

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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Editorial

Pan Asian Ornithological Congress (PASOC)

This congress originally scheduled to take place in Bangalore between 9-16 November has unexpectedly been shifted to Coimbatore as V.S. Vijayan of SACON apparently felt that the meetings could be better organised at the Head Quarters of the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History. No quarrel with that, but the "Bangalore Group" are justifiably annoyed that no information was sent to them about this in good time. This sudden and unforeseen move on his part reduced to nullity all the preparatory efforts put in by several persons for the conference. Naturally there were ruffled feathers and raised hackles in Bangalore. However, I hope this "territorial conflict" is now over, and that we will keep to the well known principle "least said, soonest mended." We wish the Congress every success.

Improving the Newsletter for Birdwatchers

I am very glad that readers have started to pull up the editor for including articles which seemingly have no focus; for not checking the species list carefully, including birds not likely to occur in particular areas; and for the poor quality of the writing. The three letters by V Santharam, Rahul Purandare and Krys Kazmierczak, included in this issue, represent, I am sure, the views of several of our serious readers.

Regarding the species list, I would urge contributors to consult local experts before passing on the article for possible publication. As far as the editor is concerned, unless an entry appears to be manifestly incorrect, it will be included. Errors (made in good faith) can lead to a useful discussion on the status and distribution of a species originally wrongly described. And this has happened in a few cases.

Regarding bad presentation, I could of course re-write some articles, containing interesting matter and make them more readable. If I had a steno at hand and plenty of time and money, this would be easy. But my steno, Beryl D'Rosario (an invaluable asset to the Newsletter) is available only part time and is 15 km away, and reaching her frequently is not possible. So I often try and just correct the

language of articles but this of course is not good enough. I often receive reprints of excellent articles (Dr. MB Krishna has sent me a few recently) but my attempt is to include material specially written for the Newsletter. I would also like to confess that I often put aside handwritten articles because of the difficulty of processing them. There is now, quite a pile in my pending tray. And here I would like to thank once again Dr Joseph George for the great trouble he takes in proof reading the Newsletter. But even after his proof-reading the printer's devil has the last word.

Munnar and Kodaikanal

I was in Kodaikanal between the 13th and 22nd September, a period when wagtails suddenly descend on the Indian sub-continent. My impression is that there were no wagtails around till the 15th and then suddenly I saw several in the vicinity of the lake. I also felt that some of the grey wagtails were very yellow on the breast — almost the shade of their breeding plumage which the jet lag had not affected. On 16th September there was one solitary green sandpiper on the lake. I believe that green sandpipers are almost always solitary. Is this so? Saw one large flock of white-eyes, a few black bulbuls but not even a greyheaded flycatcher.

In Munnar on the 2nd of October, I broke my record of seeing no birds at all. It was raining the whole time, and the birds were indoors. On the way to Munnar we stopped a night at Cochin and I had hoped that on the water front there would be gulls and terns. But there was nothing except crows and mynas. Perhaps we were in the wrong place.

What took me to Munnar was a Seminar on Biodiversity organised by the High Range Wildlife and Environment Protection Society, supported by Tata Tea Ltd. The cheering part of the meeting was the strong determination of the participants (including Government officials) to ensure that Munnar's spectacular natural scenery and its physical assets

(trees, wildlife, water and soil) were not destroyed by unrestricted tourism as has happened in Kodaikanal and Ootacamund.

Saving the Motibag Lake in Sholapur

Out of the blue, by courier, I received an article from BS Kulkarni (President, Friends of Birds & Wild Animals, Tilak Path, Sholapur 413 007) about the Motibag Lake, its history and present status. I reproduce it with minor editing and a few omissions. Apparently Salim Ali (then an MP) had written to the Municipal Commissioner of Sholapur on 9.12.1985 that "The BNHS is deeply concerned that a proper investigation of the Moti Baugh tank area be undertaken by a competent naturalist **before** the work of demolition commences. If the wetland is as valuable ... as reported, some alternative for the proposed reclamation should be sought elsewhere ..." In 1972, Prakash Gole wrote: "it is rare to find such variety of birds near such a bustling city as Sholapur. It is a wonderful natural asset and I hope every effort will be made to preserve it."

If the lake is still in a reasonable state I hope that all plans for its reclamation have been permanently abandoned.

The 22nd International Ornithological Congress

Time flies even faster than a bird, and those interested in attending this Congress should start with the formalities involved. The President of the Congress Peter Berthold, writing in the First Announcement says: "Bear in mind that this Congress not only plays an important role in scientific research but is also of great importance politically and ecologically ... It will contribute to South Africa's re-integration into the international community."

Postal Address: 111 Blair Atholl Road, Westville 3630, South Africa



Field observations of the white-winged wood duck — 1

Dr Anwaruddin Choudhury, Near Gate No.1 of Nehru Stadium, Islampur Road, Guwahati 781 007 (Assam), India

The White-winged wood duck *Cairina scutulata* (Muller 1842) is among the most threatened waterfowl of the world. It is also among the most poorly studied. A bird of the tropical rain forest, it is threatened by habitat destruction and hunting. A detailed survey was carried out in one of its known strongholds in eastern Assam's Tinsukia district and adjacent areas of Arunachal Pradesh from 1992 to 1994 (Choudhury 1996). In these series of articles, I present details of field observations, wherever observed continuously for some time, datewise, not published elsewhere. Because in such details lie the actual joy of knowing the secrets of this little known and extremely rare duck, often called the 'Ghost Duck' in local parlance.



White-winged wood ducks in a jungle pool in Upper Dihing Reserve Forest (WB), Tinsukia District, Assam

27 February, 1993. Choraipung, Upper Dihing Reserve Forest (West Block), Tinsukia district, Assam

At around 12.15 pm, we saw two local villagers suspiciously moving around an oil rig. Their *modus operandi*: to collect fire-wood and to "steal" a little crude oil deposited near the rig due to occasional leakage. The nervous villagers came to their senses when we diverted our talks to wildlife. This coincidental meeting and friendship proved to be one of the most productive for me so far as the WWW duck is concerned. One of the villagers, Bhuram Gogoi became my companion in many of the memorable hours of field observation of the WWW duck in the wild, in the leech-infested rainforest of Upper Dihing RF (West Block).

On that day, Bhuram and his brother-in-law, Prasen Gogoi took us to a jungle pool where I spotted a lone WWW duck perched on a fallen, partly submerged log (time: 12.38 pm). The pool is located near Joran (27°2' N, 95°30' E). Later on more ducks were seen and I could observe two family groups for 137 minutes.

At 1.17 pm, one more duck joined the lone duck spotted by me at 12.38 pm. Then at 1.25 pm, a conspicuously larger and darker duck with brighter yellow bill and legs joined them. Both these latter ducks came out from densely forested edge of the pool. The last one was a male while the first two were in all probability females. Activity budgeting became difficult as the probable two females could not be differentiated. However, the total time spent by both the ducks in different activities were recorded. They spent 133 minutes (min.) swimming (i.e. floating on water with movement), 35 min preening while perched on a log, 46 min resting on log and 2 min others (bathing, flying, etc). The male on the other hand spent 35 min swimming, 35 min preening, 17 min resting and 1 min in other activities (flying etc.)

While I was observing this family group (may be called Group I), another family group of 3 ducks were roosting on a horizontal branch of a tree overhanging the pool (Group II). The composition of the group seemed to be similar with one larger and darker male and two possible females. The horizontal branch was only about 15-16 metres above water and about 50 metres from us. The ducks were sleeping with their heads retracted and turned back with the bills tucked under the scapulars. The relative locations of the groups, their movement route and flight path are shown in Fig. 1.

Interesting observations

- 1 A few minutes observation would have revealed only a lone duck! The second duck became visible after a gap of 39 min.

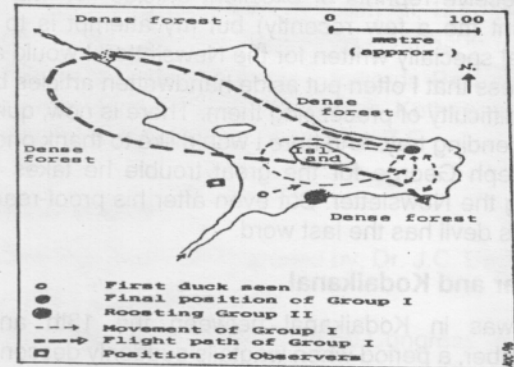


Figure 1 – "WWW duck pool" near Jorajan.

- 2 Some common teals *Anas crecca* were also observed in the same pool, but neither any association nor any antagonism was observed.
- 3 The two family groups showed sharply contrasting behaviour; while Group I was active all along the observation period from 12.38 to 2.55 pm, Group II was completely inactive and was sleeping (roosting) (Fig.2).
- 4 Once the male of Group I 'pushed' a resting female from the log (perhaps the bill did not make contact with the female but the latter moved away into the water).

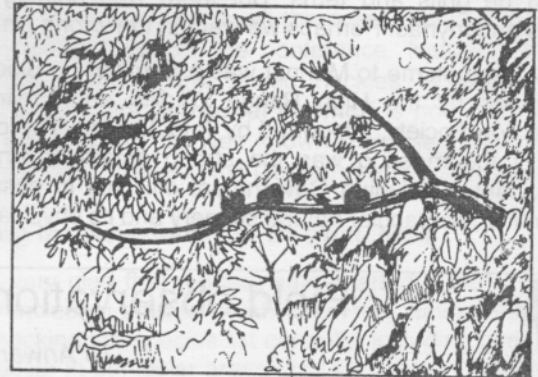


Fig. 2 – Roosting WWW Ducks (Group II). Based on photographs taken on 27 February, 1993.

- 5 When Group I took off honking on seeing us, Group II remained silent, seemingly asleep, but when Group I again came near and honked, Group II responded by uttering low honks, *knn, knn*.
- 6 A small hardshell turtle (*Bataguridae*) was also observed on a log near the ducks, but no antagonistic behaviour was observed.
- 7 Sound produced by turtles and monitor lizards (*Varanus* sp.) jumping from logs to water did not bother the WWW ducks but the common teals panicked.

(to be continued)



Do Green Bee-eaters Pair For Life ?

Lt. Gen. BALJIT SINGH SAKHUA, P.o. Mc Cluskie Ganj, Pin 829 208, Dist. Ranchi, Bihar

On a morning in March 1994, I was out on chores in our house compound. Suddenly something fluttered on the ground a mere step ahead of me. But for its instinct for self preservation it would have been crushed underfoot. It was a green bee-eater.

As I bent to pick him up, he made a valiant attempt at freedom but he could flutter no farther than a few inches. He was cold, fear in his eyes and the tiny heart palpitating almost audibly.

My wife is the apothecary for all living creatures big and small. With missionary devotion she took the bird in a gentle hug as is her wont and reassuringly soothed its nape with her index finger. I was asked to fetch rum and a dropper. In such emergencies it is always either rum or water but only she knows which. And it never fails to work. The bird picked up at once. Save for a flesh bruise at the junction of the right wing with the skeleton, there was no other visible injury. Possibly the skeleton was crushed at a vital place in the clutches of a raptor before he dropped him to the ground for whatever reason.

Barely twenty yards away were three green bee-eaters perched on an electric wire as though intently watching the injured bird. I had not noticed them till they called "tree-tree-tree". There was no response from the injured bird. My wife decided to move the bird to her study which doubles as an infirmary for the sick and injured pets and free ranging creatures. As she walked off with the injured bird, one of the three bee-eaters alighted from the electric wire, circled over the house calling out all the while. The injured bird did not respond.

We did not attach any significance to all this till the next day. The injured bird had been placed inside a cage, on a table, with full view of the compound and the sky outside. We heard a faint call from the cage at about 8.30 a.m. We took it as a sign of recovery and the bird was shifted in the cage to the open. After a while we heard the "tree-tree-tree" calls rather persistently and looked up to find the three green bee-eaters perched on the electric wire keeping up regular communion with the injured comrade. The injured bird responded a few times but seemed to get exhausted after a while.

In such emergencies my wife commandeers Adivasi lads from the village by our cottage, to scout out such of the foods as she picks up from Whistler and/or Salim Ali's books. In this case it broke her heart. No matter how much she tried all known ruses, the bird would not eat any of its natural food. He was gently force-fed tiny pellets of wet atta and a few drops of water mixed with glucose.

By the third day, the bird grew weaker but responded to his mates a few times even though feebly. On the fourth morning, he was unable to call back at all. My wife sat with him in her hands outside for over an hour. Suddenly, he was dead. His companions kept up the "tree-tree-tree" calls. He was buried with heavy hearts.

I noticed the three bee-eaters perched on the same spot now and again for about a week. Then they were gone. On the Chotanagpur plateau the green bee-eaters are obviously resident-migrants. The following year ('95) in the month of March again, I noticed a solitary green bee-eater perched on the electric wire. At first it was no more than the sighting of any other bird in the compound the year round. Then on a sudden impulse a realisation flashed inside me whether it could be the mate of the bee-eater who died the previous year. We had no answer save the sad memories. The solitary bee-eater was noticed by me on several days, sitting on the same perch or flying over the house and calling out in the normal way.

All this was put away as one more experience. And yet again in March this year ('96) a solitary green bee-eater reappeared. I called out to my wife to share the sighting. Is it a sheer coincidence? It may well be. The loss of habitat day by day, year after year is all too evident and as a result many a species cross the threshold of threatened-to-extinction. May be, that is why only one green bee-eater reappears from 1995 onwards. But is this one the mate of the dead companion and do the green bee-eaters pair for life? If the answer is yes, then this is a most poignant example of conjugal fidelity. We are richer by this experience but sadder by the tragedy that goes on and on gathering momentum towards more extinctions no matter how large the fraternity of birdwatchers, conservationists et al. Is it time not to at least figure out the architecture of an Indian Noaha's Ark even though we may postpone the framing of its cargo-manifest launch date, and destination?



Bird Spotting In And Around Poonch (Jammu & Kashmir).

MAJOR B.V. NARESH, 425 Field Ambulance c/o 56 APO

The town of Poonch with a population of about 70 thousand has a number of forested areas around it. The altitude is about three thousand feet above mean sea level and the climate varies between warm in summer to subzero temperatures in winter (December to February). A number of fruiting trees, like mulberry, plum, walnut and peach, exist in

the area and these flower from April to June. The topography of the area is gently undulating hilly terrain with a medium sized river running by the township.

The months of January, February and March were found to be almost devoid of birdlife, these being the peak winter

months when the land is occasionally snow-covered, and the trees totally barren and leafless. The birds, it appears, migrate upwards from lower heights with the onset of spring in April or May.

The following is an account of the birds observed between April and July 1996. Most of the observations were made in a wooded trough approximately 500m long, 100m wide and 30m deep, through which runs a thin brook. The area is secluded, since it is neither fit for cultivation nor for construction of houses. Trees, around 20-30 years old and about 10-20 metres in height, grow here. This particular patch was given the name "Paradise Grove" because of the frequency of paradise flycatchers seen in it. Similar patches are scattered around Poonch and it is highly likely that they have similar birdlife as described below. The dates given are the dates on which the birds were first spotted this year.

Black Drongo (*Dicrurus adsimilis*): seen occasionally

Black Partridge (*Francolinus francolinus*): Permanent hill-side residents where only scrub growth is present. Typical call ("chick-chick-chee-cherak") heard daily.

Blackbird (*Turdus merula*): Single sighting on 26th May.

Blossomheaded parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*; April & May): Several groups seen during the fruiting season.

Brahminy myna (*Sturnus pagodarum*): Seen occasionally.

Collared bushchat (*Saxicola torquata*): Both sexes seen on 23rd June.

Common swallow (*Hirundo rustica*): Seen in small groups.

Crested bunting (*Melophus lathamii*): Male seen on 8th July.

Golden oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*; 12th June)

Grey tit (*Parus major*; 13th April): Groups of 4 to 5 birds calling out "whee-chi-chi, whee-chi-chi".

Greyheaded flycatcher (*Culicicapa ceylonensis*): Single sighting on 26th May.

Hill myna (*Gracula religiosa*): Seen occasionally.

Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*): Two sightings in April.

House sparrow (*Passer domesticus*): Very common.

Indian cuckoo (*Cuculus micropterus*): Call heard throughout the day in April and May; seen on two or three occasions.

Indian myna (*Acridotheres tristis*): Very common.

Jungle crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*): Seen occasionally.

Koel (*Eudynamis scolopacea*): Heard once.

Little Brown dove (*Streptopelia senegalensis*): Fairly common.

Little egret (*Egretta garzetta*): One bird seen flying on 1st July.

Magpie-robin (*Copsychus saularis*): Very common.

Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*; 10th April): Very commonly sighted. A total of five males and ten females seen on a single day. A dozen or so birds nest here. Nests at various levels in the trees; a half dozen at eye level. All nests with 2-3 eggs. Progress observed from a distance over a three week period after hatching during which the "sparrow like" nestlings became juveniles and left the nest. The sight of white ribbons waving and fluttering while the birds fly between trees catching insects and butterflies is fascinating.

Purple sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*): Male seen feeding from blossoms of Australian Bottle-brush.

Redvented bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*): Fairly common.

Rosefinch (*Carpodacus erythrinus*; 10th April): Groups of 40 to 50 birds seen feeding on Mulberry trees which were widespread.

Rufousbacked shrike (*Lanius schach*; 5th June): A few sightings in open areas.

Rufoustailed finch lark (*Ammomanes phoenicurus*): Identity doubtful.

Shikra (*Accipiter badius*; 6th June): Seen hovering in mid-air like a blackwinged kite.

Spotted dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*)

Verditer flycatcher (*Muscicapa thalassina*): A single sighting on 13th April.

White scavenger vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*): Seen occasionally.

White wagtail (*Motacilla alba*; 16th June): Seen on open ground.

White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosa*; 12th May): Groups of 5 to 7 seen. Nest with young seen in "Paradise Grove". Fairly common.

Whitebacked vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*)

Whitebreasted kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*): Seen and heard on several occasions.

Whitecheeked bulbul (*Pycnonotus leucogenys*): Fairly common.

Whitespotted fantail flycatcher (*Rhiphidura albicollis*; 10th April): Several pairs seen. Found to be quite daring (or perhaps curious), venturing to within just a few feet of the observer. The "delightful clear whistling song of several tinkling notes constantly warbled" (Salim Ali) was most commonly heard, while the birds pranced about, bowed and displayed open feathers.

Wryneck (*Jynx torquilla*; 13th April): A few spotted. Resembles a mouse moving on the tree bark with woodpecker like habits.

Parakeets: Identity doubtful; groups seen; smaller in size than roseringed parakeet.

Unidentified: Seen catching flies on 12th May in Paradise Grove, right at the bottom and next to the stream. A pheasant like bird with white forehead, speckled body and long tail striped at intervals.

Unidentified: Seen on 12th July; about bulbul sized with turquoise cap, turquoise patch on wing and rump, and reddish yellow breast; seen perched on hill-side tree.

The fauna in the area includes Jackals, Mongoose; Civet like animals (long black bushy tail) and Rat Snakes. Domesticated birds include geese, Aleixandrine parakeets and peafowl.



Checklist of Waders (Charadriiformes) In Chilika Lake, Orissa

SMITA ACHARYA, SRF, P.G. Department of Zoology, Utkal University, Orissa 751 004, & S.K. KAR, Research Officer, Office of PCCF (Wildlife), Orissa

Chilika Lake (19°28' N to 19°54' N and 85°6' E to 85°35'E) the largest brackishwater lake in India, covers an expanse of 1165 sq km (maximum in monsoon) to 790 sq km (minimum in summer). The pear-shaped lake runs parallel to the coast and is connected to the Bay of Bengal at its northern end by a 29 km long, 365 km wide irregular channel. It is a 'Ramsar Site' of international importance (notified by Ramsar Convention, 1971).

Being a brackishwater lake, the salinity is maintained by influx of sea water by the irregular channel through the lake mouth and the freshwater from the rivers and local streams around the lake. Due to the unique habitat, the lake attracts 93 species of aquatic birds including 58 migratory species from different parts of the world in every winter season. The order Charadriiformes includes 47 species (39 migratory and 8 resident species). Among the 15 islands, Nalaban (15.5 sq km) alone hosts over 75% of total bird population. Thus in 1987, it was declared as 'wild life sanctuary'.

Most part of my study is done in Nalaban island, named after the mangrove species 'Nala' (*Phragmites karka*). It is a marshy land remaining completely submerged (5 ft-8 ft) in the monsoon and gradually exposed in winter. Its unique habitat with plenty of food and vast shallow area attracts migratory birds for feeding and roosting. The lake is threatened by a number of disturbing factors such as intensive fishing, large area of weed coverage (mainly by *Potamogeton pectinatus*), siltation, eutrophication, decline in salinity and encroachment of shore area for tiger prawn culture (*Penaeus monodon*).

Dr UN Dev (1986) has compiled a checklist of the birds of Chilika. This checklist contains site records on waders in Chilika lake during my regular field visits from November 1992 to May 1996.

Abbreviations used :

- Status
- R Resident
 - WM Winter migrant
 - B Breeds in the Island



Family Jacanidae : Jacanas

Hb. Sr. No.			
358	Pheasant-tailed jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>	R
359	Bronzewing jacana	<i>Metopidius indicus</i>	R

Family Charadriidae: Plovers, Sandpipers, Snipes
Sub-Family Charadriinae: Plovers

366	Redwattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	R,B
370	Yellowwattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>	R
371	Blackbellied or grey plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	WM
373	Eastern golden plover	<i>Pluvialis dominica fulva</i>	WM
374	Large sand plover	<i>Charadrius leschenaulti</i>	WM
380	Indian little ringed plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	WM
381	Kentish plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	WM
384	Lesser sand plover	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>	WM

Sub-family Scolopacinae: Curlews, Sandpipers, Snipes

385	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	WM
387	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	WM
389	Blacktailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	WM
391	Bartailed godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	WM
392	Spotted redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	WM
393	Common redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	WM
395	Marsh sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	WM
396	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	WM
397	Green sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	WM
398	Spotted sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	WM
400	Terek sandpiper or Avocet sandpiper	<i>Tringa terek</i>	WM
401	Common sandpiper	<i>Tringa hypoleucos</i>	WM
403	Asian dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus semipalmatus</i>	WM
406	Pintail snipe	<i>Gallinago stenura</i>	WM
409	Common or fantail snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	WM

412 Knot	<i>Calidris canuta</i>	WM	450 Yellowlegged herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	WM
416 Little stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	WM	453 Great blackheaded gull	<i>Larus ichthyaetus</i>	WM
417 Temminck's stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>	WM	454 Brownheaded gull	<i>Larus brunnicephalus</i>	WM
420 Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	WM	455 Blackheaded gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	WM
422 Curlew sandpiper	<i>Calidris testacea</i>	WM	458 Indian whiskered tern	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>	R,B
423 Spoonbilled sandpiper	<i>Eurynorhynchus pygmaeus</i>	WM	460 Gullbilled tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	WM
426 Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	WM	462 Caspian tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	WM
Family Rostratulidae : Painted Snipe			463 Indian river tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>	R,B
429 Painted snipe	<i>Rostratula bengalensis</i>	WM	475 Little tern	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	R,B
Family Recurvirostridae : Stilts, Avocets			479 Indian lesser crested Tern	<i>Sterna bengalensis</i>	WM
430 Indian blackwinged stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	R,B			
432 Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	WM			
Family Glareolidae : Pratincole					
444 Small Indian pratincole	<i>Glareola lactea</i>	WM			
Family Laridae : Gulls, Terns					

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Decrease in the number of Birds in the Motibag Lake, Sholapur and remedial measures suggested

B.S. Kulkarni, President, Friends of Birds & Wild Animals, Tilak Path, Solapur 413 007

[This article gives an account of the above mentioned lake, its birdlife data on the decline in birds number from a census done by me from 1972 to 1995 and also suggested remedial measures].

History of the Motibag Lake

The history of this lake dates back to about 600 yrs. It is believed that the lake was created by Sidheshwar's Guru Revansidh hitting the ground with his stick. It is my strong belief that the lake may have been formed by the falling of a meteor.

Sir Allan Hume in 1878 mentions this lake in his "Stray Feathers". He says "In Solapur there are in all three lakes, out of which one exists in the camp area. The lake never dries up. The lake is like an oasis in a desert, and is surrounded by trees." Further he says "It is a lake of lilies and there is one live nullah in it, which flows even in the hot season."

Present condition

There is now a national highway South to North on one side of this lake. Barring six to seven trees on this highway the area is bare. Previously, this lake was deemed to be outside city limits. Now it is in the heart of it. Housing colonies have come up in the southern and northern side. It is likely that the eastern and western portions (rocky bare areas) will soon also have human dwellings. The banks of the lake are grassy, and lilies decorate the lake all day long.

A Central Railway line cuts the lake into two unequal halves. A south eastern railway line runs along the southern border.

The lake as mentioned earlier, is of two unequal halves. The water in the smaller part dries up to a large extent in summer, unlike the larger one, which still holds a good body of water in the summer. The larger half is 1680 ft S.N. and also 1680 ft F.W.I. in the rainy season. Even in summer it is 1600 ft and 1600 ft E.W.

Bird life in Motibag tank

Of the two halves of the lake, the smaller one offers a refuge to a larger number of birds. The reason for this may be due to its shallowness. Egrets and herons find it more rewarding, fishing in its shallows. Most of the coots, jacanas and moorhens have their nests here and sandpipers, stilts, and plovers are usually found here.

The larger half is usually frequented by shy birds including the ducks. They keep to the centre of the lake as the dense aquatic vegetation, provides resting platforms for them.

Coots, jacanas and moorhens, breed in the Motibag Tank but their eggs are often stolen by humans.

Ibises used to nest in surrounding areas, but now due to the lack of trees and heavy traffic along the national highway they have ceased to do so. Surprisingly, the nearby zoo is also responsible for this. They beat a gong to drive away birds so that the ground under the trees is free of bird droppings.

Census methodology

Bird census begins at 7 am in the morning and ends at 8 am the same day. A full round of the lake is made.

Water birds, marsh land birds, and birds in flight are noted down. We have a record of the census of 23 years (1972-1995).

Immediate implementation of necessary remedial measure

The number of bird species has been decreasing with every passing year. If the condition of the lake is not rectified, there will soon be a time when the water of the lake will not support any life, leave alone birds.

I would like to suggest the following remedial measures, which I hope, readers, wildlife organisations and government will support.

- 1) The area should be converted into a park. Access to humans may be allowed at the Northern and Western portion of it for birdwatching, recreation etc. The rest of the area should be for 'Birds only'.
- 2) The "bird only" zone should be planted with trees, shrubs and grasses making it as varied as possible, so that different varieties of birds may make it their home.
- 3) The bare area, should also be brought under the park.
- 4) The public should be informed by suitable notices that killing of birds is an offence.
- 5) All the drainage water that flows from the housing colonies should be diverted elsewhere.
- 6) Washermen should be prohibited from washing in the tank. Instead, they may be allowed to wash further downstream, where the excess water overflows during the monsoon. A pump may be installed so that water is also assured during the summer. This will prevent the

water from being polluted and will keep the washermen happy.

- 7) Municipal authorities should give up the idea of turning it into a swimming tank or a boating club.
- 8) Bird lovers should support this plan and write to the Municipal Commissioner of Sholapur.
- 9) The back side of Motibag Tank which was reserved as a green belt has turned into 'Smritivan' with the help of a private trust. It is a good start.
- 10) Algae, lily flower, wild rice, wild millet should be maintained in the tank.
- 11) There are various kinds of fish in this tank like the Dhok, Dhibara, Kanher and also various species of snails. These organisms are living proof of the productivity of the Motibag tank.
- 12) Riksha and truck washing is regularly observed. It should be prevented.
- 13) It is a small Bharatpur and an "easy chair" bird watching centre. It should be protected.

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- 2 Ali, and Ripley. Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan. Oxford University Press, Bombay.
- 3 Gole Prakash. Letter dated 17.3.1972.
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Correspondence

AIMING AT HIGHER STANDARDS — A PLEA.
V SANTHARAM, 68, 1 Floor, Santhome High Road,
Madras 600 028

I was pleased to learn that you are contemplating on several measures to improve the quality of the *Newsletter* [35(3): Editorial (May/Jun 1996)]. I hope you would also give due importance to the accuracy and authenticity of the observations in the articles accepted for publication. I am aware that the main objective of the *Newsletter* is to encourage amateur birdwatchers and newcomers. But this does not mean that articles sent for publication should be published without verification.

We had had a discussion on this topic and this is how you had responded to my comments on certain sight records published in the *Newsletter* in your letter dated 25.06.1994; "You are right about the need to be cautious about accepting new sightings. My policy is that when the submission gives the impression of being genuine (even though subsequently proved to be mistaken) I would include it. After all it is evident

that a publication in the *Newsletter* is not the final word on the subject. It is meant to raise a debate and in this particular case, your own comments have made it possible/or should make it possible to train the searchlight on the issues concerned and in due course come to appropriate conclusion. I will include your comments in the July/Aug issue if there is space. Mr Robertson has also commented on these sightings and has suggested that these should be submitted in a particular standardised manner". [However neither of these comments have been published subsequently nor has anyone else bothered to comment on them, till date.]

In its thirty six years of existence, the *Newsletter* has established itself as a leading ornithological journal in India and publications in it are cited as references even in scientific journals. Besides, these are being indexed by several Indian and international organisations and individuals and brought out as Bibliographies of Indian Ornithology. These records can be used by anyone at a later date in bringing out new or while revising existing publications on Indian Birds. So it is imperative that efforts must be taken to verify and check up the material offered for publication before they are accepted.

To illustrate my point further, I present a table showing a list of bird species reported by various authors, gleaned from *Newsletter* Vols.32-36(3) i.e. 1992-1996, pertaining to

Tamilnadu. I strongly feel that the Editor should have exercised more caution in accepting them for publication.

Species	Location	Issue No. & Page	Distribution
1 Black crowned finch-lark <i>Eremopterix nigriceps</i>	Anaikatty near Coimbatore	35(5): 85-87 Sep/Oct 1995	Plains of Pakistan and north western India to Delhi, Muttra, Jodhpur and Kathiawar Peninsula
[Note: The list also includes the closely related Ashycrowned Finch-lark <i>E.grisea</i> , which occurs in Tamilnadu]			
2 Tytler's Leaf warbler (<i>Phylloscopus tytleri</i>)	--do-	-do-	Winter: Scanty records in the Western Ghats including two from Nilgiris and more recently from Munnar
3 Smaller Grey cuckoo-shrike (<i>Coracina melaschistos</i>)	Vandalur near Madras	35(3): 33-35 Mar-Apr 1995	Winter: Foothills east of Dehra Dun south through UP and MP (Sagar) to W.Maharashtra (Savantwadi) and N.Karnataka (Londa) in the West, Bastar Dist, and N.E. A.P. (Ganjam) in the east and to Calcutta, Dacca and Hailakandi
4 White-eye (<i>Zosterops palpebrosa</i>)	--do-	-do-	Mainland subspecies are confined to the hilly country C.350 m to the summits (I have never come across it in Madras in the last 20 yrs)
5 Scalybellied Green Woodpecker (<i>Picus squamatus</i>)	Kotagiri, Nilgiris	34(4): 93-94 Jul/Aug 1994	W.Himalayas from NWFP (Kohat, Chitral) Gilgit and the Salt Range east through Kashmir to central Nepal
[Note: The list also includes the little scalybellied woodpecker <i>P.myrmecophoneus</i> which occurs in the Nilgiris]			
6 Grey crowned Pygmy Woodpecker (<i>Picooides canicapillus</i>)	-do-	-do-	From Pakistan, nepal to Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland
7 Little Pied Flycatcher (<i>Muscicapa westermanni</i>)	Gudalur, Nilgiris	34(2): 33 Mar/Apr 1994	Nepal east along the Himalayas to N.E. India. Winter in the Foothills as far as N.E. Madhya Pradesh, S.Bihar, lower Bengal and Bangladesh
8 Red Junglefowl (<i>Gallus gallus</i>)	Anamalais, Indira Gandhi WLS Nov/Dec 1993	33(6): 105-106	Himalayan foothills south to W.Satpuras (Gujarat), the W.Ghats (Khandala) and roughly along the Godavari river to its mouth
[Note: The list also include the Grey Junglefowl <i>Gallus sonneratii</i> which is seen in Tamilnadu]			
9 Marshall's Iora (<i>Aegithina nigrolutea</i>)	Mundanturai, Tirunelveli Dist	32(5/6): 8-11 May/June 1992	Pakistan from NWFP east through Punjab and N.W. India from Haryana, Rajasthan and Kutch east through Southern U.P., and Western M.P. to and including Satpuras. Specimens intermediate between this and <i>Ae.tiphia</i> obtained from other parts of India and even Sri Lanka

In the above list, only two species viz. Tytler's leaf warbler and small grey cuckoo-shrike have the probability of occurrence in the sites reported. Yet, in the absence of detailed descriptions and notes, it is difficult to accept even these records as such. I had already raised my doubts about the identity of the two woodpeckers seen in the Nilgiris (34(5): 118-119) for which a reply was offered by the author and supported by the Editor (35(1): 20). The author had tried justifying his stand by saying that "new pressures on the habitats are leading to the extension of the range of several species" and cited the record of the little pied flycatcher near Gudalur. I find this explanation difficult to accept. Pressures on habitats can only lead to a contraction in the range of most bird species and not an expansion. The record of the little pied flycatcher is itself questionable and one wonders if the bird was confused with the resident pied flycatcher shrike (*Hemipus picatus*). Species with poor flying abilities (such as Woodpeckers) are incapable of extending their ranges over several hundreds of kilometres all of a sudden especially into habitats where their ecological and closely related counterparts exist. It is for the same reason that I am not fully convinced about the sighting of the browncrowned pygmy woodpecker (*Picooides nanus*) in the Guindy National

Park (32(9/10): 17; Sep/Oct 1995). This species has neither been seen in Madras City nor in its immediate neighbourhood (ca 50 km radius) in the past and its sudden appearance is mysterious.

Regarding the Marshall's Iora, the "Handbook", says that specimens showing *A.nigrolutea* characters collected within the range of *A.tiphia* (common Iora) may be variants of the latter ... "The calls of the two species are distinct and they could be told apart by their call-notes. Did the author of the note base his identification on the plumage characteristics alone or was it also supported by the calls?"

Apart from these doubtful sightings, there are occasional notes where authors attempt to identify sub-species based on mere field observations. One such note appears on page 19 of May/June 1992 issue (32(5/6)) where a subspecies of the crested serpent eagle is identified based on its "smaller and paler appearance". Such notes could lower the credibility of the *Newsletter* and should be avoided.

Let me hasten to add that I am not saying it is impossible to come across birds out of their known distribution ranges. Birds species with a tendency to wander do turn up at

unusual localities as vagrants. From my own experience, I can quote the examples of the eyebrowed thrush (*Turdus obscurus*), Ashy Minivet (*Pericrocotus divaricatus*) and desert weather (*Oenanthe desertii*). The eyebrowed thrush, for instance, breeds in Siberia and winters in Southern Japan, S.E. China, N.E. India, the Philippines, S.E. Asia and the Greater Sundas and has straggled to Europe, Arabia, Alaska, besides S.Andamans, Karnataka, Madras City, Nepal and has recently been reported from Sri Lanka and Maldives [*Forktail* 10: 176-177 (1994)].

A few minor but avoidable errors are also found in the usage of scientific names. For instance black drongo is referred to as *Dicrurus leucophaeus* and Indian cuckoo as *Cuculus canorus* as against *D.adsimilis* and *C.micropterus* respectively [35(2): 33-35; Mar/Apr 1995]. Grey crowned pygmy woodpeckers were referred to as "green" crowned in a note [35(1): 20; Jan/Feb 1995]. Family names are wrongly given in some checklists — e.g. page 89 [33(5); Sep/Oct 1993]. At times factual errors are also seen in some articles as in the case of the one on spotbilled pelican [32(1/2): back inner cover; Jan/Feb 1992]. In this note, Aredu-Sarapalle in Andhra Pradesh is referred to as an important nesting site for the pelican in India. Perhaps the author was referring to the Nelapattu pelicanry in Nellore district which is one of the larger pelicanries in Andhra Pradesh, presently. The Aredu-Sarapalle Pelicanry was abandoned by pelicans in the early 1970's.

In order to avoid such errors and to maintain credibility, I request you to pay more attention to these details in future. It is a sad trend that most of the recent entrants to this hobby now solely depend on "Pictorial Guide" or "Collins Handguide" and do not bother to read even basic books like the "Book of Indian Birds" which provide a wealth of information on habits, calls, and distribution which could further aid in identification of birds. It is understandable that not everyone has access to the "Handbook" and other standard reference works. Perhaps one could always consult the more experienced birdwatchers in their localities before sending articles for publication. The Editor, on his part, could seek help of volunteers to scrutinize carefully notes sent for publication and this could enhance the quality of the Newsletter articles.



IMPROVING THE NEWSLETTER. RAHUL PURANDARE,
18A, Kapila Society, Gokhalenagar, Pune 411 053

Date: 4.8.1996

I thank you for publishing my article in the Newsletter. I also thank you for properly editing it (except the last sentence); very few times, editors can satisfy the writers!

As far as the quality of the Newsletter is concerned, I fully agree with you, that there is a lot of room for improvement. I always see a lot of inconsistency in the quality of the articles. Some of them (or few of them) are really good with some quality observations and studies; others, practically providing no information. Normally, two

kinds of articles exist. First, simple and fully transparent with directly convincing points; second, complicated with no flow and connectivity and without any original information. Most of the articles fit in the second group, and normally, this kind of articles is supplied with a huge list of references as Mr Lavkumar points out.

The lists made in one or two short visits with no other information, are hardly of any use; and still most of the articles belong to this group. I believe, listing is important only when, done after spending considerable amount of time in that particular area. Also lists should always be a by-product of the main work. Listing just for the sake of doing it has practically no meaning. We need to have 'bird-observers' rather than 'bird-watchers' as contributors for the Newsletter.

I would also like to mention that many 'scientific' articles are not really clear in their purpose. For example, articles like 'shikras with red eyes' do not indicate its purpose. Perhaps this is not the best example, but I can give many examples, in which the purpose is not clear at least to me. 'Red Legged Pond Heron' is another example, in which there is some information, but in what way is it valuable?

I would also like to mention that some times, although 'standard', it is important to provide the reference. For example, in my article on hobby, I referred to HA's Checklist of birds of Maharashtra, to find out the status. What I can suggest is we can supplement the Newsletter with all the standard references together at the end, and just refer to them by number (index) so that the purpose would also get served.

Before I finish, I must tell you that the editorial of Vol.36, no.3 is quite impressive. It should motivate the contributors in a proper way. I am also thinking of visiting Kankeshwar hill next time. Surprisingly, I have never been to it.

Very soon I'll be writing to you regarding the occurrence of the striolated bunting near Pune. This bird, although a regular visitor to some parts of Pune, remained unnoticed by most birdwatchers in Pune. It was previously incorrectly identified (by some other birdwatcher) as the rock bunting and accordingly he had published a note in the BNHS journal. To the best of my knowledge Pune is the Southwest limit of the distribution of the striolated bunting. In the handbook it has been described as Aurangabad. I am going to write on it as soon as I find the breeding incidence of it. Mr Humayun Abulali believes that I am surely going to find it.



CHECK THE SPECIES, MR. EDITOR. KRYS
KAZMIERCZAK, 9 Norwic Road - Northwood - Middh - HA6
1 ND - England

As you may know I am a regular reader of the Newsletter and look forward to its interesting mix of articles in each

issue. I am writing this letter as a plea to authors to be a little more careful with their identifications, especially when they intend to publish these in the *Newsletter*. There are too many cases of unsubstantiated, doubtful records appearing in the various checklists which, with a little more care could be avoided. I don't wish to discourage people from making public their observations but once an erroneous record appears in print it is very difficult to retract it. To err is, of course, human and we all make mistakes but one should try to minimise this propensity.

Without wishing to detract from Soumyadeep Datta's otherwise excellent article in Vol.36, No.3 on Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary I would like to point out that, whereas lined barbet *Megalaima lineata* is a common bird at Dibru-Saikhowa, the large green barbet *Megalaima zeylonica* has not to the best of my knowledge been previously recorded from the sanctuary. The absence of the common species from Soumyadeep's list would suggest that this is a straightforward case of mistaken identity. Another species that is unlikely to be found at Dibru-Saikhowa, lying as it does in the floodplain of the Brahmaputra, is the speckled woodpigeon *Colomba hodgsonii*. A quick glance in Ali, Ripley and Dick's Pictorial Guide would have revealed that this species is a Himalayan montane species normally found between 1800 to 4000 above sea level. As such, if it was seen at plains level Dibru-Saikhowa, it would merit more than a casual listing. Again I must express some doubt as to the veracity of this sighting.

My suggestion to observers and authors is to try to pay a little more attention to the distribution information published in the Pictorial Guide, which I assume is currently the main field reference for most birdwatchers. The book is not without its faults but on the whole it still provides a fairly reliable base reference. If a species is well outside its usual altitudinal or geographic range then a detailed description of the bird and verification of the identification should be obtained, especially if an observer is unfamiliar with the species. Otherwise please apply the motto: If in doubt, leave it out.



HOUBARA BUSTARD AT SORSAN (RAJASTHAN). Lt. Gen. BALJIT SINGH

I read Mr Bharat Singh's note on the sighting of one houbara bustard at Sorsan with great interest (NLBW, Vol. 36, No. 3, Page 58). I had visited the area of the proposed Sanctuary on at least five occasions in 1988-89 when I had my Headquarters at Kota. Mr Chanchal Singh Kumadi and Mr Rakesh Vyas had sought my support to lobby with the State Govt. for the proposed Sanctuary which I did gladly;

not at all effectively though as I notice that its status remains "proposed" to this day!

What I want to share is that during each of my visits to the proposed Sanctuary, I was able to criss-cross the entire area in four to five hours, leisurely observations of wildlife thrown in. Among other species, I sighted two to seven great Indian bustard (GIB) on these visits. But no houbara bustard.

The last visit and the most rewarding was in Mar/Apr 89 when I saw seven GIB in all. There was a single parent bird with one chick the size of a full grown domesticated pigeon. I was driving an open jeep and was about to exit from a Zizyphus bush patch to a comparatively open ground. We met head-on and both parties were taken by surprise. The chick was in the lead, about ten yards from the jeep and he froze stock-still. I was quick to take a photograph before he darted into the nearest Zizyphus bush. He was able to conceal his body but his neck jutted out like a submarine's periscope. I made another delightful transparency. From a Zizyphus bush about 20 feet away I heard a persistent and loud fluttering noise. God bless her, there was the mother in a feigned broken-wing act in all earnestness to get me away from the chick. This was the first real-life act I had ever seen. I was so mesmerized that I took not a single photograph! My army driver and I sat in the jeep for a long while taking in the whole episode which lasted about five minutes or less. This was around 9.00 A.M.

Half an hour later and some two KM away, I spotted a group of three GIB. I had been advised by the villagers that so long as one remained in the jeep and kept the engine running, the birds were not unduly alarmed. So I was able to get within about 30 feet and realised that this group were one family. The sub-adult bird was distinctly a few inches shorter than the mother. As I tried to close the gap further the male took off and I got an in-flight shot, the wing span covering almost the entire frame. However much I tried the mother and child would not let me closer than 25 feet. I made a few more slides before they too flew off. This session lasted over ten minutes.

At about 11.00 a.m. and in the opposite direction, some three KM away I spotted two more GIB by a cropped field. For some reason they were wary and did not permit opportunity to close-in.

I had shared this experience with Mr Chanchal Singh Kumadi and possibly Mr Rakesh Vyas too. That was Mar/Apr 89. I wonder what is the latest count of the GIB and the antelope at Sorsan and of sarus crane in the reed-beds along the canal?



INDIAN DARTER *Arhinga melanogaster*. LAVKUMAR KHACHER, 646, Vastunirman, Gandhinagar 382 022

This note is considerably overdue and reading V Santharam's mention of a record number of Indian darters at Vedanthangal in Vol.36, No.3 (page 54) of the Newsletter has jolted me in sitting down and putting pen to paper.

Not very many years ago the darter, or what till recently was better known as the Snake bird, was fairly plentiful throughout our region and the bird was seldom given a second glance. All of a sudden one is told it is a highly endangered species and now I read that a hundred odd birds at Vedanthangal "represent about 5% of the estimated population of this species in South Asia," and that the once ubiquitous snake bird is now considered "globally threatened"! One just wonders how many species of formerly common birds are actually threatened.

Interestingly, it might be worth examining all the new reservoirs to see whether a good many of them have not attracted local populations of darters specially since most rivers and wetlands are either dried up, filled in or heavily polluted.

In conclusion, bird watchers may be surprised to learn that all along the gulf of Kachchh, the mangrove lined channels, tidal lagoons and adjacent coral reefs have a breeding population of darters. If the hundred individuals represent 5% of the South Asian population, then the darters of the Gulf of Kachchh would represent more than half the global population! Perhaps Santharam would provide a list of locations where *Anhinga melanogaster* were counted for the data with the Asian Waterfowl counts.



A CRAKE AND A MALKOHA. LT GEN BC NANDA, General Thimaya Circle, Madikeri 571 201, Kodagu, Karnataka

On the morning of 5th August, 1996, I found a bird lying dead along my garage wall. The bird had obviously dashed against the wall at night, perhaps dazzled by the security light that exists there, and the night previous was both rainy and misty.

It was evidently a crane but I could not get a proper description of it in Salim Ali's books, including the one written with Dillon Ripley. Finally I got a very clear description matching this particular bird in Birds of South India by Lt Col HR Baker, I.A. (Retd), 1930 edition. The bird turned out to be Ceylon ruddy crane (*Amaurornis fuscus zeylonicus*).

On 25th August, 1996, my wife and I were out for a walk about 3 kms outside Mercara on the Abbi Falls Road. It was 5.15 pm in the evening, when a large bird flew across and perched on a tree in the forested area that exists there. I asked my wife to describe independently what she saw. From her description and my observation the bird should be a Red Faced Malkoha (*Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus*).

Since this particular species is considered rare and endangered and its sighting had been much further south of this location. I shall try and keep a watch in the general area, so that a second spotting would definitely confirm the presence of this bird. The altitude in this area is about 4000 ft MSL.



NESTING OF BLACKNECKED STORK *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* in PANIDIHING, ASSAM. Rathin Barman and Bibhab Kumar Talukdar, Animal Ecology and Wildlife Biology Laboratory, Department of Zoology, Gauhati University, Assam 781 014

The blacknecked stork has declined steeply in Assam. The species is mostly confined to the protected areas of the state. Due to the over exploitation of the wetlands for fishing, wet-cultivation and increased human disturbance black-necked storks are rarely seen outside protected areas. Even inside protected area like Orang wildlife sanctuary, Manas and Kaziranga National Park the species has become very rare. During our study of the greater adjutant stork *Leptoptilos dubius*, we observed that the status of the blacknecked stork in Assam is even more vulnerable than that of the greater adjutant stork.

During a visit to the Panidihing Reserved Forest, near Sibsagar, on 10 December 1995, a nest of the blacknecked stork was noticed. The nest was constructed on a Simul Tree (*Bombax ceiba*) at a height of about 80 ft. We found both the adults on the nest with two juveniles. On 10 February 1996, we again visited the site, but this time we were unable to locate the nest on that tree. When we approached the local people, we learnt that some people collected the juveniles to eat them during the Bhogali Bihu, a festival celebrated throughout Assam each year between 13-15 January.

The Panidihing area has been monitored since 1993. We previously recorded the blacknecked stork during 1993-94 and 1994-95. However earlier we never sighted any nest of blacknecked stork in the area. Hence this is the first record of nesting of the blacknecked stork in Panidihing.



SNAKES AND ROLLERS. JS Serrao, A/002, Sheetal, Behind Avinash, Vaswani marg, 7 Bungalows, Andheri (W), Mumbai 400 053

Together with your letter has arrived the issue of Newsletter, 36(3), May-June 1996. At page 50 of it is an interesting observation on an Indian roller near Trichy capturing and making a meal of a striped keelback, *Amphiesma stolata* (for old timers like you and me it is *Natris stolata*). Its author, Prof A Relton poses an interesting query as to "whether or not the snake forms a common food item for the bird ...".

Snakes may not be a regular item of dietary for the roller, but that the bird does go at it as and when opportunity offers is evident from literature.

At p.388 of Vol.17 of the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* (JBNHS), Col Frank Wall quotes from *The Madras Mail* of 17th September 1904 an incident reported by one Mr Grieves at the time of an encounter between a Cobra about 15 inches long and an Indian roller close to a forest track for full 5 minutes, until the bird was frightened off by his dog.

Also on 12 April 1905, one Mr Hose, a Deputy Commissioner of Fyzabad saw in his compound an Indian roller with a live snake in its beak.

At p.865 of JBNHS Vol.39, CH Biddulph from Tanjore (present Tanjavur) reported an Indian Roller with a live snake 8 to 9 inches in its beak.



BUSTARDS IN HAGEDAL. D.B. Ghorpade, Yeshwant Vihar, Hagedal, Yelburga Post 583 236, Karnataka

This is to inform you that at 9 am on 4.8.1996 a pair of bustards were sighted in my Bajra field and flew away before I could get my camera.

The last sighting in my area was more than 20 years ago when 3 birds flew over my farm house. A couple of years later I sighted a bustard egg about a kilometer from my place. A few days later the chick hatched out and we saw the chick a couple of times before both the parents and the chick disappeared. I was quite thrilled at the latest sighting and hope we will see them again soon. By the way a pair of black ibis have made my coconut trees their nesting "ground". Last year a chick hatched and later flew away.



NEW ELEVATION RECORD FOR BLACK-WINGED KITE FROM NAGALAND. Anwaruddin Choudhury, Near Gate No.1 of Nehru Stadium, Islampur Road, Guwahati 781 007

Nagaland is a very poorly known area as far as ornithology is concerned, and any birding trip to that state is exciting. In the last week of June, 1966, I had a memorable field trip to Nagaland, and I report an interesting sighting of the black-shouldered or black-winged kite *Elanus caeruleus*.

On 28 June while going towards Satoi, a remote area in Zunheboto district, I came across a kite near Khesito village. The elevation of the place was 1800 metre above sea level. It was perched on a power line, then flew off. Later in the day, I again saw a bird, may be the same one, between Satoi and Khesito villages. This time it was recorded at an elevation of about 2020 metre. Occurrence of black-winged kite at such an high elevation was unheard of, and both the sites are new elevation records for the species. The bird was known to occur upto 1300 metres only (in India: Handbook) and 1500 metres in South-East Asia (Field Guide: SE Asia).



ABSTRACTS

EXTENSION OF RANGE OF PURPLE RUMPED SUNBIRDS. G VISWANATHA REDDY, IFS, Divisional Forest Officer, Banswara 327 001, Rajasthan

According to the Handbook, the Indian purple rumped sunbird (*Nectarinia zeylonica*) is a common resident bird, distributed in Peninsular India south of a line from Nasik (NW Maharashtra), Jabalpur (MP), Lohardaga (Bihar), Southern Bengal and north to Dacca and east presumably to the Chittagong region. However, this bird is a regular visitor to our garden and for the last one year I have been observing it. District Banswara is a southern district of Rajasthan having a common border with both MP and Gujarat.

Though I have seen only one pair, fellow birdwatchers have seen this species in other parts of the district. There seems to be some competition for nectar between the purple rumped and the ubiquitous purple sunbirds. Both species seem to be vying for the same ecological niche.



BREEDING OF GREY HERONS IN APRIL. DEEN DAYAL SHARMA, C/o Jagdish Flour Mills, Near City School, Bharatpur 321 001

On 2nd April during my routine visit in the Keoladeo National Park I was surprised to see a pair of grey herons mating. I also saw a dozen birds collecting nesting material and they were also in full breeding plumage. There were 6 nests on *Acacia nilotica* tree. The Book of Indian Birds by Salim Ali says that grey herons breed in North India from July to September.

Is it possible that birds which cannot compete with others in the normal breeding time, breed again in April/May if conditions are favourable. This is a subject which could be pursued.



REVIEW

THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS. SALIM ALI, 12th revised and enlarged edition ANDREW ROBERTSON, 2, St. Georges Terrace Blockley, Moreton-in-Marsh, Glos, GL9BN, England

354pp. Bombay Natural History Society & Oxford University Press. Rs.395/- ISBN 0 19 563731 3

The growth and change of The Book of Indian Birds over the last half century has mirrored the expansion of birdwatching and the increased interest in nature and conservation experienced in India over these years. The newest, twelfth, revised and enlarged edition marks not only the birth centenary of its author but also the transition into a firmly established, more widespread and popular phase of Indian ornithology. This latest metamorphosis of the foremost indigenous field guide, brought about under the partial sponsorship from M/s. Hindustan Lever Ltd. is a credit to all involved.

The greatest change and most significant improvement from previous editions is the inclusion of 64 totally new colour plates by India's most accomplished bird artist Carl D'Silva, with a single plate by J.P.Irani. The new plates are the best ever painted to accompany a book on Indian birds, better even than G.M.Henry's charming illustrations for Indian Hill Birds, and one must go back to the previous century and the magnificent hand-coloured lithographs of

J.G.Keulemans for Legge's A History of the Birds of Ceylon to find anything better on the sub-continent. The larger format of this new edition also allows more species per plate, usually between six and ten, and this in turn makes for easier comparison between similar species. It is very unfortunate that Carl D'Silva's work has been let down, at least in my review copy, by less than accurate colour reproduction giving a washed out look to a number of plates. Compare for example the clean, crisp colours of plate 41 with the muted, pale tones of similar species on plate 40.

Unlike previous editions, and there will no doubt be some who preferred that layout, all the plates are grouped together and separate from the detailed species descriptions. This style certainly makes it easier to check a lot of plates quickly when searching for a particular species and beginners may therefore find it more useful in identifying birds. Having done so one can then locate the full species description in the next section by simply cross referencing the number which accompanies the brief captions for each species illustrated.

One can of course always find blemishes but in this instance these mostly relate to colours, for example the un-natural straw colour of the White-headed Babbler in plate 53, and this may be caused by faulty reproduction. Certainly Carl D'Silva has captured the 'jizz' of most of the birds admirably, which indicates a familiarity with the living bird in the wild that is a prerequisite for accurate drawing. One instance where the plumage is wrongly depicted is perhaps worth pointing out: in *Chrysocolaptes festivus* the whole of the upper back is continued in a broad stripe up the nape and hind neck to where it all but joins the rearmost edge of the red crown, whereas Carl shows a black stripe down the middle of the hind neck.

What also puts this new edition in a different league from its predecessors is that a total of 538 species are included, an increase of 45% from the previous edition. This means that it now covers and yet it can genuinely be said to still fit in your pocket. This is no mean achievement.

In the preface it is noted that these 538 species are "the common and interesting birds of all biogeographic zones in India". Nearly all the commoner birds are now covered in a single volume and it is gratifying to note that many of the more interesting endemic species have found a place. Still, one might question, for example, why *Crysocolaptes lucidus* didn't find favour among the golden-backed woodpeckers when the criteria for inclusion would seem to be biased towards the more colourful and readily identified species, as well as to those that are larger. The warblers overall are badly under-represented, with only two of a potential 24 species of *Phylloscopus* included; it was disappointing to find only a single Scimitar-Babbler; while the likes of *Alcippe*, *Yhina*, *Seicercus* and *Abroscopus* can muster only a single entry between them. Birdwatchers in the Himalayan and north-eastern states will find this particularly frustrating, though they are luckily better served by field guides from adjoining nations.

Among a few personal invitations I find the lack of an index of scientific names annoying and the paragraph on p.315 that seems to condone the collecting of birds' eggs is surely no longer ornithologically acceptable. Where this book betrays the age of its augeis most is in the unaltered references offered to readers. None that I could find were published after 1970. Advice for bird photographers harked back to a technically obsolete era, referring to articles and books published in 1939 and 1952, and those interested in further reading on bird migration were offered only a text published in 1931.

There could probably be no way to celebrate the centenary of the birth of India's greatest ornithologist, that he would personally

more appreciate, than this re-issue of a hugely improved edition of his long-running best seller. Now revitalised it should reach and inspire again a whole new generation of enthusiasts. One can at long last whole-heartedly recommend without reservation a good field guide to Indian birds. This is it - buy it!



PEOPLE & PROTECTED AREAS - TOWARDS PARTICIPATORY CONSERVATION IN INDIA. Editors **ASHISH KOTHARI, NEENA SINGH & SALONI SURI.**

Sage Publications India (Pvt.) Ltd., M-32 Greater Kailash Market - I, New Delhi - 110 048. 276 pp. Price Rs. 350/=

We have had several publications in India based on papers presented in workshops dealing with themes relating to wildlife and conservation. The trouble with such publications is that the language of the contributors varies from good to bad; the topics are too diverse, and generally speaking the book does not hold together. Many presentations which are passable in speech, are failures in print.

This book is an exception. The 22 contributions are obviously carefully edited; there is a strong binding central theme, and altogether the book is a pleasure to read and very educative. The central theme has two strands; there is now a worldwide movement for the empowerment of indigenous people who have been trampled upon and denied their natural rights for centuries; and there is a new recognition by ecologists and scientists that much wisdom resides in the minds and cultural experience of these people which is essential for preserving the fauna and flora of the world.

When the environment movement commenced in India in a serious way, in the 1960's with the BNHS and WWF speaking up for the preservation of the natural world, the Central and State Governments responded by setting up National Parks & Sanctuaries. This movement gathered momentum after the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, and today there are apparently 496 National Parks & Sanctuaries, covering 4.5% of India's land area. Initially the plan was to re-settle tribals and others outside the sanctuary areas; but now it is increasingly realised that apart from the manifest injustice and cruelty of such a move, intelligent plans can be made for people and wildlife to exist side by side. After all there are far more birds and smaller animals outside than within sanctuaries. Even lions and Ibex agree to come within a few feet of humans once they are sure that men have nothing more lethal than a camera in their hands.

The 22 contributors of this book have each studied a particular sanctuary in great detail and put forward plans for J.P.A.M. (Joint Protected Area Management). Obviously with the participation of the locals, any plans made for the preservation of a natural area is likely to be much more successful than to have them as our sullen or overt enemies.

As early as 1965, in a meeting of the Education Commission of IUCN in Bangkok, E.P. Gee, the representative from India suggested that a substantial part of the revenue from tourism should go to the locals. If this principle had been followed, forest dwellers who are poisoning the tiger for its skin, may have helped Project Tiger to keep the animal alive for the money it earned from tourism. The Bedouins who hunted the Ibex in Arabia are now employed as Wardens by WWF projects in that country. If we get the indigenous people on our side, they may help the Forest Department in tracking down the poachers who at the moment seem to be "uncatchable" like Veerappan in Karnataka. This splendid book is bound to have an effect on our administrators in exploring the possibilities of JPAM.

In a recent article in *World Conservation*, Vol. 2/96, Ashish Kothari has given examples about the beneficial results when there is a shift "from custodial and commercial timber management systems to a participatory community orientation".

In the Shivlik hills below the Himalayas, trees per hectare increased from 91 to 472 after 10 years of community protection.

In the Western Ghats, 26 tree species over 1.5 metres high were found after 14 years of protection, as against none originally.

Zafar Futehally

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DHARWAD BIRD CLUB PROPOSED. DR. J C UTTANGI

In view of the growing interest shown by several birders in Dharwad and Hubli and outside in North-Karnataka and also the need to create awareness relating to nature conservation especially birds and their habitats and other wildlife in the environs of Dharwad, it is proposed to start a 'Bird Club' in Dharwad at an early date.

Being part of a Transitional Belt of Thorn Forest land in North Karnataka, the hilly landscape of Dharwad occupies a unique geographical position in Southern India. Possessed with both meadow and pond ecosystems and with thorn forest vegetation in the middle of the belt with fruit and flower bearing trees and hedge plants mixed with dry deciduous to the east and moist deciduous climate to the west, the Dharwad environment attracts a variety of bird species like babblers, bulbuls, wagtails, flowerpeckers, minivets, white eye, lora, barbets, vernal-hanging parrot, warblers, golden oriole and even the globally threatened whitenaped tit *Parus nuchalis* apart from other common birds like koel, cows, sparrows, mynas, magpie-robin, kites, egrets, herons, waterhen, sandpipers, lapwing kingfisher, larks, teals, ducks and other local migrants and vagrants.

The first activity of the group will be to prepare a checklist of all such birds of Dharwad region and later arrange to conduct regular bird outings and nature walks in and around Dharwad town and its outskirts to record happenings and give publicity of the information collected for conservation action in the urban expansion and town planning.

All those interested in joining the Group may write to Dr JC Uttangi, H.No.36, Mission Compound, Dharwad 580 001 or contact him on phone no.348240.



ANALA'S 8TH ARAVALI CAMP. Mount Abu-'96

Ahmedabad Nature Lovers' Association, now popularly known amongst its friends and well wishers as ANALA is a registered Public Charitable Trust. ANALA is functioning under the guidance of a core group of seven trustees who are committed to conservation through nature education.

Eleven years old ANALA has already conducted more than seventy nature education programmes for the benefit of thousands of students drawn from over fifty schools all over Gujarat. It now announces its acclaimed environment education programme at Mount Abu for the Eighth consecutive year. An active and efficient

network of our association helps in imparting environment education in different parts viz Amreli, Anand, Baroda, Bharuch, Bhuj, Gandhinagar and Surat in Gujarat, Ambarnath and Bombay in Maharashtra and Bikaner and Mt Abu in Rajasthan.

Those interested please contact :

ANALA
28 Sanskar-II, Near Ketav Petrol Pump
Polytechnic Road
Ahmedabad 380 015
Phone: 079-465996



22ND INTERNATIONAL ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS. PETER BERTHOLD, President, 22nd International Ornithological Society

Dear Ornithologists throughout the world

Due to recent positive developments in South Africa and the careful preparatory work of South African ornithologists, the International Ornithological Committee accepted South Africa's invitation to hold the XXII International Ornithological Congress in Durban in 1998. Many ornithologists expect a great deal from this congress - the first of its kind on the African continent - and I can assure you rightly so. Last year, the Secretary of the IOC, the Scientific Committee (SPC) and I visited the venue to see what was to be expected. It was immediately clear that the Secretary-General of the Congress, Aldo Berruti, and the Local Organizing Committee have worked exceedingly well. The Congress Centre in Durban will be one of the most modern in the world. There will be excellent lecture halls for the extensive scientific programme and facilities to eat and lounge together in a pleasant atmosphere. This will greatly enhance the exchange of ideas and above all the efficiency of the Congress. It is true that the Centre is still under construction, but it is making good progress and is on schedule. And it is also reassuring that we will not be the "guinea pigs" of the new centre. Two big conferences will be held before ours. In my opinion, the Congress in Durban will be a great event. The SPC has drawn up an attractive scientific programme with 10 plenary lectures, 50 symposia, slots for orally contributed papers, and probably unlimited poster display and round table discussions. In addition, the African colleagues are planning an attractive peripheral program with a broad palette from films to winetasting. About 40 birding safaris and other tours have been tentatively planned to provide a unique opportunity to experience wildlife and magnificent landscapes in southern Africa. My conclusion is that if it is at all possible, please do come to the Congress in South Africa. It promises to be a milestone. Bear in mind that this Congress not only plays an important role in scientific research but is also of great importance politically and ecologically. It will hopefully increase the awareness of the need for bird conservation in South Africa. It will contribute to South Africa's reintegration into the international community, and it should strengthen cooperation among different sections of the population within the country. The more visitors that come from abroad, the more effective will be the Congress - so please attend.



Cover : **White-browed bulbul** (*Pycnonotus luteolus*) is a shy and sulking bird of the scrub-jungles. This bulbul betrays its presence by an explosive cackle of whistling notes. In the photo, the bird has its crown feathers raised, indicating that it is alarmed.

Photo S. Sridhar, ARPS

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