

**30TH YEAR OF  
PUBLICATION**

# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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# THE NEOTROPICAL WATERFOWL CENSUS

Following the excellent results from the first three years of the Asian Waterfowl Census, IWRB is launching a similar programme of coordinated waterfowl surveys in the Neotropics, starting in 1990. Erik Carp, IWRB Consultant, reports.

The *Directory of Neotropical Wetlands* (Inventario de Humedales Neotropical) (Scott and Carbonell 1986); revealed the extraordinary diversity and importance of these wetlands for many different groups of waterfowl in the Neotropics. More recently, *The Atlas of Nearctic Shorebirds on the Coast of South America* (Morrison and Ross 1989) has provided the first detailed overview of the distribution and abundance of shorebirds on coastal habitats in South America. Both projects have identified the urgent need for more detailed coordinated surveys of waterfowl throughout the Neotropics. While detailed surveys have begun in several countries, there has been little international coordination, which is vital for these migratory species.

## Aims

The Neotropical Waterfowl Census will aim: (i) to gather information on the distribution and population size of waterfowl; (ii) to monitor trends in population size; (iii) to provide technical support to, and help promote, the Ramsar Convention and the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network; and (iv) to encourage a greater awareness of the conservation value of wetlands and waterfowl. The first census in July 1990, will be restricted to Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay and southern Brazil. This region shares many waterfowl species during their migrations. It is hoped that further funding will enable the project to be expanded to the whole of the Neotropics in 1991.

## Volunteer effort

This project can only succeed with the voluntary participation of many dedicated ornithologists and conservationists, willing to count birds on

wetlands in their region. In just three years, participation in the Asian Census has grown to cover 1500 sites - and we hope that similar support will emerge for this new venture. Census sheets, including the names of local coordinators, will be distributed widely in the region, but are also available from IWRB. If you intend to participate, please contact the regional coordinator (preferably) or IWRB to avoid duplication of effort.

Coverage of vast wetlands, such as the Pantanal, will require aerial survey or special expedition, and it is hoped that assistance for such work will become available.

## Coordination

Participating countries will have one or more coordinators who will distribute count forms, organise coverage, collect the forms and provide overview reports for their regions. In addition, IWRB will produce a summary report to be distributed free to every participant. Coordinators will be encouraged to develop a computerised database of the results for their region, and IWRB will establish a database for the whole of the Neotropics to be used for conservation purposes.

Large-scale international coordination of waterfowl surveys is the only way that comprehensive conservation plans can be developed for species such as migratory waterfowl. As pressure continues to grow on the wetlands of the Neotropical region, there is an urgent need to assess conservation priorities for these habitats and their spectacular wildlife.

by Erik Carp (IWRB Consultant), c/o IWRB, Slimbridge, Glos. GL2 7BX, UK.

## KHOR DUBAI

The results of a survey supported by IWRB have revealed a new site of international importance for shorebirds in the United Arab Emirates. Autumn surveys in 1986 and 1987 found over 40,000 shorebirds and many other waterfowl on the north coast of the Emirates, with more than 17,000 using Khor Dubai. Of particular significance was the location of 40 50 *Limicola falcinellus*, representing 18% of the Fenno-Scandinavian population. A greater participation in the Ramsar Convention in this region, as well as the implementation of other conservation measures, are needed to safeguard this and other wetlands.

Uttley, J.D., Thomas, C.J., Green, M.G., Suddaby, D. and Platt, J.B. 1988. *Sandgrouse* 10: 58-70.

## POCHARD SEX-RATIOS

A recent European winter survey of *Aythya ferina*, coordinated through the IWRB network, revealed an overall sex-ratio of 129-202 males for every 100 females. Higher proportions of males were found in the northerly latitudes, and the proportion of males increased with flock size. Females appear to migrate further than males before settling for winter and they tend to be more dispersed. The survival of the females is probably affected by the winter distribution because of the increased costs of migration. In addition, survival in southern Europe may be lower due to drought and hunting. Further studies are required on these patterns, in the light of the current decline of this species. For further information, please contact:

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## WINTERING WATERFOWL IN TURKEY

Expeditions to count wintering wildfowl in Turkey were supported by the Tour du Valat Foundation from 1967-1973, and by IWRB since 1986. An average of 515,650 birds were counted each winter, clearly demonstrating the importance of Turkish wetlands. The accompanying Table shows that for all but one of the species counted, numbers have been considerably lower between 1986 and 1989 than in the earlier period. The exception is the White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*, which is found predominantly on one inland lake (Burdur Golu) where up to 75% of the estimated world population (12,000 birds) of this threatened species winter. Unfortunately, Burdur Golu is unprotected so the continuing success of this species in Turkey must be in some doubt. The dabbling ducks appear to have suffered the most seriously, all species apart from Shoveler *Anas clypeata* having declined by more than 50%.

Based on data from 1969-1973, 17 Turkish wetlands were internationally important for ducks or Coot. Now only 12 sites exceed the Ramsar criteria for waterfowl and ten of these support fewer birds than in the past. Many factors may be involved in the serious declines in wintering ducks and Coot in Turkey. In some cases wetlands have been drained or used for irrigation; hunting is also known to be intense in Turkey, but there is no evidence that any increase in hunting has taken place in recent years. Lastly, Turkey is currently undergoing a serious drought that is having a profound effect on wetlands and probably their wintering bird communities. IWRB is now collaborating with Dogal Hayati Koruma Demegi (DHKD) and Turkish authorities in order to improve the monitoring system, consolidate the status of the White-headed Duck and ensure that all possible efforts are made to help conserve Turkey's remaining wetlands.

Paul Rose  
IWRB

Mean midwinter counts of waterfowl in Turkey for regularly counted sites and the % change in means between 1969-1973 and 1986-1989.

| SPECIES         | 1967-1973      | 1986-1989      | %          |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|------------|
| RUDDY SHELDUCK  | 2,950          | 2,050          | -31        |
| SHELDUCK        | 1,250          | 500            | -60        |
| WIGEON          | 76,700         | 28,550         | -63        |
| GADWALL         | 1,950          | 750            | -62        |
| TEAL            | 103,300        | 47,000         | -55        |
| MALLARD         | 42,100         | 15,500         | -63        |
| PINTAIL         | 33,450         | 9,800          | -71        |
| SHOVELER        | 5,450          | 3,550          | -34        |
| RED-CR. POCHARD | 2,450          | 350            | -86        |
| POCHARD         | 52,000         | 46,350         | -11        |
| TUFTED DUCK     | 8,450          | 2,650          | -69        |
| WHITE-HD. DUCK  | 4,750          | 6,950          | +46        |
| COOT            | 284,450        | 169,250        | -40        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>    | <b>619,250</b> | <b>333,250</b> | <b>-46</b> |

# 30TH YEAR OF PUBLICATION

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## EDITORIAL

### New Resolutions

It is too late to wish you a Happy New Year. But I hope it has been taken for granted. I would however, like to make a new beginning, by putting in more effort in the editing of the Newsletter. Can I request writers to *type* their scripts (or write very clearly)? I am sure that there is much good material in my files but handwritten notes difficult to decipher, get less priority than neatly typed scripts. Readers will ask, why does the Editor not do the editing? Quite a valid question, but editing is time consuming. The manuscripts corrected or partially re-written by the Editor, are sent to Beryl D'Rosario in Bangalore, for making them as presentable as possible for onward transit. Then the papers are handed over to S. Sridhar of Navbharath Enterprises, for printing the Newsletter. The manuscripts are checked by DR. Joseph George before giving the green signal for printing. The final version is not seen by the Editor. Hence, if the manuscripts are mistake free at the start, the end result is less likely to be influenced by the printer's devil. And that is a good resolution for the new year.

I would also like to stress that the Newsletter is meant to have a special character which I would like to retain. It must reflect the joy of birdwatching while imparting useful information about the birds seen. I find that many articles in the earlier issues did this admirably, but now the tendency is to produce scientific notes with graphs and tables which are not always easy to digest. I do not for a moment decry the need and the value of detailed records, but these must be "digested" by the writer and the presentation must be in a pleasant readable form. Let us remind ourselves constantly that it is possible to present the deepest knowledge in simple language, while complicated sentences are sometimes a cloak for confusion in the writer's mind.

### Birdwatching in Central America

Apart from the pleasure of identifying birds when you visit a new country, it is even more exciting to find a connection between the exotic birds seen and their relationship with those at home. That is one reason why Ranjit Daniel's article in this issue makes interesting reading.

It is well known that many areas which are now far apart and unconnected, were physically linked in ages gone by. Subsidence of the land and volcanic activity have resulted in the change. This made it possible for some species of bird, or at least the same group of birds, to be widely distributed. Salim Ali wrote about this in the

Satpura thesis and discussed how birds like laughing thrushes and spider hunters were found in the Himalayas and then again in the Nilgiris, but nowhere else in between. This connection or lack of connection between birds in different geological areas has been beautifully explained by George Henry Wallace in his classic *The Malay Archipelago*. I quote a few lines from Page 110, and anyone who has not read this book has a great thrill in prospect. Wallace and Darwin, surprisingly, wrote about the theory of the origin of species almost simultaneously, from their researches in different parts of the world.

"It may, perhaps, be thought that birds which possess the power of flight in so pre-eminent a degree, would not be limited in their range by arms of the sea, and would thus afford few indications of the former union or separation of the islands they inhabit. This, however, is not the case. A very large number of birds appear to be as strictly limited by watery barriers as are quadrupeds; ..... The birds of the Indo Malay region have a close resemblance to those of India, for though a very large proportion of the species are quite distinct, there are only about 15 peculiar genera, and not a single family group confined to the former district."

I wish that India had the Racket-tailed Kingfisher about which Wallace writes :

"I also obtained one or two specimens of the fine Racket-tailed Kingfisher of Amboyna, *Tanysiptera nais*, one of the most singular and beautiful of that beautiful family. These birds differ from all other kingfishers (which have usually short tails) by having the two middle tail-feathers immensely lengthened and very narrowly webbed, but terminated by a spoon-shaped enlargement, as in the motmots and some of the humming-birds. They belong to that division of the family termed kinghunters, living chiefly on insects and small land-molluscs, which they dart down upon and pick up from the ground, just as a kingfisher picks a fish out of the water. They are confined to a very limited area, comprising the Moluccas, New Guinea, and Northern Australia. About ten species of these birds are now known, all much resembling each other, but yet sufficiently distinguishable in every locality. The Amboynese species, of which a very accurate representation is here given, is one of the largest and handsomest. It is full seventeen inches long to the tips of the tail-feathers; the bill is coral red, the under-surface pure white, the back and wings deep purple, while the shoulders, head and nape, and some spots on the upper part of the back and wings, are pure azure blue. The tail is white, with the feathers narrowly blue-edged, but the narrow part of the long feathers is rich blue. This was an entirely new species, and has been well named after an ocean goddess, by Mr. G.R.Gray."

## Birds and Dams

Bittu Sahgal, Editor of Sanctuary, has offered to insert some information about our Newsletter in his magazine. He writes "I wonder if it would be possible for you to ask your readers to go into the question of the destruction of roosts, nesting sites, feeding sites, etc. for birds as a result of dams? The Narmada Project, for instance, will destroy over 25 million trees. Its sandy banks which play host to millions of migrants will be devastated. Do look at such problems for other dams as well."

Some of the dams, by having created new water bodies, have been helpful to birds, but of course the natural habitats destroyed by flooding and the general disturbance caused during construction must have had a very damaging effect on bird life.

## Checklists from Various Regions

A number of our readers have been supplying lists of the local avifauna which can prove very useful for obvious reasons. I was glad to hear from Prof. Sudhakar Marathe of the University of Hyderabad, that a mention of his list in the November-December 1989 issue, has led to some requests by readers for copies of the list. He has now submitted a small problem which some of our readers may be in a position to clarify. "Several times during the past few years I believe I had spotted the Brown Rock Chat *Cercomela fusca* in the winter months on this campus. But I had never been able to make an identification. This year, one bird has been spending time so near my flat that I can see it at no more than 25 feet, and even without the glasses it is clearly a *Cercomela fusca*. But, Ali-Ripley (Compact Ed.) 1692 at Volume 9, p.583/20, in its description of its habitat does not seem to include Andhra Pradesh.

Could you or someone else tell me if I am making any mistake or whether I have made a valuable sighting? The picture in the Ali-Ripley (Compact Ed.) at Plate 91, Fig.12, does not at all resemble the bird; but the bird I see is practically identical with the picture in the Collins Handguide to the Birds of the Indian Sub-Continent, Martin W.Woodcock, 1980, 1983, reprint page 97."

(I do not know if this helps but in the Book of Indian Birds by Salim Ali, Eleventh edition, page 111, referring to the Blue Rock Thrush, the author says "In silhouette; during flight and while alighting, may look confusingly like Brown Rock Chat *Cercomela fusca*. The same fact has been referred to in the Handbook to which you refer. Editor).

A list of the birds of Mudumalai Wild Life Sanctuary has been received from J.K.Tiwari, Jr. Scientist, now with BNHS. The list includes 94 species which is by no means



complete, but would be useful for anyone intending to visit the sanctuary.

Another list from the district of Surendranagar in Gujarat, has been received from D.K. Vaidya. This list consists of 201 species, and he has interesting comments to make about some of the species seen and about the difficulty in identifying the female Stone Chat. Readers can ask for the list from him, if interested.

#### Floricans

The BNHS has now produced its Annual Report No.4, on the floricans. These reports which give details of the birds in various protected areas, should help in producing management plans for our threatened bird life. The present report deals with the Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis*, and of the Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica*. The reports emphasise the importance of studying birds over a very long period because a change in the rainfall pattern in a particular year has a serious effect on the vegetation growth, and this again affects the population of birds which are being investigated.

"One explanation for the few floricans seen in 1988 is (perhaps) due to good rainfall. Suitable habitat was available to the Lesser Floricans over a much vaster area than in previous years. It would then be logical to assume that the birds had spread out over this area. However, the

reports and feedback from ornithologists and naturalists in Gujarat indicated that nowhere were Florican concentrations seen and the reports were in fact quite discouraging. It is more than plausible that due to the droughts in the previous years, the Florican population has received major setbacks."

#### Waterfowl Counts 1990

S.A. Hussain writes : "I have just seen a copy of Newsletter for Birdwatchers (Vol. XXIX, No.11 & 12, Nov/Dec 1989) in which you have announced the 1990 Waterfowl Counts. I hope this will help in increasing the number of participants in India and thereby contribute a great deal to our efforts. However, there may be a small problem which may create confusion. You have not mentioned about the National Coordinator as well as the need to send the completed form to the National Coordinator, rather than to IWRB direct! This fact was mentioned clearly in my circular to Indian participants and the IWRB Newsletter 1989, which also emphasises this fact. (Please see pages 91, 92 and 94). You have also carried the IWRB count form which asks the participants to send the form directly to IWRB! This will create further confusion and cause delays collating and analysing the data.

I request you to kindly inform your readers to send the copies of their count forms to BNHS so that we will be able to coordinate counts in India."

## BIRDWATCHING IN CENTRAL AMERICA

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I had the opportunity to spend three months, between September and December 1989, in Panama. I spent most of my time on the Barro Colorado Island, in the Panama Canal. Opportunistically, nevertheless, I travelled and looked for birds both along and across the Canal and also made a cross-country trip to the Costa Rican border of Panama in the northwest.

Panama, now much in the news, is a small country with a total land area of about 77,000 sqkm. Except that it is oriented in a rather west-east direction limited by the major oceans on either side, it can be compared to our Malabar province with a range of rugged hills running right through like a midrib. These hills are at their highest towards Costa Rica where the vegetation differs from the lowland rainforests of the rest of Panama in being more elfin or montane like our sholas in the Nilgiris. It is cool, cloudy and wet and as a result, a greater abundance of moss, ferns and epiphytes of the aroid and bromeliad groups.

Elsewhere in Panama, the lowland rainforests predominate. They are comparable to our forests with a four month dry season and a fair proportion of deciduous trees emerging out of the canopy. Forests are often quite disturbed and fragmented. The Latin American Indians besides having converted vast stretches of lowland forest into cattle ranches, have also invaded existing forests, cleared them and have grown coffee, banana and other orchard crops. It was also surprising to see large numbers of mango trees inside forests, suggesting recent human settlements in many of the now protected areas.

It is well-known that speciation of landbirds has reached its maximum (for reasons still unclear) in the neotropics. Panama with its nearly 900 species of birds is no exception to this. Despite having been in Panama during the rainiest part of the year, I got to see and identify close to 200 species of its birds. A few were just different races of existing old-world species that we find in India too. The

majority, however, were different from ours starting at the level of species to family and taxonomic order.

For the past thirty years, Cattle Egrets have been part of the avifauna of Panama. They are in large flocks, especially along the cattle ranches in the plains. They appear smaller in size than ours. Other species of our birds also found in Panama are the Large White Egret, Little Green Heron, Common Moorhen and the Barn Owl. Migrants like the Osprey, Whimbrel and Common Swallow and a few oceanic birds such as the magnificent Frigate Bird, Sooty Terns and other more inland terns like the Gullbilled Tern and Common Tern can be readily recognised.

Migrating new-world vultures and hawks over the isthmus is of significance when the birdlife of Panama is discussed. Thousands of these soaring birds pass the country, day after day during October from the north to south. Similarly, the 60 km long Panama Canal is an important link between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans permitting the regular movement of Frigate Birds, gulls and flocks of terns almost daily, as with the large ships of the world. Brown pelicans, large flocks of neotropical cormorants and an occasional American Darter (*Anhinga*) resting on the floating beacons along the canal is a common sight.

There are no crows. However, there are the crow-like grackles (*Icterids*) that are common along urban gardens and lawns foraging in flocks on the ground much like our House Crows. I saw no House Sparrow in Panama. Feral Blue Rock Pigeons in domestic plumes fly about buildings in the city. Other common urban birds, except in the heart of the city, are the Claycoloured Robin (a thrush), tropical Mockingbird, kingbirds and the related new-world or tyrant flycatchers, including the elegant Swallowtailed Flycatcher (reminiscent of our Paradise Flycatcher), the pretty, tiny ruddy Quail Dove, a handful of tanagers and seedeaters (finches), a wren and an occasional hummingbird. Black and Turkey Vultures are amongst the most widespread birds in Panama. The caracaras (birds of prey exclusive to the new-world) are commoner along the drier open plains.

Tanagers, a new-world family of birds resembling our buntings, are remarkable for their colours. Common along forest borders and urban gardens, they immediately catch the attention of birdwatchers. Orange, scarlet, yellow, blue, green and combinations of these and the habit of these birds forming mixed flocks on fruiting trees, made them a spectacular group of birds to watch. I was fortunate to have one fruiting tree outside my window on the Barro Colorado Island where these birds flocked every morning and evening.

Forest birds are generally shy. Besides being small, many are rather drab and secretive. The many species of ant-following birds, characteristic of the neotropical forests, forage close to the ground or low in the understory, much like some of our forest babblers (especially Blackheaded Babbler) do. The trogons, unlike ours, are predominantly green or slate on the back. Woodpeckers, the black coloured species, are particularly like our black and pied woodpeckers. The kingfishers, however, are mostly combinations of dark green, brown and white.

Fruitcrows (*Cotinga*), orioles (*Icterid*) and the slaty antshrike were amongst the noisiest birds in the forests. The oriole reminded me of our Racket-tailed Drongo and Shama when it sang. Large flocks of amazon parrots filled the Canal Zone air with their raucous calls as they prepared to leave their roosts at dawn and get back at dusk. The Crested Guans (large turkey-like, arboreal galliform birds) were startlingly noisy when disturbed inside the forest by a casual observer. In trying to fly away, guans bring down big, dead branches from the trees they were foraging on.

Toucans, with their brightly painted faces and bills forage in flocks and behave like hornbills. Flight is very similar to the Malabar Grey Hornbill. A calling pair acts much like a pair of Great Indian Hornbills, sometimes perched facing each other, throwing back the neck and bill as a bird calls.

Hummingbirds are curious and bold. Anything red attracts them. Flowers in the hair of an observer, flowers embroidered on the shirt, etc, are known to attract these birds which besides buzzing past the observer's ears may even land on the head! I once noticed a hummingbird curiously examining the glowing red lamp at the rear of a bus as it stopped on the road.

There is much more that I can write on these creatures if space permitted. The great Tinamou silently walking on the forest floor, the bee-eater like motmots and the spectacular manakins (*Piprids*) are amongst birds exclusive to the neotropical forests. The Goldencollared Manakin, a small, short-tailed bird, is remarkable for its call which sounds like a whiplash. The woodcreepers running along the tree-trunks, and their gentle taps on the wood were often the only signs of life in the quiet forests during my morning walks.

Despite the taxonomic differences, I found convergence in almost every group of birds – similarities between our birds and those in Panama. Convergence in patterns of colour, morphology, song and behaviour was quite apparent. Lots of studies have been made and published about these birds. It seems to me that a closer look at our birds would reveal several such facts as ecological linkages



and mutualism, often popularised based on studies of neotropical birds, operating within our bird communities as well. After all, if the earth has a finite number of niches to offer and if these were equally distributed over the different continents, there should be at least one species of

bird (if not some other organism) to fill a niche in each continent. As a result we would find ecological convergence despite taxonomic difference in species between the continents. I hope this inspires the reader to look at our birds more closely.

## THE NESTING OF ASHY WREN-WARBLE (*Prinia socialis*, Sykes) IN BANGALORE

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### Introduction

The Ashy Wren-Warbler (*Prinia socialis*) is a resident, insectivorous bird often found in agroecosystems. To encourage the bird in agroecosystems, it is necessary to know two of its primary needs, viz. nesting and food habits. In the present study, an attempt was made to document the nesting habits of this bird.

Though several nests were sighted in urban areas of Bangalore (12°58'N, 77°35'E), detailed observations could not be carried out because of disturbance due to human activity. Therefore, a nest situated in the campus of the University of Agricultural Sciences in 1978 was selected. Further, as the nest was situated in a cultivated tract, efforts were also directed to study the impact on the agroecosystem.

### Methods

A pair of Ashy Wren-Warblers (AWW) was seen actively foraging and courting in a cultivated patch at the University campus during August 1978. Detailed observations on their activities were made from nest building till the young ones fledged. The nest was built within the dense canopy of Pacholi *Phagostimon cablin*, a medicinal herb and was not easily visible. However, it was found that the activity and movements of the bird inside the nest could be observed from a spot 5 m away and 15 m high.

The parent birds were differentiated based on their body colour and size. One of the parent birds had a light orangish wash on its under parts, and the bird was smaller. This bird was designated as the female, because the eggs were incubated only by this parent. The other bird was relatively bigger with lighter underparts, and was designated as the male.

The area within which the nesting pair confined their nesting activity was marked as their territory. The male

chased away intruders from this area. A small plot of citrus (10m x 12m) with 48 plants grown nearly to a height of 2m, and small patches of cotton, beans and cowpea plants, formed parts of this territory. Observations on the activities of the nesting pair inside and outside this territory were made from a second spot 'Y', 5 m away from the nest and 1 m high.

Details on the foraging activity of the nesting pair within the territory was recorded. The structure of the citrus plant (i.e. no branch up to 0.75 m from base) permitted us to record the mean feeding rate pecks (min) and bout length of time spent in searching, collecting, handling and eating the prey under citrus continuously. Soil macro-arthropods were analysed using Macfayden multiple extractor. For this purpose, five samples of leaf litter, each weighing about 500 g and drawn from 1 m<sup>2</sup> quadrats were used. Organic matter of soils in different feeding sites were estimated by determining organic carbon and multiplying it with 1.724; five samples of soil, each weighing 250g were collected for analysis.

Six other nests of AWW were studied between 1978-80 in Bangalore, and one nest in Hyderabad (17°23'N, 72°29'E). Detailed observations were made only on the nest built in the *Phagostimon* patch and limited observations were made on the other nests.

All observations were made with the aid of 8 x 30 binoculars.

### Nest Building

Nest building by AWW was observed from mid-April to the beginning of August in Bangalore. The nesting activity almost coincided with the South-West monsoon in Bangalore. Only the male was seen carrying nesting material and arranging them in the nest. However, Ali and Ripley (1973) indicate that both the sexes share nesting duties.

### Nest Shape and Structure

Three different types of nests, namely cup, funnel and dome-shaped nests were observed during the study. Such a variation in the nest types has already been reported by Ali and Ripley (1974), Ganguli (1975), Gay (1965) and Whistler (1968). Of the seven nests observed, three were cup shaped. The leaves of the host plants were sewn together to form the outermost covering of the nests. Cotton *Gossypium sp.* were most commonly used to stitch the leaves. However, in two nests thread and silk cotton *Bombax sp.* fibres were used. The dome shaped nests were made of neatly woven dry Coconut *Cocos nucifera* and fine grass fibres and were matted externally with a layer of cotton. The nests were hidden within the dense cover of leaves through which sunlight hardly penetrated.

In nest A it was observed that the Warblers built the nest facing north-east, which enabled them to receive solar radiation during early mornings (till 07.00 a.m.). The nest was fully protected from rain by the dense growth of Pacholi, wherein the plant height varied from 0.5m to 2.0m. It was observed that even on days of heavy rainfall (e.g. on 24.8.1978 Bangalore received 30.5 mm rain) the nest chamber was dry. Rain spray during the South-West monsoon was avoided as the entrance hole of the dome shaped nest was facing North-East. The layer of cotton on the outer surface of the nest was wet indicating that the raindrops that fell through the leaves had been absorbed by the cotton layer. As the nest was well hidden within the dense stand of plants, no physical damage to the nest structure was observed.

The above features of the nest site may confer advantages relating to nest insulation and protection. Studies of Moore (1945), Silov (1968) and Orr (1970) have shown that when birds obtain overhead protection from plants, rapid radiation of heat to the sky is reduced and such sites also give protection from predators.

### Territory

The nesting territory mapped by observing the activity of the nesting pair is shown in Fig.1. The territory was defended by male alone. Intruders were pursued and chased away by the male. Before and after the pursuit flight, the male called out repeatedly *tween - tween* from tall perches. The male was tolerant to sunbirds, munias, White-eyes, Common Mynas and House Crows, but was aggressive to Tailor Birds. The feeding zones of Tailor Bird and AWW overlapped at the citrus plot and on two occasions the Tailor Bird was seen chasing away the male while the latter fed below the citrus canopy.

The sexes differed in the frequency of use of perch sites (Fig.II). The male showed a tendency to use taller perches than the female, obviously indicating that territorial

defence necessitates the use of taller perches that offer a better view of surroundings.

### Eggs and Egg Laying

The eggs of AWW are short, pointed and ovate in shape. The eggs were brick red in colour and at nest E egg laying followed a day after the nest was completed. In nest A and E, eggs were laid at intervals of two days. In Nest E, an egg was laid between 6.20 and 7.20 a.m. while the nest was under observation.

While the egg was being laid at nest E, the male was not seen close to the nest.

The clutch size varied from two to four eggs in Bangalore. Similar observations have been reported by Ali and Ripley (1974) and Ganguli (1975). Variations in clutch size may in part be related to the capacity of parent birds to successfully rear the chicks.

### Incubation

Incubation commenced when the clutch was completed. Only the female incubated the eggs. Incubation lasted for 12 days.

During incubation only the female attended to egg turning activity. On 9/9 the female turned the eggs thrice between 12.45 and 02.25 p.m. Our records on egg arrangements show that eggs are arranged in a definite pattern inside the nest (Fig.III). Eggs of AWW were always arranged in closed circles, possibly to conserve heat. In fact, Govrilov (1972) demonstrated that a closed circle is more effective in conserving heat than when eggs are arranged in a linear order.

The female spent more time in incubation in the forenoon than the afternoon (Fig.IV). Obviously to maintain the clutch temperature constant, the female would incubate for more time during periods of low temperature. In a 8-h observation during incubation, the male visited the nest 11 times; brought food to the nest and returned without feeding the female twice. The female uttered a low *mae... mae...* five times at the termination of incubation, to which the male readily responded. The call *mae... mae...* seemed to have served the purpose of communication between the sexes.

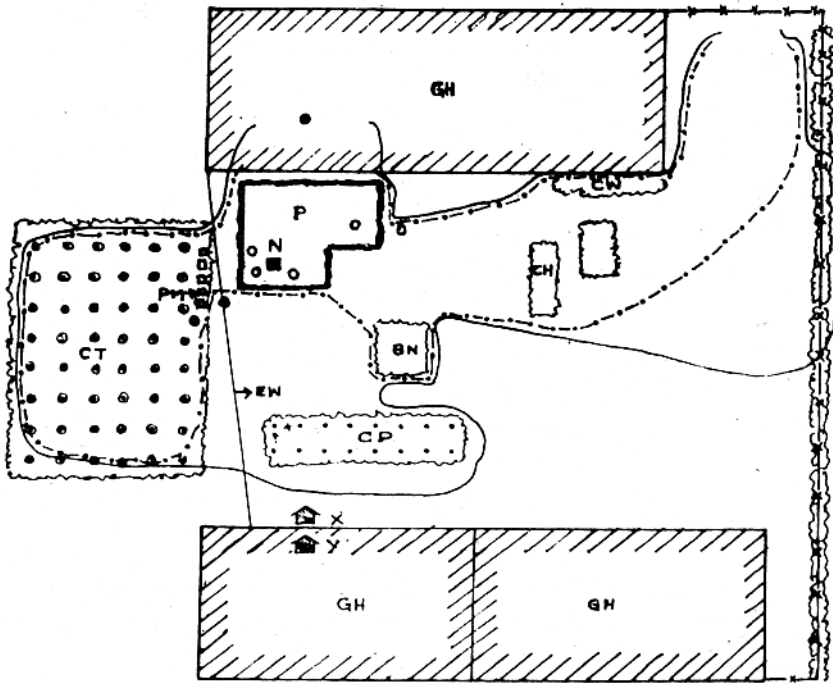
Attentive activity lasted for shorter periods and was more frequent in forenoon than in the afternoon (Fig.IV). Differences in ambient temperature and differential demand for intake of food by incubating bird in fore and afternoons presumably determined the observed sequence of attentive and inattentive periods.

### Egg-Hatch

The eggs hatched at intervals of a day. According to Ganguli (1975) the parent birds remove the egg shell and drop it in the nesting area.



Fig.I Nesting territory of Ashy-Wren Warblers



• : Primary Perch, m Secondary Perch, — Territory of Male,  
 --- Territory of Female, CH: Area under chillis, CP: Cotton plants, CT: Area under Citrus, CW: Cowpea Plants, EW: Electric wire, GH: Glass house, P: Pacholi planted area, PM: Palm pots, X and Y: Observation points, N: Nest site

Fig.II Frequency of use of perch sites by the sex of Ashy-Wren Warblers

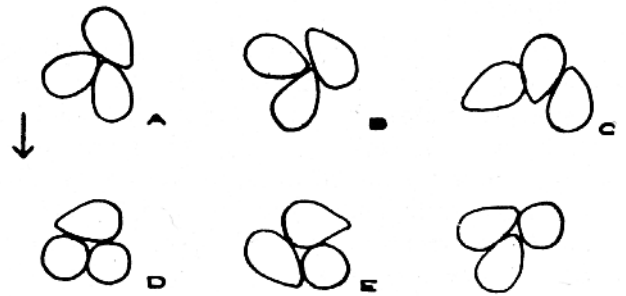
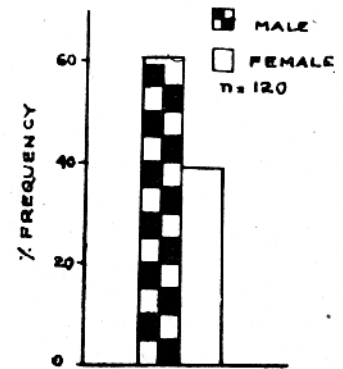
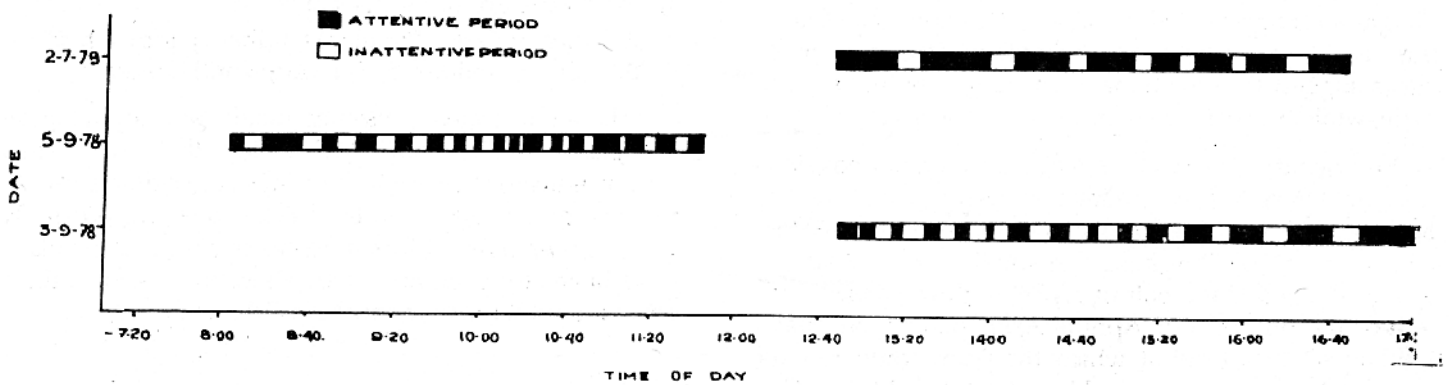


Fig.III Types of egg arrangement observed in the nest of Ashy-Wren Warbler. Arrow indicates the direction of nest entrance

Fig. IV Sequence of attentive and inattentive periods observed in Ashy-Wren Warbler



## Nestlings

Changes in the gross morphological features of the nestling associated with development were recorded till they fledged.

## Feeding the Nestlings

As the nestlings grew older, changes in the type and the size of prey brought to the nest by the parents was noticed. We presume that the increasing demand for food by the developing nestlings was met by a shift from insects with lesser biomass (e.g. coccids, aphids, earwigs, leafhoppers) to a higher biomass (e.g. large caterpillars, glasshoppers, butterflies). Week-old nestlings were fed with soft bodied insects while two weeks old nestlings were fed with large insects. Also the parent birds fed week-old nestlings more frequently (once in every 9.63 min;  $\bar{x}$  of 32 observations) than two weeks old nestlings (once in 11.33 min;  $\bar{x}$  of 32 observations).

## Self-Feeding

Both sexes foraged under the citrus canopy more than any other site. The ground under the citrus was an undisturbed area. Probably because of fallen leaves, leaf buds, twigs, flowers and fruits of the citrus, and faeces of birds, the soil under citrus recorded more organic matter than soils of other sites. These features possibly favoured the development of more arthropod communities under citrus than in other sites.

The female always foraged in the company of the male. In a 16-h watch during incubation, the female followed the male six times to the feeding sites. At nest F, the male fed the female with caterpillars and other insects twice, in a 4-h watch. Thus, the male may help the female in locating food.

The sexes differed in their feeding behaviour under citrus. The female moved from ground to citrus stub (at 0.1 to 0.2 m. from base) and stub-to-ground. It stood at a spot, fed and hopped to the next spot, while the male searched the ground hopping, fed on prey and at times called *mae... mae...* and/or *tee... tee*. Feeding behaviour of the sexes under citrus suggest that the female fed more rapidly than the male, while the male fed on prey more selectively.

Preliminary observations made on diet compositions indicate AWW to be a predator of insect pests. This has been the observations of earlier workers (e.g. Gay 1963) too. Observations of Verghese (personal communication) clearly showed that a pair of AWW in three weeks could reduce the numbers of Aphids *Aphis gossypii* on guava *Psidium* sp. to a level at which the plant could recover completely from damage and bear fruit. In addition, Gay

(1963) showed that man can supplement insect food of AWW and protect its nest from predators. In sum, these studies indicate that AWW are beneficial in cultivated tracts and that efforts to encourage this bird in agroecosystems is worthwhile.

## Predation

Though the nesting outcome of the typical pair was successful, many other nests observed were predated. Eight instances of predation of eggs or chicks of AWW by pet cats were observed in various locations around Bangalore. At one of the AWW nest a parent was observed feigning wing injury and rolling on the ground to distract the attention of a cat, when the young ones were about to fledge. Nesting failure was observed in four instances on the outskirts of Bangalore, due to plucking of Mulberry leaves on which the AWWs nested. On one occasion, when the particular Mulberry plant was left intact but all surrounding Mulberry plants in the plot were stripped of leaves, the AWW pair deserted the nest. In yet another case predation of eggs by a Bonnet Monkey *Macaca radiata* was observed.

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- (The authors have presented details of morphological changes in chicks from 12.9.78 when there were "two skinny nidicolous altricious nestlings with closed eyes," to the time on 24.9.78. when the "older chick can preen, fly and call *chiss-chiss*,". Measurements of eggs and details of nests have also been provided. Those interested in these details could write to the authors. Editor)



## CORRESPONDENCE

**INDIAN LONGBILLED VULTURE NESTING IN ASSAM.** PRASANTA SAIKIA AND P.C. BHATTACHARJEE, *Animal Ecology and Wildlife Biology Laboratory, Department of Zoology, Gauhati University, Guwahati 781 014*

The Indian Longbilled Vulture is less gregarious than the Whitebacked Vulture and can easily be distinguished. The adult birds are light to dark brown above, the feather edges are paler. Head, neck and nape are partially covered with white brown hair like feathers. A distinct ruff of soft white feathers is prominent at the base of neck. Underparts are pale brown, almost sandy, with broad pale shaft strips. The bird may easily be confused with Indian Griffon Vulture, but the Longbilled Vulture is smaller in size. In flight the Longbilled Vulture differs from the Whitebacked Vulture by the absence of white feathers in the rump and paler under wing coverts.

So far there was no record of any nest of the Longbilled Vulture within Assam, whereas the nests of Whitebacked Vultures can easily be seen during November and December. During the survey of nests in the month of November to 15th December, '89, in Lower Assam area, four nests were located in the westernmost part of Kamrup district near the river Brahmaputra. The altered forest lands with lofty trees are the preferred nesting habitat. Nests were located on Mango (*Mangifera indica*) and Kadam (*Anthocephalus indicus*). The nests were at a height of 55 to 60 feet above the ground. The diameter of the nest is 1.5 to 2 feet with a compact structure formed mainly of leaves of *Ficus* sp., Mango and Kadam. Up to the period of survey the eggs were not hatched but the parents were incubating. Agonistic behaviour has been observed between Longbilled Vulture and Whitebacked Vulture when the former approaches the nest of the latter in the same colony. During incubation the Longbilled Vulture rests its head and neck on the edge of the nest and changes the incubation position at regular intervals possibly to provide uniform temperature on the eggs.

**RECORDS OF THE KING VULTURE IN ASSAM.** PRASANTA SAIKIA AND P.C. BHATTACHARJEE, *Animal Ecology and Wildlife Biology Laboratory, Department of Zoology, Gauhati University, Guwahati 781014*

The King Vulture *Sarcogyps calvus* is a huge black vulture and can be readily identified by its deep yellowish red naked head and neck, thighs and legs, with white patches at the base of neck and upper thighs. When sailing aloft the red head, white breast and thigh patches and a thin white band on outstretched wing, are visible conspicuously.

The number of King Vultures has declined sharply in Assam. The bird was earlier sighted in a number of places

where dead animals were thrown. The bird has become very rare since the last 10 years.

During the survey of the originally sighted places of the Brahmaputra valley during March to April '89, only 2 birds were sighted on 19th April '89, in Kachamari of Sibsagar district, but other scavenger vultures of the region were abundant. But the prize finding is the tracing of two nests of the bird in an interior area of Hahkati Reserve Forest near Sawkhwaghata, on 21st March '89. As the species is in an extremely precarious condition in Assam, a status survey of the species is very urgently required to take appropriate conservation measures in the State.

**PROTECTING CROPS FROM CROWS.** K.SIVASUBRAMANIYAM and N. GANAPATHY, *National Pulses Research Centre, Vaman 622 303*

Crows as an agriculture pest is common knowledge especially in groundnut growing areas. We found a flock of twenty Jungle Crows having a field day. They frequently congregated at a particular strip. Intrigued we observed the plots after they left. To our dismay, the plants were dug out with roots and pods exposed. The pods were eaten and strewn all around. At the same time, the strip next to it was untouched because of adequate plant population that provided a denser ground canopy preventing the crows from moving among them. Hence, maintenance of adequate plant population seems to prevent the bird menace.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR THE NEWSLETTER.** V.SANTHARAM, 68 (I Floor), Santhome High Road, Madras 600 028

I have some suggestions for the Newsletter on its 30th Birthday:

- 1) There should be honorary representatives of this organisation in each State/region....
- 2) Training camps could be organised for members with the help of other institutions such as BNHS.....
- 3) As for the Newsletter itself, I suggest we have an index of all the article published from 1959....

**A NEW DEVICE TO MEASURE EGGS.** H. DANIEL WESLEY, 126 Ramalinga Nagar South, Tiruchirapalli 620017

Reference to the article by Mr. K. Sivasubramaniam and Mr. N. Ganapathy on the above.

I should like to say that the already available and much refined Vernier Callipers would serve the purpose very well. I have been using it myself for measuring the eggs. It can measure accurately to decimal points, with zero correction. The new device would be inconvenient in as much as it requires to be dismantled and reassembled out of and in use. Perhaps the Vernier could be made of wood to make it lighter but then the device would soon become

loose and shaky with use. I think it is wasteful exercise with only one favourable point, that of being indigenous.

**POND HERON SNAPPING UP DRAGONFLIES.**  
H.DANIEL WESLEY, 126 Ramalinga Nagar South,  
Tiruchirapalli 620 017

I was observing a few Pond Herons which were feeding in a fallow plot of land, grassy and with water patchily collected in it, close to my house. At 5.25 p.m. on 3 December 1989 one of the birds flew up to the prosopis by my window about 15 metres away, apparently satiated. Ten meters high on a branch it sat quietly, so it seemed, neck drawn in and unmindful of the environs. There were brown dragon flies on the wing, criss-crossing all over the place, many of them moving around the tree too. Watching a little more intently, I observed that the bird was making a feast of the unsuspecting flies that happened to come within striking distance of the bill. The observation lasted for a little over 15 minutes. The bird made nineteen attempts of which twelve were successful and seven failures; the failure was 36.84%. One of the successful catches, however, also failed when the insect held at the bill-tip by the abdomen escaped as the bird tried to manoeuvre it down the gape. The seven certain failures were due to the bird's jabbing being inaccurately aimed. The successive catches were made at an average time interval of 10.17 seconds. The failed attempts were in quick succession, the average interval being 3 seconds between them. The very close failures may have been because the bird became conspicuous by its action to the prey; of the confusion in the predator due to the random and quick flight of the insects and the consequent indecision as to which insect to stalk, and to the visual fatigue having to see against the western sky. By about 5.45 p.m. the dragon flies were not seen at all. And the Pond Heron flew away to its roosting coconut grove.

**VISIT TO SULTANPUR JHEEL.** JASJIT MANSINGH,  
Bibliophile, L24 Hauz Khas Enclave, New Delhi 110 016

Winter has arrived, and we made our first pilgrimage to Sultanpur about 50 km away. There is very little water in the Jheel this year, in fact, two thirds of it is dry. They seem to be making efforts to supplement it by pumping in tubewell water which is how they kept it going two years ago after that terrible drought. However, most of the usual winter birds are in, though the numbers are much more spectacular right here at the Okhla barrage. Two smart moves at Sultanpur. The tourist-picnic area has been cordoned off with its own entrance, and those who want to go to the water have to use the Sanctuary entrance and do some walking. And to keep the 'instant' sightseers happy, a flock of domestic (Chinese?) geese have been introduced at the very first viewing point!!

**BAIKAL TEAL IN RAJASTHAN.** R.N.CHATTERJEE,  
A/4 Naka Madar, Ajmer 305 001

In the Nov/Dec. issue of the Newsletter, in the list of Ducks in the Asian Waterfowl census, South Asia, I find that there is no mention about Baikal Teal. We have a duck skin which has been identified as that of Baikal Teal. In its description, it is mentioned, as a rare straggler in Rajasthan. This species is supposed to come in numbers in the eastern region. This specimen had been shown to you and DR.Salim Ali. I hope this is not a mistaken identity.

**FORKTAIL-LEICA CONSERVATION AWARD TO DR.RENE DEKKER** - Announcement by the Oriental Bird Club, C/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, U.K.

On the afternoon of Saturday, 16th December 1989, leading Dutch ornithologist Dr. Rene Dekker, was announced as the winner of the Forktail-Leica conservation award. The announcement took place at the AGM of the Oriental Bird Club, Royal Zoological Society Meeting Rooms, Regents Park, London.

The award, which goes to the best conservation based study of an Oriental bird species or habitat, is worth £500/- and is funded by LEICA in the U.K. distributors of the world famous Leica Cameras and Trinovid binoculars.

The project will initiate a conservation scheme and train Indian biologists in the conservation, management and study methods appropriate to this bird which is endemic to Nicobar Islands. The total population of this species is thought to be found on Great Nicobar Island.

The Indian government has, in order to facilitate this project, allowed unprecedented access to this restricted area, and staff from the Ministry of Environment have already started mapping nest sites prior to Dr. Dekker's arrival.

**COMMENT ON THE NEWSLETTER.** L.A. HILL, 64  
North Parade, Grantham, Lincolnshire NG31 8AN,  
England.

I must congratulate you on the appearance of the magazine. The quality is getting better and better.

I had another 5 weeks on the Coto Donana in Spain this year, but this time in the spring, and it was most enjoyable, ringing Golden Orioles, Woodchat Shrikes, Serins, etc. Hope to go again next year, but in the autumn.

**THE REDWINGED CUCKOO.** A.M. SOMAN, Panda  
Nature Club, 20 State Bank Colony, P.O. Katol Road, Nagpur  
440 013

During a visit to Top Slip for a WWF camp between 24th December and 29th December, we sighted a Redwinged Cuckoo *Clamator coromandus* near Tiger Lodge. The weather was cloudy and foggy. We watched the bird for about 4 minutes flying from one tree to another.



## TRAGOPAN TRIUMPH

The ICBP team investigating the status of the spectacular Western Tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus* (see *World Bird-watch* 11,1: 10) returned this July from Indus Kohistan in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan with excellent



Mixed temperate forest, Khajjil Nala, home of the Western Tragopan. (Photo: J. Eames)

news. Guy Duke, Jon Eames, Fazal Baqi and Akhtar Munir, following up survey work by Duke in 1987 and 1988, were delighted to find an extensive area of pristine moist temperate mixed forest in the Palas Valley. As many as 49 calling males were heard in dawn surveys, leading to hopes that some 200 pairs (assuming the species is monogamous) may survive in what is the largest enclave for the bird found to date west of the Indus River.

## RARITIES IN CENTRAL AMERICA

One of Central America's most enigmatic birds, the Keel-billed Motmot *Electron carinatum*, is losing some of its mystery: Steve Howell and Sophie Webb saw and heard up to five at one locality in Honduras in June 1988, and Bruce and Carolyn Miller report it fairly abundant in the lowland forest around the Caracol archaeological site on the Vaca Plateau, south-western Belize. The Millers hope the entire area will be proposed as a World Heritage Site.

In May 1988 Howell and Webb learnt of a possibly sizeable population of Horned Guans *Oreophasis derbianus* in the Sierra de las Minas, in eastern Guatemala, well beyond the known range of the species, though it is suspected of occurring in Honduras.

Indeed, Sergio Midence has been searching for this and other cracids in Honduras in the past year with a grant from the Pan American Section, work that has resulted in renewed confidence that the Highland Guan *Penelopina nigra* is relatively secure there (he even found one in a restaurant in Tegucigalpa!).

The Horned Guan is almost exactly sympatric with another threatened species, the Azure-rumped Tanager *Tangara cabanisi*. The major site for both birds outside Guatemala is the El Triunfo Reserve in Sierra Madre del Sur, Chiapas, México. The reserve is being developed through the WWF-backed efforts of the Instituto de Historia Natural in Tuxtla Gutiérrez. This year, Adrian Long and Melanie Heath have been working for IHN on the tanager, and in April/May had three nests under observation. Much new data are accumulating on the breeding biology and habitat needs of this very poorly known bird.

Despite such encouraging news, the list of threatened species in Central America remains undiminished. Howell points out that the Short-crested Coquette *Lophornis brachylopha* is a good species, not a race of Rufous-crested Coquette *L. delattrei*. Its recent rediscovery (*Wilson Bull.* 99: 719-721) indicates it to be a rare inhabitant of ever-diminishing cloud-forest and edge in the Sierra Madre del Sur, Guerrero, México — another bird to watch.



Sergio Midence and friends.

## PARIA PENINSULA, VENEZUELA

Last summer the winners of the 1988 Expedition Competition, the Cambridge Columbus Zoological Expedition, visited the Paría Peninsula in north-east Venezuela. The peninsula, site of Columbus's first landfall on mainland America, has long been recognised as a centre of endemism and has national park status, yet its relative inaccessibility has meant that the avifauna remains little known even today. Indeed, as travel is solely by small fishing boats, the peninsula is still a paradise whereas surrounding areas have come under the plough.

Liaising closely with local people, the team based themselves in the national park to study the birds, dragonflies and



Forest understorey on the Paría Peninsula. (Photo: R. Bond)

plants. Of the four species mentioned in *Birds to watch*, the White-throated Barbtail *Margarornis tatei* was common in inaccessible montane forest, Yellow-faced Redstart *Myioborus pariae* was seen only once, but encouragingly both the White-tailed Sabrewing *Campylopterus curvipennis* and the Scissor-tailed Hummingbird *Hylonympha macrocerca* were found in good numbers in primary forest, and also seemed to thrive in secondary vegetation.

The threat to the national park from agriculture and unsympathetic tourism is considerable. Expedition members Ruth Bond and Chris Sharpe are making plans to return. They hope to set up an integrated agroforestry project, both to generate income for farmers and to provide a buffer zone protecting the boundaries of this ornithologically important area.

## EXPEDITION COMPETITION 1990

Entries are invited for the 1990 ICBP/FFPS Expedition Competition. The expedition must take place in a country outside Europe or the U.S.A. There will be prizes of £1,000 and £800 for the winners and runners-up respectively in the two categories *Birds* and *All other wild animals and plants*. The Expedition Guide, available from the Secretariat, describes the competition in more detail and gives advice to expedition organisers, together with a list of useful addresses and publications. Entries should be submitted not later than 31 January 1990.

## CHARITY CALENDAR

Thirty organisations, including ICBP, will receive a royalty from the sales of a new calendar for 1990 entitled *Animals at risk*, produced on recycled paper and available from Oakroyd Press, 9 Oakroyd Avenue, Potters Bar, Herts, EN6 2EH, U.K., price £5.99 post free.

## OIL vs MEGAPODE

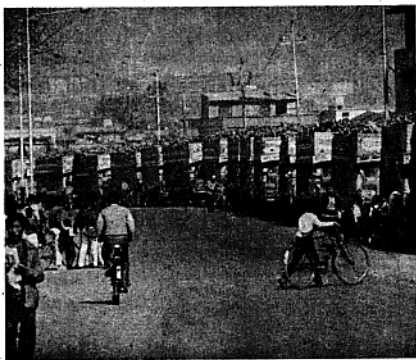
The *Tonga Chronicle* of 28 July this year revealed that Iran is pursuing diplomatic ties with Tonga so that the small Pacific kingdom could serve as a crude oil storage depot. Niuafu'ou, the kingdom's northernmost island, is under consideration for the site of the depot because of its surrounding deep sea.

Niuafu'ou is the beautiful, tiny and only home of the threatened megapode *Megapodius pritchardii*, which incubates its eggs in the hot volcanic soils of the island. An oil storage depot will destroy the site's natural beauty and expose the megapode – whose colonisation of and speciation on the island remain a mystery – to immediate risks of extinction: ICBP has expressed concern to His Majesty King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV.

## FORESTS FOR FUEL IN NEPAL

In March this year Nepal's trade and transit treaty with India lapsed, and the two countries have since been locked in dispute, writes *Carol Inskipp*: Consequently very little transit traffic has reached Nepal, resulting in serious economic and environmental problems; most development projects are at a standstill.

Environmentally, the worst impact of the dispute falls on Nepal's forests. With kerosene supplies effectively cut off, there has been a five-fold increase in demand for fuelwood, resulting in the cutting of 60-300 ha of forest every day. Nepal's forests were already badly depleted and this additional destruction is lamentable, particularly when it is widely judged that the now recurrent flood disasters in Bangladesh are in part attributable to deforestation in the Himalayas.



Fifteen lorries loaded with timber enter Kathmandu. (Photo: Bikas Rauniar)

## WHISKERED PITTA LIVES

In a forthcoming *Fieldiana: Biology*, Steven Goodman and Pedro Gonzalez report on a 1988 sighting of Whiskered (Koch's) Pitta *Pitta kochi* on Mount Isarog in southern Luzon – welcome news, as this Philippine endemic is evidently in serious trouble in northern Luzon, to which it had been thought restricted (see *World Birdwatch* 11,2: 4). Moreover, Mount Isarog is a national park. The viability of the population surviving on the mountain now merits urgent study.

## KUPE BUSH-SHRIKE REDISCOVERED



Kupe Bush-shrike (Painting: N. Arlott)

One of Africa's most enigmatic birds, the Mount Kupe Bush-shrike *Malaconotus kupeensis*, has been rediscovered. Only ever known from one small mountain in Cameroon, and only ever seen by one man, William Serle, in 1949 and 1951, the species eluded visitor after visitor until this year, when Duncan McNiven spent 10 days in July exploring Kupe at the altitude (c.1,370 m) Serle found it. He made two sightings, one on the afternoon of 4 July at 1,310 m when a bird perched 15 m from him and 8 m up in a vine, one at dawn on 10 July at 1,220 m and only 150 m from the first site, when a bird moved through the canopy 20-25 m up and 30 m distant. Both times the diagnostic features of the species were clearly seen. McNiven adds that the forest on Kupe is "absolutely pristine".

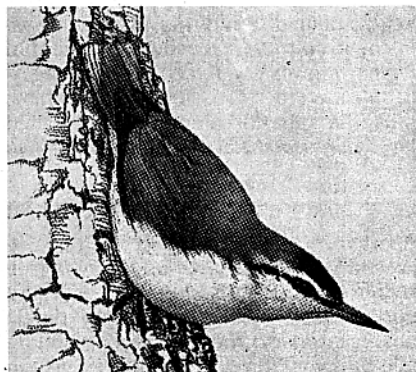
## TANZANIAN DISCOVERIES

One of ICBP's Tanzania representatives, Neil Baker, has enjoyed an eventful year. With his hard-working companion, Liz Boswell, he has been instrumental in the growth of a new organisation, the Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania (P.O. Box 70919, Dar es Salaam); encouraged and succeeded with Tanzania's lobby of CITES for the African Elephant's move onto Appendix I; and discovered no fewer than four new species of bird – two cisticolas, a weaver, and a bishop! Details of these will appear in a later *World Birdwatch*, but one of the four, the bishop, illustrates another Baker/Boswell field of action: stemming the destructive trade in captive birds from Tanzania. Neil and Liz discovered the new species in a cage in a Dar es Salaam market! In addition to all this, they supported a team that has found the threatened Spotted Ground-thrush *Turdus fischeri* nesting in a forest on the Rondo Plateau in southern Tanzania. This is almost certainly the previously unknown breeding area of the birds that "winter" in Sokoke and other coastal forest remnants in Kenya. Congratulations to them both.

Meanwhile, another Sokoke speciality has been found in northern Tanzania. In August this year Neil Burgess, Chris Cutts and Mark Huxham netted two Sokoke Pipits *Anthus sokokensis* in the isolated, 50 km<sup>2</sup> Kiono Forest Reserve (near Sadani). This brings the total known sites for this threatened bird to four, and represents a significant improvement in its long-term prospects.

## NEW SITE FOR ALGERIAN NUTHATCH

Chalabi Bouzid of the Algerian Department of Forestry and Nature Protection discovered a second population of Algerian Nuthatches *Sitta ledanti* on 16 June this year. The new site is in the eastern part of the forested Guerrouch massif in the middle of Taza National Park. This discovery is as welcome as it is unexpected: M. Bouzid will publish the details shortly.



Algerian Nuthatch (Painting: Alistair Robertson)

## GUAM RAIL FOR ROTA

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service plans to introduce a number of Guam Rails *Rallus owstoni* to the island of Rota. The rail, like other Guam landbirds, has suffered catastrophically from the accidentally introduced Brown Tree Snake *Boiga irregularis*, and although it does well in captivity it needs a new, more secure home.

The U.S. Section of ICBP has written to USFWS to support the Rota initiative, but stressing the importance of minimising the risks of transporting the snake to Rota or other islands in the Pacific, and urging assessment of the rail's impact on Rota's native reptiles and invertebrates, in case the bid to save one extinction only results in another.