

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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BUSH-SHRIKE FINDS

After an absence of 98 years, recent observations confirmed the presence of the enigmatic Monteiro's Bush-shrike *Malaconotus monteiri* in Cameroon.

The species is known from a few forested sites on the scarp of Angola (although there have been no records since 1954) and a nineteenth century record from Mount Cameroon.

During a visit to Mount Kupe in September, Mark Andrews, Tom Gullick and Steve Keene were attempting to observe the rare Green-breasted Bush-shrike *M. gladiator* through human imitation of its distinctive whistle. Both Green-breasted and Monteiro's Bush-shrike were attracted by the whistles, and the two birds joined company, duetting and bill rattling.

During a five day visit based at the ICBP Mount Kupe Conservation Project headquarters in Nyasoso, most of the mountain's endemic species were observed. This included at least four of the highly elusive Mount Kupe Bush-shrike *M. kupeensis* - two single birds and a pair were seen.

Since the project's launch two years



A project display at a local market (Photo: C. Bowden)

ago, data on local human uses and requirements from the forest have been collected, and a detailed land-use map is now available. Several forest-based industries (bee-keeping, mushroom farming, rabbit rearing) are under trial and an education programme has included the establishment of schools-based wildlife clubs, the equipping of a visitor centre and the painting of murals depicting wildlife.

One of the main achievements of the project has been the attraction of visitors, both scientists and tourists, to Mount Kupe. This helps demonstrate to local people the international significance of the mountain and its wildlife and has also, through careful management by project staff, resulted in financial benefit to the villagers, who house, feed and guide visitors.

NATIONAL PARK PROGRESS

The Western Himalayan region in north India and Pakistan is in one of the 221 Endemic Bird Areas (EBAs) identified in ICBP's report *Putting biodiversity on the map*. The Great Himalayan National Park, in the Beas (Kullu) Valley in India, is one of the few places within this EBA where thorough, sustained survey work has been carried out.

The work, initiated in 1980 by Peter Himalayan Monal, now protected in Himachal Pradesh (Photo: V. Sinha/Survival Anglia)



Garson and Tony Gaston, resulted in the notification of the park, and subsequent surveys were carried out in 1983, 1985 and 1991. So far, 164 bird species have been recorded within its 620 km², although only its 200 km² of closed canopy forest has been properly surveyed. The Western Tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus* also occurs.

Himalayan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus* and Koklas *Pucrasia macrolopha*, as well as several large mammal species, were encountered sufficiently often during all the surveys to allow an assessment of population trends and altitude distributions. There appears to have been a general improvement in the status of these large ground-based species both inside and outside the Park boundaries during the early 1980s. This is probably due to new legislation in Himachal which protects the Monal, the head feathers from which were used to decorate hats until 1982. The price of musk also plummeted, removing the two principal reasons for hunting wildlife in this area.

The data also show an increase of 50% in the frequency of certain indica-

tor species from 1980 to 1991. This may indicate a reduction in disturbance since the Park's inception in 1984.

However, other evidence suggests that the continued presence of permanent human settlements, although small, may be deleterious. In 1991, the one uninhabited valley (Tirthan) yielded three times more wildlife records than the two inhabited ones. Sheep and goats graze in all three valleys and in the alpine meadows, and Morrel fungi *Morchella esculenta* and medicinal herbs are collected. The impact of all these activities is unknown.

These activities will have to cease before the National Park is fully declared, and research into the ecological impacts and the socio-economic importance of these traditional practices is needed. Himachal's wildlife authorities are, however, to be congratulated on the work they have done so far in the Park. There is now a staff of nearly 20, and there are huts throughout the area, well connected by paths. Thus patrolling staff, scientists and adventurous tourists are all able to visit most areas of the park.

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National Seminar on
'CHANGING SCENARIO OF BIRD ECOLOGY AND
CONSERVATION IN INDIA'
November 13 & 14, 1993 Bangalore

First Announcement

It is proposed to hold a National Seminar on **Changing Scenario of Bird Ecology and Conservation in India** in Bangalore on 13th & 14th November 1993. The venue will be announced later.

The Seminar is intended to give a momentum to the growing interest in ornithology in the country and to provide an opportunity to serious birdwatchers to exchange ideas and be encouraged by contact with like minded people.

The Second Announcement of this Seminar will be made in the April/May issue of Newsletter for Birdwatchers after getting a response from the Regional Secretaries of OSI about topics and participants. Please take the trouble to write to the nearest regional secretary, along with a copy to the Secretary General and offer your suggestions for the Seminar.

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EDITORIAL

House Martins (*Delichon urbica*)

Our faithful friend L.A. Hill (64 North Parade, Grantham, Lincolnshire NG31 8AN, U.K.), continues to send reports of the House Martin Study Group. Readers will recall reference to Sandy Hill and their Study Group on House Martins in past issues. The Third Annual Report for 1992 reports on the findings so far. Between 1987 and 1992, 1672 birds were ringed, and out of these 216 were retraps. The retraps have provided incontrovertible data about pair bonds, fidelity to breeding areas, etc. Thanks to the BNHS and their ringing groups, we in India have become aware of the importance of ringing as an aid to reliable information about bird migration. But aside from such national projects, we must now progress to undertaking ringing by knowledgeable bird watchers in different locations. Admittedly, the training of ringers is not easy. In the U.K. : "Ringing is administered in the United Kingdom by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). Trainee ringers have to undergo lengthy training under qualified supervision before they are allowed to operate on their own. This may take two or more years while handling several thousand birds of many species."

In India, House Martins, according to the Synopsis, winter as far south as Madras, but since they breed only in Kashmir and Nepal, they are not a suitable species for ringing. The red-rumped swallow which builds mud nests like those of the House Martin, and which is widespread in India, should be our target. Will BNHS and SACON help to spread the movement to the readers of our Newsletter? I know that such experiments can go wrong, but there is also hope that with a growing number of reliable birdwatchers in the field, netting and ringing may result in procuring information which is not possible to obtain otherwise.

And though this may sound out of context, in his recent letter of 19.1.93, Sandy Hill denigrates "scientific gobbledegook that is so evident in "Ringing & Migration" and such serious journals I am all for unsophisticated descriptive ornithology.... biologists use statistics in the same way that a drunk man uses a lamp post - more for support than illumination!" No danger of the Editor of this Newsletter getting drunk on statistics.

Catalogue of Indian Heronries

Dr. S Subramanya is planning to publish a catalogue of Indian heronries. He is on the lookout for data on every existing heronry in India. To get details on different sites that exist today he has specially developed a Heronry Information Sheet and has already sent it to over fifty birdwatchers. Such a catalogue will be of great value to bird watchers, researchers and conservationists. Work on Heronries may stimulate some readers to take a clearer look

at the 'bedroom' of birds. My recollection of one in Dodda-Gubbi (Bangalore), related to the roosting of Paddy Birds. They came on a karonj (*Pongamia glabra*) tree at sunset, and it was remarkable how quietly they slipped into the foliage and what a low profile they kept thereafter. I also recall that this particular tree overhung a *Nullah* which must have added to the factor of safety. The other roost was of Night Herons on a large tamarind tree, and during the day the presence of birds could only be noticed when it was realized by a close look that they were at home.

Interested birdwatchers should contact Dr. Subramanya at 326, Chitramala Apartments, Byrasandra, Bangalore 560011.

The "edge" effect in Dharwad

Naturalists have been impressed by the comparative abundance of species along the edges of two different habitats - forests and open meadows, the open space between rows of hedges, the squelch around a water body, fallow land around cultivation. The edge effect can be created in all types of country, and if the planners take the wishes of birds into account, with minor changes, our cities could accommodate a variety of interesting birds. Dr. A.K. Chakravarthy's article on Dharwad highlights this aspect.

Birds on Private Lands

One of our conservation problems is to devise strategies for preserving trees and animal life on private lands. In this respect the article by Prof. Stephen Herrero offers some valuable suggestions, and comments are invited about possibilities of organising such projects in India.

Nomenclature of Birds of the Indian Sub-Continent

In this first issue of 1993, we are glad to announce that as a result of collaboration between Andrew Robertson and Aasheesh Pittie, we have the text for printing as a separate volume the Nomenclature of Birds of the Indian Sub-Continent - a review of some changes taking place.

All readers will find this volume useful. At any rate by possessing it they will get an idea of the rationale behind the change in names, the procedures involved, the opportunities for us to put in our own arguments for accepting or not accepting changes in the English and scientific names. Such an exercise will stimulate thinking regarding the systematics of ornithology. So place your orders with Newsletter and let the order be accompanied by a cheque for Rs. 25/-.

Index at Last

Thanks to Aashish Pittie we have an index of Vol. 32 in this issue. In his introductory note the nature of the index any suggestions for modification of the index for future issues are welcome.

CONFERENCE OF ICBP ASIAN CONTINENTAL SECTION 7-11 December 1992, Seoul, Korea

ASAD R. RAHMANI, Centre of Wildlife and Ornithology, Aligarh 202 002, INDIA

The Asian continental section is very important because one third of the world's threatened birds are found in Asia. The Asian continental section meeting is held two years after the international meeting. I have attended two meetings: Bangkok meeting in 1988, and the recently held meeting (7-11 December 1992) in Seoul, South Korea. Prof. Won Pyong-Oh of the Institute of Ornithology, Kyung Hee University, Seoul, was the Chairman of the Asian continental section.

At Seoul, representatives and ornithologists from 18 countries were present. The important 'bird countries' missing were Afghanistan, Bhutan, Myanmar (Burma), Laos, Kampuchea, North Korea, Brunei and Papua New Guinea. Malaysia and Thailand not only share a common border but have similar problems of deforestation so it was natural for Malay and Thai delegates to sit down and chalk out a strategy of joint conservation action. The fate of the Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* was a topic of concern among Chinese, Taiwanese, Philipinos and Japanese

guests. I shared my concern with a Pakistani delegate about Houbara (*Chlamydotus undulata*) protection because Houbaras come to the Thar desert in winter via Pakistan, and unless the birds are effectively protected there, we cannot do much to save them. The message was clear: everywhere we have to cooperate to protect disappearing species.

After the inauguration of the conference on 7 December 1992 with brief welcome addresses, Prof. Ryo Tatsukawa of Japan gave a very informative talk on the ecotoxicology of persistent contaminants in birds. The second talk by Dr. A.V. Andreev of the Institute of Biological Problems of North Russia, was about the conservation of geese in north-eastern Asia. The rest of the day was spent in regional reports from ICBP country representatives.

The theme of the second day's proceedings was "Conserving Biological Diversity in Asia". It was chaired by S.A. Hussain of the BNHS who has now shifted to Malaysia to work with the Asian Wetland Bureau. Hussain,

who has done extensive work on bird migration, is the Vice Chairman of the ICBP Asian Continental Section. Dr Colin Bibbi, Research Director of the ICBP gave the results of the ICBP Biodiversity Project, and their brilliantly produced report "Putting Biodiversity on the map : Priority areas for global conservation" was distributed to select people. Afterwards we heard about the endemic bird areas (EBAs) of Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand and Pakistan.

On 10 December, four workshops were arranged : (i) Developing non-governmental bird conservation, (ii) bird trade, (iii) Ramsar convention in Asia, and (iv) Approaches to environmental education. Due to lack of time, two workshops were held simultaneously. Delegates split into smaller groups and intensive notes were exchanged.

The last day of the conference was devoted to discuss ICBP Action plan in Asia. It was decided to identify endemic bird areas (EBAs) and important bird areas (IBAs) in each country. Many resolutions were formulated and passed.

On 12 December, after an early breakfast, we went to Pusan, about 560 km south of Seoul. The mayor of Pusan hosted a lavish Korean dinner in an exquisite restaurant. Prof. Won repeatedly reminded us that there is "no limitation" on food and drinks. Actually during the one week we were with him, we found that there was no limitation to Koreans' cheerfulness, hospitality and friendship.

BIRDWATCHING IN IGNP AREA AND THAR DESERT

R.G. SONI, IFS, Conservator of Forests, Stage II, Sagar Road, Bikaner, Rajasthan

Though the prospect of birdwatching in the desert may not seem promising due to paucity of vegetation, it actually is very rewarding, especially in the Indira Gandhi Nahar Pariyojana (IGNP) part of Thar.

The project area is an approximately 100 km wide belt along the Indo Pak border. Due to availability of water the area has become very dynamic undergoing rapid improvement in vegetation due to increasing irrigated agriculture and afforestation. What used to be a vast stretch of undulating sandy dry land a few years ago, is now also having lot of water in canals, escape depressions and unfortunately, or fortunately for water birds, some depressions along the main canal where large water bodies have formed due to seepage. Thus, it is a very tempting area for birdwatchers as besides having vast dry sandy scrub track it also has cropped fields, thickly vegetated young forest patches, waterbodies and marshes. All this with easy accessibility, good visibility and hardly any disturbance.

At many spots in the main canal there are large number of migratory ducks like Common Pochard, Tufted Pochard, Shoveller, Gadwall, Wigeon etc. Comparatively more shy birds like Mallard, Pintail, Common Teal, Spotbill Duck, Comb Duck etc prefer the water bodies along the canal. Purple Moorhens and Indian Moorhens are found in large numbers round the year. Coots are found from September to April. With all these birds around, the Marsh Harrier also has to be there. Strangely at certain spots it can be seen almost round the year. Because there is fish both the Large and the Little Cormorants are there. Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, Little Grebes and the Great Indian Reed Warbler are also seen almost round the year. Many of these water birds are also found outside the project area.

Vast waterbodies around Suratgarh (Ghagghar depressions) attract thousands of migratory ducks and other water birds reminding one of Bharatpur. It certainly

deserves to be included as a permanent site for the forthcoming Asian Waterfowl Census. A count at these depressions and along the main canal itself will substantially alter the numbers of water birds west of the Aravalis.

With luck the Great Indian Bustard and the Lesser Bustard can be seen at certain places. A large number of Demoiselle Cranes winter in desert areas every year. However, for an assured sighting Khichan near Phalodi and Talchhapar are the best places. The Black Ibis and the Raven are also generally seen.

For persons interested in birds of prey this area seems to be a heaven because it is so very easy to locate and observe them perched on telephone posts. Tawny Eagles, Short-toed Eagles, Laggar Falcons, Kestrels, White-eyed Buzzards, P. Kites, various vultures, Spotted Owlets, Horned Owls, B.W. Kite are among the commonly seen resident birds of prey. During winter, Spotted Eagles, Steppe Eagles, Harriers, Desert Buzzard, are also seen. Plenty of rodents and lizards in this area keep them well-fed.

Among the terrestrial and arboreal birds the very common ones are Common Babbler, Whitecheeked Bulbul, Blackbellied Finch Lark, Crested Lark, Redwattled Lapwing, Grey Partridge, Indian and Creamcoloured Coursers, Purple Sunbird, Grey and Rufousbacked Shrikes, Pied Chats, Blue Rock Pigeons, Rosy Pastors, Starling, Common Myna, Black Drongo and Yellow throated Sparrow. Plenty of waders are found during winter, particularly near village tanks.

There are more than a dozen species of birds which are found in the whole of India which are not seen in this desert. However, due to rapid environmental changes in the I G N P area many of these are likely to be seen here by the turn of the century eg. Coppersmith, Magpie Robin,

Indian Robin, Jungle Babbler, Common Hawk Cuckoo, Tailor Bird, White Eye, Sarus Crane, Blossomheaded Parakeet, Greyheaded Flycatcher, Yelloweyed Babbler and

Crested Bunting. It is this aspect of rapid changes taking place in this area which may be of special interest to birdwatchers.

COMMON BABBLER NESTING IN RESIDENTIAL AREA IN KOTA

RAKESH VYAS, 2-P-22, Vigyan Nagar, Kota 324 005

This summer of 1992, a pair of Common Babblers *Turdoides caudatus* nested on a *Citrus aurantifolia* tree among the thickly criss-crossing branches in the compound of my house in Kota, Rajasthan (25°10'N, 75°52'E). This provided me an opportunity to closely watch and record their breeding activities. In a number of *Turdoides* spp. breeding pair is accompanied by 'helpers' (Ali and Ripley 1987, Maclean 1985, Zacharias and Mathew 1988). Among the Indian species *Turdoides malcomi* (Ali and Ripley 1987), *T. affinis* (Zacharias and Mathew 1977) and *T. striatus* (Zacharias and Mathew 1977, 1988) are known to have sisterhoods (Ali and Ripley 1987) or helpers (Zacharias and Mathew 1977, 1988) with the breeding pair. In all the *Turdoides* spp. found in Southern Africa (Maclean 1985) helpers are known to assist in nest building and care of the young.

The pair of *Turdoides caudatus* was accompanied by a helper throughout the nest building process, incubation and care of the nestling. The nest was constructed at a height of 2.7 metres with the readily available material in the vicinity of the houses. The nesting material included soft and fine coconut fibres in the centre with the covering of grass, rootlets, wire, nylon strips, thorny twigs and the base made up of the leaf stalks of *Delonix regia*. The nest building was completed within a week and on 25 May, I saw 3 eggs in the nest. Throughout the 15 days incubation period, the helper was always in attendance but was not seen incubating the eggs. I saw it guarding the nest when both the parents were absent. The helper was distinguishable from the parents by its slightly smaller size, lighter body colour and unbarred tail. I often saw the helper begging for food in the manner of a fledgling and was occasionally fed by the breeding pair. This behaviour gives credence to the idea that the helpers are often the young from the previous brood, either of the same season or a previous season.

The Babbler pair showed tolerance towards other bird species namely *Passer domesticus*, *Pycnonotus cafer*, *Acridotheres tristis*, *Sturnus pagodarum* and *Saxicoloides fulicata* but were very wary of *Corvus splendens* and the five striped squirrel *Funambulus pennanti*. The squirrels were aggressively attacked and chased away by the parents and the helper, in case they ventured anywhere close to the nest. The Babblers were not unduly disturbed by human

presence. On 8 June, two eggs hatched but the third egg failed to hatch. After three days, it was found on the ground broken and it contained a premature embryo. On the 5th day, one of the chicks was also found lying dead on the ground. Early morning was the most hectic time of the day as the parents and the helper were busy with feeding the chicks frequently. The nestlings were fed on insects, caterpillars and house gecko young ones, which were available a plenty at that time. Midmorning was the time for preening and deticking the nestling, which was necessitated by the presence of some unidentified fleas. The parents cleaned the cloacal region of the nestling and threw away the faecal sac. Evenings were for relaxing, allopreening and chattering sweetly with musical notes. In allopreening special attention was given to the helper by the breeding pair.

After 11 days, the chick left the nest on 19 June. The tail feathers and the secondaries were undeveloped. Feeding and cleaning of the chick was the main daily chores of the parents and the helper was always ready to assist them. The chick was never left unguarded for first four days and it was encouraged to hop from branch to branch and on the ground in the undergrowth.

Interestingly another nest building was subsequently started by this pair on 15 June when the chick was still in the nest. Some time was taken by both the parents for the construction of the nest approximately 1.5 metres from the previous nest. The material for this nest was procured from a deserted nest of *Passer domesticus*, which was located on the same tree. The second brood started on 26 June with the laying of a clutch of 3 eggs laid between 24 & 25 June. The parents attended to the duty of incubation and care of the chick, which was now fully fledged. It was a family group of four which moved together in the mornings and evenings when the eggs were left unattended for sometime, otherwise the chick remained in the company of the helper. Frequently, the group indulged in allopreening. The second brood could not be completed as the eggs were devoured by a house crow on 4 July. The family group continues to live in the same locality.

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BIRDS OF DHARWAD

A.K. CHAKRAVARTHY, Jr. Entomologist, University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore 560 065

On the 21st of April 1992 I travelled through Dharwad on my scooter with the object of seeing the birds through my 8 x 30 binoculars. I saw a great deal which was interesting.

Dharwad has stands of eucalyptus, casuarina, wooded areas with Copperpod, stretching almost half a kilometer along the road, bamboos, mangoes, coconuts, neem, acacia and others. In the first 3¹/₂ hours I sighted only Purple Sunbirds, Red Vented Bulbuls, Koel, Jungle Crow, House Sparrow, Pariah Kite, Blue Rock Pigeon, House Swift and Common Mynas. Monotonous stands, absence of blooms and dry and hot weather touching 38°C, and 10 hours of bright sunshine, may be the reason for the paucity of birds seen.

On the 22nd, I concentrated on the uplands where there were some fruit orchards and a variety of trees including ficus, melia, cassia. I spotted a pair of Indian Robins, Brahminy Myna, Common Myna, Indian Pipit, Grey Hornbill, Pond Heron, Roseringed Parakeet, Rufousbacked Shrike, Redrumped Swallow, House Swift, Indian Wren Warblers, Iora, and Grey Cuckoo Shrike. In the evening I went to the 40 acre botanical garden of the Karnataka University campus. This was established in 1963 and the campus contains deciduous trees which were barren at this time. I saw a flock of Whiteheaded Babblers, Redvented Bulbul, Coucal, Koel, Purple Sunbird, Jungle Crow and House Swift.

Then on the 23rd I went to the cultivated tracks along a path leading to the Agricultural University. This cultivated track of 20 acres was mostly fallow at the time with stubbles

of crops in a few patches, and with maize in a 3 acre plot in one corner. Here I experienced the pleasant warbling notes of the Ashy wren Warbler. There were six of them. Along the banks and edges of the fields there were Redwattled Lapwing, Cattle Egret, Common Myna, Jungle Myna and Hoopoe. Indian Wren Warblers exploited the vertical height of the edge. There were others using the edge partly or fully, including Tailor Birds, Fantail Warbler, Redvented Bulbul, Koel, Pied Bushchat, Little Brown Dove, Magpie Robin, Ring Dove, Brahminy Myna, Indian Skylark, Roseringed Parakeet and Munias. Two groups of Whiteheaded Babblers and Whitecheek Bulbuls were also sighted in this area later in the evening. What impressed me was the active interaction including vocalisations between and among this group of birds in what I would like to call the edge area.

On the 24th I was delighted to see a party of Grey Tits, Small Minivets, Grey Hornbills, White eyes, Whitebreasted Kingfisher, Iora, Tailor Birds, Whitecheek Bulbuls, Rufous backed Shrike, Coppersmith, Magpie Robin, Yellow-eyed Babbler and Indian Wren Warbler. All these were within a 10 metre stretch of the edge of the fallow land. The varying heights of the vegetation were exploited by different species.

It seems to me that if Town Planners make use of the edge effect in an appropriate manner, they will succeed in attracting a large number of birds of different species. I would suggest that other birdwatchers when they visit Dharwad, pay special attention to the abundance of bird species where there is a mix of different habitats.

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION ON PRIVATE LAND IN CANADA - A GRASSLAND CONSERVATION PLAN AND OPERATION BURROWING OWL

STEPHEN HERRERO

About half of the wildlife species in Canada are found in the prairie (or grassland) region. Yet this is also the most intensively developed area in Canada. Most of the land is

in agricultural production. But in wetlands, and pockets of native grassland too difficult to plan, there still remains much wildlife. It is, however, under threat because of

pressure to drain wetlands, and to convert native grasslands to turn over of much lesser diversity.

Most of the grasslands are in private ownership, so WWF Canada realized that for wildlife conservation to be successful, private landowners would need to be supportive. WWF formed a Prairie Conservation Committee - The "Wild West" Committee, of which I was Chairman throughout its duration 1987-1990. Also on the Committee were other conservationists, private landowners, and Government officials with jurisdiction over prairie lands. Together, and in mutual accord, we wrote a Prairie Conservation Action Plan.

Because Government was involved, all prairie provinces officially support the Plan. Most provinces are implementing it at regional levels - a very encouraging sign.

Private landowners have supported many initiatives, such as Operation Burrowing Owl. This small owl nests in holes in the ground. But if the land is ploughed, the nests are destroyed. The challenge was how to get farmers to stop ploughing areas important for burrowing owls. We did this by offering farmers a variety of incentives. Some farmers wanted nothing more than a plaque, recognising that they agreed to protect burrowing owls. The plaque was signed by HRH Prince Phillip. He visited two farms as part of launching the project. Other farmers required modest compensation for agreeing to protect burrowing owl habitat. We signed over 400 agreements with farmers. Each agreement offered something modest that the farmer wanted. Overall the programme protects a majority of burrowing owl habitat in Canada, retaining nesting habitat for 1000-2000 Owls.

Conservation on private lands has required innovative approaches in Canada's Prairie region. Similar programmes could be worked out for privately owned land to serve conservation objectives in India.

NEW SIGHTINGS

ON THE OCCURRENCE OF WESTERN AND SATYR TRAGOPAN TOGETHER IN UTTAR PRADESH. S. NARENDRA PRASAD, *Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Kalampalayam P.O., Coimbatore 641 010, India*

The Western Tragopan (*Tragopan melanocephalus*) an endangered pheasant has now been confirmed to exist in the Tons forest division of Western Uttar Pradesh. So far this pheasant has been recorded in the Great Himalayan National Park. Although its eastern most distribution limit was not exactly known, it is known to be 'somewhere' in Garhwal (Ali and Ripley 1983).

Based on my field visits from October to December 1992 I now confirm its existence in Kotigad and Sandra forest

ranges of Tons forest division in Uttarkashi districts of Western U.P. This is the second report of Western Tragopan in Tons division. Earlier Bland (1987) reported this species further east of this locality in Tons division. The 'discovery' came on 22 Dec. 1992 in the Tons forest division in the afternoon at 2.50 p.m. in Kotigad range. I was trekking a mountain slope densely clad with Deodar (*Cedrus deodara*) Blue pine (*Pinus wallichiana*) and occasional Rhododendron (*Rhododendron arboreum*). It so happened that we 'lost' our way back to the camp and in the process, we chanced to hear the short bleating noises of sheep, characteristic of Western Tragopan. Because of the dense litter, we could not unfortunately sight the bird. Later on when we checked with the villagers at Chinwa, they readily identified the photograph of Western Tragopan and also volunteered the startling information about its getting killed by Shikaris every winter. The existence is confirmed independently by a former CCF and the present conservator of forests.

The villagers also identified Satyr Tragopan to be existing in this area along with Cheer, Kaleej, Koklas and Monal pheasants albeit at different altitudes and habitats. There are also reports that bordering forest tracts in Simla district west of Kotigad range and those in Govind Pashu Vihar Sanctuary in the east and north east in U.P. also harbour populations of Western and Satyr Tragopan. Since the latter's distribution limit is supposed to be Garhwal, and since there are no reports of its existence in either Simla or Kinnuar districts, the Tons division, along with Govind Pashu Vihar Sanctuaries are extremely important for conservation of this endangered Western Tragopan. Again biologically this area is interesting. The sympatric association is never reported earlier and this is the first ever report on such an occurrence. From a habitat view point this 'happenstance' is only but natural as the heavily snow clad areas of Sangla in Kinnaur in winter are out of reach for the Western Tragopan. The only known dense Deodar-Blue pine-fir forests exist in the Tons Raddi forest divisions in U.P. and H.P. respectively. The Tons forest division is especially an attractive wintering habitat as it is contiguous with Govind Pashu Vihar Sanctuary. This tract has less of anthropogenic pressure compared to that of Himachal Pradesh. The villagers also confirm the nesting of Western Tragopan in these localities. It is therefore essential that Tons forest division along with parts of Raddi division in H.P. and alpine pastures in Sangla north of Changshil peak in Kinnaur be declared as a Western Tragopan sanctuary. We are currently involved in estimating the population, habitat and threats to its existence.

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BLUEBREASTED QUAIL - AN ADDITION TO BANGALORE AVIFAUNAL LIST. J.N. PRASAD and A. MADHUSUDAN, C/o. Merlin Nature Club, 13, 8th Cross, 30th Main, 1 Phase J.P. Nagar, Bangalore 560 078

On 14 June 1992 a cloudy morning, while we were passing through the Tatguni Estate (12° 52'N, 77° 32'E) on our way to the Badamanavarthi State Forest, we noticed a quail run across the road. As we approached it, it ran into a roadside trench and lay motionless. After a few minutes it suddenly took off and landed amidst the Barsera plantations of the Tatguni Estate and disappeared amidst the bushes. We had a clear view of the quail; the blue eye brow, red eyes and yellow legs. But the blue throat and blue breast could not be seen as we were observing the bird from above; however the buff and reddish brown pattern on the back helped to identify the species with certainty. It was a male Bluebreasted Quail *Coturnix chinensis*. Though we could not see the other birds of the flock we heard a soft tir-tir-tir call emanating from the nearby bushes.

The HANDBOOK quoting Baker (FBI Vol.V p 370) states that it is a common breeding bird from Kerala (Travancore & the Malabar coast) to Bombay but this does not seem to be true today, as there are few definite records of the species. In Karnataka this sighting happens to be only the second report and the first for Bangalore. The first sighting is that of G.V.R. Frend in 1949 from Chickmagalur district (1950; JBNHS : 49;118-119). Salim Ali came across the species only at Warangal in South India during his Hyderabad Survey. Jerdon is supposed to have collected a specimen from somewhere near Carnatic and Fergusson from Travancore. It would be interesting to know if there are any other confirmed sightings of the species.

BARHEADED GEESE AT SHAHWADI SUBURB OF SOUTHERN AHMEDABAD. KETAN TATU, Research Student, Department of Botany, University School of Sciences, Gujarat University, Ahmedabad 380009

On 29-11-92 at 4.30 p.m. I was counting the population of Brahminy Duck *Tadorna ferruginea* at the man-induced wetland of Shahwadi, Ahmedabad. While scanning through their huge flock with a pair of 8x40 binoculars, I detected the presence of a pair of waterfowl (*Anatidae* family). I was interested in them due to their apparently bigger size and different plumage colour compared to accompanying Brahminy Ducks.

Careful observation revealed the presence of two conspicuous black bands, one passing across their heads and the other one passing across their napes. Hence, I concluded at once that the waterfowl were Barheaded Geese *Anser indicus*. I could see pure white on their necks. Rest of their bodies was greyish white.

Both birds were bigger than the Brahminy Ducks.

The geese were standing on the edge of a large shallow water pool formed due to industrial effluents of Shahwadi suburb. One of them was seen preening itself. After some time, it was also seen uprooting the grass with its beak. Another individual was resting quietly.

It may be of interest to note that Barheaded Goose is comparatively rare in Gujarat. Here its occurrence has been recorded at Muli Dam (Dist. Surendranagar) on 14-1-1984 (Raol. 1988). Subsequent occurrences in Gujarat have also been reported for the same place including the occurrence of 23 individuals on 9-1-1989 (Mundkar et.al. 1989)

Acharya (1979) has reported its occurrence in the environs of Ahmedabad at Gobhlaj, Chharodi and Sonasan but without dates and their numbers.

Thus, polluted water wetland of Shahwadi, Ahmedabad is a new site for the occurrence of Barheaded Goose.

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ROSY PELICAN AT AAKKULAM. MANOJ V. NAIR, 34 Thoppil Nagar, Kumarapuram, Trivandrum 11

Aakkulam is a medium-sized brackish lake partly covered by water-hyacinth rafts, water-lily and other water weeds situated about 7 km from Trivandrum, it provides an important wintering ground for multitudes of migratory water fowl. Susanth, Rafeek, Prakash and I were watching birds there on 12 December 1992. It was a warm sunny morning with a gentle breeze and the time was 7:32 a.m. The water level in the lake was fairly high. Seeing a large bird floating far out in the lake, I focussed my binoculars on it and was surprised to find that it was a Pelican. I pointed the bird to Susanth, an experienced birder and he too had no doubt that it was indeed a Pelican. The bird was swimming lazily with a group of little cormorants and did not appear to be feeding. It allowed a small boat to approach it to about 30 metres, but as the boat kept coming closer, the Pelican with much flapping, rose heavily out of the water and flew in our direction. The flying bird presented a grand spectacle and the flight style was a few flaps followed by a short glide. We were able to watch it clearly at close range. The overall colour was pale pinkish white. The upperparts of wings were greyish white with the primaries and trailing edge black. The tail was white in colour. There was also a black patch at the 'wrist' (junction

of wings). The underparts of the wings was more greyish, with the black trailing edge fused with brown. The beak was a pinkish yellow and the pouch a light lemon yellow. After a few minutes of hesitant flying, the bird with rhythmic wing beats gained height and flew away. The facts above clearly point out that the bird was a Rosy Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*. This sighting is remarkable, as this is the first record of Rosy Pelican in Kerala and extreme South India. The only other record of a Pelican in Kerala is by Ferguson (JBNHS 16:13) who states that he saw three Spotbilled Pelicans flying over the parade ground in Trivandrum.

RECENT SIGHTING OF WHITEBROWED BLUE FLYCATCHER IN BANGALORE. S. KARTHIKEYAN and J.N. PRASAD, C/o Merlin Nature Club, 13, 8th cross 30th Main, J.P. Nagar I Phase, Bangalore 560 078 and L.SHYAMAL, D-206, Indian Institute of Science Campus, Bangalore 560 012

During the group outing organised by Merlin Nature Club, Bangalore to Badamanavarathi State Forest (12 51'N, 77 30'E) about 21 km south of Bangalore on 25 October 1992, a female Whitebrowed Blue Flycatcher *Muscicapa superciliaris* Jerdon was sighted. The bird was observed actively foraging and flycatching on a Fig tree *Ficus* sp.

The present sighting happens to be only the second record of the species for Bangalore, the first one being that of Hemanth's observation (1988; NLBW 28 (5+6) : 17-18) at Krishna Rao Park. The other nearest record of the species is at Namadchilume in Devarayanadurga State Forest, Tumkur where Salim Ali had collected a specimen of a male on 2 January 1940 during his birds survey of the erstwhile Mysore State (1942; JBNHS 43(3): 318- 341).

CORRESPONDENCE

FROM LAVKUMAR KHACHER IN HIMACHAL PRADESH. Hinglajbaug, Vashishta, HP 175 103

I am writing to you from the Himalaya watching the winter frost remorsefully move down the surrounding mountains each night. The days are brilliantly sunny and warm - it is marvellous.

From my cottage window, looking through the glass panes, I can watch a number of birds at surprisingly close quarters. Today morning for instance a small flock of Black throated Jays came to bath and spruce up at a drip in the waterpipe behind the cottage. I couldn't have observed their subtle colouring better through a high resolvancy binocular. What struck me was the terribly stupid name given to these birds - for all practical purposes the throat looks white! True the white is because of streaks on the black throat, nevertheless, Blackheaded would have been more graphic.

The smaller Passerines are all going around in mixed flocks - the famous "hunting parties" of Whistler and Salim Ali. While the busy bodies are around there is commotion and one just does not know which call is emitted by what bird and, just as you have decided the little bundle of feathers is a Large crowned Willow Warbler, it has gone and its place is taken by Greyheaded Flycatcher Warblers. Each group often contains three to four species of tits, several species of warblers, a Tree creeper for good measure, but before you have decided who is around the whole lot have moved on. Quite frustrating unless you have reached a degree of wisdom to enjoy what comes by. At this time of the year, two high altitude birds give me great pleasure the rather flamboyant wall creeper flashing crimson in its wings as it flickers among the boulders of the torrent past my property and the tiny, stubby tailed wren which makes a home among the crevasses of the rubble wall. Unlike yesteryear, I do not chase after birds, I let them come to me and this is so marvellous about this hobby - it can be indulged in at any age and does it really matter what bird made a call as long as the calls can be heard all around? I am now planning to install a bird feeding station just outside my window so that I can watch my feathered friends even as I sit with a book beside a warm stove.

1st January, 1993. It is a marvellous way to start a New year - The weather which had been bright and sunny for the full fortnight we have been here clouded over yesterday and started raining. In the night, the rain turned snow and even as I am writing to you, snowflakes are descending thickly from a grey sky. Outside my window is a tracery of black, leafless branches, and every now and then flocks of little birds arrive, flutter, flick and flit, look for tiny insects - Redheaded Tits, Crested Black Tits, Grey Tits, Greenbacked Tits and an assortment of Willow Warblers and Grey headed Flycatcher Warblers.

Moments like this make one realise how critical the supply of summer insects must be for these birds to not only build up fat reserves, but also provide them with ample food supplies through the bleak winter months in the form of grubs, hibernating cocoons, etc. It is precisely this food base which we systematically destroy by intense horticultural practices.

I have decided to convert a section of my property into a sanctuary and here I propose to introduce Oak, Chestnut, Deodar, Blue Pine and high altitude bamboo. The leaf litter and the herbaceous undergrowth will not be disturbed and in a short while, this will be a desirable address for all the birds and hopefully for my birdwatching friends.

It is a pity I am leaving today to go down because this snowfall will bring Redbilled Choughs, wall creepers and other species who descend only when the upper slopes get too bleak for them to survive.

COMMENTS ON THE NEWSLETTER. DR. VIJAY B. TULJAPURKAR, Shivaji Road, Miraj 416 410

I have read your editorial in the latest NLBW Vol 32 No.11 & 12, 1992 with interest. I have followed the initial writeups on the OSI and was happy to learn that the organization, though in embryonic stage, is taking shape. In your recent editorial you have expressed your views that the NLBW should be the official publication of OSI. I do agree with you on this point and have a couple of suggestions to make.

I have been prescribing the NLBW for last one year or so and found that it makes interesting reading giving information on the avifauna of various places, habitat status etc. There are several articles which would be useful as references, among these are the studies by Asad Rahmani, S. Sridhar and many others.

Though the checklists of various places is published regularly I find that the observations and studies based on the subject 'Bird Behaviour' are infrequent. Could we publish more data on this topic? Secondly, I think that the NLBW is not indexed as yet. Would it be possible for someone in the editorial team to see that the publication is indexed so that it would attract more articles based on many facets of bird life and this itself would strengthen the NLBW and OSI in the long run. I truly am not aware of the format of NLBW in the past but I am sure it must have improved over the years in matters related to contents, photographs etc. Why not go one step ahead and see that the writeups and articles authored by numerous bird watchers be made available as references? I would welcome your views on this as well as from others.

Raptor Survey - Israel

EXPERIENCED BIRDWATCHERS REQUIRED

1993 AUTUMN MIGRATION SURVEY, ISRAEL

For the annual Raptor, Stork and Pelican Migration Survey in the Northern Valleys, Israel (10 August - 20 October)

During the autumn of 1991, over a period of 45 days, some 806,000 migrating birds were counted in the skies above Israel. These included 580,000 reports of 30 different species, 190,000 White Storks and 36,000 White Pelican.

You are invited to join an international team of birdwatchers to experience the busiest migration route in the western Palearctic. The minimum participation period will be three weeks. You will have to cover the cost of your travel to and from Israel, we will cover the cost of food and lodging in Israel.

If you are an experienced birdwatcher, capable and willing to watch migration for a minimum of 8 hours a day, please inform us as soon as possible, enclosing details of your previous experience.

RON BEER / Autumn Survey

Israel Raptor Information Centre (IRIC)

Har-Gilo, Doar Na Zfon Yehuda, 90907 Israel

Tel: 972-2-932383/4 Fax: 972-2-932385

972-3-826802

ATTENTION

We urgently need your help in writing letters to save the blackfaced Spoonbill

We recently received an urgent request for assistance from the Wild Bird Society of the Republic of China (Taiwan). The Government has plans for industrial development of the Tsen-Wen River Estuary in southwestern Taiwan. This is a very important wintering area for many waders and waterfowl, including the Blackfaced Spoonbills. About 200 Blackfaced Spoonbills winter in this area. This represents two thirds of the known world population of this endangered species. Development of this estuary could severely threaten the continued survival of the species. Alternatively, this estuary would be an ideal location for a winter wading bird sanctuary.

Please write letters to the Taiwanese Government authorities urging them not to develop this important area for industrial use, but to save this as an important sanctuary. Write To:

Mr. President Lee, Teng-Hui, 122, Chung-Chin S. Road, Sec.1, Taipei, Taiwan, R.O.C.

Mr. Ling, Shiang-Nung, Vice-Chairman, Council of Agriculture, 37, Nan-Hai Road, Taipei, Taiwan, R.O.C.

Mr. Hau, Pei-Tsun, President of Executive Yuan, 1, Chung-Hsiao E. Road, Sec. 1, Taipei, Taiwan, R.O.C.

Mr. Li, Ya-Chao, Magistrate, Tainan Country Government, 36, Ming-chee Road, Hsin-Yin, Taipei, Taiwan, R.O.C.

We can help save the Blackfaced Spoonfill but only if each of us writes letters!

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of this campaign, we would appreciate your sending a copy of your letters to,

Yeh-Wang Chen, President, Wild Bird Society of R.O.C.,

6, Alley 13, Lane 295, Fu-Shin S. Rd. Sec. 1, Taipei, Taiwan, R.O.C.

WE APPRECIATE YOUR ASSISTANCE IN THIS CRITICAL AND URGENT CRISIS!

Newsletter for Birdwatchers
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 for Vol. 32, 1992 Issues 1-12

Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie, 14-7-370 Begum Bazaar, Hyderabad 500012

1. These are not indexes in the exact sense of the term, where an item is listed followed by Issue No. and Page No. or just Page No. They are bibliographical indexes.
2. They are not exhaustive indexes where each page no. on which an item (eg. *Corvus splendens*) occurs, is recorded. You will realise that species from lists of birds seen are not recorded. In the latter case, importance is given to the PLACE and indexed accordingly.
3. Issues and general topics are listed under ORNITHOLOGY or BIOLOGY in the Species Index, under heads which I feel are convenient and easy to use. I suppose they do not conform to any indexing standards. Here, comments from you and readers will be useful.
4. The basis for this type of a bibliographical-index is that a user refers to an index when information is required on a species or on a place. At least in 99% of the cases this is the need.
5. I have observed that most articles/papers are on a species or on observations in a place. The title of a paper generally conveys the emphasis of the study/observation. If the weight is on a species, then that is indexed and also the place of observation. If the study is carried out in a place on birds in general, that place is indexed.
6. In the state-wise index the following descending alphabetical order is followed. State / Place / Author / Issue No. / Page No.
7. In the species index it is Species / Author / Issue No. / Page No.
8. Some miscellaneous items of news published in 1992 have not been indexed eg. inside covers of No.3-4

I will be glad if comments are received to improve on this index.

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NEWS FROM ICBP**BIRDWATCH '93**

On the weekend of 9-10 October 1993, ICBP aims to involve 1 million people around the world in a giant birdwatch. If your organisation would like to get involved-you can use the event to raise money, recruit new members or create publicity - please get in touch with Gillian Stacey at the Secretariat, ICBP, 32, Cambridge Road, Griton, Cambridge, CB3 0PJ, United Kingdom.

Cover : Red-Wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*). A sleek, immaculate bird in a sandy brown suit, black cap and bright red wattle around the base of the beak, frequenting open country side. Nests on the ground by making a scrape and lining with mud pellets or pebbles. Eggs and chicks are superbly camouflaged. Its ceaseless vigilance and frantic screaming 'did-he-do-it', 'did-he-do-it', is a familiar call of the country side.

Photo : S. Sridhar, ARPS.

News from AWB,

'FIELD GUIDE ON THE WATER BIRDS OF ASIA;

We have received a communication from Dr. Taej Mundkur, of Asian Wetland Bureau, University of Malaya, Lambah Pantai, 59100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, that the AWB has succeeded in getting a Japanese Foundation to send complimentary copies of 'Field Guide on the Water Birds of Asia', to regular AWC participants. The Wild Bird Society of Japan & AWB are producing this Field Guide.. This Field Guide will go a long way in improving the standards of waterbird identification and raise the quality of counts. Regional Co-ordinators are requested to send the list of names & addresses of regular AWC participants to Dr. Mundkur, so as to reach him by middle of March. The Japanese Foundation will directly mail complimentary copies of the Field Guide to as many regular participants as possible.

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Red Data Bird

Jerdon's Courser

by Bharat Bhushan

The rediscovery of Jerdon's or Double-banded Courser *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus* in 1986 was a significant achievement for field ornithology in the Indian sub-continent.

Jerdon's Courser was first recorded near Cuddapah and Nellore in the Eastern Ghats of south Andhra Pradesh by Dr T.C. Jerdon, a British Army Medical Officer, in c.1848. There were two subsequent records, by Blandford in 1874 and Howard Campbell in 1900, all were from the Godavari and Pennar river valleys in the state of Andhra Pradesh, southern India.

Several surveys between 1900 and 1986 did not succeed in finding the bird. Posters showing Jerdon's Courser with the Indian Courser, which were circulated in the regions from where the bird had been recorded, failed to elicit any positive response, and the species was presumed extinct.

In January 1986 the species was rediscovered, after a year-long survey by the Bombay Natural History Society, under the aegis of their Endangered Species Project, funded by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Government of India.

Jerdon's Courser is a nocturnal and crepuscular species that inhabits small open patches within scrub areas bordering dry deciduous forests. It is known from six sites in the vicinity of the Lankamalai ranges, but the total area of suitable habitat within its known range in the two valleys is only 2,000 km². At the time of rediscovery, this habitat was deemed to be fairly secure. However, about a month after the rediscovery, it became clear that an irrigation scheme planned by the Andhra Pradesh State Government would go right through the exact rediscovery site.

The planned scheme would supply water to the city of Madras, the fourth largest metropolis in India, but the worst equipped to supply water to the inhabitants during the summer. The area of Rayalaseema to the north of Madras was chronically drought-stricken, and



(Photo: B. Bhushan)

water for irrigation was essential. The plan to channel water from the large Nagajunasagar dam to the north of the Courser area through Rayalaseema to Madras would address both problems, but it would be disastrous for Jerdon's Courser.

Fortunately, officials in the Forest Department and the State Government of Andhra Pradesh both recognised the international importance of Jerdon's Courser, and lobbying to save it was successful, resulting in the canal being realigned away from the Courser habitat.

Considerable progress has been made subsequently in the protection of the habitat. The forest near Cuddapah where the bird was rediscovered has been gazetted as the Sri Lankamalleswara Wildlife Sanctuary. An important milestone was when arrangements were made with the local government for local tribes-people to be employed by the state Forest Department on protection of the sanctuary. This was largely due to the initiative of forest officer Jaganmohan Rao, the local Conservator of Forests. Involving the local people in the conservation of the forests where Jerdon's Courser occurs was deemed essential to success.

To the south of the Sri Lankamalleswara Wildlife Sanctuary, 500 km² of the Palakonda forests have been gazetted as the Sri Venkateswara National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary. This is an extremely important area for biodiversity, with four other endemic

species apart from Jerdon's Courser occurring (the red sandalwood tree, Red Sanders *Pterocarpus marsupium*, the dwarf palm *Cycas beddomei*, the golden gecko *Calodactylodes aureus* and the medicinal herb *Pimpinella tirupatiensis*). Tiger, Leopard, several ungulate and primate species and over 230 species of bird also occur in the area. Plans are also underway to demarcate nearly 1,300 km² of the Velikonda forests to the east of Palakondas as a Wildlife Sanctuary. Jerdon's Courser has been reported from these areas also.

Bharat Bhushan is a researcher at the Bombay Natural History Society, and played a significant part in the rediscovery of Jerdon's Courser.

(Painting: R. Gillmor)



PAKISTAN ALLOWS ROYAL HUNT OF BUSTARDS

Every winter hundreds of Arab sheikhs and their helpers converge on the deserts and arid plains of Baluchistan and Sind. Their aim is to kill – using rare and expensive falcons – as many houbara bustards as they can. But the bustards are already among Pakistan's most threatened birds and, if the 'sport' continues, they could soon disappear altogether.

The houbara is a shy bird, slightly bigger than a large domestic hen. It prefers to walk but is a strong flier, able to twist and turn with great speed and agility in the air. This is precisely the reason for its popularity as a quarry for falconers.

In the past, the falconry was practised as a leisurely art, and the bustard stalked from the back of a horse or camel. But with the advent of oil wealth, the mode of transport has changed and hunting parties arrive with enormous entourages and convoys of trucks and four-wheel drive cars to carry all their gear. They bring with them firearms – and treat any other wildlife they find as equally fair game.

The pressure is so severe that the houbara population has been declining by 20 per cent every year for more than decade. Literally thousands are killed each season and the toll is increasing.

Scientists and conservationists have been warning for years that the killing should not continue. In 1983, they called for a five year moratorium. The President promised to consider such a ban, but nothing has been imposed. Perhaps ironically, Pakistaners themselves are not allowed to hunt the houbara. But the Government continues to issue permits to dignitaries and heads of state from the Gulf.

This year also Pakistan has issued special permission to 20 Arab Princes, according to Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Siddique Kanju.

A Campaign by conservationists to save the birds from the Arab royal hunter's falcons last month angered a Gulf ruler. Mr. Kanju was sent to persuade the gulf ruler to keep up his hunting appointment.

The authorities said that the hunt spreads money to poor areas, by paying for the building of roads, mosques and hospitals. But most of the hunting takes place in the desert and the roads are built purely for the use of the hunters; lavish mosques in the desert serve very few; and the hospitals are empty shells, left without doctors, staff or equipment. The rest of the money is distributed in the form of bribes to corrupt officials for allowing infringements of rules and bag limits. Officially, only 200 bustards per party are allowed, but the actual numbers killed run to several times that limit.

On a larger scale, the Government no doubt feels that the houbara is a negligible price to pay in order to keep the Gulf aid pipeline functioning smoothly.

Of course, it cannot be pretended that Pakistan will witness great economic decline or that the average citizen will be any worse off if the houbara is allowed to become extinct. But there are many good reasons for not letting that happen.

A piece of national - and international - heritage will have been destroyed. The eyes of the world are closely watching to see how Pakistan handles its responsibility for the largest over - wintering population of houbara anywhere. The hunting itself, with all its disturbance, destruction and corruption, is gradually eroding values and lowering standards. Besides, if the birds do disappear - they are already nearly extinct in the Gulf region - the sheikhs will no longer have any quarry to hunt.

A final effort to save the houbara was made in the National Assembly. In mid-1985, a private Members Bill was introduced by Begum Abida Hussain. MNA from Jhang, which seeks to impose a five-year moratorium, called the Houbara Bustard (Banning of Hunting and Capturing) Bill 1985.

The Minister told the Pakistan Senate that although hunting of the Bustard was banned under law, it could be hunted with special permits.

Need of the Hour: Please write letters to the Pakistani Government authorities urging them not to issue Special Permits for hunting the houbaras. Write to : Abdul Latif Rao, or Karimulla Shirazi, Conservators of Wildlife in the National Council for Conservation of Wildlife, under the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Co-operatives, No.485, St No. 84-G-6/4, Islamabad, Pakistan

You can also urge the Saudi Arabian authorities to discourage the practice of hunting the houbaras. Write to : Anas Z. Sanbas or Mohammad I Al Salamah, National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development (NCWCD) P.O. Box No. 61681, RIYADH 11575, Saudi Arabia.



Houbara Bustard
Chlamydotis Undulata

Source : IUCN, DPA

Arab Sheikhs on a hunting expedition in the deserts of Baluchistan. – GM

