view these studies, it is no use to point out only one bird i.e. black partridge present in the area, which was absent before the introduction of irrigation. It may be mentioned casually, that there are two species of bulbuls, three species of cuckoos, golden oriole, koel, coucal, green pigeon, three species of doves, two species of wood peckers, three species of king fishers, grey horn bill, wire tailed swallow and cliff swallow. How could the later inhabit this area, without canal bridges, under which it constructs its colonies of mud nests. Two species of migratory cranes and three species of migratory ducks come to the area for wintering. All this avifauna could not be visualized for the district without the introduction of irrigated agriculture, by the three canal systems, from the Punjab rivers.

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Hornbill Poaching by S. Subramanya, Dept. of Entomology, Univ. of Agril. Sciences, Hebbal, Bangalore-560 024:

The July-August 1984 issue of the Newsletter carries two notes pertaining to the decline in number of the great pied hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*). It reminds me of my visit along with two of my 'insect hunting' colleagues, to Jog Falls in Shimoga district of Karnataka, during the last week of September 1982. During a brief conversation, the District Conservator of Forests, whom we contacted for our accommodation in the Forest Bungalow at Jog, mentioned that the great pied hornbills were being poached in the district by some tribals and villagers. The victim was always the female, who while she remains in the self-imposed incarceration during nesting, gets greatly fattened by thriving on the labour of the devoted male, who keeps feeding her with a variety of fruits, insects and small vertebrates.

During the next two days, while I watched birds in the forest around Jog Falls, I made enquiries with the local people I ran into. Only one out of over a dozen I contacted could give details of such happenings. According to him, the poachers are lured by the quantity of meat they get from the plump female, rather than by the taste of it. The nests are located by tracking the male carrying food in his beak and are kept under observation till the eggs hatch. Once the eggs hatch, the female would be dragged out after breaking the confining

wall of the nest, and the young are also taken. On one such occasion the man himself was present when the nest was broken. He said that the female had lost most of her feathers and looked 'real' plump. It also appears that the head of the hornbill with the casque is a marketable item.

It is not known how wide-spread this practice is and whether it is responsible for the decline of the species. Perhaps Mr. Ranjit Daniels and Mr. S.T. Bhaskaran could make enquiries in the areas they frequent.

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Eye-colour in koels by Ranjit R.J. Daniels. Centre for Ecological Sciences, Sirsi 581 402: The blood-shot eyes of the koel are very conspicuous against its dark face and an observers keen eyes can hardly miss them. However, only the adult birds seem to have this red colour in their eyes. I once had a chance to hand-rear a koel nestling for a month or so. It was a male and quite amusing due to its greed. Though I had handled dead adult koels several times before, a 'nestling in hand' was something new to me. My close acquaintance with the bird led to realise that the bird's eyes were not red! The eyes were instead dark brown or blackish as are in a crow or bulbul. After some time, the bird was sent to a small private zoo. I saw it again as a full-grown bird after a few months. To my surprise, the eyes were red! The eyes really had changed colour though I could not make out when.

I have not come across such a 'change' in the other birds I have closely observed. I have only seen the iris become clearer and visible as the birds mature. I believe that the dark iris colour in nestling koels is a kind of mimicry. It has been documented that in closely resembling gulls (*Larus spp.*), breeding in communal colonies, the eye-colour is the major factor that helps species recognition (thereby preventing possible inter-breeding). Crimson-red eyes in dark-eyed crows' nests would be outstanding and may reduce the chances of survival on the koels' part. Hence (as I believe) the koels develop the characteristic red eyes at a later age when they are no longer dependent on their foster parents, the crows and begin to seek their own kind.

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A friendly flycatcher by Harkirat S. Sangha, D-2 Raman Marg, Tilak Nagar, Jaipur: I usually visit the family farm at Jaisaman, Sahabad Tehsil, Kotah District in winter season when the neighbouring Garda lake is thick with birds and the adjoining forest full of life.

This year, however, I went in sweltering May also and had an unexpected and personal experience. An incomplete room without doors and windows at the farm provided an unforgettable experience during my brief stay.

A whitebrowed fantail flycatcher (*Rhipidura aureola*) would regularly visit this room to feast on houseflies present there in hundreds, to escape the intense heat in the open. The bird was present there between 10 am and 2 pm during my observation (May 11-15). He ceaselessly made sally after sally to catch the houseflies. It was most interesting to watch him snap a housefly in mid air with a little 'tikk' of the mandibles.

Since the room was bare he successfully used a cot as his observation and launching pad. Later, when I had a small table placed in the room it too was used freely.

The flycatcher was extremely friendly and confident. Perhaps he sensed no threat from my presence. Even the presence of more persons and some disturbance seemed not to hinder him in his pursuit. Once after a successful sally he perched on my hand!

He did not mind the presence of housesparrows and their irritating chirping. But he refused entry to any other whitebrowed fantail flycatcher and defended his 'room' with great determination.

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A ringed pigeon in Udupi by Dr.N.A.Madhyastha.Poornaprajna College, Udupi 576 101: A male rock pigeon made its appearance in one of the fishing boats near Malpe, Udupi, Karnataka, on 20th February 1984. It carried a thick plastic ring around its leg with inscription CRPA - 84 4220304. It was retained by a local youth and ofcourse, initially it was reluctant to stay with the other domestic pigeons that he has; it was furious and was trying to fly off. But subsequently, as days went by, it not only adjusted to the new home but also became one with the host birds. It even mated with a white (albino) pigeon and became father of two chicks on 20th July 1984.



Surprisingly these chicks were larger and more active than the chicks born to other males. But, unfortunately, both the chicks died of a severe infectious disease (yellowing of neck). Attempt to save their life was in vain. Again, after another month, it mated and was responsible for two more eggs that are laid.

Now the pigeon is perfectly at home here, does not even go far off. The question is, where has it come from? Our attempt to get this information from BNHS is not fruitful. Could anybody tell us?

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Raptor collisions with utility lines: A Call for Information:  
by U.S. Bureau of Land Management; The U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Sacramento, in cooperation with the Pacific Gas and Electric Company, is assembling all available published and unpublished information concerning collisions of raptors with power lines and other utility lines. Actual case histories -no matter how circumstantial or fragmentary- are needed. Please acknowledge that you have such information by writing to Dr. Richard R. (Butch) Olendorff, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, 2800 Cottage Way, Sacramento, California 95825 U.S.A. (Phone (916) 484-4541). A form on which to record your information will then be sent by return mail.

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# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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"SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 1985  
WILL BE APPRECIATED"

Editorial: Readers will remember that I had suggested that in 1985 a new Editor may be appointed so that the Newsletter could be given a fresh look.

I now think a better plan would be to appoint a guest editor for particular issues. I am glad to say that Dr. Kumar Ghorpade has agreed to produce the January-February issue of 1985.

I hope all of you who have subscribed to the Newsletter in 1984 will continue to do so in 1985. I would appreciate if your money orders and cheques come in soon. Please write your addresses clearly. Cheques should be made in the name of Newsletter for Birdwatchers.

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Nesting of the Great crested grebe at Khijida by Taej Mundkur, Dept. of Biosciences, Saurashtra University, Raikot 360005: On seeing just a single great crested grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) in its winter plumage at Bharatpur, Rajasthan in November 1982, I was quite thrilled to see six of these beautiful birds in the fresh water marshes at the Khijidia Bird Sanctuary. All these birds were in prime breeding plumage, upstanding blackish ear tufts and chestnut frills ending in black on both sides of the head.

On 30th September, I revisited the marsh and was overjoyed to see four pairs of adult grebes with chicks. Three pairs had three chicks each (a normal clutch being of three eggs) and one pair had two. The chicks were roughly the same size and were striped black and white on the head and neck, the back being a dull black.

The parents were seen feeding the chicks, in one case it looked like a small fish. While the fish was being offered, a little tern hovered above in the hope of pinching it. The chicks stayed close to their parents and once when both adults had disappeared underwater, one of the chicks became alarmed and paddled rapidly towards a family of coots, and when the parents resurfaced, the chick returned to them. On another occasion one of the chicks was seen riding on the back of its parent, hidden out of sight except for its head that showed out from near its parents neck. This behaviour was seen on later visits, on 4th October and 19th October.

The Synopsis states that this grebe breeds in Baluchistan, Ladakh and possibly Nepal. It is a winter visitor to northern India, south to Kutch and Orissa.



The only other breeding record of this bird is from Kharaghoda, Gujarat when one nest with three eggs was found by H. Bulkley in 1891. He shot one parent and collected the eggs, which he sent to the BNHS collection. The next year, he reported that no birds nested there at the lake.

In addition to these family groups, we also saw five adult birds in breeding plumage. Adult birds have also been seen this summer in Rajkot and I plan to search all the water bodies possible during the next nesting season.

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Exodus of the Forest Wagtail from Madras by R. Kannan, BNHS Research Station, Bharatpur 321001: The pretty little forest wagtail is a common winter visitor in Madras. One can, without much difficulty spot these birds foraging beneath the undergrowth in the woodlots or shady casuarina plantations outside the city. It arrives around the last week of September and since then, can be seen practically every month till the subsequent summer.

I was sitting in the porch of my house around 5 pm on the 18th April 1983, when I was taken aback to see a forest wagtail alighting on the weed infested garden in front of me. For the next forty minutes, I along with my family members observed the bird as it moved about the entire garden, running after insects and flapping its tail from side to side. Seeing this forest bird in the heart of Madras city is without doubt a rare occasion and, as I was watching the bird, it dawned on me that the bird could perhaps be on the verge of migrating back north. I decided then to investigate the exact pattern of departure of this species from Madras by visiting the promising areas as much as possible for the next few days.

Early on the morning of 25th April I was at the well wooded campus of the Theosophical society, on the southern banks of the Adyar estuary. Within three hours of strolling about the area, I sighted atleast six to ten forest wagtails. Most of them were wandering about the shady forest, while some of them sat perched on low branches, uttering their 'pink.. pink' calls. Moreover, I saw several individuals as they kept flying over the tree tops from one forest glade to another. Since they were so common that day I presume that most of them must have been the north bound spring passage migrants, emigrating from their winter quarters in south west India.

A couple of days later, on the 28th, I was at the same campus once again at about the same time. Though this trip yielded a good bag of 51 bird species, I recorded that the last of the wagtails had left. But when I came to the same forest on the 30th April, and again on the 1st May, I saw atleast a pair each day, very close to the main entrance. In some of the birds there was a distinct 'dollar' in the upper gorget of the breast, thereby making the pattern quite striking.

My last record of the forest wagtail for the season came on the evening of 6th May when I heard first and then saw a bird a few minutes before sunset. The bird kept very actively running about feeding, despite the gathering gloom, and just as dusk deepened into darkness, it flew up vertically to the topmost canopy of a tree where I lost sight of it.

I did not come across any forest wagtail when I went birding around the same campus on the 8th May, nor did I see any for the rest of the summer. I did want to keep track of their movements and seasonal occurrence at Madras for atleast the next few years, but by December 1983 I found myself far away at Bharatpur. But I hope the other MNS birders will gather more information about these lovely birds in forthcoming years.

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Vultures arriving at Carrion by Arun Kumar Banerjee,  
Saurashtra University, Rajkot 360005: Most of us  
Indians consider vultures rather loathsome and abhorrent,  
and most bird authorities are singularly unenthusiatic about 'one of the most hideous birds in the world'. Most writers are nevertheless unstinting in their praises of the magnificent flight powers. Mountfort (1958) recorded vultures from an aircraft at heights of upto 15,000 feet over Africa. Useful scavenging qualities of vultures are also acknowledged. Their service to mankind throughout those parts of the world which they occupy is of inestimable value, for without them a great part of the overpopulated tropics and semi-tropics might well be uninhabitable.

Vultures in general are scavengers and they have fascinating feeding habits. But there are exceptions to this rule. In 1961 C.W.Benson noted one White-headed near Lusaka (Africa) feeding on flying-ants in company with two eagels, one Montagu's Harrier, atleast 50 pied crows and many black kites. But in the Gir Forest, I have noticed vultures scavenging on lion and leopard kills.

Flying vultures watch each other and follow the one that first locates carrion and sometimes they also follow certain mammalian predators to locate carrion. If the carcass is not attended by other species of birds and mammals and not hidden in deep shade they can easily locate it. It is quite a common sight in the Gir Forest to find lion on a fresh kill with vultures already patiently waiting in the surrounding trees. I have even observed several whitebacks settle in a tree adjacent to the site where a struggle between a lion and a buffalo was still in progress. Macworth-Praed and Grant (1952), while admitting the vultures eyesight is undoubtedly remarkable, suggest that it is not so much the animals that are watched as the behaviour of lower-flying kites and ravens. This is quite probable in the Gir Forest where the appearance of house and jungle crows on large predator kills are usual. In several National Parks of Africa to locate poachers the vultures pitching down into the trees from high up in the sky are observed from a great distance. Olfactory sense possibly plays a part in carrion location. While I was observing from a hideout, a large number of vultures on a buffalo carcass for two hours, everything went normally but suddenly, the change in the wind direction caused the mass of birds to leave the carcass and sit on a nearby tree.

As long as the wind remained in the same direction no feeding took place, although several times individual birds landed for short intervals near the carcass. The species involved were whitebacked and longbilled. Feeding recommenced when the wind changed, again to put me down wind. It was remarkable that the birds were able to identify a human smell inspite of that stinking carcass.

Vultures are quite cautious while approaching the carrion. They only descend to the ground if there are no signs of mammalian predators or scavengers which may constitute a source of danger to them. Actually before landing the method used is for one of the birds to circle at decreasing heights and settle on a nearby tree before landing. It has been also observed that the first bird will give a tentative peck accompanied by a backward jump, seemingly to test the quality of the carcass.

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The golden oriole of Kinnqur district by Rathin Mukherjee and Mahesh Chandra, High Altitude Zoology Field Station, Z.S.I. Solan, H.P.: It was our third trip to the District of Kinnqur, H.P., to undertake a survey of the fauna of that region. All day long while collecting fauna, there was no sight or sound of any bird. All of a sudden we heard Pia-au-o, Pia-au-o, the pleasant familiar loud mellow whistle of the golden oriole. The golden oriole are of a shy nature, and hence it was very difficult for us to watch this bird at a close distance. Moreover it was flying high up from tree top to tree top. After a few more Pia-au-o, Pia-au-o, the golden oriole was not seen or heard.

After a few days we moved camp to Karcham, and on moving there, we were greeted by the familiar whistle of the golden oriole, and we spotted a pair in the vicinity of the P W D Rest House.

We think that this is a new arrival, as no sighting of the golden oriole has been reported in this region over the past one decade, and we think that this is a case of a recent appearance of oriolus Kundoo in this region.

After completing our survey on fauna, we had to decamp and hence we had no time to gather any more information about the birds. We do hope that other birders will spend some time in gathering details of these birds.

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### Correspondence

Killing more than if necessary by Satish Kumar Sharma, I/C Mixed Plantation, Tatar Pur, Alwar Raj: On the 2nd of June 1984, while I was inspecting my forest nursery at the Tatarpur forest division of Alwar, I saw a pair of grey shrikes (*Lanius excubitor*) feeding their little one with what looked to me like crickets which they caught among the polythene bags containing seedlings of *Eucalyptus*. After a while they stopped feeding on crickets and impaled their prey on thorns of *Acacia Tortilis* which they nibbled at intervals.

On my return on 13th of June 1984, I watched their activities more closely with the help of my binoculars and noticed one of the adult shrikes attack a common Indian monitor lizard (*Varanus bengalensis*) and on getting hold of it had it impaled on a near by bush and began eating and feeding its little ones. After their feeding was over they flew away to a nearby tree.

On a rainy day one July, when I was inspecting Tatarpu mixed plantation 'A', I once more noticed a grey shrike fly down to the ground to get hold of a centipede. After a short struggle the shrike succeeded in killing the centipede which it carried to a Acacia Tortilis and began removing the poisonous fangs and legs of the centipede. Having got rid of them began feasting on its prey along with its little ones.

On many other occasions, I have observed the grey shrike attack, kill and feast on a variety of insects. I have also noticed they would not complete the meal at one sitting but nibble on the remains at leisure, before making a fresh attack.

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Telephone poles used for perching by the lagger falcon in the Thar Desert by Dr.V.C.Soni, Department of Biosciences, Saurashtra University, Rajkot 360 005: In the Thar Desert the population of the spiny tailed lizard uromastix is very high. Uromastix is very common especially between Bikaner and Falaudi. The common predator on the uromastix is the lagger falcon, Falco biarmicus in the desert.

Many birds are found to perch upon the telephone poles. It is very interesting to note that large number of telephon poles were found perched by the lagger falcon during August, 1981.

The falcon scans for the Uromastix from its favourite pole perch; as soon as the prey is found it flies to seize upon the prey and then returns to the pole with the prey. Thus, in the desert where tree height and tree density are smaller comparatively, the telephone poles serve as sites for the purpose of the perching in the desert and such poles are being intensively used by the falcons for the said purpose.

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Birds of Sambalpur (Orissa) by Hari Prasad Patnaik, Jr. Entomologist, pulses and oilseeds scheme, Chiplima 768 026, Sambalpur(Orissa): Sambalpur, one of the hilly regions of western Orissa, is located at an elevation of 154.3 meters above the sea level and experiences the extreme climatic conditions. The summer is quite hot and humid with an average temperature of 37.89°C. The average rainfall recorded in this area during monsoon months was 218.7 mm. The Hirakud Dam built across the river Mahanadi, provided

maximum irrigation facilities, as a result of which vast areas adjoining Sambalpur area are mostly utilised for cultivation. The entire surroundings are clad with rocky hills and within the radius of about 30 kms., one can see a number of ponds and irrigation tanks. In addition, a number of banian, peepal, neem, mango, tamarind, palm trees and few other forest trees constituted, both the road side and inland vegetation.

On the whole, the entire area, though seemingly more aquatic, provides home for a number of birds. And watching them and their habits, since the last two years i.e. 1982 and 1983, concurrently resulted in a fair list of birds and some of the preliminary observations on them are briefed in the following paragraphs.

To start with the aquatic birds, little grebe or dabchicks, cormorants, herons, little egrets, cattle egrets, cotton teals, pheasant tailed jacanas, bronzewinged jacanas, Indian moorhens, purple moorhens and coots were seen in outskirts village ponds and tanks, that are close to the river Mahanadi. Most of these ponds and tanks are filled with floating vegetation. Roosting of cormorants along with egrets, are seen on banian trees. The cormorants come in for roosting in flocks of 30 to 90 in the December to April. Their nesting sites could be traced within this locality. They might be nesting far away from their roosting sites. However, egrets in their breeding plumage were seen from April onwards. Nests of egrets and herons were mostly observed on tamarind trees. Little grebes, being sedentary in their habits, were observed, in small numbers ranging approximately, from 17-56 till January. Subsequently, their number increased upto March when the little grebe parties that were residing or visiting the village ponds consisted of more than 200 birds. It was further, observed that they made circular flights while descending or ascending the ponds. Also, the egrets and cormorants, before returning to their roosting sites, habitually, made a good gathering in the nearby paddy fields and on some trees, at a particular time of dusk between 5.35 pm to 6.45 pm and while perching over the banian trees they made circular flight (perhaps owing to certain disturbance), round the roosting trees. In the months of December to February, increasing numbers of cotton teals (8-43) and pheasant tailed jacana (10-24) were also observed.

As regards to the mynas, brahminy myna only appeared for breeding in the month of January. Building the nests by mynas usually commenced from the last week of March.



For nesting, common mynas and pied mynas preferred mostly mango trees, while brahminy myna preferred the light posts. And the latter, never left the nesting sites till the end of May, but soon after the breeding season, they disappeared from this locality.

Birds like purple moorhen and coots were observed for the first time at this location. On three occasions during the last two years grey hornbills were spotted in the outskirts in the month of February and March, these birds were always seen solitarily on the top of the banian trees making a cackling sound. The banian trees were still in a fruiting stage, this probably might have attracted the hornbills.

Birds like shikra, crow pheasant, pied crested cuckoo, black winged kite, collared bushchat, wryneck, pied king fisher and white stork, though not abundant, were sighted occasionally.

Besides, in the unmanned areas filled with scrubs and bushes, along the right dyke of the Hirakud dam, a fairly good number of redvented bulbuls and the common Indian nightjars were spotted.

Some of the common birds seen were small green bee eater, blue jay or roller, drongo, ring dove, white breasted king fisher, crimson breasted barbet, spotted owl, golden oriole, purple sunbird, finch lark, rufous tailed finch lark, Indian pipit, spotted munia, white throated munia, red munia, baya weaver, common wood shrike, kufous backed shrike, cliff swallows and blossom headed parakeets.

On a few occasions in the month of July, it was observed that the baya weaver and the spotted munia built their nests on the terminal branches of mango trees, at a height of 11-12 meters. This seemed quite unusual, so far the habits of these birds are concerned.

Lately, it is worth to mention that the malbar whistling thrush, whose occurrence in sambalpur(Orissa) mentioned in the book of Indian Birds (pp-223) are yet to be located.

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*Cover Picture:* SPOONBILLS (*Platalea Leucorodia*) — Courtesy E. HANUMANTHA RAO

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