

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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THE ICBP BIODIVERSITY PROJECT IN THE ORIENT

Within the Oriental Region there are many islands, and many isolated areas of forest and grassland, which support species of animals and plants which are found nowhere else. Examples are the evergreen forests of the eastern Himalayas and the Western Ghats, and the islands of Indonesia and the Philippines. The conservation of the wildlife of these unique areas is vital to maintain the diversity of the region as a whole.

The ICBP Biodiversity Project is designed to map these areas of endemism throughout the world. The distribution of all bird species with an estimated total range size of less than 50,000 km² will be mapped, and these maps overlaid to identify areas and habitats which support concentrations of these species. By comparisons with recent vegetation maps it will be possible to highlight those areas of endemism which are most seriously threatened by habitat destruction, and it will also be possible to assess whether the key habitats of these areas are adequately represented in the current protected areas system.

The species being mapped range from extreme rarities which have not been recorded for many years to birds which are common within their restricted ranges. A list of species is given below, broken down by region within the Orient. Please note that the regional breakdown cannot be perfect, so a few species overlap more than one region. The list includes a few taxa which are generally considered to be subspecies, but possibly warrant full specific status; in these cases, the specific name currently in use is given in parentheses. Several migratory species are included, because they have very restricted breeding ranges.

Most of the published information on the distribution of these birds has already been collated. We would be grateful for additional records of any of these species which OBC members have made on birding trips or during survey work, and any other unpublished information. Bird records are being entered into a computerised database, so it would be useful if records can be provided in the format outlined below:

- * SCIENTIFIC NAME of bird species.
- * SUBSPECIES name (only required to resolve taxonomic problems).
- * description (or sketch map) of the LOCALITY where bird(s) recorded, detailed enough to enable us to find accurate coordinates.
- * geographical COORDINATES of the locality, if possible. Please indicate how these were found - eg. the Sunday Times Atlas, the US Defense Mapping Agency Operational Navigational Charts (available from Stanfords, London, cover the entire world and are detailed enough to extract accurate coordinates).
- * maximum and minimum ALTITUDE (in metres) of records at this locality, if known.
- * HABITATS in which this bird has been recorded at this locality.
- * DATE(S) of records at this locality, with any details of the timing of breeding or seasonal movements.
- * ABUNDANCE at this locality.

NE Indian subcontinent, China and northern Indochina
Nycticorax magnifica White-eared Night-Heron, *Ardea imperialis* Imperial Heron.
Tadorna cristata Crested Shelduck, *Mergus squamatus* Scaly-sided Merganser.
Tetraogallus altaica Altai Snowcock, *Alectoris magna* Chinese Partridge, *Perdica manipurensis* Manipur Bush-quail, *Arborophila mandelli* Chestnut-breasted Partridge, *Arborophila ruficeps* Sichuan Partridge, *Arborophila gingica* White-necked Partridge, *Arborophila ardens* Hainan Partridge, *Tragopan blythii* Grey-bellied Tragopan, *Tragopan caboti* Chinese Tragopan, *Lophophorus sclateri* Sclater's Monal, *Lophophorus lhuysii* Chinese Monal, *Crossoptilon (crossoptilon) harmani* Tibetan Eared Pheasant, *Crossoptilon manchuricum* Brown-eared Pheasant, *Syrnaticus ellioti* Elliot's Pheasant, *Polypteron (bicalcaratum) katsumatae* Hainan Peacock-Pheasant.
Coturnicops exquisita Asian Yellow Rail, *Gallinago nemoricola* Wood Snipe, *Triinga guttifer* Nordmann's Greenshank, *Larus relictus* Relict Gull, *Larus saundersi* Saunders's Gull, *Sterna bernsteini* Chinese Crested Tern, *Srix davidi* David's Owl, *Caprimulgus centralasicus* Chinese Nightjar, *Apus acuticauda* Dark-rumped Swift, *Harpactes wardi* Ward's Trogon, *Indicator xanthomus* Orange-rumped Honeyguide, *Prunella koslowi* Koslov's Accentor, *Brachypteryx hyperythra* Rusty-bellied Shortwing, *Brachypteryx stellata* Gould's Shortwing, *Luscinia ruficeps* Rufous-headed Robin, *Luscinia obscura* Black-throated Robin, *Tarsiger hyperythrus* Rufous-breasted Bush-Robin, *Phoenicurus alaschanicus* Ala Shan Redstart, *Cinclidium frontale* Blue-fronted Robin, *Saxicola insignis* Hodgson's Bushchat, *Turdus feae* Grey-sided Thrush, *Prinia cinerascens* Swamp Prinia, *Locustella pleskei* Pleske's Warbler, *Megalurus pyrei* Japanese Marsh-Warbler, *Acrocephalus sargophilus* Streaked Reed-Warbler, *Acrocephalus (agricola) tangorum* Manchurian Paddyfield Warbler, *Abroscopus hodgsoni* Broad-billed Warbler, *Seiurus affinis* White-spectacled Warbler, *Phylloscopus (rickerti) goodsii* Hainan Warbler, *Phylloscopus cantator* Yellow-vented Warbler, *Phylloscopus fulviventris* Smoky Warbler, *Muscicapa mutui* Brown-breasted Flycatcher, *Ficedula (narcissina) elisae* Chinese Flycatcher, *Turdoides nipalensis* Spiny Babbler, *Babax waddelli* Giant Babax, *Babax koslowi* Koslov's Babax, *Garrulax maesi* Grey Laughingthrush, *Garrulax nuchalis* Chestnut-backed Laughingthrush, *Garrulax galbanus* Yellow-throated Laughingthrush, *Garrulax gularis* Rufous-vented Laughingthrush, *Garrulax sukatschewi* Sukatschew's Laughingthrush, *Garrulax lunulatus* Barred Laughingthrush, *Garrulax bieti* Biet's Laughingthrush, *Garrulax virgatus* Striped Laughingthrush, *Garrulax austeni* Brown-capped Laughingthrush, *Garrulax subunicolor* Scaly Laughingthrush, *Garrulax formosus* Red-winged Laughingthrush, *Garrulax henrici* Brown-cheeked Laughingthrush, *Liocichla omeiensis* Omei Liocichla, *Myzornis pyrhoura* Fire-tailed Myzornis, *Actinodura nipalensis* Hoary Barwing, *Actinodura waldeni* Streak-throated Barwing, *Actinodura souliei* Streaked Barwing, *Alcippe variegaticeps* Black-whiskered Fulvetta, *Alcippe cinerea* Yellow-throated Fulvetta, *Heterophasia gracilis* Grey Sibia, *Heterophasia pulchella* Beautiful Sibia, *Yuhina bakeri* White-naped Yuhina, *Pellorneum palustre* Marsh Spotted Babbler, *Rimator malacoptilus* Long-billed Wren-Babbler, *Spelaeornis caudatus* Rufous-throated Wren-Babbler, *Spelaeornis badeigularis* Rusty-throated Wren-Babbler, *Spelaeornis troglodyoides* Bar-winged Wren-Babbler, *Spelaeornis chocolatinus* Long-tailed Wren-Babbler, *Spelaeornis longicaudatus* Tawny-breasted Wren-Babbler, *Sphenocichla humei* Wedge-billed Wren-Babbler, *Stachyris oglei* Snowy-throated Babbler, *Paradoxornis paradoxus* Three-toed Parrotbill, *Paradoxornis flavirostris* Black-breasted Parrotbill, *Paradoxornis brunneus* Brown-winged Parrotbill, *Paradoxornis alphonisianus* Ashy-throated Parrotbill, *Paradoxornis zappayi* Grey-hooded Parrotbill, *Paradoxornis przewalskii* Rufous-throated Parrotbill, *Paradoxornis heudei* Black-browed Parrotbill, *Parus (palustris) hypermelas* Black-bibbed Tit, *Parus davidi* David's Tit, *Sitta yunnanensis* Black-masked Nuthatch, *Sitta formosa* Beautiful Nuthatch, *Oriolus mellianus* Silver Oriole, *Perisoreus internigrans* Sichuan Jay.

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EDITORIAL

Birds of Madras

Preston Ahimaz and the CPR Environmental Education Centre have published an attractive brochure, illustrating and describing the commoner birds of Madras. The Introduction says : Madras City is one of the most polluted cities of India. It has one of the highest road accident rates in the country and a high degree of water scarcity. Environmentally a bleak picture of the city seems to emerge, but this is not entirely true. Madras still has a great many trees and several parks worth mentioning. In fact there are over 200 species of birds in Madras and there are several areas like the Guindy Park, the Theosophical Colony grounds and Adyar Estuary where birding is a pleasure. A copy of this publication could be obtained from The CPR E E Centre, 1 Eldams Road, Madras 600 018.

Bird Flight

Professor Satish Dhawan, apart from sending satellites into space, found the time to prepare the Raman Memorial Lecture in 1988 and the subject was bird flight. This has been published by the National Aeronautical Laboratory, Bangalore and readers would do well to attempt to get a copy. The Introduction is reproduced in this issue and further extracts will follow.

Bulbuls on the Knee

J T M Gibson, a rare person, honoured both by British and Indian Governments has settled in Ajmer for the past many years, after ending his term as Principal of Mayo College. One of his pastimes is to establish friendly relations with the birds of his compound. He writes : It has taken me many months to tame two Redvented Bulbuls to eat from my hand. By last April they would take banana if I held it on the ground. Then I left here for Mussoorie to escape the heat and expected to have lost them. However they appeared again shortly after my return in August. One will now alight on my knee and eat banana which I am holding in my left hand. About twice a day, mid-day and tea time they come and demand to be fed! The bigger one is more shy than the other - won't come on my knee but eats from my hand... Which would be the male and which the female? I can see no difference except in size.

The Yellowthroated Bulbul

The article on the Yellowthroated Bulbul makes sad reading, but I am glad to report that in the mid-eighties Richard Fitter of the FFPS London, spotted this bird at the top of Nandi Hill in Bangalore. As far as I remember he was able to see the bird quite well through his binoculars, and spent quite some time making sure of its identity by looking over the reference books. S. Karthikeyan and his friends

must make a trip to Nandi. I hope the bulbul will not disappear from here.

Hindi Names of Birds

L. Balasubramaniam in his letter refers to the "vital importance (of) universally accepted Hindi names for all our bird species..." I doubt whether this is possible or desirable. In the Introduction to the 3rd Edition of the Book of Indian Birds Salim Ali says: "The practice of employing a uniform Latin terminology is current throughout the modern scientific world. It is a boon to workers in different countries since it is more or less constant and enables the reader of one nation to understand what the writer of another is talking about. To take an example: what the Englishman calls Hoopoe is Widehopf to the German. A Pole knows the bird as something else - doubtless with a good many c's z's and s's and other consonants in bewildering juxtaposition - while the Russian has yet another equally fantastic looking name for it..." I am afraid with our penchant for regional linguism we will be in difficulties if we try to invent Hindi names. We have some good names in Hindi like: bagla, kawwa, cheel, Gid, bulbul(?), andha bogla, titori, and a number of others. But 'hindification' per se does not seem to be worthwhile. In other words if there is no existing Hindi name, don't invent one but use the nearest one available be it in English, Gujarati or whatever. In course of time this will get standardised.

Field Guide for Water Birds

C.S. Nagendran, 21 Hardi Compound, 5th Cross Narayanpur Dharwad 8, has sent me a xerox copy of portion of the Draft Manual for Field Studies on Water Birds in Thailand. This has apparently been published by the Asian Wetland Bureau, and perhaps Mr. Nagendran will be happy to provide copies on payment of xeroxing

charges and postage. The illustrations and descriptions can be a useful aid to identification. It is a help to be provided with accurate descriptions of different types of beaks and tails. Tails: square, rounded, forked, wedge-shaped, pointed, notched. Bills: long and straight, curved upwards, short and thick, thin and sharply pointed, thin and hooked, sharp and pointed, curved downwards, flat and spoon-shaped, triangular, slightly flattened.

Rufous-bellied Eagles

Rishad Naoroji, Godrej Bhavan, Home Street, Bombay-1 continues his hunt for this rarest of our eagles. He writes: Corbett has a dazzling array of birdlife. Over 600 sp. and I have spotted a pair of Rufous-bellied Eagles near Sultan. It's a different matter finding a nest for photography and research. I have done surveys which have given me an idea of the various raptor species. Mountain Hawk Eagle is relatively common. The Red-thighed Falconet is also found here, up to Ranikhet... Should you ever get to know about a Rufous-bellied please do let me know immediately..."

Asian Tropical Forests

WWF has produced a splendid report on this subject. The section dealing with India is reproduced in this Newsletter. [India. "Rural Participation ..." (Page 12)] Copies are available with WWF India, P.O. Box 3058, Lodi Road, New Delhi 110 003.

Finally

A Happy New Year. But don't let your happiness be curtailed by the guilt of not having sent your donation to the Newsletter.

BIRD FLIGHT

PROF. SATISH DHAWAN
Palace Cross Road, Bangalore

Introduction

Since times immemorial man has been fascinated and intrigued by the beauty, grace and intricacies of bird flight. There is perfect harmony of form and function. It is equally exhilarating to attempt to understand how the physiology and performance of birds are related to scientific principles.

Birds evolved from reptilian stock during the Jurassic period some 150 million years ago. Insects were the first life form to conquer the air earlier, during the Carboniferous period, about 300 million years ago. The pterosaurs also

preceded the birds. These flying animals had evolved wings in which a membrane or skin was stretched out between elongated fingers. Until recently it was generally considered that Pterandon, with a wing span of about 7 m and weighing 16 kg (wing area = 4.6m^2 , $AR=10.5$, $W/S=3.6\text{ kg/m}^2$) was the largest flying animal that inhabited the earth. However, in 1971, the skeletons of a pterosaur - Quetzalcoatlus Northropi (Q.N.), were discovered in Texas, USA. It has been deduced that Q.N. had a wing span of 11m and weighed about 64kg (wing area = 8m^2 , $AR=15$, $W/S=8\text{ kg/m}^2$). By the late Cretaceous period the flying

reptile experiment seems to have failed and the Pterosaurs were extinct. The evolution of birds overlapped the pterosaurs but is considered quite distinct from them; in fact, the two flying forms must have been in competition for the same ecological niche with the birds eventually proving spectacularly more successful.

Evolution

While there are several theories regarding the lines of bird evolution, it is generally accepted that birds evolved

from reptiles and have come from the same stock as dinosaurs. Two main theses have been advanced about the route followed. One suggestion - the 'cursorial' theory - is that the ancestor was a bipedal ground dwelling reptile which, whilst running rapidly, derived advantage of aerodynamic lift from its fore limbs. Another view is that the first birds were arboreal in habit and had evolved from tree climbing lizard-like reptiles who used their forelimbs in gliding from tree to tree. Fig.1 depicts the evolutionary process. Evolutionary advancement must have led to the

scales on the forelimbs becoming elongated, eventually developing into feathers. Very little is known about the detailed process of evolution and it is possible that during the transformation of scales into feathers there was need for body temperature control and the aerodynamic advantages which accrued were really fortuitous. Obviously a stage was eventually reached when the aerodynamic qualities increasingly gave decisive advantages. The freedom of movement, increased access to new food supplies and a more efficient means of escape from enemies and predators - these factors must have become the prime foci for evolutionary change. The oldest fossil remains discovered, which display all the essential characteristics of a bird, are those of Archaeopteryx found in lime stone rocks in Bavaria, West Germany in 1861, two years after the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Fig.1 summarises the pre-history - the earliest known bird had feathers and was semi-reptilian in appearance. It was probably a poor flier compared to the birds of today. Its wing claws helped it to clamber about in trees and perhaps by flapping its wings it could move from tree top to tree top - often gliding part of the way. Fossils of birds since Archaeopteryx have also been found. Two of them, the Ichthyornis and the Hesperornis, are shown in Fig.1. Both became extinct long ago. Other more recent extinctions are the Dodo and the great Auk which were extinct only a few hundred years ago.

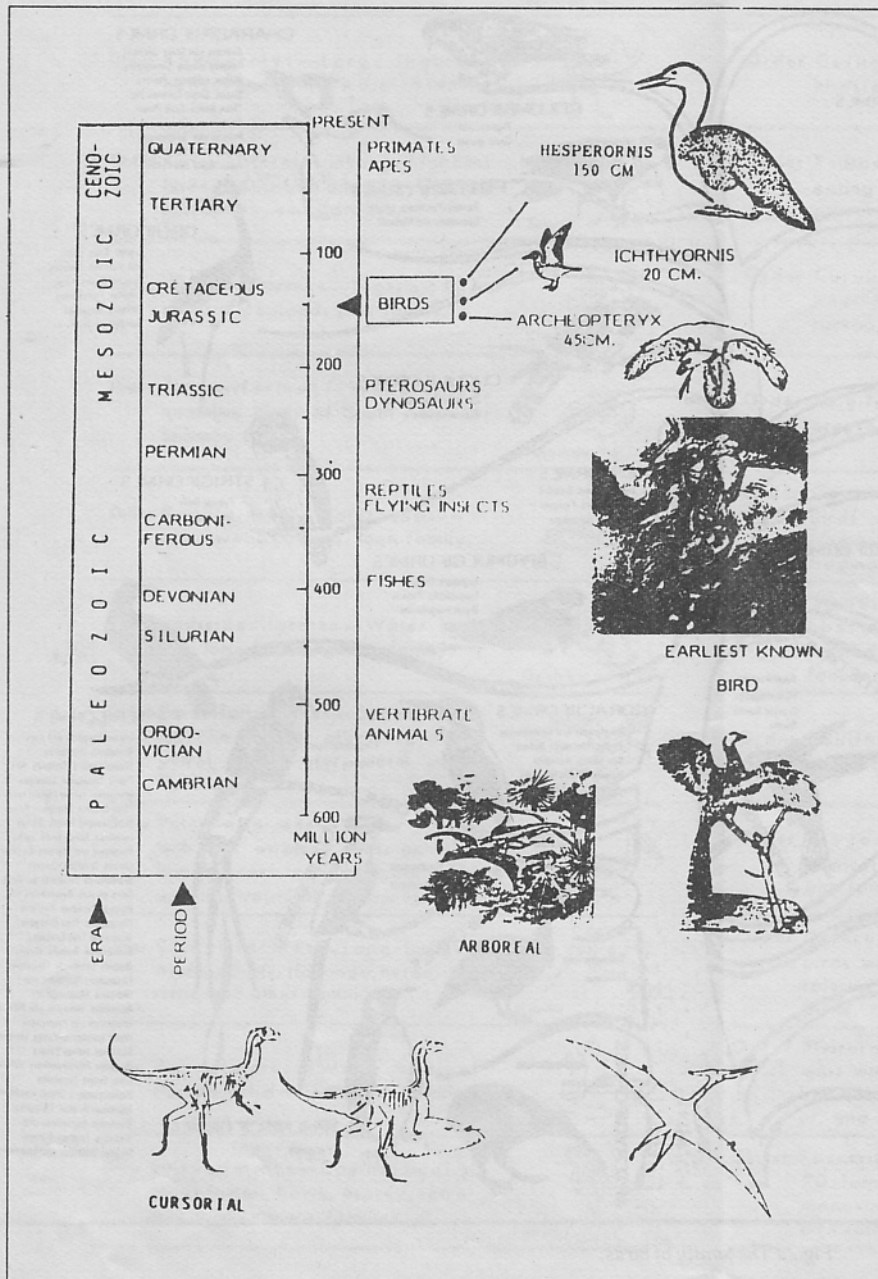


Fig.1. Dinosaur to bird

Species

Today birds inhabit every continent. There are nearly 9000 species classified into 27 orders. Fig.2a (from [1]) shows a family tree of the 27 orders with one bird from each. Some orders have only one

species. The order Passeriformes (*perching birds*) contains the largest number of species (70). It has generally been found that the survival rate of the primitive orders is much poorer compared to the highly evolved ones. Fig.2b (from [2,3]), gives a tabulated classification of birds.

Occurrence

James Fisher the ornithologist, has estimated that the world population of birds is approximately 100 billion. The most abundant are the oceanic birds of the large land

masses. The distribution is roughly as follows :

South America	3000 species
Africa	1500 species
Indian subcontinent	1200 species
China and Japan	1100 species
N.America & Canada	750 species
USSR	700 species
Australia	650 species

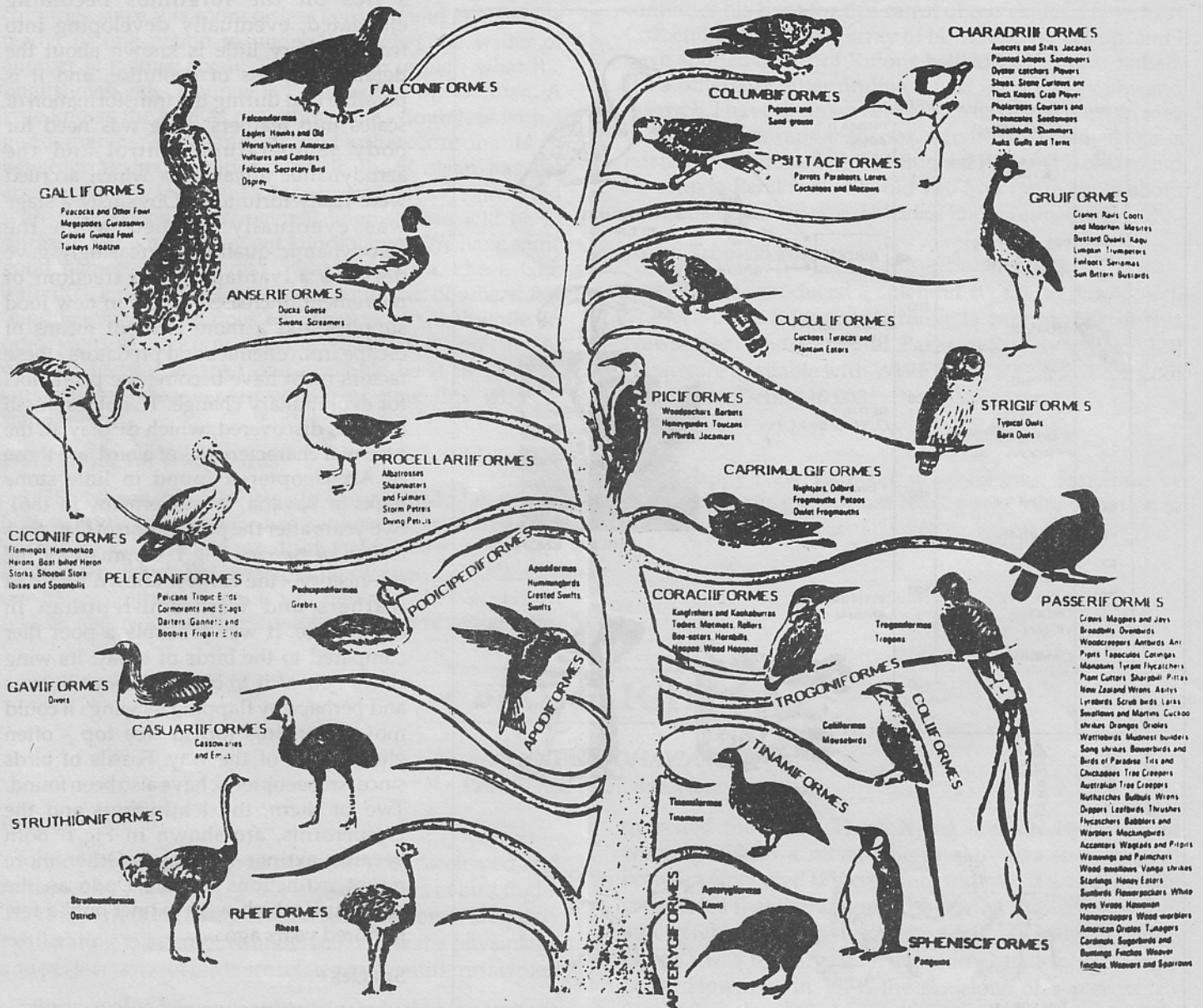
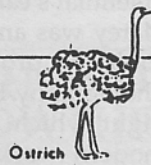


Fig.2a The family of birds.

Order Sphenisciformes—Flightless swimming birds with paddlelike wings; penguin family.



Order Struthioniformes—Large flightless birds of Africa and Arabia; ostrich family.



Order Rheiformes—Large flightless birds of South America; rhea family.



Order Casuariiformes—Large flightless birds of Australia and New Guinea; cassowary, emu families.



Order Apterygiformes—Flightless birds of New Zealand; kiwi family.



Order Tinamiformes—Weak-billed, quaillike birds of South America; tinamou family.



Order Gaviiformes—Water birds with three webbed toes; loon family.



Order Podicipediformes—Water birds with lobed toes; grebe family.



Order Procellariiformes—Sea birds with tubelike nostrils; albatross, diving petrel, shearwater, storm petrel families.



Order Pelecaniformes—Water birds with four webbed toes; anhinga, booby, cormorant, frigate bird, pelican, tropic bird families.



Order Ciconiiformes—Long-legged wading birds; flamingo, heron, ibis, stork, and other families.



Order Anseriformes—Water birds of marshlands; duck, screamer families.



Order Falconiformes—Daytime birds of prey; falcon, hawk, osprey, secretary bird, vulture families.



Order Galliformes—Fowl-like birds; curassow, grouse, guinea fowl, hoatzin, megapode, pheasant, turkey families.



Order Gruiformes—Varied group of chiefly land-dwelling birds; bustard, cariama, crane, rail, and other families.



Order Charadriiformes—Shore birds and water-feeders; auk, gull, plover, sandpiper, and other families.



Order Columbiformes—Pigeonlike birds; pigeon, sand grouse families.



Order Psittaciformes—Seed- and fruit-eating birds with hooked bills; parrot family.



Order Cuculiformes—Varied group of tree- and land-dwelling birds; cuckoo, touraco families.



Order Strigiformes—Nighttime birds of prey; barn owl, typical owl families.



Order Caprimulgiformes—Owl-like birds with typically weak bills; frogmouth, nightjar, oilbird, owl-frogmouth, potoo families.



Order Apodiformes—Strong-winged birds that spend much time flying; crested-swift, hummingbird, swift families.



Order Coliiformes—Long-tailed, fruit-eating birds of Africa; coly family.



Order Trogoniformes—Long-tailed tropical birds with weak feet; trogon family.



Order Coraciiformes—Varied group of birds with large bills and metal-colored feathers; bee-eater, kingfisher, roller, and other families.



Order Piciformes—Tree-dwelling birds, most with long, strong bills; barbet, jacamar, toucan, woodpecker, and other families.



Order Passeriformes—Perching birds; 70 families, including broadbill, manakin, lyrebird, and all song-bird (lark, thrush, etc.) families.



Fig.2b Classification of birds. (Class Aves - Birds; Subclass Neornithes - True birds.) Superorder Impennes - Penguins. Superorder Neognathae

As noted before, the most highly evolved birds are the Passeriformes order - sparrows, finches, crows, jays, etc.

The ability to fly - like many other biological properties of living things - came about as an adaptation to particular conditions. The variety of habitats and the varied response to them has led to an incredible diversity of flight techniques and apparatus :

- Swifts spend most of their lives in the air
- Sparrows cannot glide
- The larger vultures are champion gliders but cannot take off without a run into the wind
- Penguins and ostriches cannot fly
- Geese fly over the Himalayas (9000 m)
- The humming bird can hover for long periods
- Arctic terns migrate between the Arctic and Antarctic continents - 18,000 km each way.

It would therefore appear as if no two species fly exactly in the same manner!

Pioneers of flight

These lectures examine some general features of bird flight - the flight apparatus of the bird and the modalities

of flight. Man learnt to build aircraft - machines - which enable him to fly by studying birds. Pioneers like Otto Lilienthal (1849-1896) in Germany and E.J. Marey (1830-1904) in France and George Cayley (1773-1857) in England were among the earliest scientists who not only observed birds but analysed their flying. Fig.3a shows Lilienthal's early glider and his diagrams of birds' wings. Marey was among the first to realise that birds in flight could be properly studied only through high speed photography. Fig.3b shows his apparatus and the phases of flight which he derived from his photographs. More modern work by Brown [4,5,6]. Pennycuick [7,8] and Tucker [9] has helped clarify the essential aerodynamics.

The Scientists

The Wright Brothers' first flight in a heavier than air machine in December 1903 (Fig.3c), ushered mankind into the era of the conquest of the air. The science of flight - aerodynamics and flight mechanics - rapidly grew out of the earlier foundations laid by Newton, d'Alembert, Helmholtz, Rayleigh, Prandtl and Von Karman. The modern science of aeronautics is a very sophisticated combination of mathematical theory and physical principles supplemented by experimental measurements.

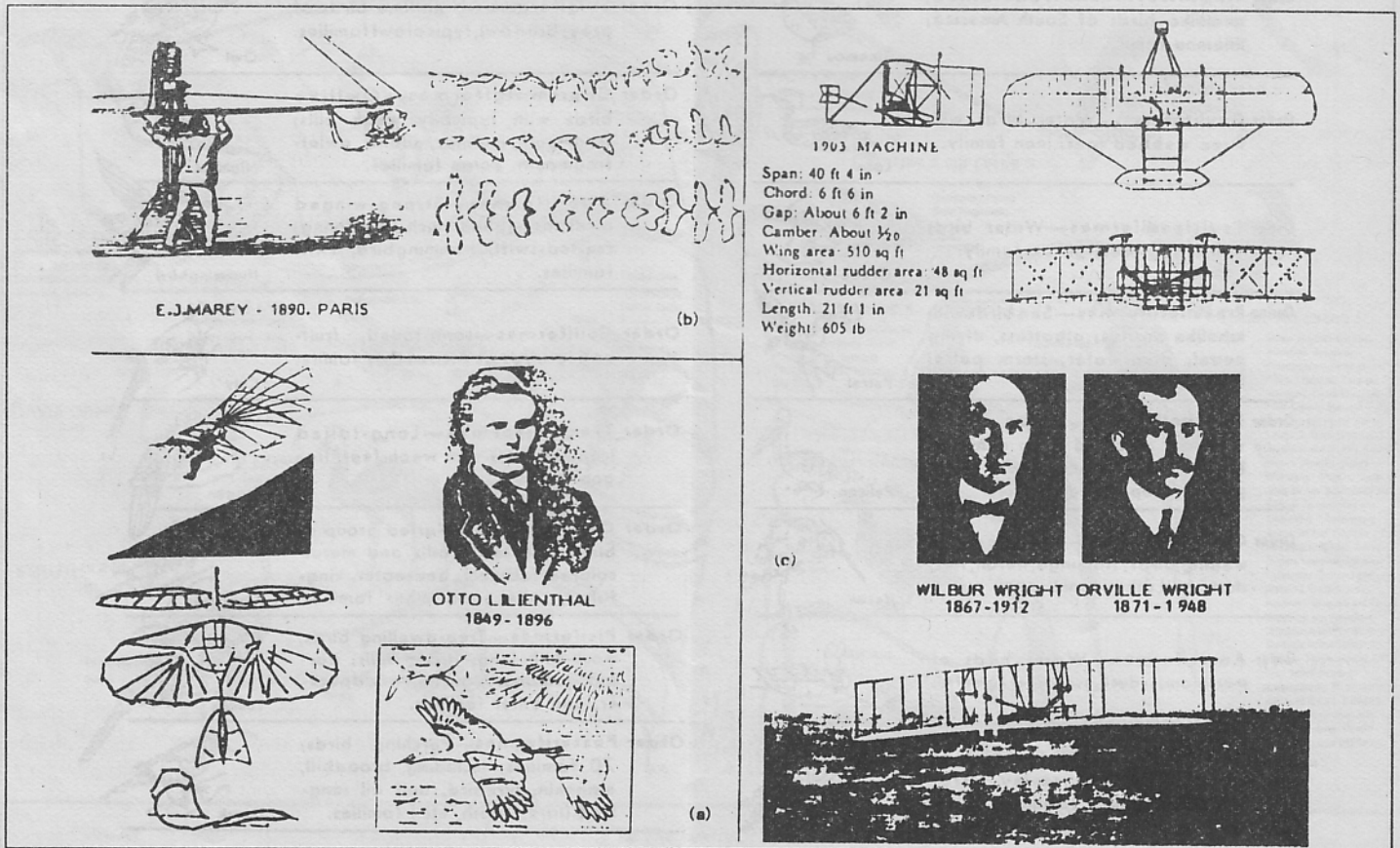


Fig.3. Pioneers of Flight.

Man has learnt to build aircraft which can carry 350 passengers 10,000 km non-stop across oceans, fly faster than a bullet and zoom to the outer edges of the atmosphere, etc., and yet there are complexities of bird flight for which there is as yet no complete mathematical description. Man-made flying machines still cannot

perform the range of manoeuvres that a blackbird or a sparrow can. There is still much which science can learn from the birds.

(To be continued)

A TRIP TO THONDEBHAVI IN SEARCH OF YELLOWTHROATED BULBUL

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and

S. KARTHIKEYAN, J.N. PRASAD, T.S. SRINIVASA and B. ARUN

Merlin Nature Club, 13, 8th Cross, 30th Main, J.P. Nagar I Phase, Bangalore 560 078

During his Birds of Mysore Survey, Salim Ali collected three specimens of Yellowthroated Bulbuls *Pycnonotus xantholaemus* at Thondebhavi about 83 km north of Bangalore on 29 December 1939. With an idea of sighting this bulbul, endemic to inland South India and to study its habitat, we made a trip to Thondebhavi on 1 September 1990.

After a short coffee-break, we made our way to the only hillock, Arasalubande (892 m above MSL) of coordinates 13°30' N, 77°30' E, Thondebhavi. After nearly an hour long search we could not sight the bulbul, we were so eager to see. The reason was quite obvious - the hillock was totally denuded. What remained of "..... the sparse thorn scrub, interspersed with some large trees" that Salim Ali found in 1939 (JBNHS Vol.43 : 325-326) was only scattered clumps of lemon grass *Cymbopogon* on the boulder strewn slopes.

As we were trying to search the top of the hillock, one of us (SS) flushed a Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis* from a *Cymbopogon* clump. A close inspection of the spot revealed a scrape nest containing two eggs. The nest amidst the clump was lined with rootlets. For a species known only to nest well above the ground in bushes and trees, this nest, built typical of a ground nesting species was something unexpected and totally baffling. Much to our surprise we did not see a single bush within about 200 m radius of the hillock. The safety in the slopes of the rocky hillock may have compensated for the absence of 'its typical nest-substrate' and prompted the dove to nest on the ground.

While observing the dove's nest a Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* flew overhead. At the base of the hillock a flock of eight Redrumped Swallows *Hirundo daurica* were observed swooping on the winged termites *Odontotermes* sp. emerging out of a small hole in the ground. Suddenly, from over our heads, a Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax* glided

down and settled next to the emergence hole of the termites. The eagle gleaned out every termite as it emerged and not even a single insect was seen fluttering into the air in the next 20 minutes. While the eagle feasted on termites a pair of Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* swooped repeatedly on the eagle, nearly striking it. The hostile attacks of the mynas did not deter the eagle from its tasty repast.

Before we could climb down the hillock we had sighted Pariah Kites *Milvus migrans*, Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*, Rufoustailed Finch-Lark *Ammomanes phoenicurus*, Dusky Crag Martin *Hirundo concolor*, parakeets, crows and heard a flock of Large Grey Babblers *Turdoides malcolmi* rendering a disorderly chorus far away.

Though we failed to sight the species we had come after, the present state of the hillock at Thondebhavi showed quite glaringly that loss of the sparse vegetation could lead to a local extermination of Yellowthroated Bulbul in hills where it once flourished.

CORRESPONDENCE

NEW RECORDS OF WADERS IN ASSAM.
PRASANTA SAIKIA and P.C. BHATTACHARJEE,
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781 014, Assam

There were altogether 182 species of water birds which were originally reported by Ali and Ripley (1983), out of which 87 species were waders. During the course of a long study in the wetlands and around the Brahmaputra as many as 30 wader species could not be traced now.

But it is interesting to note that 3 new species have been recorded in the course of the survey (1986 to 1990). The

species which are newly recorded are Terek Sandpiper or Avocet sandpiper *Tringa terek*, Rednecked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* and Giant Heron *Ardea goliath*.

Terek Sandpiper

It is a winter visiting migratory wader whose recorded distribution are in Western India and West-Bengal. The species is unmistakable by its long slender upcurved bill, rather short orange yellow legs, greyish brown with conspicuous white forehead and supercilia. The species was first recorded on 17th November 1988 in the Brahmaputra river track near Palasbari. Subsequently the species were seen upstream near Guwahati. The Terek Sandpipers are being trapped along with other waders in the Brahmaputra river tract and nearby wetlands. One specimen of Terek sandpiper has been collected from the trapper.

Rednecked Phalarope

It is a winter migratory wader and the recorded distribution are in Delhi, Rajasthan (Bharatpur), Bihar, Karnataka and Kutch in the inland waters in India. The Rednecked Phalarope is similar to the Grey Phalarope and can be distinguished only by being slightly smaller in size, darker grey upper parts, a prominent white wing bar visible in flight; a finer black bill, and blackish legs. It differs from other waders by its characteristic habit of alighting and swimming on squelchy mud. The bird was first recorded in Assam on Panidihing-wetland in Sibsagar district. The wetland Panidihing, very near to Brahmaputra river has a great potential for being made into a bird sanctuary. On 17th January 1990 a flock of 5 birds was located in the shallow muddy tract from a distance of 100 meters, by a spotting scope.

Giant Heron

It is an African species and is a rare vagrant and recorded in Pakistan, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The species was recorded in Deeper beel in January 1986, January 1987 in Sareswar beel, January 1989 also at Sareswar. This bird is extremely rare and can be seen only as an isolated individual. It is considerably larger than the Grey Heron. The iris is yellow with an outer rim of red. The bill is dark. The lower mandible, gape and commissure paler and yellowish. The legs and feet are slaty black. The crown and crest are chestnut.

SIGHTING OF GREAT CRESTED GREBE IN EASTERN RAJASTHAN. RAKESH VYAS and MANOJ KULSHRESHTHA, 2-P-22, Vigyan Nagar, Kota 324 005

The Great Crested Grebe is a waterfowl which causes a flutter in the hearts of bird watchers. It is nowhere

abundant, but lately there are reports of its breeding in Kutch in Western Gujarat. In the past, we had not encountered a Great Crested Grebe in Kota in Eastern Rajasthan. This year, however in the last week of October, we saw a beautiful bird swimming in the centre of the lake along with Common Pochards and Tufted Pochards. It was distinguishable due to its long white neck and black crest. Unlike Pochards it kept diving for 30-40 seconds to chase and catch fish under water, only to emerge a little distance away with a fish in its bill. We were thrilled to see a Great Crested Grebe in our area, but thought it to be a passage migrant or a vagrant. Our joy knew no bounds, when on a subsequent visit to Alniya reservoir, we saw 79 Great Crested Grebes. They were scattered all over the place and seemed to be thoroughly enjoying themselves. We also found that they were not very wary of our presence and kept coming up to 50 feet from us without showing any sign of nervousness. That day, we observed two Great Crested Grebes in full summer plumage with dark ear tufts and red ruffle, four in partial summer plumage with orangish sheen. We also saw three juveniles or first winterers as they had no crest, and body and bill were dull grey in colour. They were seen following a pair of adults everywhere.

Then on 23rd November, the largest number of 112 Great Crested Grebes were seen at Alniya and 25 at Ranpur village tank, which is about 5-6 km from Alniya, as the crow flies. These birds stayed near Kota throughout the 89-90 winter. The number started declining from the 2nd week of January, and by the end of January all had gone except one, which was seen at Ranpur on 31st January. This last one had also gone, when we again visited Ranpur on 10th February.

It is difficult to attribute the presence of such a large number to any one factor. Probably their breeding in Kutch has got something to do with it as subadults and adults in full summer plumage were seen. They probably got concentrated in this area as the rest of Rajasthan had insufficient rainfall. We may know more about their migration and favourite wintering areas, if we have the facilities of banding and tracking. In the absence of such facilities, accumulated data like this, by various bird watchers in different areas can throw some light on the winter movement of the Great Crested Grebe.

THE COMMON BABBLER AS A FOSTER MOTHER. A.J. ANANDAN, 10 Leonard Lane, Richmond Town, Bangalore 560 025

The campus of the National Police Academy, the premier police training Institute in India, about 15 km from Hyderabad, with its bushes, trees and rocks, is a veritable bird sanctuary.

In September 1987, I was there for a week, attending one of the numerous courses we undergo as part of our

bureaucratic rejuvenation programme.

Being a novice in bird-watching, I was fortunate to play apprentice to a colleague from Delhi, Arun Bhagath, whose knowledge of birds amazed me as we proceeded with our birding on the first day. Arun taught me two basic rules of birding - start very early in the day and do not watch a bird with the sun behind it. We followed the rules strictly and soon were rewarded with sighting of a number of birds. As we were completing our wanderings for the day, we came across a pair of Pied-crested Cuckoos. I referred to a few books and collected some material on these picturesque cuckoos. The Sub-adult has a less developed crest and a small white wing patch. Some of these birds are migratory and come from Africa, arriving in India more or less synchronising with the rains in early June (hence its other name, Monsoon bird) and leave by September or October. They are largely arboreal and insectivorous, feeding up in trees but also descending into low bushes and even to the ground, in search of food. They are brood-parasitic, mainly on babblers.

Our field trip early next morning was also equally eventful. The first bird we saw was a Golden Oriole. But the high point came after an hour when Arun pointed out a young Pied-crested Cuckoo, on a small tree ahead of us. We sat down on a rock and watched it. On the tree behind us we noticed a babbler flapping its wings and jumping from one branch to another. Evidently, it was trying to draw the attention of the Pied-crested Cuckoo to our presence. The young cuckoo took no notice of this and continued sitting with a blank look. The babbler hesitated to cross over to the other side because we were sitting in between. We could not figure out why the babbler was agitated. Then it dawned on us that it was the foster-mother of that cuckoo. So she was desperately trying to warn her foster-offspring about what she thought as an impending danger. After a few more minutes, the babbler screeched and jumped from one branch to the other. But the cuckoo did not notice this at all. Then in a desperate attempt the babbler darted across, almost brushing against our heads and joined the cuckoo on the other side. She touched it with her wings and chirruped. Both of them flew away in the opposite direction.

I had only read about brood-parasitic habits of cuckoos but that day I was able to see it in real life, a rare drama in nature.

ECOTOURISM - A LOOK AT BIRDWATCHERS.
ARUN BHATIA, 241, 4th Cross, 1st Block,
Koramangala, Bangalore 560 054

A WWF USA publication "Ecotourism: The potentials and pitfalls" authored by Elizabeth Boo (1990 pp.72 price not stated) is a study of revenue needs pitted against demands placed on ecosystems due to tourism to natural areas in third world countries. In delving deep into

developing ecotourism wisely and recognizing this as an enormous challenge, it has several nuggets of information on birdwatchers, mostly laudatory.

1420 individual areas covering 175 million hectares now play an important role in promoting tourism in almost all tropical countries and increasing number of tourists enjoy participating in some aspect of park improvement e.g. helping with trail repairs, censusing of animals and birds, and habits of these species. In a 1988 WWF survey, natural history was found to be the most widely given reason for travel (69%) and among activities, jungle excursions (23%) wildlife observing (55%) were topped by birdwatching (58%), especially as half of those who listed jungle excursions and wildlife observing stated that they enjoyed birdwatching.

Certain groups of tourists become "attached" to a particular park. Sealions and albatrosses have undergone behaviour changes in the Galapagos since rates of tourism have dramatically increased.

US tour operators have researched birding tourism as a specialized form of travel and many tour operators offering birdwatching tours contribute to the conservation and maintenance of natural areas. For instance, Victor Emmanuel heads an organization with the same name and leads primarily birdwatching trips. On one tour to Costa Rica, he donated \$500 per tourist to help buy threatened rainforest. He also posted a notice in his agency's news-letter, which has a circulation of 10,000 for people to make a certain pledge for every bird seen on a particular trip and raised \$16000 in that campaign in 1989.

Nature tourists were far less demanding about accommodations, but eager to learn about the area and demanded more educational materials. The study recommends that local conservation organizations give weight to local population (consult, represent, employ) to ensure their input in nature tourism sites.

WHO IS THIS JERDON ? S. THEODORE BASKARAN, 124, Ashoka Pillar, Bangalore 560 001

The name Jerdon was very much in the news a few years back when the Bombay Natural History Society launched a search for the fabled Jerdon's Courser and subsequently when the bird was located near Cuddapah. In addition to this Two-banded courser, quite a few other birds have also been named after Jerdon.

Jerdon belonged to that category of British civil servants, who in addition to building the empire, looked around and took interest in what they saw. Some, like Robert Sewell, studied monuments and some, like D.C. Drury, after whom an orchid in Courtallam hills of Tamilnadu has been named, studied plants. And some others like Jerdon took interest in birds.

Jerdon served mostly in Madras presidency, in the Nilgiris, Travancore, Tiruchi and Madras in the 1840s and

50s. He sent the pelts of the birds he could not identify to the British museum in England for taxonomical classification. In this work he was assisted by his colleague Walter Elliot, who incidentally is the man who discovered the Madras Tree Shrew and in the process lent his name to it (*Anathana ellioti ellioti*). Jordon's book *The Birds of India* published in 1862 marked the earliest attempt at systematic look at the birds of the Indian sub-continent. In this work Jerdon had incorporated the earlier works of Hodgson and Blyth also, names that are familiar to the bird-watchers in India as quite a few species have been named after these two pioneers.

The Indian birds that are named after Jerdon are Blyth's Baza (*Aviceda jerdoni*, Handbook No.125), Indian Little Ringed-plover (*Chardruis dubius jerdoni*, No.380), Jerdon's Courser (*Cursorius bitorquatus*, No.441) Southern Rufuous Woodpecker (*Micropternus brachyurus jerdonii*, No.804) Jerdon's Chloropsis (*Chloropsis cochinchinensis jerdoni* No.1107), White-breasted Laughing Thrush (*Garrulax jerdoni*, No.1309), Ceylon Tickell's Flycatcher (*Muscicapa tickelliae jerdoni*, No.1443), Eastern Orphean Warbler (*Sylvia hortensis jerdoni*, No.1565), Jerdon's Bushchat (*Saxicola jerdoni*, No.1704), Western Rufuous-breasted Accentor (*Prunella strophiaata jerdoni*, No.1782), Brown Rock Pipit (*Anthus similis jerdoni*, No.1897) and Jerdon's Rufuous-bellied Munia (*Lonchura kelaarti jerdoni*, No.1973).

ROOSTING OF EGRETS. DR V.R. BHAGWAT and DR. N.A. RAMTIRTHKAR, 'SWIFT' Nature Club, Govt. Medical College, Miraj 416 410

The majority of birds come together for different reasons. One of the purposes of bird aggregation is roosting, to spend the night in relative security. We report on one such roost. The roost is heterospecific involving Cattle Egrets, Little Egret, Median Egret, Jungle Crows, House Crows and Common Mynas. Cattle Egrets predominate.

The area and site

The campus of our Government Medical College is situated about a km from the main town of Miraj in the north. It is divided by a state highway. The site is located on the eastern side of the campus, where a nucleus of Banyan trees is surrounded by Casuarinas, Rain Trees, Siris, Gulmohar, Jacaranda and others. Around the cluster of trees, there are nine residential multistorey buildings.

Activities prior to roost

Birds come from all directions in the evening, starting about 5.30 pm. The first to arrive are the mynas, followed by crows. The mynas and crows shift from one tree to another and sometimes there is fierce fighting among mynas. Jungle Crows occupy the top branches.

Egrets arrive in small flocks of about 12 birds at a time. The largest flock observed contained 58 birds. Jungle Crows disturb the incoming birds by chasing them, or even forcing them to leave the place.

Egrets alight on the top branches of the banyan tree and shift to the interior branches under the canopy for more comfortable positions. They clean and preen their feathers. Occasional confrontation occurs between Cattle Egrets and Little Egrets. The aggression is indicated by pecking at each other and raising the head and neck feathers by Cattle Egrets, while the back and breast feathers are raised by Little Egrets. This lasts for about 4-5 minutes and then they settle down.

Roosting pattern and duration

The mixed group does not form concentric sleeping aggregation. On the contrary, egrets prefer the banyan tree, while mynas, the adjacent siris and rain trees. Rarely do they mix and intermingle during the roosting. The average duration of the roost was 12 hours. The number of egrets roosting were 540 on an average. The count was carried out on successive evenings on two separate occasions.

As the day breaks, egrets start their activities with chattering and shifting to other branches, adjusting feathers and stretching wings. The earliest to leave the place, are the Median and Little Egrets, mostly in singles, followed by Cattle Egrets in 2s and 3s, sometimes in a loose flock of 6-8 birds. By 6.45 am, most of the birds leave the site.

These birds have been seen using the place consistently year after year. If the disturbance becomes unbearable, they shift to other trees about 200 metres away from the main nucleus of the trees in the campus.

RARE SIGHTINGS IN KUTCH. S.N. VARU, Junavas Madhpur, Bhuj 370 020

The little Gull *Larus minutus* : On 17.12.1989, we were at the Sinay reservoir in Anjar Taluka with members of the Pelican Nature Club. We saw 3 diminutive sized gulls but were not sure of their identity. We visited the area again on 21.12.1990 with MK Himmatsinhji and we were sure that what we had seen was the Little Gull, a small blackheaded species of the Palaearctic Region. Salim Ali suspected the occurrence of this bird in Kutch during his visits between 1956 to 74, and this was confirmed in a note in the Journal of the BNHS Vol.71-(3) 12/74. However, he wanted a specimen to be absolutely certain. We have so far a single specimen from Ladakh, a possible sighting in Bombay harbour and the notes by Salim Ali. We can now be certain that the bird visits Kutch in winter.

Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus* : While bird watching at Chhari Dhandh we saw a bulbul sized bird, brown coloured, with the edge of the tail feathers black, and a black line on the neck. It was feeding on unripe fruit on

the *Piloo* tree. The Pictorial Guide confirmed our identification. The Handbook reveals that the bird was once seen in Kihim (near Bombay) by Salim Ali, and has also been recorded in Kutch previously at Kharbet in 1960. We also saw a female drinking water from a village tank not far from Chhari Dhandh. So this is the second record of the bird in Kutch.

(Salim Ali, on his morning walk in Kihim, saw a bird which looked very much like a Grey Shrike, but was yet different. Excited by this vision of something new, he rushed back to the house, got his gun and collected the bird. Taxonomical investigation confirmed its identity. While in its home range of Iraq and Southern Iran it lives largely on dates and figs, its stomach contents showed that while in our area it lived on berries of lantana, ber, and *Salvadora persica* ... ED)

Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus*: We saw this bird at Chhari Dhandh on 23.2.1990. Salim Ali recorded this in the Little Rann of Kutch on 3.1.1946. Thus an old record is confirmed after 44 years.

PARTIAL ALBINISM IN A KOEL (*Eudynamis scolopacea*). L. SHYAMAL, D-206, IISc Campus, Bangalore 560 012

On the 30th of August, 1990, a flying male Koel with very conspicuous white patches on the wings caught my attention. Initially I thought it was an immature with some of its feathers still sheathed. In the following three weeks I was able to observe it almost daily in the afternoons, stretching its wings (sunning?), on a fig tree behind my residence in IISc, Bangalore. The inner vanes of the secondaries of both the wings and two tail feathers were totally white. There was no special behaviour shown by crows or other Koels towards it. When normally foraging with wings closed only small patches on the sides and a line on the tail showed white. Towards the end of September, I could see that the unpigmented parts of the feathers had worn out faster than the pigmented parts. By the end of September, it seemed that the Koel had moved out of my area and I no longer saw it.

It would be interesting for observers of abnormal plumages to see if the abnormality remains after the next moult and thus possibly attribute it to either environmental or genetic causes.

INTRODUCING MR. DAVID HANCOCK. KR.SURESH SINGH, Auto House, 3, Sringer Singh Building, Lal Bagh, Lucknow 226 001

There is a biologist/ornithologist based in Canada/USA who also happens to be a publisher. He is interested in examining manuscripts from Indians with a view to publish them. He is chiefly interested in avicultural and conservation topics as also cranes, waterfowl and

galliformes. Three titles published by him recently are 'Rocky Mountail Wildlife', 'Wild Berries' and 'Eskimo Life'. I request that you kindly publish a small note in the next issue of our Newsletter so that our younger people may come to know of it. His name and address : Mr David Hancock, Wildlife Research Center, 19313 Zero Avenue, Surrey, B.C. V3S 5J9, Canada.

FEEDING HABITS OF THE BLACK DRONGO. ASIF R. KHAN, 'Van Chhaya', Prant House, Athwa Lines, Surat 395 001, Gujarat

All living creatures adapt themselves to the change in their habitat by introducing new means and techniques, to feed and nest. One well known example is that of the Grey Tits in Europe. These tits open the Aluminium foil cover of milk-bottles and drink the contents.

One such habit is now adapted by the King Crow or Black Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis*. Tonight I observed a unique habit of this acrobatic insect hunter. By 6.15 pm all the birds had returned to their roosting places, but one Black Drongo established itself on a branch of a Rain Tree just above a glowing tubelight. It was already dark and many insects were attracted towards the tubelight. The Black Drongo fed on these insects from 6.30 to 9.00 pm. Next night again it was there feeding on insects.

Thus the (City) Black Drongo which is a diurnal species has now become partially nocturnal to survive in this cement Jungle by feeding around tubelights.

BLACK STORKS IN MAHARASHTRA. P.G. SAWJI, Opp. Gajanan Talkies, Khamgaon 444 303

During our regular birdwatching at Januna Lake two km away from Khamgaon, Dist. Buldana, Maharashtra State, we sighted Black Storks *Ciconia nigra*, regularly wintering at this beautiful lake. All the time they were five in number.

SPARROWS - LEARNING BY EXPERIENCE. S.DEVASAHAYAM, L4/38 KSHB Colony, Malaparamba, Calicut 673 009

While at Madras during May 1990, I was told of an accident that occurred to fledgelings of house sparrows *Passer domesticus* at my parents' residence at Tambaram. A pair of sparrows had built their nest in a crevice in the wall of the well in the backyard. One day my parents were attracted by the frantic cries of the sparrows near the well and when they peeped in they found that two fledgelings had fallen into the water and drowned. Probably the fledgelings had made their first attempt to fly or had accidentally fallen from the nest. This happened on two occasions but later the sparrows learnt their lesson and stopped raising their broods in the well.

INDIA. RURAL PARTICIPATION IN CONSERVATION IN MANIPUR. AJAY RASTAGI

The 'Seven Sisters' – India's seven northeastern states – are connected to the rest of mainland India by a strip of land barely 50km wide. Manipur, one of the Seven Sisters, is a frontier state bordering Burma and is amongst the greenest states in the country. It shares the last remnants of the dwindling rainforests in northeast India with the State of Arunachal Pradesh.

The best maintained forests in this region tend to be those which are under the direct ownership of tribal communities. In Manipur, over 28% of the total forest cover falls in this category. These forests are governed by village law under the Meiyam Act. Villages are divided into three or four zones, each of which is under the charge of a Chieftain who is liable to punishment by the village council in case of any breach of law in his zone. This system has worked well since time immemorial but is now losing ground because of many factors in complex interplay with one another. A dramatic increase in *jhuming* (slash-and-burn cultivation), which is now spreading to steeper and steeper slopes, the reduction in the *jhum* cycle and faster rate of degradation of *jhum* fields are amongst the chief factors. It is estimated that in Manipur about 65,000 ha are *jhumed* annually and over 40 tonnes of soil a year may be eroded from each hectare. Deforestation due to timber extraction has also increased sharply. An indicator of this is the fact that the number of saw mills in the capital city of Imphal alone has increased from five in 1970 to 85 in 1980 and doubled again in the following six years. It is interesting to note that, though the market price for timber has steadily gone up, the tribals are forced to sell 20ha of dense tree crop to a contractor for just 1,000 rupees (US\$70). The rapid degradation of hill forest has led to disruption of the wetland ecosystems in Manipur's Imphal valley. Logtak Lake is one of the few remnants of the once-extensive wetland ecosystem. The high siltation rate has reduced the area of the lake to about 390 km² from 500km² in a decade. This lake is a crucial resource for the human population. It is estimated that 70% of Manipur's population lives in the Imphal valley and over one million people rely on the lake's fish for food and its water for irrigation and domestic purposes.

Logtak is unique, containing extensive floating mats of vegetation known as *phumdi*. This habitat supports a variety of endemic plants and is the only refuge of the Manipur brow antlered deer, which is closer to extinction in the wild than any other cervid. This species was once considered to be extinct in the wild, but in 1950 a small herd was discovered in Keibul Lamjao, where a sanctuary of about 50km² has now been created. This caused vigorous protests in local communities and in 1979 a violent protest resulted in the burning of forest checkposts and observation towers. Although the sanctuary has been

elevated to the status of a national park, conservation measures are still far from adequate. The population of deer at present is around 50-100 and is dwindling.

In partnership with the Central and State Governments, WWF is helping to prepare a comprehensive conservation plan for Keibul Lamjao National Park, Logtak Lake and the surrounding hills. This two-year project, which is due to commence in October 1990, will also study the feasibility of integrating the resource requirements of the local population with conservation measures.

The degradation of India's natural resource base and the depletion of its biological diversity is reaching a critical state. WWF is taking a strong initiative to bring about action to reverse this trend of over-exploitation. A countrywide programme, the Jawaharlal Nehru Community Biodiversity Conservation Movement, has been launched, under which emphasis will be laid on participation of rural and tribal communities in sustainably managing the country's biological heritage. An important component of the programme will be strengthening the livelihood security of these millions of people.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON UNCONVENTIONAL PESTS : CONTROL VS CONSERVATION

University of Agricultural Sciences and Bangalore University are jointly organising this symposium during April 1991, at Bangalore.

The Symposium

The present Symposium is aimed to create a common forum for bringing together people working on vertebrate pests, vectors and predators to evaluate the research done so far and recommend future lines of investigation. Rodents are excluded from the purview of the Symposium since commendable work is being done in that area.

Scope

The Symposium is open to wildlife ecologists, pest control operators, officials of the Departments of Agriculture, Health and Veterinary Sciences, Live-stock producers, Scientists, Pesticide Registration and Enforcement officials and Conservationists. Papers can be contributed to any of the following pest categories :

Field Rabbit and Hare Control
 Bird Control - Urban and Agricultural
 Urban Wildlife
 Wildlife Depredation on Cultivated Crops
 Wildlife and Reforestation
 Vertebrates as Vectors of Human and Animal Diseases
 Endangered species and Vertebrate Pest Control Programmes
 Economic, Social and Religious aspects of Vertebrate Pest Control
 Non-insect Invertebrate Pests, Weed Control

Abstracts

Original research and review papers are invited for platform and poster presentation. Abstracts in duplicate not exceeding 300 words, giving title, name of the authors and affiliation should be sent to the Organising Secretary, Dept. of Vertebrate Biology, UAS, GKVK, Bangalore-560065.

Registration

The Registration Fee of Rs.150/- (Associate Rs.100/-) in the form of Bank Draft in favour of the Organising Secretary, First National Symposium on Unconventional Pests, should be sent along with the abstract on or before 15th January 1991.

Contd. from Front Inside Cover

Whitehead's Magpie, *Dendrocitta frontalis* Black-browed Treepie, *Podoces biddulphi* Chinese Ground-Jay, *Saroglossa spiloptera* Spot-winged Starling, *Acridotheres albocinctus* Collared Myna, *Ploceus megarhynchus* Finn's Baya Weaver, *Kozlowia roborowskii* Roborowski's Rosefinch, *Haematospiza sipahi* Scarlet Finch, *Latoucheornis siemsseni* Slaty Bunting, *Emberiza koslowi* Koslov's Bunting, *Emberiza jankowskii* Jankowski's Bunting.

NW Indian Subcontinent

Ophrysia superciliosa Mountain Quail, *Tragopan melanocephalus* Western Tragopan, *Catreus wallichii* Cheer Pheasant, *Saxicola macrorhyncha* Stoliczka's Bushchat, *Prinia bernesi* Rufous-vented Prinia, *Phylloscopus tytleri* Tytler's Leaf-warbler, *Phylloscopus subviridis* Brook's Leaf-warbler, *Ficedula subrufa* Kashmir Red-breasted Flycatcher, *Moupinia altirostris* Jerdon's Babbler, *Aegithalos niveogularis* White-throated Tit, *Aegithalos leucogenys* White-cheeked Tit, *Passer pyrrhonotus* Sind Jungle Sparrow, *Pyrrhula aurantiaca* Orange Bullfinch, *Callacanthus burtoni* Red-browed Finch.

Peninsular India

Cursorius bitorquatus Jerdon's Courser, *Columba elphinstonii* Nilgiri Woodpigeon, *Psittacula columboides* Blue-winged Parakeet, *Athene blewitti* Forest Spotted Owlet, *Batrachostomus monileger* Sri Lanka Frogmouth, *Megalaima rubricapilla* Crimson-throated Barbet, *Pycnonotus ptilorhynchus* Grey-headed Bulbul, *Pycnonotus xantholaemus* Yellow-throated Bulbul, *Brachypteryx major* White-bellied Shortwing, *Turdoides subrufus* Rufous Babbler, *Garrulax delesserti* Wynaad Laughingthrush, *Garrulax cacchianus* Nilgiri Laughingthrush, *Garrulax jerdoni* White-breasted Laughingthrush, *Schoenicola playura* Broad-tailed Grass-warbler, *Ficedula nigrorufa* Black-and-orange Flycatcher, *Niltava pallipes* White-bellied Blue Flycatcher, *Muscicapa albicaudata* Nilgiri Flycatcher, *Parus nuchalis* White-winged Tit, *Anthus nilgiriensis* Nilgiri Pipit, *Nectarinia minima* Small Sunbird, *Lonchura kelaati* Rufous-bellied Munia, *Dendrocitta leucogaster* White-bellied Treepie.

Sri Lanka

Galliperdix bicalcarata Sri Lanka Spurfowl, *Gallus lafayetii* Sri Lanka Red Junglefowl, *Columba torringtoni* Sri Lanka Woodpigeon, *Psittacula calthorpae* Laysan's Parakeet, *Loricus beryllinus* Sri Lanka Lorikeet, *Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus* Red-faced Malkoha, *Centropus chlororhynchus* Sri Lanka Coucal, *Batrachostomus monileger* Sri Lanka Frogmouth, *Megalaima flavifrons* Yellow-fronted Barbet, *Megalaima rubricapilla* Crimson-throated Barbet, *Pycnonotus penicillatus* Yellow-eared Bulbul, *Myiophonus blighi* Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush, *Zoothera spiloptera* Spot-winged Thrush, *Pellorneum fuscicapillum* Brown-capped Babbler, *Turdoides rufescens* Sri Lanka Rufous Babbler, *Garrulax cinereifrons* Ashy-headed Laughingthrush, *Bradypterus pallaseri* Sri Lanka Bush-warbler, *Muscicapa sordida* Dusky Blue Flycatcher, *Dicaeum everetti* Legge's Flowerpecker, *Zosterops ceylonensis* Sri Lanka White-eye, *Sturnus senex* Sri Lanka White-headed Starling, *Gracula ornata* Sri Lanka Hill Myna, *Lonchura kelaati* Rufous-bellied Munia, *Urocissa*

South-east Asia

Arborophila davidi Orange-necked Partridge, *Arborophila cambodiana* Chestnut-headed Partridge, *Lophura imperialis* Imperial Pheasant, *Lophura edwardsi* Edwards's Pheasant, *Lophura hatinhensis* Vietnamese Pheasant, *Polyplectron inopinatum* Mountain Peacock-Pheasant, *Polyplectron malacense* Malaysian Peacock-Pheasant, *Polyplectron germaini* Germain's Peacock-Pheasant, *Rheinartia ocellata* Crested Argus, *Otus sagittatus* White-fronted Scops-owl, *Collocalia gigas* Giant Swiftlet, *Psilopogon pyrolophus* Fire-tufted Barbet, *Megalaima lagrandieri* Red-vented Barbet, *Picus rabieri* Red-collared Woodpecker, *Pitta gurneyi* Gurney's Pitta, *Pseudochelidon sirintarae* White-eyed River Martin, *Myiophonus robinsoni* Malaysian Whistling-thrush, *Niltava sumatrana* Rufous-vented Niltava, *Turdoides gularis* White-throated Babbler, *Garrulax milleti* Black-hooded Laughingthrush, *Garrulax vassali* White-cheeked Laughingthrush, *Garrulax yersini* Collared Laughingthrush, *Garrulax humilis* Burmese Yuhina, *Jabouilleia danioui* Short-tailed Scimitar-Babbler, *Napothera marmorata* Marbled Wren-babbler, *Stachyris herberti* Sooty Babbler, *Stachyris rodolphei* Deignan's Babbler, *Crociás langbianis* Grey-crowned Crocias, *Macronus kellei* Grey-faced Tit-Babbler, *Paradoxornis davidianus* Short-tailed Parrotbill, *Sitta victoriae* White-browed Nuthatch, *Sitta solangiae* Yellow-billed Nuthatch, *Sitta magna* Giant Nuthatch, *Temmurus temurus* Ratchet-tailed Treepie, *Crypsirina cucullata* Hooded Treepie, *Carduelis (spinoides) monguilloti* Vietnamese Greenfinch.

Taiwan

Arborophila crudigularis Taiwan Partridge, *Lophura swinhoei* Swinhoe's Pheasant, *Syrnaticus mikado* Mikado Pheasant, *Treron formosae* Whistling Green Pigeon, *Pycnonotus taiwanus* Styan's Bulbul, *Tarsiger johnstoniae* Collared Bush-Robin, *Myiophonus insularis* Taiwan Whistling-thrush, *Regulus goodfellowi* Taiwan Firecrest, *Garrulax morrisonianus* White-whiskered Laughingthrush, *Garrulax poecilorhynchus* Scaly-headed Laughingthrush, *Loicichla steeri* Taiwan Liocichla, *Actinodura morrisoniana* Taiwan Barwing, *Heterophasia auricularis* White-eared Sibia, *Yuhina brunneiceps* Taiwan Yuhina, *Parus holsti* Yellow Tit, *Urocissa caerulea* Taiwan Magpie.

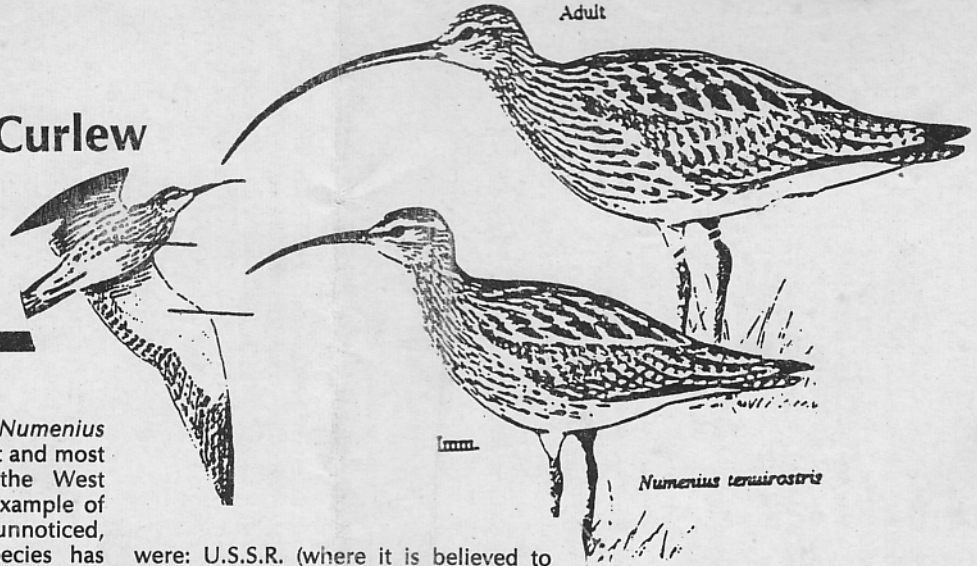
Indonesia and the Philippines

The majority of the bird species endemic to these island groups are being covered in the project. Please send all of your records of endemic birds, or write to Tim Johnson and Alison Stattersfield at ICBP for detailed species lists.

Please send records to Mike Crosby and Craig Robson, ICBP, 32 Cambridge Road, Girton, Cambridge, CB3 0PJ, UNITED KINGDOM. All information used will be fully acknowledged.

Slender-billed Curlew

by Adam Gretton



The Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* is one of the rarest and most poorly known species in the West Palearctic. It is an alarming example of how a species can slip, almost unnoticed, close to extinction. The species has been the subject of an ICBP project for the past two years, and information gathered in that time suggests that only 100-400 individuals remain — a perilously low number for a long-distance migrant.

The Slender-billed Curlew appears to have been common in much of its range up to the turn of the century. It was abundant in several Mediterranean countries, being apparently the commonest curlew species in Malta, Sicily and north-west Africa. Although detailed accounts are lacking, observations from Algeria describe "incredible flocks...as big as starling flocks", and there are reports from Hungary in 1893 of a flock so dense that four birds were killed with two shots!

A major decline in the species was first noted as long ago as 1943 by Erwin Stresemann and Hermann Grote, but interest did not really develop for another forty years. Information resulting from an appeal in 1979 by Derek Scott and Tony Prater for records of the species confirmed that it occurred regularly at only a handful of sites, in very small numbers. Prompted by Prater and Scott's analysis, and with encouragement from Hans Meltofte (ICBP Danish section) and others, in May 1988, ICBP launched the Slender-billed Curlew project (*World Birdwatch* 9,4:8). The project aimed to research the habitat requirements and current status of the bird, and to formulate an action plan for its recovery.

The project began by establishing a network of national coordinators in the nine (now ten) states included in the species's range. The countries involved

were: U.S.S.R. (where it is believed to nest), Turkey, Romania, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Greece, Italy, Tunisia, Morocco and (recently added to the list) Iran. The emphasis at the start was on collecting records of the species from museum collections, old journals and notebooks, and on conducting surveys of the bird at suitable wetlands. As a result of these efforts, the original database compiled by Scott and Prater was expanded to include over 530 records from this century and dozens more from the last.

Eighteen key sites for the species, covering over 800,000 ha in total, have now been identified from the data, ranging from the Azov Sea in the U.S.S.R. to the Mehran delta in Iran and Merja Zerga in Morocco. Further sites (e.g. the vast marshes of Iraq) seem likely to be important too but are little-known ornithologically.

Of course, identification of the causes of the species's decline is a crucial component of any conservation effort. Many of the passage areas used by the species have undergone radical change, particularly in their agricultural usage. The steppe in Hungary and Yugoslavia and the wetlands in Romania, Greece and Italy are only a fraction of their former size, and the bird must have had increasing difficulty finding suitable stop-over sites on its migration. Considerable habitat changes have also taken place in its passage areas in the U.S.S.R. and in its North African wintering grounds.

The Slender-billed Curlew uses a variety of habitats on its migration, however, so habitat loss alone probably cannot account for its drastic decline. Curlews, being large and (apparently!) tasty, were favoured quarry for hunters in much of Europe and North Africa. In several countries, decoys, call imitations and other specialised means were used to lure them within range of a gun or net.

The Slender-billed Curlew would have been particularly vulnerable to hunting because of its tameness and rather narrow overland migration route. The scale of the hunting problem is reflected by the statistics from Italy: 47 specimens from the past century, and 63 of the 76 records this century, are shot birds. Obviously only a very small proportion of birds shot reach museum collections, so these 110 represent many thousands of individuals shot over Italy alone.

Hunting of Slender-billed Curlews still continues, and as recently as last December, one of three Slender-billed Curlews at Merja Zerga, Morocco, was shot and wounded. This autumn ICBP will publish an action plan for the conservation of the species, which will include a number of proposals to amend hunting legislation and tighten enforcement, as well as to establish effective protection of key sites. What is really needed is a ban on all shooting of curlews and godwits in the ten states; Hungary, Greece and Tunisia already have such a ban and Morocco has recently protected all curlews.

Several mysteries surrounding the Slender-billed Curlew remain — most notably, where does it nest? Reliable nesting records exist from only two west Siberian forest-steppe areas early this century, and despite recent searches by ICBP and the Soviet Academy of Sciences, no light has been shed on the current breeding grounds. The search will continue, but the most urgent need now is for effective conservation measures. The future of the species is far from certain, but if ICBP's action plan is implemented there is some chance that the Slender-billed Curlew can be saved from becoming the first West Palearctic avian extinction since the Great Auk.

Cover : Large Egret (*Ardea alba*) with a powerful rapier like beak set on 'S' shaped neck, and a cold glare in its beady yellow eyes, patiently waits for frogs and crabs in grassy shallows and marshes teeming with aquatic life. Then one electrifying jab and the patient wait is rewarded. This egret announces its presence in the heronry with a deep croak followed by several curt snaps of its bill.

Photo: S. Sridhar

Courtesy: World Birdwatch - Sept 1990