

# *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*

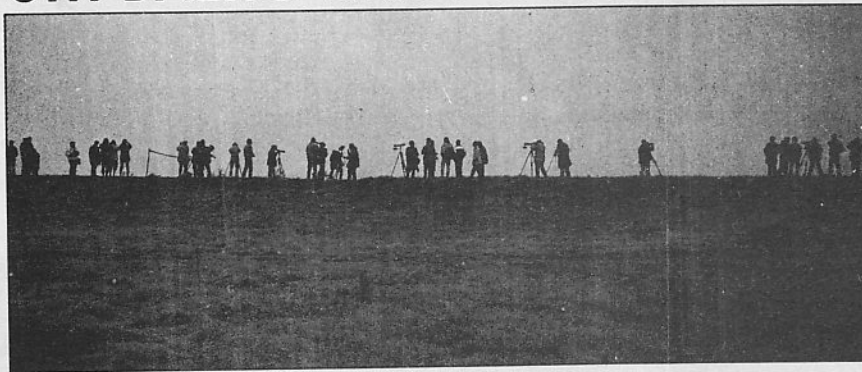
VOL. XXXI

No. 5 & 6

May - June 1991



# 6TH BALTIC BIRDS CONFERENCE



Participants on the excursion to Ramsar area at Rugen watching cranes. (Photo: J. van Vessem)

From 7-12 October 1990 about 80 participants attended the 6th Conference on the study and conservation of Birds of the Baltic Basin. This was held at Pruchten (Rostock county, Germany) and was organised by The Waterfowl Research and Wetlands Protection Bureau of Potsdam and the Zoological Garden of Rostock. All countries, republics and regions around the Baltic region were represented, except Finland. Topics included dynamics and monitoring of bird populations, migration, threatened and endangered bird species, habitat and bird conservation and population ecology and behaviour. Besides papers and posters, nearly all evenings were spent on workshops, which gave a good opportunity for stimulating discussions, also about practical and technical matters.

IWRB was involved in workshops on the importance of the Baltic region and a general workshop for the national coordinators of the International Waterfowl Census. Besides these, workshops were held on

population trends and stock development of the White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*; population trends, ecology and protection of waders; and finally about policies and implementations of international conventions in the Baltic region. Three recommendations were brought forward by the conference. The first including a conservation plan for the White-tailed Eagle, towards the German Government. The second was focused on a demand for increased support, collaboration, scholarships and exchange for the Baltic Republics. The third recommendation was a demand of the Baltic Republics to become individual members of IWRB; and if not possible, to intensify bilateral contacts with institutions, organisations and individuals.

Overall this was a stimulating and well-organised conference. If adequate financial support is available, "Baltic Birds 7" will be held in Lithuania in 1994.

**Janine van Vessem**  
Head of Waterfowl Division  
IWRB

## WATERFOWL IN RIO GRANDE DO SUL

Rio Grande do Sul, the southernmost state of Brazil, harbours 19 out of the 24 listed duck species in Brazil. It is the only Brazilian state with legal hunting. Since 1980, the Brazilian bird banding centre has supported field studies of the huntable duck species, to advise the federal government nature conservation authority on game regulations, species and habitat conservation.

*Netta peposaca* and *Dendrocygna bicolor*, showed important movements within the state, Uruguay and Argentina. The lower portion of the Parana river valley, Argentina, is the most important breeding place for both species. Ducks marked in Brazil with such a breeding area use the central depression of Rio Grande do Sul state as their flyway. The coastal lagoons are also heavily used on the north/south movements after the ducks reach the coastal wetlands.

Table.  
Ringing data from Rio Grande do Sul

|                            | Ducks banded<br>1980/89 | Recoveries<br>till 1989 | % recovered<br>shot |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Netta peposaca</i>      | 2,689                   | 172                     | 93                  |
| <i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i> | 1,585                   | 51                      | 91                  |

*Netta peposaca* was the first south American duck to be studied through banding. However, our findings show no circuit migration for the population, as proposed by Dr C.C. Olog. The marked birds moved from Rio Grande do Sul into Parana valley; then, after breeding, they moved back to Rio Grande do Sul or stayed in the valley until late autumn.

*Dendrocygna bicolor* has a similar movement pattern to *Netta peposaca*, although the data did not show an annual migration. Data also suggest a strong cohesion of the marked birds in Brazil, with dispersion only in the Argentinian breeding grounds.

The results raise the obvious need for international cooperation. This is being achieved through a programme of international workshops which are leading to a coordination of conservation efforts for waterfowl and wetlands in South America.

**Paulo de Tarso Zuquim Antas**  
Coordinator of CEMAVE

## ASIAN WATERFOWL CENSUS 1990

Thanks to the fieldwork of hundreds of dedicated Asian ornithologists, the summary report of the Asian Waterfowl Census 1990 has recently been published and distributed to all participants. This fourth year of the census was once again a record, with 28 countries submitting data on over 1,400 wetlands and recording a total of 6.6 million waterfowl of over 200 species.

In December 1991, the International Symposium on Wetlands and Waterfowl Conservation in Asia, to be organised by IWRB in Pakistan (see announcement), will be a unique opportunity to review the achievement of the first five years of the Asian Waterfowl Census and to set its future targets. A meeting of all the National Coordinators of the census in west and south Asia is planned during the Symposium.

While thanking again all the participants of last year's census, we wish them a very successful census in 1991 as well as a Happy New Year.

**Christian Perennou**  
Scientific Officer  
IWRB

NB. The report *Asian Waterfowl Census 1990* is available from IWRB headquarters. Price £5.00 + £1.00 postage and packing.

## REQUEST FOR INFORMATION Chinese Egrets

In July 1990, the Asian Wetland Bureau (AWB) and Kyung Hee University, Seoul, colour marked 82 fledgling Chinese Egrets *Egretta eulophotes* on Shin Islet, South Korea. The birds were marked using red or white colour bands, with the following codes:

- i) one, two or three horizontal bands
- ii) a digit (0-9) repeated on three sides.

Information on this endangered Red Data Book species is urgently required. Please send ALL sightings (including those with incomplete details or repeated sightings of the same bird) to: **Colin Poole, AWB, Institute for Advanced Studies, University of Malaya, 59100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.**

## Ringed Flamingos

Since 1977, over 12,000 Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber roseus* chicks have been ringed in the western Mediterranean with coded plastic legbands. These are engraved in black alpha- numerical codes of 3 or 4 digits. French rings (yellow or white) from the Camargue are placed on the right tibia and Spanish (orange) from Fuente de Piedra (Malaga) on the left tibia. The black line engraved between the first two digits of the Spanish rings must be recorded to avoid confusion with some codes. These birds may be encountered in all Mediterranean countries, in western Asia and in West Africa. All sightings will be acknowledged with details of the bird's life history.

**Alan Johnson, Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat, Le Sambuc, 13200 ARLES, France.**

**Juan Calderon, Estacion Biologica de Doñana, Pabellon del Perù, Avenida Maria Luisa s/n, 41013 SEVILLA, Spain.**

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## EDITORIAL

## Sridhar Honoured

Our Newsletter is justifiably proud that our Publisher S. Sridhar has been awarded the Associateship of the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain. Obviously he won this distinction for his exclusive bird photographs. Sridhar's photographs, apart from their technical excellence, succeed in capturing the essential qualities of the species. We have also to be grateful to Sridhar for placing his photographs at the disposal of the Newsletter.

## The Indira Gandhi Canal

This canal has come in for a lot of criticism from environmentalists because of the water-logging it has created over a wide area around it. The salts which have emerged on the surface of the land, from their appointed place lower in the ground, have made large areas uncultivable. What is the effect on the bird life? Indra Kumar Sharma (Bhagwati Bhavan, Ratanada Road, Jodhpur 342020) intends to study this aspect. He says the Black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa* was observed here "though it had not been observed (before) in wetlands of the Thar desert."

## Hazards of Nuclear Plants

Since birds, because of their fast metabolism suffer greatly from air and water pollution, it is natural that they would also be the first victims of atomic radiation. R. Ashok Kumar (Type III, 36 E Tata Colony, Mahul Road, Chembur, Bombay 74) says that in May 86 a radio active cloud passed over India due to the Chernobyl disaster, as a result of which many insect eaters may have died. He points to some data collected at the Palo Marin Field Station, 25 miles North of San Francisco. "During the summer of 1986 the number of newly hatched birds captured in our standardised mist-netting programme was only 37.7% of the previous ten year mean". Can we draw any conclusions from this?

## Flocking of Red Wattled Lapwings

Rakesh Vyas (2-P-22, Vigyan Nagar, Kota 324005) suggests that Salim Ali and Ripley were not correct in stating in the Handbook that these birds do not form large flocks. Vyas claims that he has seen "large congregations ..... ranging from 26 to 200 birds on large open drains, nullahs, ponds and talabs."

### Drongos Feeding at Night

Records keep coming in about Drongos feeding on insects around mercury lamps late into the night. Rajiv Saxena (Hanuman Nagar, Phalka Bazar, Gwalior 474009) writes "I saw 6 or 7 Drongos feeding on insects flying around a mercury bulb ..... at 5 A.M." I recall that in our Andheri garden, Drongos were active well after dusk when all the other birds had vanished from sight. Why is it that other insectivores do not take advantage of the insects swarming around our modern lighting systems. Nightjars I think, keep close to the ground, but there are several others which chase insects in the air.

### Handwritten Scripts are Unwelcome

I would like to repeat that handwritten, as against typed scripts, cause problems for the Editor. For one thing they seem to be "dashed off" in a hurry without much planning. There are some exceptions of course, like V. Santharam, whose writing is neat and clear and easy to decipher. Anvarkhan Babi sends interesting pieces from time to time, but in a recent article on Dholka which have "an astounding amount of birdlife, specially Small Minivets, Ioras, Baybacked Shrikes, Whitebrowed Flycatchers, Weaver birds, Woodshrikes....." he refers to the Gold-crested Woodpeckers. I believe there is no such bird. Or is it that some recent changes have been made in nomenclature.

### Lakhota Talava in Jamnagar

There have been encouraging instances recently, of local activists having motivated the authorities to create bird sanctuaries, even in the midst of busy cities. Lakhota Talava or Lake Ranmal, has been declared a Protected Bird Reserve by the Jamnagar Municipal Corporation recently. The original plan was to fill it with scrap and other waste material and create a shopping complex and an Institute for Studies. Credit for this must go to Jaydey Nansey (c/o Dr. K.S. Shah, Jamnagar, 361008) and his group. J Nansey writes that there are about 93 species of birds on Lake Ranmal. But to his surprise he came across a pair of East African Crowned Cranes. The birds had obviously come from the Zoological Park of the Jam Sahib. They seem to be in the habit of emerging from the Park for a few hours and visiting the outside world. Africa is the home of two crane species. "One is the majestic Crowned Crane with its conspicuous topknot of stiff feathers that look like a shaving brush. It has been commonly domesticated, and is reported to be a useful bird around gardens because of its fondness for insects and reptiles."

### Hindi Names of Birds

In response to L. Balasubramaniam's suggestion that Hindi names of birds (wherever available) should be

mentioned in the Newsletter M. Shashidhara (State Bank of Mysore, Arsikere, Karnataka, writes : "65% of Indians speak other Indian languages..... it is better to have a different Hindi magazine. Please continue English language and do not use Hindi anywhere in the Newsletter". S. Devasahayam (L4/38 KSHB Colony, Malaparamba, Calicut 673009) writes : "Scores of birdwatchers and readers of the Newsletter whose knowledge of Hindi is nil or limited (I am sure there are many) would stand to lose much.... I am sure you will continue to retain the international outlook of the Newsletter by accepting articles only in English". We certainly do not want the Newsletter to be a cause of linguistic discord. In fact it must bring people closer together. There will be no change in the present policy of using the English and the scientific names. If there is some special reason for mentioning the local name it will certainly be mentioned in the English script.

### Bird Study in Rishi Valley School

Flt. Lt. S. Rangaswami (Retd.), of 35, West Anjenaya Temple Street, Basavanagudi, Bangalore 560 004, has sent a report about activities in Rishi Valley School. Apart from regular bird watching, a check list is being prepared of the migrant and resident species. So far 105 species have been identified. "25 students, boys and girls, have become members of the Birdwatchers Club, and all of them have evinced much enthusiasm for bird watching and bird study. Some of them are regularly writing to Mr. Sridhar and Mr. Santharam, who are among the members of the team guiding them, about their birdwatching experiences and some students have displayed a flair for making sketches of birds observed by them."

### Wetland and Waterfowl Conservation in South and West Asia

I hope many of our readers will participate in the Conference which is to be held in Karachi between 14-20 December 1991. The Second Announcement is printed elsewhere in this Newsletter. It will be a good opportunity for people, divided artificially by political boundaries (irrespective of the more important ecological needs for unity) to work for more sensible arrangements. Can we not have the Rann of Kutch declared an International Bird Sanctuary, so that instead of being an area of discord between India and Pakistan, it becomes a pleasure ground for humans and avians alike. There have been several instances, in Europe and America, where boundary disputes between countries have been solved by creating National Parks on the border. This strategy must be increasingly employed all over the world.

## THE 'FLAMINGO CITY' IN THE RANN OF KUTCH

M.K. HIMMATSINHJI, Bhuj, Kutch 370 001

Accounts have appeared in the Newsletter and elsewhere recently of the Greater Flamingo - *Phoenicopterus roseus* - breeding in the Great Rann of Kutch. It would interest the readers of the Newsletter to have the history of the 'Flamingo City', as the late Dr. Salim Ali called it.

The credit for the discovery of the only breeding colony of flamingos in the sub-continent goes to the keen naturalist, the then Maharao Shri Khengarji of Kutch. He informed Lt. C.D. Lester of this fact first in the year 1893. Lt. Lester wrote on this subject in the journal of the Bombay Natural History Society (Vol. viii p.553). Thereafter His Highness himself published a note on the subject with a photograph of the colony in 1904 (JBNHS Vol.xv p.706). Since then the breeding colony was visited by Mr. C.McCann (1935) of the BNHS. To those to whom Vol.xi, pp.12-38, of the Journal of the Society (Aug. 1939) is accessible, Mr. McCann's account of his visit in it would provide interesting reading.

While on his survey of Kutch prior to updating the 'Birds of Kutch', written by Capt. Lester, Dr. Salim Ali went to the area in the Rann where the Flamingo breed in 1943; but the place was dry then with the birds absent. However his second visit there was extremely exciting and interesting. For when he went to the colony in April 1945 after the very heavy monsoon rains of the previous year the water conditions and the inundation of 'hanj bet' (the local name for the 'Flamingo City' which perhaps came into use after its discovery, as 'hanj' is the Kutchhi name for flamingo, and 'bet' means island) was more than ideal. Thus Dr. Salim Ali estimated that along with the young, the total number of Flamingos present were not less than half a million. This was the first time he recorded Avocets breeding in the undivided India of that period. These birds had their nests on the bare mudflats on the periphery of the flamingo colony. The Rann had sprung more surprises with almost all subsequent visits to it by Dr. Salim Ali. For example, in 1960 he found the White or Rosy Pelican breeding among old worn-down nests of Flamingos in the occupied 'City'. This again was a first breeding record within our limits.

The visit of Dr. Salim Ali along with the late Darbarsaheb Shivraj Kumar Kachar of Jasdan produced the crowning glory for them in the last but one expedition in the discovery of the Lesser Flamingo - *Phoeniconaias minor* - breeding in January 1974 along with their larger cousins. Though suspected of breeding in Kutch, this was the first confirmed record of the birds breeding in India. One cannot

do better in describing the breeding activities in the Rann of the Lesser Flamingos than that great ornithologist, SA, himself. In his Note (JBNHS Vol.71, No.1, April 1974, pp.141-44) he says: "it may be mentioned that among the enormous number of birds present (estimated as 25 to 30,000) we guessed the total number of Lesser Flamingo in the more congested sector of the mixed colony ("north colony", photo 2) to be between 2000 (SA) and 5000 (Shivraj Kumar). The nests, with these birds sitting on eggs or newly hatched chicks, were scattered among those of the larger, but some sections were patronized almost exclusively by *P. minor*. These segregated *mohallas* or 'ghettos' stood out clearly in the distance as patches of dark rosy pink against the white masses of *roseus*. Nearly all nests of both species contained eggs in every stage of development - mostly hard-set or chipping or just hatched — in addition to a great many newly hatched chicks in french grey velvety powder-puff down, and hordes of older grey plumaged runners (pullets) of more or less uniform size ..... looking like a vast stretch of mobile undergrowth around the parents' legs while being herded away at our intrusion".

It must be mentioned here that prior to the SA-Shivraj Kumar visit to the Rann, Dr. Philip Kahl who was at that time making a comparative study of all the flamingo species of the world, flew over the breeding grounds on 15 November (1973) and took aerial photographs of the two sections of the City. The reference to the photo in the above-quoted extract from Dr. Salim-Ali's note is to one of the two photos of Dr. Kahl published with that note.

The last visit of Dr. Salim Ali to explore the Flamingo City drew a blank. On the wrong information given by the Forest Department that the flamingo had gathered in the Rann, he rushed to Kutch and went all the way up to the area where these birds are known to breed. This was in the year 1979. With the extremely heavy rainfall in that year the water in the Rann, which is normally quite shallow, was deeper and came up to the bellies of the camels. So there was no chance of dismounting anywhere till the party came back to the starting point which involved an uncomfortable and rough camel ride of approximately 20 km, followed by another camel-back journey of about 5 hrs. SA described his earlier experience in his above-mentioned note in 1974 thus: "After the heavy monsoon inundation the edge of the Rann was still wet and boggy and impassable for jeeps, so — as on the previous occasion — we motored from Khavda to Kuran (c. 15 km) and then transferred to camel-back. The

route to Nir lay along the stony base of the Kala Dongar hills across the rocky hummocks and dry stony water courses, sparsely scattered with *Euphorbia*, *Salvadora*, *Zizyphus* and *Prosopis* scrub. The distance from Kunar to Nir, said to be c. 22 km, took 4 1/2 hours of merciless pounding on some of the most uncomfortable saddles ever designed! The distance from our bivouac at Nir to Flamingo City, approximately 10 km, was covered on the same mounts in 2 1/2 hours next morning, over alarmingly slithery slush alternating with shallow brine....." So when the party reached the location of the breeding colony, they found to their utter chagrin, there was no trace of the flamingo there. This episode brings into focus the typical example of grit, keenness and the powers of endurance of that remarkable person, SA, even at that advanced old age he had reached in the Year of Grace 1979!

This brings us to the question as to why were the Flamingos not there? In 1978 pesticides were sprayed on Kala Dungan, a hill feature overlooking the Great Ran of Kutch, to destroy a swarm of the Desert Locust that had settled in that area. A heavy shower of rain soon after that washed the poisonous substances down into the Rann. Owing to the pollution of water in this manner the Flamingo were absent from the Rann for at least a couple of years after this incident.

Although Flamingos are known to breed, or to start their nesting activities, between July and September, there is no fixed season for their nidification. For they depend upon the actual conditions of inundation of their breeding ground in the Rann. They start these activities when the wet mud becomes available for nest-building as the water starts receding from the higher ground of the City. The water comes into the Rann through rivers and rivulets flowing into it from both sides of the Indo-Pakistan border and through the tidal creeks to the west during the summer high tides. The main rivers emptying into the Rann are Luni from Rajasthan and River Banas from north Gujarat. The volume of rain water flowing in has decreased owing to the dams having been built over the years on both these rivers. In years having low rainfall or famines, the birds do not breed at all. During the last season there was heavy rainfall

both in southern Rajasthan and northern Gujarat with the result that the dams over the two main rivers overflowed and continued to do so for quite some time and so the Flamingos started their nest-building activities from October/November onwards. The figures initially given of the number of these birds present this time were highly exaggerated. Judging from the sample count of nests and eggs carried out by Mr. N.N. Bapat (covering c. 1/6 of the area of the breeding colony), it appears there were between 20 to 30,000 birds present. This count was made on January 30 (1991). Mr. Bapat first paid a visit to the Flamingo City on January 7, but at that time his excitement over going there and his elation at seeing the Flamingo breeding got the better of his good judgement and so he gave the total number of birds present as half a million. He may possibly have had this figure estimated by Dr. Salim Ali, in 1945, at the back of his mind!

Very few people are aware of a new possible danger posed to the 'Hanj Bet' during recent years. For some time now the authorities in Sind (Pakistan) have been pumping water out into the western part of the Great Rann of Kutch through a nullah. This is perhaps being done to relieve the southern portion, facing the Rann, of the problem of waterlogging in that part of Pakistan. The flow of water has increased during the last couple of years as a result of which water has started spreading eastwards over a large area. If this state of affairs continues without any let or hindrance, eventually this spread of water would become wider and it would not be too long before it starts flowing through channels formed in the Rann both by the tidal waters flowing into it as also the rain water; and it would reach the area where the Flamingo breed. If this happens, and if the water is polluted by the residues of pesticides and chemical fertilizers, it would certainly have an adverse effect on the breeding of these birds. Even though there may be no element of pollution in the water, the semi-sweet water would, in the long run, alter the regime in and around the Flamingo City. Efforts should therefore be made by NGOs such as the WWF, IUCN etc. to persuade the government of Pakistan to stop this flow of water into the Great Rann of Kutch.

## FIELD OBSERVATIONS ON THE BEHAVIOUR OF LESSER WHISTLING TEAL IN ASSAM

MANIDEEP RAJ, Department of Zoology, Darrang College, Tezpur, Assam 784001

The family *Anatidae* is represented by 39 species in Assam of which 32 species are migratory and 9 resident. Of the residential *anatids*, only the Lesser Whistling Teal *Dendrocygna javanica* is distributed throughout the state,

while the others have become highly localized and rare. To understand the reasons for the success, observations were carried out on the behaviour of Lesser Whistling Teals. The behaviour patterns observed are described as follows.

## Preening and Bathing

Preening and bathing which forms the essence of maintenance behaviour of teals occurred mostly during late morning, mid-day, and early afternoon. Activity budgeting revealed that the teals spend around 23% of their time preening during the wintering period and slightly more during breeding, while only 1 to 2% of the total time of the day was allotted to bathing in both the seasons. Bathing is accomplished by dipping the head in water accompanied by the beating of wings as also by short dives. With preening three types of activities could be recognised.

### 1. *Autopreening:*

It consists of preening different parts of the body with the beak. The wings are preened by stretching and nibbling with the beak from the underside while standing and from above while sitting on the ground. Feathers on the throat are frequently nibbled leisurely with the beak while the same process on the breast is at most times manifested in a bout of activity. Tail feathers are preened by raising one leg and nibbling with beak the tail rectrices from the underside. For preening the feathers on the back the wing is pushed forward and downward and neck is turned to reach the back.

### 2. *Dip Preening:*

It consists of dipping of the bill in water while standing at the edge of a wetland and subsequently rubbing it on the breast. Since the act is observed to occur only during mid-day it probably helps in temporary cooling of the body against the heat.

### 3. *Mutual Preening:*

It takes place with a teal nibbling another on the crown, neck, nape, throat or upper breast and this occurs more frequently during the breeding season. It however plays no role in mating display.

## Resting

Resting in Lesser Whistling Teals comprises of loafing and sleeping. In general teals spend more time resting in the wintering period (53%) as compared to that of the breeding period (42%). While loafing, the teal may simply be standing or sitting down on the ground or it stays motionless in water or shows a variety of fatigue or relaxing moves generally known as comfort movements.

Teals sleep while standing, sitting on ground or holding themselves motionless in water. Eyes are closed intermittently during the mid-day mainly with the neck held in the normal or retracted position or with the bill tucked under the scapulars. Though in no case were the eyes kept closed for more than two minutes at a time, at

least five percent of the teals in a flock remained alert or preening at all times during mid-day.

## Feeding

While no instance of feeding was observed in teals during day time in water, they allotted around 20% of the time of the day to the act in the breeding period, probably to supplement for the excess energy required during that time. Even then feeding was mainly restricted to early morning and evening by the adults during the breeding period. The teals generally feed by dabbling their bills on the surface or up-ending in shallow water to reach food at the lake bottom and also occasionally dive for food. At most times they could be seen walking in marshy places having grass height less than one foot, where they stoop down to dabble. This is accompanied by frequent jerking of bill towards the sky indicating the swallowing of animal matter.

## Alert

The teals in a flock become immediately alert on what they think is of danger to them. What constitutes imminent danger also seems to vary under different circumstances. It has been observed that while in some areas of Assam where safety is provided to flocks of Lesser Whistling Teals in the urban areas, a person may approach them fully exposed up to a distance of 15 ft. Yet in the sanctuaries where they occur, the closest they would allow a person to approach is around 60 ft. It thus appears that the objects to which the teals may or may not be accustomed to, play an important role in determining as to what constitutes a danger signal to them. There is also a marked difference in their method of becoming alert during the wintering and breeding periods. While in flocks in winter, at the slightest disturbance the teals would stop all other activities, wag their tails and start calling incessantly. In the breeding season the same sequence is followed only if the total number of teals are more than four in a flock. In all other instances while the tail wag is much less the teals without calling go on looking consistently in the direction from where the disturbance emanates and if it persists they would fly off or make a quick dash for cover, if with chicks.

## Courting

The breeding period of teals in Assam extends from May to September. Two broods may be brought up in a single year. Mating always takes place in water. While at most times teals can be seen mating in big wetlands the process is also sometimes accomplished in small puddles around one foot deep and two feet wide. The display is initiated with the male dipping only its head in water and subsequently raising it with the effect that water seems to drip from the tip of the bill. It then swims around the female

in a head down tail up posture. This is followed by both the partners swimming together for a short distance with the female slightly in front. The male then mounts on the female holding the back of the female head with the beak as in the case of domestic ducks. As soon as the male dismounts, both the partners raise themselves in water and dip their bodies head first in a way that the water rolls from the head to the back of the body. This is followed by throwing back of the head and rubbing it vigorously on the back. The process of bathing and head rubbing may be continued for four to twelve times. The male is the first to leave the spot and resumes preening thereafter. The female then raises itself for the last time in water, flaps its wings and follows the male. The whole process is completed in less than two minutes.

### Flock Dynamics

The Lesser Whistling Teals maintain tightly knit flocks during water. At most times they do not intermingle with other species except with the larger whistling teals. The closely knit structure however starts to disappear with the first incidence of rains in the month of March, when from a distance, the flight pattern resembles the loosely knit flock of cormorants. Hereafter the teals spread out to occupy a variety of habitats to breed. They start regrouping by the month of November once the broods are raised.

### CORRESPONDENCE

#### SOME URGENT CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF NARCONDAM ISLAND. S.A. HUSSAIN , Senior Scientist, Bombay Natural History Society, Bombay

It has been estimated that the major cause for extinction of endemic island species over the past 400 years has been habitat loss, range restrictions and introduction of alien species. Of these three factors, introductions lead to competition for food resulting in an aggressive species replacing other less aggressive ones. In islands, it naturally causes extinction of endemic species which are not geared to face new threats.

It has been repeatedly proved that goats and sheep are the major factors in vegetation degradation of any given area, and introducing them in any island, will cause havoc in the regeneration capacity of such islands.

Narcondam island in the Andaman group is of a unique volcanic origin. Situated in isolation between the main Andaman group of islands and mainland Burma, the island hosts one of the world's rarest species of hornbill which is also endemic to the island. The Narcondam hornbill *Rhyticeros narcondami* has been little studied and its

population is estimated to be around 400 birds (Hussain, 1972). The birds have so far survived in the island due to its remoteness and to the abundance of food as well as nesting sites. The island was uninhabited until 1965, when a small police party was stationed there. This output has been maintained ever since as a permanent feature.

During my earlier visit to the island, I found the area fairly undisturbed, except at the landing site, where the police have their establishment. However, during a recent trip (February/March 1991) it was noticed that there have been some drastic changes in the environment in Narcondam. Most alarming of all is the introduction and rapid proliferation of goats in the island.

Apparently goats were brought to the island by the police party to ensure meat supply to themselves. Currently there are over 400 goats in the island under the control of the police party, who admitted that some more are freely ranging around in the island.

All ground vegetation around the police camp is wiped out except the vegetable patches maintained by the police camp which is protected. This means that all regeneration of wild species of plants and trees is severely affected. The vegetation in an area of about 1 sq.km. of the camp is very degraded. In fact the 400 goats under the police control have to be fed by cutting branches of trees.

Normally the forest floor is littered with dropped fruits/seeds, and under every Hornbill nest these are quite evident. During the present trip I examined the vicinity of at least 6 active Hornbill nests but failed to see any trace of fallen fruit/seeds. These, I suspect, were eaten by the free ranging goats. This is a serious situation where the very regeneration of the forest is severely affected, and in the long term may be ecologically disastrous.

We strongly urge that the goats be removed from the island immediately and the police party may be directed to ensure that *all* goats, including free roaming individuals be caught and transhipped from the island. Following conservation action is recommended:

1. Remove all goats from the island immediately.
2. No exotic species of plants should be planted or brought into the island. There already is an invasion of *Eupatorium* in the island. With constant human presence other exotics may also invade the island upsetting the delicate ecological balance.

The Narcondam Hornbill is one of the rarest Hornbill in the world. Its very endemic nature, and the small isolated population confined to hardly a 15 sq. km. island, makes it doubly vulnerable to external pressures.



**IOC STANDING COMMITTEE ON APPLIED ORNITHOLOGY (SCAO), Working Group on Bird Damage to Agriculture.** B.M. PARASHARYA, AICRP on Economic Ornithology, Gujarat Agricultural University, Anand 388110, India

The Standing Committee on Applied Ornithology (SCAO) set up by the International Ornithological Congress has been reconstituted for the period 1990-94. The President of IOC, Dr. C.M. Perrins, has asked me to serve on the SCAO for four years up to the 1994 International Ornithological Congress in Vienna. I will be serving as a member of the Working Group on Bird Damage to Agriculture.

The main tasks of SCAO and thus of the Working Group is as follows:

- (1) to advise the Scientific Programme Committee of the 1994 IOC on topics in applied ornithology and suggest speakers.
- (2) to improve communication between applied scientists and pure scientists within and among fields of applied ornithology.

Regarding the first role, I request you to think about Applied Ornithology topics for the next IOC in Vienna in 1994. If you have a topic, you need to provide names and addresses of candidate speakers (from different parts of the world) and some background information to explain why the IOC is well justified devoting a symposium to the proposed topics. I request you to send your ideas and suggestions to me by 10 June 1991 for consideration at the Scientific Programme Committee meeting.

At Vienna an overview of developments during 1990-94 will be given. This will be published in the IOC Proceedings as part of the SCAO Report to the IOC. Contributions and help to activities are welcome.

**A CASE OF POISONING OF BIRDS AND ITS TREATMENT.** P.K. UTHAMAN, Field Publicity Officer, Kalpatta, Wyanadu 673122 and P.O. NAMEER, College of Forestry, Kerala Agricultural University, Mannuthy, Thrissur 680 654

Once a veritable haven for birdwatchers, the 'Kole' paddy fields of Thrissur (Kerala) has of late become a death trap for birds.

On 12th February 1991, we went for birdwatching in the 'Kole'. The fields with young paddy was full of waders, egrets, wagtails, etc. The reeds on the canal bunds were humming with various species of warblers. Thousands of Terns were busy fishing in the canals and tanks. Most attractive were large numbers of raptors, which include Brahmini Kite, Pariah Kite, Blackwinged Kite and Marsh

Harrier. While we walked through the canal bunds, one Marsh Harrier after another was always in our field of vision.

In the morning it looked all pleasant with large number of birds around. But gradually it became apparent that our perception of things about bird life in the 'Kole' was wrong. First we noticed two carcasses of Brahmini Kites in the paddy field. A few metres ahead was a dead Whiskered Tern. The farmers told us that these birds were poisoned by people for the purpose of collecting meat and selling it to nearby liquor shops. The poison applied is said to be the insecticide Furadan.

On our way back, we saw a Little Egret lying in the paddy field with outstretched wings and open mouth. We took the bird and put it in the shade of a bush. After sometime, we saw a female Marsh Harrier sitting on a heap of uprooted weeds. We could recognize it as the bird which we followed in the morning for a long distance for photography. Seeing it sitting quiet, one of us approached it with the hope of taking a snap. To our astonishment we found that the bird was sick and showed drooping wings and tried in vain to lift. The bird did not move even though the photographer approached it very close. It was then that we realised that the Harrier was also having the same fate of the Little Egret. When the photographer was about to touch the bird it fell back and lay there with outstretched wings. We immediately caught the bird, tucked it inside one of our haversacks and took it to the Veterinary College Hospital, Mannuthy, which is 6 km from Thrissur.

On the advice of the Veterinary doctor, Atropin Sulphate was injected as an antidote to the poison. Atropin Sulphate 0.1 ml (in the concentration of 0.65 mg/ml) was given as intramuscular injection. Vitamin B Complex Syrup was also given *per os*. First injection was given by 8.30 pm, 4 hrs after getting the bird. A second dose of Atropin Sulphate was given after one hour of first injection. One hour after the second injection the bird was able to move its wings and showed signs of recovery.

Next morning we saw the bird in its full activity. It was kept under observation for one day. Even though we offered it fish, it did not eat anything. On 14th February morning the bird was released from the cage. At first it remained still for 2-3 minutes, presumably to fix the direction. Then it took off on wings, and flew in the westward direction.

**BUSH LARKS AND FIELD GUIDES.** L. SHYAMAL, D-206, I.I.Sc., Campus, Bangalore 560012

On the morning of 28th March 1991, while on a walk the campus of the Indian Institute of Science (Bangalore) I observed an interesting display of two Madras Bushlarks *Mirafra assamica*. The bushlarks were settled about two feet

apart and had their tails erect (perpendicular to the ground). They flicked open their wings, which were drooped, once every three seconds and moved round each other in short spurts. In between these movements they pecked the ground (feeding?). The whole display lasted five minutes and the birds were silent all through. The whole display was reminiscent of wrestlers in a ring. On the morning of the 5th of April I once again saw this display in the same patch of ground. This time too I failed to see the start of the display. On both the days one of the bushlarks ultimately flew off, upon which the other quickly lowered its tail and went about foraging normally. Has anyone seen more of this?

My identification of the bushlark as belonging to this species is based purely on the known distribution of this and Redwinged Bush lark *M. erythroptera* and not on field character. At this juncture I would like to comment that we lack a good illustrated field guide. Though the handbook gives fieldmarks, identification ultimately depends on the total mental picture formed. No amount of description can substitute good illustrations in identifying birds and popularising bird study. 'SHORBIRDS: An identification guide to the waders of the world' [By P. Hayman, JH Marchant and Tony Prater: (Croom Hel. M, 1986)] is I think an outstanding example of a good field guide. That bad guides can put a person off track has been shown by Mr. Thomas F. Martin in the last issue of the Newsletter.

#### OPPORTUNISTIC FEEDING BY LITTLE EGRETS. V. SANTHARAM, 68(I Floor), Santhome High Road, Madras 600 028

While watching birds in Peechi on 1.3.1991 in the company of Mr. P.O. Nameer, I had the occasion to witness an interesting association between Little Egrets *Egretta garzetta* and Indian shags *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*. The observation was made in one of the many 'fingers' of the Peechi reservoir, c.20 km from Tichur, Kerala. We witnessed this around mid-noon and were able to watch this behaviour for about two hours.

Our attention was first drawn to a flock of about 150 Little Egrets and 100 Shags, in flight. This group moved to a small 'bay' which appeared to be fairly deep. The Egrets settled on the rocky shores encircling the bay and were seen as a tight flock. The shags landed in the water and fished, diving in. As the shags moved about, feeding, the egrets were seen flying (less than about a dozen birds at a time), low over the water and even briefly landing 'belly-flopping' and swimming in the midst of the shags. They appeared to be catching fish disturbed by the feeding shags. Throughout the period of our observation, we could see this behaviour of the egrets. The egrets followed the shags as they moved from one part of the reservoir to

another. No egrets were seen feeding in their usual way, wading along the shore.

Feeding by floating in water has been reported for several species of herons (Hancock and Kushlan, 1984, Parasharya, 1982, Neelakantan, 1986, Santharam, 1986, Parasharya, *in litt*). Hancock and Kushlan (1984) also mention that little Egrets make "use of particular opportunities to forage, such as those made available by cormorants *Phalacrocorax*, in the water . . . .". This observation further establishes that these birds can be opportunistic and adapt themselves to local conditions, whenever necessary. At Peechi, when this observation was made, there was not much of the feeding habitat (shallow areas) of the egrets available. The sides of the reservoir were steep, thus denying egrets the opportunity to forage in their normal way. The shags provided the egrets an alternative which the latter made use of.

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#### BARN OWLS IN THE ANDAMANS S.THEODORE BASKARAN, 124, Ashoka Pillar Road, 1st Block, Jayanagar, Bangalore 560011

The Newsletter of March-April '91 had reproduced, on the back inside cover, a report carried by *The Hindu* of 8.4.91 that six Barn Owls would be introduced in the Little Andaman islands, in what was evidently a misplaced enthusiasm for biological control of pests. The idea was to control the rodent population in the island which was damaging the oil palm plantations, by introducing these birds into that island. This move was promptly opposed by the Society for Andaman & Nicobar Ecology at Port Blair. This Society, which has emerged as the watch dog of Andaman and Nicobar islands environment, led by Samar Acharya, pointed out the possible danger to the island ecology by the introduction of an exotic species. Wiser counsel eventually prevailed and the birds have been sent back to the main land, where they belong.

An island ecosystem has grown in isolation for millennia and so the birds and animals there have evolved to suit this unique environment. It is the remoteness of an island which ensures evolution of new species, like the

Narcondam hornbill and the Megapodes of Andaman islands. These remote islands are fragile and vulnerable to any outside influence. So man should not introduce new species into these islands without analysing the implications of such a step and he might never know the full implications of such an introduction.

**BARN OWLS AS BIOLOGICAL CONTROL AGENTS IN THE ANDAMANS.** V. SANTHARAM, 68(I Floor), Santhome High Road, Madras 600028

This is with referene to the news item, 'New remedy for rodent menace', regarding the introduction of Barn Owl *Tyto alba* in the little Andaman Island and the editorial comment which appeared in the March-April, 1991 issue of the Newsletter.

There is no doubt that biological control is the best and the least harmful to the environment. But before this is advocated, a complete study has to be done with respect to whether the proposed agent would be effective in the given situation and whether this would have other impacts on the environment. Besides, the other requirements of the introduced species have to be taken into consideration such as nesting stratum, etc. Earlier experiments in other areas have failed by not taking into account the full range of ecological requirements of the introduced species.

There are several examples which have shown us that inadvertent and indiscriminated introduction of new species in a new environment, especially on island ecosystems can often have severe adverse impacts on the native and endemic species.

But in the present case, the Barn Owl may not, in the strict sense, be a "new" species. The Handbook says that there is a race of the Barn Owl, *Tyto albade-roestorffi*, which is said to be a "very scarce resident in the Andaman Islands (Port Blair, South Cinque Island)". It has not been recorded from the Nicobar Islands.

I wonder whether the PC(I) and AVC College experts have done a survey of the local populations of the Barn Owl of Andamans to determine its status. Perhaps this local population could do a better job in the conditions existing in the Andamans than an introduced population from the mainland. The habitat and climatic conditions are quite different between Mayiladuturai and Andamans. The birds selected are one-year-old, hand-reared birds. It remains to be seen if these birds would be able to adjust to the new environment and survive to keep a check on the rodents.

I suggest a project to study the ecology and populations of the Andaman Barn Owl is initiated. This could indicate the status and ecological requirements of this species with

regard to the local conditions. This data could be used in conserving and managing Barn Owl populations, especially in oil palm plantations to keep a check of the rodents.

**THE BARN OWL - MAN'S SILENT GHOSTLY FRIEND.** ANTHONY C. SEBASTIAN, AWB, Institute of Higher Learning, University of Malaya, Lembah Pantai, 59100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

I recently had the opportunity to read a copy of 'Newsletter for Birdwatchers', Vol. XXXI, No. 3 & 4, March-April 1991. There were two articles on Owls. I refer to the article by K. Gunathilagaraj entitled Owl Perches.

I have been involved with biological control of rats in Oil palm estates and ricefields using Barn Owls *Tyto alba* for the past three years. This is an on-going project in the state of Selangor, Malaysia.

We have succeeded in getting wild Barn Owls to breed in nest-boxes. These boxes are erected in paddyland.

Our results show that with establishment of a box-breeding owl population, effective rat control can be realized. This effectively means maintaining the rat damage level at around 2%.

The balance between rats and owls can be effectively managed and maintained. No rat damage does not necessarily mean no rats. It would be impossible to have a situation with no rats in rice-fields. No rats would, in fact, result in no owls!

Spotted Owlets *Athene brama* are small, mainly insectivorous, owls capable of eating one small rat or vole at the most a night. Barn Owls eat up to three rats a night.

My conclusions are that the presence or absence of Spotted Owlets in an area of paddy will not have any significant effect on rat populations.

I would also like to comment on the back inside cover article, **New Remedy for Rodent Menace**. Barn Owls are unique birds of prey, not only in being nocturnal but by exhibiting no apparent territoriality. This characteristic allows large populations of this species to be built up rapidly. This owl can therefore act as a very effective predator, hence pest control.

The Indian Barn Owl *Tyto alba stertens* occurs from west Pakistan, throughout the Indian sub-continent to west Burma where the nominate race *Tyto alba javanica* takes over. This sub-species came to the Malayan peninsular probably in the late sixties from Sumatra, Indonesia. The first breeding record in Malaysia was in 1970 in an Oil Palm estate manager's bungalow.

The introduction of *Tyto alba stertens* to the Andamans would not have drastic ecological consequences. Predator-prey relationships would prevent population explosions and ecological disasters as often seen in history. The Barn Owl is restricted by its exclusive diet.

An area of suspect, however, is the introduction of a western Asiatic sub-species into the natural spreading range of the eastern race. *Tyto alba javanica* is a much larger owl with feet twice as large as the European Barn Owl *Tyto alba alba*. It is spreading fast throughout its range, already being recorded on Borneo in 1990. The Andaman Islands are in its range and *T.a. javanica* should eventually reach these islands. What the impact of having two sub-species, one introduced, on the same islands (more so, being islands) would be is unknown.

I would be glad to contact persons involved in biological control of rodents using predators. I am sure valuable information could be exchanged.

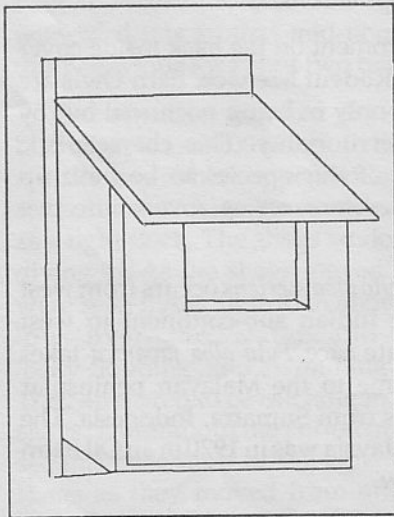
**BARN OWLS AS RODENT CONTROL AGENTS.**  
S. SRIDHAR, No.10, Sirur Park 'B' Street,  
Seshadripuram, Bangalore 560 020

I would like to make the following observations on the News item 'New Remedy for Rodent Menace', appearing in Newsletter Vol XXXI, No 3 & 4.

The Barn Owl and its numerous sub-species are spread throughout the world, except extreme latitudes, Newzealand, Hawaii and some Malaysian Islands. Being strong fliers, the Barn Owls have extended their range to many Islands in the Pacific and Indian oceans. The Indian sub-species of Barn Owl also occurs in Andamans and Java.

The Barn Owls are specialised as rodent hunters. The dispersal pattern of rats and the Barn Owl are seemingly analogous, as the former is also disbursed world wide.

In the Andamans, the rodents are an invader species introduced by man. The Barn Owls have followed them from the main land. It will be worthwhile to provide suitable nesting sites to the already established Barn Owl population at the Andamans, as the Barn Owls readily adopt to wooden nest boxes. This can be constructed without difficulty and should be approximately 25cm wide and 45cm high,



with a 14 cm square entrance in one of the upper corners. This box should be fastened to a tree or a tower about 8 to 12 metres above ground level and positioned preferably at secluded parts of the oil palm plantation.

The hand reared Barn Owls being sent from Madras are unlikely to develop the natural instinct to hunt rats all by themselves and having lost their fear for humans, they are bound to suffer from mans' anathema, at the Andamans. Finally, the catastrophic impact of rinder epidemic transmitted by domesticated cattle, on the susceptible Wild Bison population in Karnataka during the late 'Sixties, is a vivid retrospection to all biological control zealots.

**LAPWINGS AND SNAKE.** DR.V.R. BHAGWAT,  
Dept. of Biochemistry, Govt. Medical College, Miraj 416  
410, Maharashtra

There is a small scrubland behind the Medical College campus in Miraj. The ground has Acacia shrubs of average 2-3 feet in height scattered all over. This is the area of lapwing. On 14th April, 1991, I was birdwatching at 8.00 am around that place. When I was scanning the ground for lapwings, I saw a small group of birds at the far end of the ground. There were both Red as well as Yellow-wattled Lapwings. And on the ground was a long pipe like object shining in the morning sun. After careful observation through by binoculars, I could make out a slow moving snake. It must have been 6-7 feet in length and about 100 yards away. I was curious to know what was going on there between the lapwings and the snake. I stood there watching through my binoculars.

The wind was blowing from that direction towards me. The snake was casually moving on the ground. One of the lapwings was crouching on ground in front of the snake as if incubating eggs in nest. Whenever the snake used to come near, the bird would get up and sit again at some distance away, inviting the snake to come near. This was continued for quite some time. There was no fight between the birds and the snake. Other birds were also moving around casually. The snake was obviously searching for the nest and possibly eggs to swallow. After some time the snake disappeared in the ground. The birds were moving around that spot. The snake reappeared, this time it was moving towards an anthill. It tried to enter a hole halfway, then came out. It tried a second hole, again it came out. Then it raised its head from the ground about 2-3 feet. There was a no hood, I was certain that it was not a cobra. It scanned the ground and after assuring itself that no one was around it proceeded further in search of its food.

In spite of a dog passing nearby, the snake was not alarmed. When the dog sensed the snake, it sniffed and after realising that it was a snake, it jumped and went away. The snake remained undisturbed. One of the lapwings was

following the snake and when it came about 50 meters away from me, one Red wattled lapwing was trying to attract (?) the snake by partially spreading the wings and tail feathers, pointing downwards, chest expanding and in upright gait. It was virtually leading the snake with a gap of about 1-2 feet between them. This was accompanied by treet.... treet..... trit calls. A lone curlew was standing indifferently near an acacia bush and was not interested in the drama which was going on around.

The snake was heading towards my direction in a zig-zag route. The lapwing sensed my presence, left the snake and flew away. Now the snake was almost 15 feet away from me. It was not aware of my presence as I stood there motionless almost like a tree stump. When it was nearing me, I decided to move and as I took a step, the snake

realised my presence and wriggled away to a nearby acacia bush.

Lapwings are known to be great actors and their ability to distract or confuse intruders or predators away from their nest/chicks is remarkable.

**STATUS OF DARTER IN ASSAM.** P. SAIKIA and P.C. BHATTACHARJEE, *Animal Ecology & Wildlife Biology Lab, Department of Zoology, Gauhati University, Guwahati 781 014, Assam*

The Darter or snake bird *Anhinga rufa melanogaster* is the only representative of the family Anhingidae. The bird is known as 'Moniori' in Assam. Like other large wetland birds, the darter population is declining. C. Perennou of IWRB included the darter, with more than 3 individuals in

Table I - Sightings of *Anhinga rufa melanogaster* in Assam

| District  | Place/Wetland     | Coordinates                  | Date           | No. observed | Flock size |
|-----------|-------------------|------------------------------|----------------|--------------|------------|
| Dhubri    | Sareswar beel     | 26°-26°5'N<br>89°8' - 92°E   | 7th Jan. '91   | 2            | -          |
|           | Diplai beel       | -do-                         | 11 Jan. '91    | 3            | -          |
|           | Dhir beel         | 90°2' - 92°                  | 9th Jan. '91   | 6            | -          |
| Kamrup    | Dipor beel        | 26°-26°5' N<br>90°2'-92° E   | 4th Jan. '90   | 6            | 4          |
|           |                   |                              | 4th Jan. '91   | 6            | 3          |
| Nowgoan   | Kaliabar (Hatbor) | 26°27'N<br>92°-93° E         | 29th March '91 | 1            | -          |
|           | Pubthoria         | - do -                       | - do -         | 3            | 2          |
|           | Pobitora WLS      |                              | 17th March '91 | 6            | 4          |
| Golaghat  | Kaziranga N.P     | 26°-27°N<br>93°-94° E        |                |              |            |
|           | Bokabill          | - do -                       | 24th March '91 | 1            | -          |
|           | Rowmari beel      | - do -                       | - do -         | 6            | 6          |
|           | Daflong beel      | - do -                       | - do -         | 30           | 30         |
|           | Bor beel          | - do -                       | - do -         | 4            | 4          |
|           | Dunga beel        | - do -                       | 25th March '91 | 1            | -          |
|           | Mer beel          | - do -                       | - do -         | 22           | 16,4,2     |
|           | Shala beel        | - do -                       | 26th March '91 | 30           | 18,8,2     |
|           | Mihi beel         | - do -                       | - do -         | 40           | 16,14,9    |
|           | Habital           | - do -                       | - do -         | 2            | 2          |
|           | Mona beel         | - do -                       | - do -         | 2            | 2          |
| Cachar    | Chatla beel       | -                            | 13th Feb. '89  | 3            | -          |
| Karimganj | Son beel          | -                            | 15th Feb. '89  | 5            | -          |
| Jorhat    | Janjimukh         | 26°5'-27°N<br>94°2'-94°5'E   | 13th Jan. '89  | 1            | -          |
|           |                   |                              | 13th Feb. '90  | 3            | 3          |
|           |                   |                              | 18th Jan. '91  | 1            | -          |
|           |                   |                              | 17th Jan. '90  | 2            | -          |
| Sibsagar  | Panidihing        | 27°2'-27°5'N<br>94°5'-95°1'E | 19th Jan. '91  | 6            | 4,2        |
|           |                   |                              |                |              |            |
| Darrang   | Orang WLS         | -                            | 23rd Feb. '90  | 3            | -          |
|           |                   |                              | 24th Nov. '90  | 2            | -          |
|           |                   |                              | 30th Mar. '91  | 4            | -          |

a flock, as a species to watch in India. The Mid-winter waterfowl census of 1990 confirms the presence of 1260 individuals in the 16 states and union territories in India. In Assam alone 331 (26.27%) individuals have been recorded in the counting sites of 13 wetlands covering both protected and non-protected areas of the State.

The present status report of the darter is based on the observations on 30 wetlands within Kaziranga National Park, Orang and Pabitara game sanctuaries and the wetlands outside the protected areas during the census periods of mid-winter counts between the years 1989-91, as well as the survey during that period for adjutant storks.

The darter is found to be distributed almost in all the districts of Assam except in the hills, mainly as isolated individuals and the large flock size are very few. The details of the sightings are given in Table I.

*Dhubri District* : Observed in Ketmora pukuri of Rupsi, and in Sareswer beel. A few individuals also observed in Chandakula beel, 8 km from Dhubri town. The other beel which were surveyed in the district were Diplai, Dhakra, Dhir and Rainy where a few birds were recorded.

*Kamrup District* : Dipar beel, Jangdia, Chandubi and Kukurmara complex were surveyed. However the darter was sighted only in Jangdia and Dipar beel.

*Nowgang district* : Isolated individuals were sighted in the Chamaguri beel and at Pabitara.

*Golaghat district* : Kaziranga National Park is the only location where large flocks were observed. A Flock size as high as 30 was observed at Daflong beel. And the flock size of 16, 16, 18 were observed in Mer-beel, Mihi beel and Shahala beel respectively.

*Cacher District* : Isolated individuals were recorded from Chatla beel.

*Karimganj District* : At Son beel as many as 6 individuals were sighted in the year 1989, but no flock was observed.

*Darrang District* : In the Orang game sanctuary isolated individuals were observed in Satsimulu, Digali and at Roumari nala.

*Jorhat District* : Individual birds were observed only at Janjimukh areas.

*Sibsagar District* : At Panidihing, darter was sighted once in a flock of 4 individuals.

Kaziranga National Park is the only site having a fair population of Darters with large flock size, presumably because the wetlands here have a high density of fish. A special bird sanctuary is urgently needed not only for darters but also for storks, pelicans and other waterfowl.

## TAEJ MUNDKUR IN AWB. Kuala Lumpur

With my Ph.D. viva over, I have just removed a self imposed letter writing ban on myself and am trying to catch up with several months of mail.

My Ph.D. thesis is entitled "Nesting and feeding ecology of aquatic birds in Saurashtra and Gulf of Kachchh". It deals with the nesting strategies of ground-nesting and tree-nesting waterbirds in freshwater, salt-works and coastal habitats, with a fair hunk containing information on the birds that turn me on - the terns, in particular the Indian River Tern and Little Tern. Feeding ecology looks mainly at feeding strategies of the Crab Plover and Large Egret on the coast.

My work in Rajkot for the moment is now over and I have taken up a two year contract with the Asian Wetland Bureau in Kuala Lumpur as a Project Officer (Waterbirds), and my duties would include coordinating studies on migration of waterbirds in east Asia, training persons to study wetlands and waterbirds, coordinate studies on feeding of waders, etc.

## BREEDING OF BULBULS. R.G. SONI, Conservator of Forests, Stage II, Sagar Road, Bikaner

I observed more than 12 nests of Redvented Bulbuls *Pycnonotus cafer* at Kota between 1985 and 88. Only two of them were successful. The rest were destroyed by predators at various stages. I would like to bring the following points to your notice as they differ from what is indicated in the Handbook Vol.6.

- a) Incubation period was found in three cases to be 12 days - the period between the laying of first egg and the hatching of first chick. In one case it was only 11 days, and not 14 days as stated in the Handbook.
- b) The fledging period in two cases was found to be 10 days - i.e. The period between the first hatching, and the departure from the nest by one or all the chicks.
- c) Out of the 12 nests observed one had five eggs while the others had three or four.

In the case of the Whitecheeked Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys* I observed six nests at Bikaner between 1989-91, none of which was successful. Two had only one egg each. The incubation period was found to be 12 days. In one case the chicks were still in the nest when they were 10 days old, and could have flown away in a day or two, but some predator finished them.

**SMALL GREEN BARBETS AND PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRDS.** J.N. PRASAD, 13, 8th Cross, 30th Main, J.P. Nagar, I Phase, Bangalore 560 078

Recently I had been to Mysore City where I was told by Mr. Guru Prasad, secretary of Mysore Amateur Naturalists, that they have both Large and Small Green Barbets within Mysore city itself and Large Green Barbets occur in small numbers. Though I was very eager to see the Large Green it seemed to evade me and was not able to spot even one during my two days stay in Mysore. I had to be happy with Small Green Barbets only. Still wondering how they could have disappeared from Bangalore?

In Mysore I came across a Purplerumped Sunbird nesting in Eresid spiders (social spiders) colony which is quite interesting, as the Handbook says only the Purple Sunbird is known to nest in such spiders colony.

**A HUGE FLOCK OF DEMOISELLE CRANE SEEN IN DESERT OF RAJASTHAN.** SATISH KUMAR SHARMA, Arboriculturist, World Forestry Arboretum, Jhalana Dungri, Jaipur 302 004 and SUBHASH BHARGAVA, B-49, Prabhu Marg, Tilak Nagar, Jaipur 302 004

The Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo* is a winter visitor to the North-West parts of our country. This year on 28.1.1991, a huge flock of these cranes, consisting of thousands of birds was seen around a small pond at village Kheechan on Phalodi Nagaur Road in the Thar Desert of Rajasthan. A similar type of congregation of Demoiselle Cranes, (perhaps the same flock) was observed at village Gudha (near Jodhpur city) few days earlier.

It was noticed that the birds are not disturbed by women, taking water from the pond and even passing through the flock. Also when a camel cart passes by the birds are not disturbed. But whenever a cameraman approached the flock, the birds were disturbed and some of them took off for a safer place.

This crane flock is being saved by the local people and no one is allowed to kill them. In the last two Asian Waterfowl Census of 1989 and 1990, 195 and 164 individuals of this species have been reported from Rajasthan. But this single observation indicates that the number of wintering Demoiselle cranes is much greater than known earlier.

**NOTES FROM RAJASTHAN ON PIED CHAT AND MARBLED TEAL.** JUGAL KISHAR TIWARI, Field Biologist, BNHS Bird Migration Project

On 24th Feb 91 at around 1830 hrs I was on a general birdwatching trip on the bank of Luni river.

I happened to see a female pied chat having a sooty black belly. The hind parts and rump were white. Pied chats are the commonest winter visitors to Jodhpur district along with Redstarts. This is my experience during the past five years.

This was the first time I came across a black-bellied morph of this species. I find that when winter visitors like Pied chats and Redstarts arrive in their winter quarters there is a competition for food between the Indian Robin and the immigrants. Pied chats and Redstarts seem to occupy the same niche year after year.

Like other, semi arid districts of Rajasthan, Pali also received very good rainfall last year. On the 25th February 1991, at around 1630 hrs. I was watching birds at Lakhotia, a beautiful wetland in the heart of Pali city (Rajasthan). I counted about 502 ducks in the wetland. In the mixed flock of Shovellers and Spotbilled ducks I saw two ducks, of  $\pm$  Common Teal size, having a brown patch running from the eye to the nape, the general body colour was brownish mixed with grey, identified as Marbled Teal.

I am familiar with Marbled Teals, for I have seen them in Kachchh (Gujarat). This species is classified as a straggler to Rajasthan. (S.Ali 1983) and reported only from Bikaner and Bharathpur districts, hence the present record of this species from Pali district deserves mention.

**ON THE ROOSTING OF INDIAN WHISKERED TERN.** C. SASHIKUMAR, 9, Subhash Nagar, Cannanore 670 002, Kerala

The usual roosting sites of terns are sand bars, small islands, rocky outcrops off-shore, etc. where they are safe from predators and other disturbances. My observations on the roosting habit of Indian Whiskered Terns *Chlidonias hybrida indica* (Stephens) at two sites in Kerala reveal a new adaptation : these terns were found to be roosting on powerlines stretched over large bodies of water.

On 13th Dec. 1987, Mr. C. Jayakumar and myself saw about 200 Whiskered terns roosting on power lines above water near the Kattampally regulator-cum-roadbridge 9km north east of Kannur. Later observations proved that this is a regular roosting site for the Whiskered Terns of this area.

On 2 March 1991, two bird watchers Mr. C.P. Sethumadhavan and Mr. Ranjith arranged a trip for me to the Mangad bund at Kunnamkulam in Trichur Dt., where a large roost consisting of several thousands of Whiskered Terns was seen. Here also the terns were roosting on power lines over water. The voice of these terns could be heard from quite far away. Mr. Ranjith whose house is nearby has observed this roost for at least a decade. There were several instances when the electric wires were broken under the sheer weight of these birds!! It appears that most of the

**International Symposium on  
ENVIRONMENTAL & HORMONAL APPROACHES  
TO ORNITHOLOGY**

(Garhwal Himalaya, 27 November - 1 December 1991)

**PRELIMINARY NOTICE**

Birds not only enrich our lives with their aesthetic and food value but are important indicators of environmental degradation and have been instrumental in unfolding some of the fundamental principles in Biology. An International meeting is being organised in Garhwal Himalaya which abound in avifauna. These mountains envelope in their fold environmental extremes of tropics to tundra, affording a unique opportunity to study how birds adapt to diverse ecosystems - all within a width of 150 km!

**Aims of the symposium**

- to give an impetus to ornithological researches in the Indian subcontinent
- to highlight the contribution of ornithology to environmental conservation, socio-economic development and biological concepts
- to provide a platform for Indian ornithologists, specially younger enthusiasts, to interact with leading authorities in the field from different countries
- to bring together researchers, conservationists, managers and policy makers to evolve strategies for effective management of Himalayan avifauna

The symposium shall constitute invited lectures and contributed papers on applied (game birds, pest birds, habitat and species conservation, captive breeding) and basic aspects (ecology, physiology, special sessions on reproduction, migration, biological rhythms) with an emphasis on the environment and on adaptation to the environment (hormones).

To acquaint the participants with the Himalayan habitats bird watching/nature trails and sight seeing trips in the mountains are envisaged before and during the symposium.

A formal call for abstracts/papers along with information on registration and accommodation shall be sent by June end to all those who return the enclosed pre-registration form to the undersigned :

Dr. Asha Chandola-Saklani  
Post Box 45  
Garhwal University, Srinagar Garhwal  
U.P. 246 174 India

FAX : 0135-28392; (International) 0091 135 28392  
TELEX : 585-345 EBD IN ; 585-232 PAL IN

**PRE-REGISTRATION FORM**

**International Symposium on Environmental and  
Hormonal Approaches to Ornithology.**

(Garhwal Himalaya, 27th Nov.-1st Dec. 1991)

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TENTATIVE TOPIC OF PRESENTATION \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ (see enclosed notice)

Please send me more information about the symposium. I am interested

- in 1-3 days pre-symposium Himalayan habitat trip
- in birdwatching treks
- in watching pheasants in the wild.

**THIS FORM SHOULD BE RETURNED TO THE  
UNDERSIGNED BEFORE 15 JULY, 1991.**

Dr. Asha Chandola-Saklani  
Post Box 45  
Garhwal University  
Srinagar Garhwal, UP  
246 174 INDIA  
Fax. 0091 135 28392  
Telex : 585 345 EBD IN





**Second Announcement**



**WETLAND AND WATERFOWL  
CONSERVATION IN SOUTH AND  
WEST ASIA**

**BEACH LUXURY HOTEL, KARACHI  
PAKISTAN**

**14 - 20 December 1991**

*Convened by*

**The International Waterfowl and Wetlands  
Research Bureau**

**The National Council for the Conservation of  
Wildlife, Pakistan**

and

**The Asian Wetland Bureau  
At the Invitation of  
THE GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN**

**Cooperating Organizations  
Bonn Convention Secretariat  
IUCN-Pakistan  
Ramsar Convention Bureau  
WWF-Pakistan**

- To develop a Strategy for addressing future wetland conservation priorities;
- To provide an international forum for improving the conservation of wetlands and their migratory species in west and south Asia.
- To evaluate the status of, and threats to, wetlands and waterfowl in south and west Asia;
- To promote the Ramsar Convention, and to prepare for the forthcoming meeting of Ramsar Contracting Parties in Japan, 1993;
- To investigate the potential for an Agreement under the Bonn Convention, for the conservation of migratory waterfowl in Asia.

**Audience**

The meeting is specifically aimed at the following groups :

- Government conservation, environmental and land use management agencies
- Non-governmental conservation organizations
- Wetland and waterfowl managers and researchers
- Water resource managers and researchers

**Call for Papers**

Submitted papers and posters on the above themes outlined in the programme are welcomed. The content of papers and posters should address one or more of the objectives given in the introduction. Those wishing to present a paper or poster should send an abstract in English of no more than 400 words to IWRB no later than 31 August 1991.

**Training Workshop**

A workshop on training and education requirements for wetland conservation in South and West Asia will be held in Karachi prior to the conference. Those interested in involvement should write to : Asian Wetland Bureau, Institute of Advanced Studies, University of Malaya, Lembah Pantai, 59100 KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia, or fax (+3) 757 3661.

**Additional Information**

Further information on the conference can be obtained from

**IWRB  
Karachi Conference  
Slimbridge, Gloucester, GL2 7BX, UK.**

**Introduction**

The effective conservation of wetlands in Asia requires a high level of international cooperation for the identification of conservation priorities, for the conservation of shared water resources, for the conservation of migratory species, and for the exchange of information and expertise.

In February 1987, IWRB and AWB convened an international symposium on waterfowl and wetland conservation in Asia, in Malacca, Malaysia. The meeting assisted in completion of The Asian Wetlands Inventory project which provided, for the first time, an objective assessment of wetland resources in Asia.

Whilst the Malacca meeting focused mainly on south and east Asia, the present meeting will give special attention to south and west Asia, building on the results of The Status Overview of Asian Wetlands and the Asian Waterfowl Census. The objectives of the symposium are;

Whiskered terns which spend their day hunting in the vast "Kole" paddy fields in this area congregate at the Mangad bound in the evening, arriving a batches of 50 to 100 to roost on the power lines.

Certain similar behavioural patterns were observed at both of the roosting sites. The terns keep a distance of about a foot between each other as they perch on the wire. A group of about 50 terns will take off from the perch and

circle over the other terns calling incessantly, only to settle down on the lines again after about 5-6 minutes. Another group will take off immediately and this will continue till it is quite dark.

It would be interesting to know if any of the readers has come across similar roosts of the Whiskered Terns at any other places.

## GURKHAS CALLED IN TO SAVE RED KITES.

PAUL WILKINSON, *The Times (London), April 29, 1991*

Gurukhas who struck terror into the hearts of the stoutest Argentine soldiers in the Falklands with apocryphal tales of what they did with their kukris are hoping to instil the same fears in the minds of potential egg thieves.

Men from the army school of infantry in Dering Lines Barracks at Brecon in Powys have been called in by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds to protect the nests of rare Red Kites in the surrounding hills. Teams from the 2nd Battalion



Under cover: Gurkhas on the look-out for the collectors threatening the nests of rare Red Kites in Wales

of the 2nd King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles are being deployed in the hills with emergency rations to bivouac overnight and deter poachers. Unscrupulous egg collectors have already raided some sites, and four nests near Lampeter in Dyfed have been wrecked.

The society says that its resources are too stretched to protect all the known sites of the remaining 62 pairs of Red Kite left in this country. Weekends are known to be an active time for egg thieves and the next few days are crucial for hen birds brooding on nests.

The soldiers are regarded as experts in open country warfare and are renowned for their fierce fighting skills. By tradition, Gurkhas have to draw blood if they ever take out the kukri they always carry. An army spokesman in Brecon said: "When we asked for volunteers for this operation the Gurkhas wanted to help. They are already on the mountains and people who have approached nests have been deterred by seeing troops suddenly appear to warn them off. They have no powers of arrest but their presence near the nesting sites is proving an excellent deterrent."

John Gower, of the RSPB, said: "We are combating professional egg collectors. Some collectors are pathological, so it makes sense to use the best surveillance people."

Cover : **White Eye** (*Zosterops palpebrosa*). This restless tiny olive green bird has a marked preference for gardens and hill jungles close to cultivation. Found in small parties always on the move, singing pleasing jingling notes *cheen....cheen....cheen*. They help in pollination and dispersal of seeds. The male White Eye renders a melodious warbling song at regular intervals from a favorite perch during the breeding season.

Photo : S. Sridhar, ARPS

Editor : ZAFAR FUTEHALLY, Moitaka, Bear Shola Road, Kodaikanal 624101

Printed and Published by S. Sridhar at Navbharath Enterprises, Seshadripuram, Bangalore 560 020, for Private Circulation only