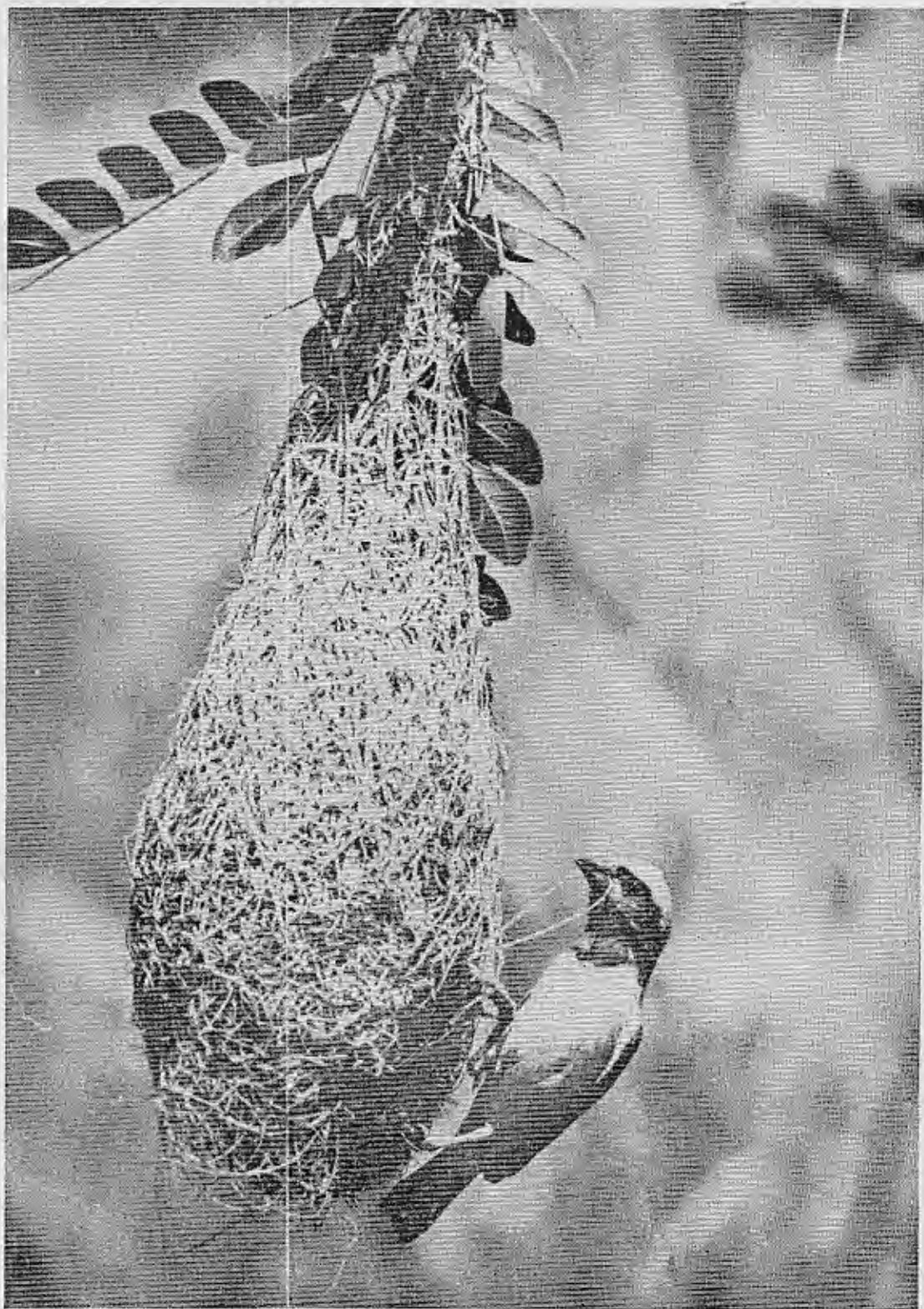


# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

---

Waveson, D.C.



VOL. XXVII NO. 1 & 2

JAN. - FEB. 1987

ಗಣರಾಜ್ಯವಾದ ದಿನ ಜನವರಿ 26, 1950

ಗ್ರಾಮಸಭೆ ಮತ್ತು ಜಿಲ್ಲಾ ಪರಿಷತ್ತುಗಳನ್ನು ರಚಿಸಿರುವ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ರಾಜ್ಯ ಸರ್ಕಾರ  
ಜನತೆಗೆ ಅಧಿಕಾರ ನೀಡುವ ಹೊಸ ಹೆಜ್ಜೆಯ ಮೂಲಕ ಸಂವಿಧಾನದ  
ಕನಸುಗಳಲ್ಲೊಂದನ್ನು ನನಸಾಗಿಸಿದೆ

1983ರಲ್ಲಿ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕದಲ್ಲಿ ಅಧಿಕಾರಕ್ಕೆ ಬಂದ ಹೊಸ ಸರ್ಕಾರ ಜನತೆಯ ಅಶೋತ್ತರಗಳನ್ನು ಈಡೇರಿಸಲು ಕಂಕಣಬದ್ದ ವಾಯಿತು. ಜನಸಮುದಾಯದ ಜೀವನ ಮಟ್ಟ ಸುಧಾರಿಸಿ ಸಮೃದ್ಧಿ ಮತ್ತು ಸಂತಸವನ್ನು ತಂದುಕೊಡುವ ದಿವಸದಲ್ಲಿ ಹೊಸ ಹೊಸ ಮಾರ್ಗಗಳನ್ನು ಕಂಡುಕೊಂಡಿತು.

ಜನತೆಗೆ ಅಧಿಕಾರ :

ಪ್ರಜಾಪ್ರಭುತ್ವದಲ್ಲಿ "ಪ್ರಜೆಯೇ ಪ್ರಭು" ಎಂಬ ತತ್ವದಲ್ಲಿ ಅಚಲವಾದ ನಂಬಿಕೆ ಇಟ್ಟಿರುವ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಸರ್ಕಾರ, ಪ್ರಜಾ ಪ್ರಭುತ್ವ ಅರ್ಥಪೂರ್ಣವಾಗಬೇಕಾದರೆ ಆಡಳಿತದಲ್ಲಿ ಜನತೆಯ ಸಕ್ರಿಯ ಪಾತ್ರ ಅತ್ಯಂತ ಅಗತ್ಯ ಎಂಬುದನ್ನು ಮನಗಂಡಿದೆ.

ಇದಕ್ಕೆ ಮುಖ್ಯವಾಗಿ ಬೇಕಾದದ್ದು ಅಧಿಕಾರ ವಿಕೇಂದ್ರೀಕರಣ. ಅದ್ದರಿಂದಲೇ ಪಂಚಾಯತಿ ರಾಜ್ಯ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಗಳನ್ನು ರಚಿಸಿ, ಗ್ರಾಮೀಣ ಪ್ರದೇಶಗಳ ಸಮಗ್ರ ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ ಕಾರ್ಯಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಜನತೆ ನೇರವಾಗಿ ಪಾಲುಗೊಳ್ಳುವ ವ್ಯಾಪಕ ಅವಕಾಶಗಳನ್ನು ಕಲ್ಪಿಸಿದೆ.

ಈ ಗುರಿ ಸಾಧನೆಗಾಗಿ ಎರಡು ಪ್ರಮುಖ ಚುನಾವಣಾ ಸುಧಾರಣೆಗಳನ್ನು ಕಾರ್ಯಗತಗೊಳಿಸಲಾಗಿದೆ. ಮೊದಲನೆಯದು : ಯುಪ ಸಮೂಹ ಸಾರ್ವಜನಿಕ ವಿಚಾರಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ತಮ್ಮ ಅಭಿಮತ ವ್ಯಕ್ತಪಡಿಸಲು ಅನುಕೂಲವಾಗುವಂತೆ ಮತದಾನದ ವಯೋಮಿತಿಯನ್ನು 18 ವರ್ಷಗಳಿಗೆ ಇಳಿಸಿರುವುದು. ಎರಡನೆಯದು : ಈ ಸ್ಥಳೀಯ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಶೇಕಡ 20ರಷ್ಟು ಸ್ಥಾನಗಳನ್ನು ಮಹಿಳೆಯರಿಗೆ ಮೀಸಲಾಗಿಟ್ಟಿರುವುದು. ಇದರಿಂದ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರು ರಾಷ್ಟ್ರಾಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ ಕಾರ್ಯಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಹೆಚ್ಚಿನ ಪಾತ್ರ ವಹಿಸಲು ನೆರವಾಗಿದೆ.

ಈಗ ಪಂಚಾಯತಿ ರಾಜ್ಯ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆಯ ಮೊದಲ ಐವರ್ಷವೇ ಜಿಲ್ಲಾ ಪರಿಷತ್ತುಗಳು ಮತ್ತು ಮಂಡಲ ಪಂಚಾಯತಿಗಳಿಗೆ 900 ಕೋಟಿ ರೂಪಾಯಿಗಳನ್ನು ಸರ್ಕಾರ ನೀಡುತ್ತದೆ.

ಪಂಚಾಯತಿ ರಾಜ್ಯ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆಯ ಅನುಷ್ಠಾನದಿಂದ ರಾಜ್ಯದಲ್ಲಿ 2469 ಮಂಡಲ ಪಂಚಾಯತಿಗಳು ಮತ್ತು ಜಿಲ್ಲಾ ಪರಿಷತ್ತುಗಳು ಅಸ್ತಿತ್ವಕ್ಕೆ ಬಂದಿವೆ.

ಈ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಗಳು ತಮ್ಮ ವ್ಯಾಪ್ತಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಬರುವ ಪ್ರದೇಶದ ಪ್ರಗತಿಪರ ಕಾರ್ಯಗಳನ್ನು ರೂಪಿಸಿ ಅನುಷ್ಠಾನಗೊಳಿಸುವ ಹಿರಿಯ ಹೊಣೆ ಹೊತ್ತಿವೆ. ಈ ಮಂಡಲ ಪಂಚಾಯತಿಗಳು ಮತ್ತು ಜಿಲ್ಲಾ ಪರಿಷತ್ತುಗಳೇ ನಿಜವಾದ ಅರ್ಥದಲ್ಲಿ ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ ಕಾರ್ಯ ನಿರ್ವಹಿಸುವ ಮೂಲ ಘಟಕಗಳು.

ಪ್ರಥಮ ಬಾರಿಗೆ ಸಮನವಾದ ಪ್ರಾಥಮಿಕ ಹಂತದಿಂದ ಸುಮಾರು 56,000 ಪ್ರಜಾಪ್ರತಿನಿಧಿಗಳು ಆಯ್ಕೆಯಾಗಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಇದರಲ್ಲಿ 29,051 ಜನಸಾಮಾನ್ಯ ಪರ್ಗದ ಪ್ರತಿನಿಧಿಗಳು. 11887 ಜನ ಪರಿಶಿಷ್ಟ ಜನಾಂಗದ ಪ್ರತಿನಿಧಿಗಳು ಹಾಗೂ 14356 ಮಹಿಳಾ ಪ್ರತಿನಿಧಿಗಳಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಮಹಿಳೆಯರಲ್ಲಿ 2469 ಜನ ಪರಿಶಿಷ್ಟ ಜನಾಂಗದ ಪ್ರತಿನಿಧಿಗಳು. ಇವರ ಜೊತೆಗೆ ಜಿಲ್ಲಾ ಪರಿಷತ್ತುಗಳಿಗೆ 887 ಸದಸ್ಯರು ಆಯ್ಕೆಯಾಗಿದ್ದಾರೆ.

1987ರ ಜನವರಿ 2 ಮತ್ತು 20ರಂದು ನಡೆದ ಚರಿತ್ರಾರ್ಹ ಚುನಾವಣೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ 1,82,18,177 ಜನ ಮತದಾರರು ಮತ ಚಲಾಯಿಸಿ ತಮ್ಮ ಪಕ್ಷ ಅಭಿಮತ ವ್ಯಕ್ತಪಡಿಸಿದ್ದಾರೆ.

ಪ್ರಜಾಪ್ರಭುತ್ವದ ಮೂಲ ಈ ಹೆಮ್ಮೆಯ ನಾಡಿನ ಮಣ್ಣಿನ ಮಕ್ಕಳಲ್ಲಿ ಅಡಗಿದೆ ಎಂಬುದನ್ನು ಶ್ರುತಪಡಿಸುವ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕದ ಜನಸಮುದಾಯ ನಿಜಕ್ಕೂ ಅಭಿನಂದನಾರ್ಹರು.

ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ವಾರ್ತೆ

ರಾಜ್ಯದ ಪ್ರಗತಿ ಮತ್ತು ಸಮೃದ್ಧಿಯ ಸಾಕಾರ — ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಸರ್ಕಾರ

NEWSLETTER  
FOR BIRDPWATCHERS

Vol. XXVII

No.1 and 2

January-February 1987

---

Contents

Editorial: Asian Wetlands Inventory: Nature Education:  
Join the International Council for Bird  
Preservation: Birds and Pesticides: Birds in  
the Editor's Garden: Swimming Ability of Herons:  
Floating Ability of the Common Crow: Birds  
Harassing their Companions in Distress.

-Birds of the Kaveri Valley By Dr.Eric J.Lott.

-Tropic Bird in Madras by T.R.Sridhar.

-Observation of Glossy Ibis by Ketan S.Tatu.

-The noctuary of an incubating male painted snipe by  
H.Daniel Wesley.

Correspondence:

-Feeding behaviour of red wattled lapwing by A.Z.Babi.

-Letter from Mrs.J.Mattingly.

Book Review by Mrs.Laeq Futehally.

---



Editorial:

Asian wetlands inventory: Ever since the Ramsar Conference in 1971, the movement for the conservation of wetlands has been making steady progress. An Asian wetlands inventory is now under preparation and this is sponsored by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the International Council for Bird Preservation and by the International Waterfowl Research Bureau. Information from India is being supplied by Prof. C.K.Varshney, Department of Environment; S.A.Hussain, Bombay Natural History Society, and Prakash Gole of the Ecological Society, Pune. Mr.Derek Scott, the International Coordinator, seems to have motivated several countries into action. If these wetlands can be saved it will mean that a large number of water birds are assured of suitable habitats. Incidentally the Editor wrote the following letter to the Deccan Herald which was published on the 22nd of January. Attempts are being made to persuade the Karnataka Government to take suitable action.

Bird Sanctuaries in Bangalore (Deccan Herald, 22 Jan.'87)  
As part of the mid-January waterfowl census organised by the International Wildfowl Research Bureau and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, a group of birdwatchers in Bangalore, led by Dr.Joseph George and Dr.S.Subramanya, have been counting various species of birds in the tanks around Bangalore. On Sunday, January 18, we visited the Jakkur and Yelahanka tanks and the bird life and the landscape provided a glimpse of how beautiful our environment could become with a little effort from the city planners.

The Yelahanka tank, just a furlong away from the Bellary road, could become a spectacular bird sanctuary and a pleasant halting spot for week-enders on their way to Nandi, and for other visitors to Bangalore. At this time in the migratory season there are blue winged teal, pintail, marsh harrier, greenshank, several kinds of sandpipers, black winged stilts, egrets, and a host of other water and marshland birds. All this in spite of the physical and chemical assault on the water by washermen, factory effluents and sewage from residential areas. With a modicum of planning, the 'ecology' of the tank would improve greatly and reward sightseers with a beautiful experience.

Discussions with local residents indicate that some 40 years ago, the water level in this tank was as high as 17 ft. in the monsoon, and even in summer the maximum depth was 12 ft. At present, there is water only in the

main bed which has a spread of about 12 acres with a depth of just 2 1/2 ft. This shows how much more water would be available if the inflows were opened up, siltation arrested by planting up of the foreshore, and pollution from industrial enterprises like the Wheel and Axle Plant, and other establishments, reduced to the minimum.

The Jakkur tank provided an unexpected multitude of migratory duck, and what was such a pleasure was to see a pair of white storks, those handsome black and white birds with their pink bills. Later in the year the Jakkur tank has a good population of painted and open billed storks.

Now that there is a growing awareness about the need to preserve - not to reclaim the tanks of Bangalore - for improving the water regime of the city, I hope that urgent steps will be taken to arrest the unplanned growth around, and encroachment within, the tank beds of these two tanks, so that something of the glory of the past may be available to the present generation.

=====

Nature Education: A large number of organisations have now started to take an interest in nature education including bird watching. One such centre is the Centre for Cultural Resources and Training, Department of Education, Government of India, New Delhi 110 001. During a recent training programme for teachers in Bangalore it was noted that there was great need for simple guidelines on bird identification. Some of our readers may like to offer themselves as guide lecturers for these training programmes held in various parts of the country. Write to Mrs.K.Ramdas if you are in a position to help.

=====

Join the International Council for Bird Preservation(ICBP):  
ICBP is devoted entirely to the conservation of birds and their habitats. Founded in 1922, it pioneered the cause of nature conservation worldwide. Since then, ICBP has grown into a federation of over 300 member organisations representing some ten million people in 100 countries.

ICBP's founders, prominent bird enthusiasts in Europe and America, were among the first to realise that only

morning and sometimes in the evening. The good monsoon this year (42" instead of the 22" of last year) has improved the ground cover a great deal, and terrestrial birds are probably well supplied with food. Tree pies are very noisy, and sometimes produce rather pleasant sounds, rendered in the books as bob-o-link, instead of the harsh che che che che che. Koels are multiplying and I find that the females continue to all even though the nesting season is over. A pair of grey tits arrived last month, and they are occasionally seen. There must be over a dozen purplerumped sunbirds in the garden, and they are certainly the most attractive inhabitants. Spotted doves are multiplying and so are the whiteheaded babblers. S. Subramanya has offered to net the ring these birds and if that could be done we would discover a number of interesting facts about their social relationships, longevity, etc. There is just one pair of Drongos in our 5 acre orchard. Perhaps this area is required to sustain one pair. There are still fortunately no house sparrows in our compound or house. They congregate in the neighbour's poultry farm where they get all the food they want. Roseringed parakeets take a toll of the fruit and nothing can be done about that.

There are no flycatchers at the moment though some time ago the little brown flycatcher was in residence. I suspect that green barbets occasionally call from our garden now that the trees have become taller and provide them with suitable resting areas. Surprisingly no copper-smiths so far. A whitebreasted kingfisher hunts in the pond. Cattle egrets (sometimes as many as nine) assemble around the horse and snap up insects disturbed by the horse's feet. A pond heron is also occasionally seen near the pond. The tailor bird population is going up slowly and there are loud duets from time to time. We find nests occasionally but suspect that many are destroyed by crows or cats, possibly also by a pair of crow pheasants which operate systematically seeking food in likely places. Spotted owlets produce merry chuckling sounds in the evening. We have only the common myna here though less than 2 furlongs away jungle mynas are seen in the damp area around quarry pits filled with water. Hoopoes are commonly seen on the lawn probing into the soil in search of insects. Yesterday (i.e. 1st February) we saw a hoopoe tapping on the lawn in one spot for three minutes, and ultimately after this hard labour it was rewarded by a large soft bodied insect which emerged from the ground. It was too large for the hoopoe to swallow without hacking it into small pieces with its bill. How did the bird



realise that there was this insect underground and by tapping the ground hard and creating shock waves it would force it to emerge?

There are no migrant wagtails to be seen yet. A pair of the large pied wagtail nest under the tiles of our roof. Sometimes there is a big commotion amongst the crow population because of the arrival of a honey buzzard. Shikras are occasionally seen, but they are silent and hardly call at all. The ioras too have ceased to call. Perhaps they do not relish the cold weather. On the 25th of December I went out for a walk and a furlong away from our house was a male and female Indian robin going in and out of a hedge. Robins are getting scarce and it was a pleasure to see this species after a long time. On the 25th of January I saw the first golden oriole of the season. These birds disappear during the monsoon, presumably going not too far away and then come back here about this time. The Blyth reed warbler came in November and the redstart which comes right into the verandah has not shown up yet (yet being 25/1/87).

=====

Swimming ability of herons: The note by Prof.K.K.Neelakantan in Newsletter No.XXVI May-Jun 1986, on the floating ability of pond herons has aroused some interest among our readers. V.Santhanam followed up with a note in Vol.XXVI, No.7 and 8 Jul-Aug. 1986, and now we have received comments from B.M.Parasharya. He reports on seeing a night heron actively swimming in a small pond in the Victoria Park in Bhavnagar. It was feeding while in the water. He has also regularly observed a number of night herons employing swimming feeding during April/November, at Kankaria Lake in Ahmedabad.

=====

Floating ability of the common crow: Abdul Jamil Urfi writes about the floating ability of the common crow.

'My interest in writing this brief note was triggered by reading V. S anthanam's Article 'Floating ability of herons' published in the Newsletter (Vol.XXVI, No.7 and 8, 1986). During my birdwatching trips this season I came across a few instances when the common crow, *Corvus splendens* was observed to behave differently from any rule described in the book.

The first occurred on 2.10.86 at Okhla - which is a beautiful picnic spot in Delhi, and also the site of a barrage on the river Yamuna. In this case three crows, one after the other, were seen to plunge into the river from a clump of water hyacinth nearby and dabble about in the water in a manner resembling ducks. With clumsy but rhythmic action of their wings the birds avoided sinking or losing their balance and soon, after a brief bath lasting for roughly five minutes, flew away to a drier spot. It was the evening of a warm day in autumn.

While in the water the crows did not display any signs of fear or excitement. However, it was not clear how they managed to steer in the water. Either they were using their flapping wings only or perhaps the feet were also involved for propelling them forward and steering. This along with V. Santharam's and other observations, suggests that even terrestrial birds may have an innate ability to occasionally swim in deep water'.

=====

Birds Harassing their companions in distress: It is a common sight to see crows attacking a member of their own clan when it is wounded or in distress of any kind. It is difficult to comprehend why this happens. Presumably they prefer to have a member of their own species dead rather than captured by man. Smt.Kamala Venkataramani writes:

'On a cloudy morning in the month of August 1986, I saw a group of 7-8 mynas crowding around a myna hanging upside down on the wire. Then a group of crows came pecking at the mynah..... With the help of a few friends I tried to disentangle the myna but 15-20 mynas started hovering around me disturbing the operation'.

Smt.Kamala Venkataramani concludes her note by the statement 'Strange is the behaviour of crows and mynas'.

=====

---

Birds of the Kaveri Valley by Dr.Eric J.Lott, United Theological College, 17 Millers Road, Bangalore 560 046: Birdwatching can become quite an addiction. One can reach the point where a regular shot of 'birding' is a necessity, and life seems unbearably dull without this almost mystical delight of the sight of flashing feather and the richly



varied sound of bird-song. Birdwatching is actually a misnomer. For the satisfaction of visually identifying a species - and learning more of its life-habits through repeated sightings - is certainly equalled by listening to bird-calls and bird-song. Indeed, it will often be the case that a bird is identified by its call first, then seen and watched through the glasses. Binoculars are a must; what is to the naked eye a grey blur turns, perhaps, into a miracle of blue-sheen and russett-gold. Even with glasses there are times of frustration. A bird, perhaps a whole flock, calls away vigorously in a nearby tree, and we see not one flicking feather. This is typical especially of the early days of bird-watching. Gradually we discover how to cope with shy skulkers.

I limit this account of our birdwatching (my wife is equally obsessed) to a short stretch of the Kaveri river, especially Galiborai, some 5 miles upstream from Sangam, where we've camped several times over the past 7 years. I will not attempt to be exhaustive, as to date we've seen some 127 species in or near the Kaveri Valley. To write of all 127 would result in a mere listing of species. So I'll be selective and concentrate on those we find specially attractive.

On the plateau above the valley there are a few birds not seen by the river that I'll briefly mention. There are some interesting birds of prey: the strikingly coloured redheaded merlin is sometimes found, pigeon sized but streamlined for diving and attacking the smallish birds (even doves at times) and animals on which it preys. With its reddish-brown head and its black-on-white moustache, its slate-blue back and wings, tipped with black, and its cross-striped (again dark-grey on white) underparts, it's a fine-looking falcon. I'm equally impressed by the slightly bigger black-winged kite, and just in September we saw three of them gliding low across the valley, gleaming like silver in the late-evening sunlight. Clear white underparts contrast with the grey above, marked with black patches on shoulders and wing-tips. For the most systematic quartering of the countryside there's the occasional Harrier, pale and montagu's, to be seen, with those superb swept-back wings.

What other birds of prey are there down in the valley? At Galiborai from time to time we seen one of the most impressive hunters of all, the Osprey. Very dark-brown above, its white belly and crown, with black eye-stripes, make a splendid sight as it waits on a prominent branch

overlooking the river, then moving out across the water dives down, sometimes fully immersing itself in the water, to seize a fish of up to may be 4 or 5 lbs. With its strong talons, lift-off is sometimes a problem, and birds have been known to drown, unable or unwilling to release their too heavy prey. The Grey-headed fishing eagle is also a valley-hunter, usually further upstream where the river is wider.

Another fascinating fish-hunter is the Darter, aptly so called as it impales its prey with its sharp beak, on the end of a neck like a coiled spring, deep in the water sometimes in quite fast-moving streams. Another equally apt name for it is snake-bird, as it swims with its body under the waterline and neck/head move along to and fro just like the movement of a cobra about to strike. Its flight is somewhat clumsy, but how pleasing to see them gliding along over the water, probably from the Ranganatittu colony. Then there's a less aggressive hunter, the brown fish-owl, seen plunging from one tree to another to escape the mobbing of small birds, or sitting motionless on a branch, its ears usually a bit drooped, looking as mournful as its call, a low and eerie 'moom-moom', that carries surprisingly far. The brahmany kite too feeds off fish, picking up the occasional dead fish from the surface. And recently I saw a white backed vulture (they nest in the taller trees along the river) flying overhead with a mahseer of perhaps 5 pounds, its orange fin still gleaming brightly.

Back to the more aggressive hunters: there's the fierce-looking crested hawk-eagle, sometimes to be seen watching for likely prey from the fork of a tree. Walking along the forest road once a screaming spurfowl flashed above us a mere 6 feet, followed determinedly by a crested hawk-eagle. Almost immediately after, the spurfowl lost some of its panic and dived down into the undergrowth, safe from harm. Another incident probably involved a shaheen falcon. While drinking mid-morning tea, there was a sudden wild wooshing of wings, then a 'crump' and just beyond the trees a flurry of feathers of what looked like a little brown dove. The killer was not seen well enough to give a definite identification.

For a few days in February each year we see a rare visitor to India, the splendidly multi-coloured European bee-eater, bigger in body than any of its Indian cousins (the green and the chestnut-headed are found at Galiborai),

and more exotically coloured, with yellows, browns, greens and splashed all over its back. Coming down the road that drops into the Sangam Valley, tiny, gentle, scurrying little button and jungle bush quail can be seen, and quite possibly a grey partridge or two, if we arrive as morning breaks. Despite being hunted by various kinds of two-legged hunters (and a few with 4 legs), and in spite of the serious depletion of tree-cover all along this valley (even more so on the badly eroded hillsides), there are still a few grey jungle fowl left and may well be crossing the track in the dawn light. 'Grey' is far from aptly descriptive of this splendid bird, the cock being especially colourful with the rich golden-spangled effect of his neck and wings, the purple-black-green of his long arched tail, and his bright red comb. Four or five cockbirds can be heard crowing at each other challengingly from both sides of the river in the early hours, and again in late evening. Their crowing is soon joined by the strident triple call of the partridge. On rare occasions, too, we might hear the distant call of peacock, that needs no description. Sometimes small flocks of beautiful painted sandgrouse might either be heard with their 'chirik, chirik', coming down for water before light, or even squatting in the scrub path from dawn onwards, not wanting to fly up until almost run down, and then dropping down again after 30 yards or so of quite strong flight. (To be continued).

=====

---

Tropic bird in Madras by T.R.Sridhar, 23 D'Silva Road, Mylapore, Madras 600 004: On the morning of the 20 July 1984, I saw a Tropic bird soaring at about 100 feet, over the Santhome Cathedral, here in Madras. I could not identify it at once as the bird was flying at a good height. But I was able to notice that it had a full-white body with long, narrow pointed wings and greatly elongated white tail streamers, almost as long as the body itself.

Incidentally just behind the cathedral stretches the beach and then the Bay of Bengal into oblivion.

Fortunately my brother Sriram and myself again saw the tropic bird on the 27th of the same month in the same locality. But now, since it was flying at a lesser height than before, we could, with little difficulty perceive the other features of its plumage. It had in addition, a narrow black bar over the wing, black in



the primaries and an orangish beak. We identified the bird as the white tropic bird (*Phaethon Lepturus*). It appeared to be a powerful flier; it flew with a few flaps followed by a short glide. Again, on the 2nd August I saw the bird over the sea near the Santhome Cathedral. It hovered continuously at a height of about 75-125 feet (it was too far off to be identified unmistakably.) We again came across this bird on the 3rd and 6th August at the same locality. When I gave this article to the published quarterly of the Madras Naturalist's society called Black-buck, the article incited the following comment from the Editor. 'All three species of Tropic birds have been recorded in the Indian ocean and neighbouring areas, so the possibility of the occurrence of the white Tropic bird in Madras cannot be over looked. However such records need to be treated with a certain amount of caution as Tropic birds superficially resemble terns in their appearance and there are opportunities for confusion'.

Excellent! I could not have put it better myself. This is certainly true and it is not without some difficulty that we identified the bird.

Then, again last year (1985) we recorded a number of sightings. The first of these was on the afternoon of the 24th June 1985. Two birds were spotted. It was a partly cloudy day but the lighting was excellent. The birds flew quite low, perhaps at about 100 feet or less and afforded a superb view. The time of the sighting was about 3.50 pm and the place was the neighbourhood of the Santhome Cathedral. The subsequent sightings were also made at the same area. The next sighting was on the 25th June and again a pair was noticed around 4.00 pm. On 26th June, one bird was spotted around the same time. The birds flew quite low and the weather was cloudy on both days. They were next seen on 1st July 1985 on a bright sunny afternoon.

This year (1986) one bird was seen by me on the morning of the 20 July, Strangely, if I may say extraordinarily the date, month, time, weather everything except the year, exactly corresponded with the date, month, time and weather of my first sighting of this enchanting bird.

After observing these birds for so long I shall give a detailed description as to its appearance and habits.

The bird was overall white in colour and about the size of a large tern with long, narrow, pointed wings

slender body and a short wedge shaped tail with extremely long tail streamers like the Paradise flycatcher (*Terpsiphone* spp.). The streamers were as long as, if not longer than the body length. The bill was orangish yellow, stout, quite long and pointed. The black legs preseed against the under tail coverts were seen with some difficulty. The black eye stripe from the lores to nape was quite clear. The wings were white with black primaries and wing tips. The wings also had, on the top, a narrow black bar (perhaps across the median and greater wing coverts) described by Dr. Salim Ali as from shoulder to shoulder. The head was long and the neck short. The flight was a few flaps followed by glides. It was similar to a pigeon's but was stronger, slower and steadier, each flap raising and lowering the bird in the air. It was a strong flier. The identification part of it was the most enjoyable and I being a great fan of Sir A.C. Doyle's, Sherlock Holmes decided to adopt the process of elimination.

The long tail, almost longer than the body, and the narrow wings proved it was a Tropic bird. Now there are three species of Tropic birds that wallow in the oceans. They are: -

1. Red tailed tropic bird (*Phaethon rubricauda*)
2. Red billed tropic bird (*P. aethereus*)
3. White tropic bird (*P. lepturus*)

The birds we saw didn't have red tail streamers nor a red bill and barred back, thereby eliminating the first two. Our notes and observations tally with the descriptions of the last and so the birds were categorically and positively identified as *P. lepturus*.

It is ironical that the birds travel ways been seen near the Cathedral but not at all in the nearby Adyar Estuary which provides a much better habitat. Probably the tropic birds prefer salted fish!

=====  

---

Observation of Glossy Ibis by Ketan S. Tatu, 4/21, Azad Apartments, Nr. Azad Society, Ambavadi, Ahmedabad 380015:  
On 7th October 1983 I was birding nearby a pond in an uncultivated land at Vastavapur, a suburb of Ahmedabad (North). A small population of birds, including cattle egrets, small egrets, pond herons, openbills, black winged stilts, red wattled lapwings, common sandpipers,

wood sandpipers, white wagtails and grey wagtails were busy feeding. About 150 feet away 35 comb ducks were gathered probably eating shoots.

My attention was drawn by a flock of about 15 birds arriving from the south-east. They landed near the comb ducks. This group was followed by two consecutive groups containing 5 and 3 birds respectively. Their long down curved bills suggested that they were black ibises. However, focusing my 8x30 binoculars not a single bird showed any crimson skin on the head, brick red legs or a white shoulder patch, and hence the birds were not black ibises. Could they be glossy ibises? But there was neither chestnut colour nor glossyness on any part. They were totally black including the bill and legs.

These birds were again seen until 12th October, however in a smaller number (10).

Two months later I received the NFB (Vol. XXIV No. 1-2 Jan-Feb) and was pleased to see the note about 'glossy ibises in Vedanthangal heronry' by Mr. R. Kannan. According to his note, he too had a similar experience about these birds i.e. no chestnut colour and no glossyness anywhere on the body. His article helped me to identify the birds but my attempts to see them that year (1984) were in vain.

After a long period on 3rd March 1985 I visited Aalteshwar 62 kms from Ahmedabad and noticed these birds on the opposite edge of the river stream (40 ft wide) collecting titbits from the mud. I focused my 8x40 binoculars and to my surprise all of them exhibited a completely different plumage. They had glossy velvet like chestnut plumage from the head to the back and also from the throat to the belly. The wings were glossy black having greenish tinge. The naked face was dull black and the tail was bright black.

A lonely bird was also spotted at Bokh talav 5 km from Aalteshwar.

I went to Vasana dam situated in the south of Ahmedabad 2 1/2 miles from Vasana village. I was fortunate to spot them once again in this marshy river tract. It was certainly the most satisfying place where I studied this bird for a month [7.3.85 to 10.4.85. Observations were interrupted due to a violent turn of the antireservation stir].

I have noted some facts about these glossy ibis from all these observations.



1. It is a bird of marshes like white ibis and is often seen in its company. It has been observed that glossy ibis never enters nearby fields at third specie does.
2. It has been observed that they keep in small parties (3-5 birds on different occasions) as well as many times in large flocks (10,17,19,30,35,41 birds at different occasions).
3. Normally it seems to be silent but sometimes utters a prolonged harsh call (like k-a-a- without any accent or descent) when alarmed.
4. The birds fly in 'wave' formation and not in 'V' formation (rapid wing beats followed by short glide).
5. When feeding, they keep their bills (sometimes heads too) submerged in the muddy water for a considerable time standing at one particular spot and do not walk here and there in search of food like the white ibis. There is an apparent difference in summer and winter dresses.

The Late Mr. Harinarayan Acharya, a well known naturalist from Gujarat has recorded in his book (Vanvagada na vasi) that the glossy ibis is a winter migrant for Gujarat and doesn't occur abundantly. In connection with this observation it would be of interest to record the occurrence of this bird in its summer quarters.

=====

---

The noctuary of an incubating male painted snipe by H. Daniel Wesley, Wild Life Conservation Society, C/o. Hotel Sangam, Tiruchirapalli 620 001: In the month of April '82 a male painted snipe was incubating a clutch of four eggs under a low branch of a bush of Prosopis juliflora. The grass 'wall' of the nest had been nibbled off at the top and on one side by the sheep and hence the sitting bird could be observed from a distance of 25 feet with a pair of 8x50 mm binoculars. The waning moon was quite bright most of the time and fell on the nest so that the presence or absence of the bird in the nest could be ascertained quite accurately by the white shoulder strap of the bird that stood out bright against the moon or the torch that was used when the former was behind the clouds.

The total duration of observation in minutes on 13, 14 and 16 April 1982 were 295, 246 and 235 respectively

the observation was done since an hour or two after midnight till dawn. It was observed that the bird shifted his sitting position to face different cardinal/intercardinal points. He did not face north during these observations. The percentage of time at each position is given in Table 1.

Another behaviour was that the bird got out of the nest to relax and sat again on the eggs in a few minutes; twice was he observed standing at the edge of the nest and to step in and sit on the eggs. Whether he ventured far for feeding was not known.

To the light from the torch at an angle a brilliant ring of amber shown around the iris. When, however, the torch was focussed directly at the eyes they blinked, the eyelids dropping from above.

=====

---

#### Correspondence

Feeding behaviour of red wattled lapwing by A.Z.Babi, Neelambaug Palace, Bhavnagar 364002: I have some very interesting bird behaviour to report.

Yesterday and today I observed a red wattled lapwing drumming out insects. It was not scratching at all but positively tapping the soft ground with one of its feet daintily and catching any insect that she could drive up a little ahead. She never pecked where she was stamping. The time was around 6 am. I have never seen anything like this before nor read about it. The behaviour could be adaptive like the galapagos finch using a thin twig to bring out insect or larvae. I have yet to see the lapwing tap the ground lightly on hard soil so far only one of the lapwings has been doing this. I could not bring out any insects when I tried tapping with a small stick, where the lapwing was feeding there were only a few small red ants and a very small beetle.

=====

Letter from Mrs.J.Mattingly, Hon.Treasurer, 'Pandora', 33, Pilgrims road, North Halling, Rochester, Kent, England, ME2 1HN: Mrs.Mattingly has sent a copy of their N.L. of September '86. Among other things it contains the following:-

Do Birds Play: It is wellknown that animals have a sense of fun and there is nothing more delightful than watching puppies, kittens and fox cubs gambolling, skipping lambs, frolicking shire horses - there seems no end to animal fun.

Somewhere down the natural order we come to those 'of little brain' to whom play would seem beyond them. But, what of birds?

A strange bird seen from my window was a house sparrow with a six inch white feather in its beak, flying to the top of a hawthorn tree and gliding down with fronds of the feather wafting in the breeze. The bird did this five or six times before tiring of it. Another sparrow chased a brimstone butterfly around, seemingly just for the fun of it and had no intention of catching it. In my previous garden a blue tit and a sparrow chased one another around the garden, the best of friends it seemed. This happened daily for a short period. Do you know of any other examples of bird play? S.A.C.

=====

Book Review by Mrs. Laeeg Futehally:

The Amateur Naturalist a practical guide to the Natural World by Gerald Durrell with Lee Durrell, Penguin's, 388 pp, copiously illustrated with drawings. £ 4.95.

This book may well turn out to be the most important, because the most useful, of Gerald Durrell's books. What he sets out to do here is not so much to amuse, entertain, or astonish people; he sets out, simply to tell amateurs how to pursue and enjoy the study of natural history. Where to look, how to look, how to make relevant observations, how to make a bark rubbing, how to measure the height and girth of a tree and what to deduce from it; how to catch and mark small creatures, and how to keep the right kind of notes. He tells us how to identify these creatures, and how to note the relationship between different kinds of living forms, all this being laced with personal reminiscence and anecdotes. One reads on, and finds that one has, painlessly, collected a great deal of practical 'guidance'.

Durrell begins with a brief, competent and thoroughly intelligible account of the theory of evolution. His lively and imaginative style is ideal for explaining even rather complicated 'theories' to the uninitiated. The



description of Linnaeus' classification system lucid and rational enough for it to lodge in the young mind after a single reading.

Following the introductory section the reader is taken, chapter by chapter, to visit all the different habitats, starting with our own home backyard. Then we go on to other places, through 20 different kinds of habitats including, marshlands, coastal wetlands, smooth shores, rocky shores, and seas and oceans.

In each place, we are told what to look for, how to watch the animal's activities and its movements, how to follow its food and shelter habits until we discover the whole tangled and well-spread web which sustains it.

In all this we are instructed not only by word, but by diagrams and drawings as well. The excellent illustrations are an integral part of the text, for they are all designed to clarify the writing - while at the same time they succeed in enriching and decorating the page.

'One of the great things about being a naturalist' says Durrell, 'is that you are born with all your basic equipment - your eyes, your ears, and the senses of smell, taste and touch. All these, of course, can be added to by mass-made tools, but a naturalist should be capable of enjoying his craft naked on a desert island. Never forget that, while taking a deep interest in the world outside, you are yourself walking around inside a miracle. The human body is an extraordinary piece of adaptation and you should learn to use it in the same way as you learn to use the other adjuncts of the naturalist's art - the hand lens, binoculars, camera and so on'.

Perhaps something of the quality of this book can be gauged by the acknowledgements page at the end. The list of institutions, individuals and illustrators who 'helped' is formidable. And this is a reminder that, just because it is good fun to read, we must not think of it as less than totally scientific.

This book - or parts of it - would make an excellent text book for our schools and colleges. Is it not possible to come to some arrangement with Penguins which will enable our students to have the advantage of learning about living things from this very live work? Mr. Khushwant Singh, please note.

=====

With best compliments of:



**Tata Engineering & Locomotive  
Company Limited**



**Jamshedpur, Bombay, Pune**

# G M D C

offers

**BEST QUALITY MINERALS**

- \* **FLUORSPAR**
- \* **SILICA SAND**
- \* **BAUXITE in various grades**
- \* **LIGNITE**

Forward enquiries to :



**GUJARAT MINERAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LTD.**

(A Govt. of Gujarat Enterprise)

'Khanij Bhavan', Ashram Road, Ahmedabad 380 009

Phones: 402475-76-77-78-79

Gram: 'MINICORP'

Telex: GMDC AM 0121 320

Front Cover: BAYA

Courtesy E. HANUMANTHA RAO

Editor: Zafar Futehally

Dodda Gubbi Post, Bangalore - 562 134

Annual Subscription Rs. 15/-



# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

---



VOL. XXVII NO. 5 & 6

MAY - JUNE 1987

With best compliments of:



**Tata Engineering & Locomotive  
Company Limited**



**Jamshedpur, Bombay, Pune**

NEWSLETTER  
FOR BIRDPWATCHERS

VOL. XXVII

No. 5 and 6

May-June 1987

---

C O N T E N T S

Editorial

- \* Pilgrimage to Bangalore by Amir Ali.
- \* Some Zambian Reminiscences by L.A. Hill.
- \* Asian Waterfowl Census - 1987 by S. Asad Ahtar.
- \* A Review, Birdwatcher's Digest by Amir Ali.

Correspondence:

- \* Painted Storks by S. Theodore Baskaran.
- \* Ringing in Zambia by L.A. Hill.
- \* Jannagar Birds by Bantu Nensey (Extracts from his letter).
- \* Capturing a Guillemot by Thomas Gay.

Oriental Bird Club.

---

If you have not paid your subscription  
for 1987, please send an amount of Rs. 20/-

If your name and address is incorrectly  
spelt, kindly inform the Editor.



Editorial:

Amir Ali's article "Pilgrimage to Bangalore" was inadvertently not included in the March/April issue inspite of being mentioned in the contents. I will make sure that it is in this time.

There is some repetition in the several accounts of the Annual Waterfowl Census, but this is an important event and it is encouraging to see that the response to the appeal by the B.N.H.S. Coordinator has been so satisfactory.

I am very glad that contact has been re-established with L.A. Hill. His Zambian Reminiscences published in this issue, testifies to his competence and enthusiasm, and hope that he will continue to write for us. I recall spending a splendid week-end with him in Keonjir in Orissa where he was Mining Manager. The large gardens had many honeycombs and the Hills had a special accessible room where birdwatchers and others could rush into in case the bees showed any displeasure at their presence.

With regard to his comment about 'Photography not allowed', I recall my own discomfiture in Bombay during the Indo-Pakistani war, when I was surrounded by a threatening mob because my bird watching was considered a cover for guiding Pakistani parachuters to a safe haven. A friend from the Punjab had a similar experience, and requested the Editor to issue "Passes" to genuine birdwatchers so that they came to no harm.

Complaints continue to come in about non-receipt of Newsletters, spelling mistakes on the addresses, and so on. I wish the Editor of the Newsletter had the kind of advertising and other support which the Birdwatcher's Digest has, and to which Amir Ali refers in his Review. Is there anyone who can undertake to help with maintaining the subscription list in order, and up to date, and look after the posting? I hope I will not have to report that the silence was deafening.

=====

---

Pilgrimage to Bangalore by Amir Ali, ch. de la Tourelle, 1209 Geneva, Switzerland.

I seem to have got into the habit of going on an annual pilgrimage to Bangalore and doing some birding with the Editor of our Newsletter. I do not know how much merit this pilgrimage earns me but it certainly earns me a lot of fun. It is exciting to go to a strange country where even common birds are new to you; it is equally exciting to go to familiar haunts and renew acquaintance with old friends.

On my last visit, the Dodda Gubbi water tank had been reduced to a puddle and what birds there were looked pathetic. This time - end of February 1987 - the tank was fuller than I have ever seen it. The rains last year had been good after many years of drought, and the water birds were showing their appreciation of this. But as always on such occasions, they had chosen to cluster at the other end of the tank and the early morning sun was blazing directly into my eyes. There were many Lesser Whistling Teals, though I heard none of their 'shrill, wheezy whistles', and Pintails.

How rare it is, I thought, that you get a good view of a bird, with the light in the right direction and the bird in the right position, so that its shape and colouring can be properly seen. And even as I was grumbling to myself, on a nearby telephone wire, were four Pied Kingfishers, sitting in a row, in exactly the right position, waiting to be admired. Four together seemed an unusual bonus. Would they all hover and dive in disciplined formation? But one should not ask too much of life. Guessing what I was thinking, they all flew away to practise their diving elsewhere.

It was a day for Brahminies: a Brahminy Myna on the ground, elegant with his black head, and a Brahminy Kite overhead, elegant with his white front. What is the significance of the word 'Brahminy'?

It was a special pleasure to see three White Storks, easily recognisable in spite of the sun, because I had just seen a couple near Tikangarh in Madhya Pradesh. We were visiting an area - about 600 acres - that used to be rich forest owned by the old Rajas of Orchha; now there was hardly a tree to be seen. Even the Storks hung their heads in shame.

The Bhilleshwar tank, about half an hour's drive from Dodda Gubbi, seemed to have shrunk since I was last there. Could it be that while one tank had more water, another had less? I suppose it could. Apart from several Blackwinged Stilts, Little Ringed Plovers and Common Sandpipers, there was a flock of Little Stints. These are what we had really come to see. On the last occasion, they had treated us to a magnificent aerobic display, flying and wheeling in a tight, perfectly synchronised formation. Would they give us another display? Well, again one mustn't be too greedy. We had a mini-display. The flock kept much closer to the water, was smaller and conducted its skilled performance for a shorter period. The flashing of white as they turned, was however, as impressive as ever. I'm expressing my gratitude, not grumbling.

We went to Ooty for a couple of days and this proved disappointing. I had imagined Ooty as a paradise of exciting, colourful birds. Alas, there seemed to be few birds of any sort. The forests through which we drove were more animated: Warblers (I like warblers, you can, without losing face, refuse even to try and identify them; Roger Tory Petersen in his Field Guide, rightly labels them 'Confusing Warblers'); White-eyes; Grey Tits; Purple Sunbirds. For me, the most interesting bird was the Black Bulbul with its rather messy black crest - like an untidy schoolboy - and its orange bill.

The most rewarding sights were however, Grey Junglefowl and Nilgiri Langurs. We left Ooty early in the morning and very soon glimpsed a Grey Junglefowl running across the road and disappearing into the forest. A few minutes later, there was a couple on the road, who took their time to disappear so we could have a better look at them. Then another. All in all, in the space of an hour, we saw 16, which is more than I had seen in all my long life. They obviously came out on the road to feed, on what? Gourmet snacks which had spilled out from overloaded lorries panting uphill, belching foul black fumes, no doubt. Long may such inefficient transport continue; who would have thought that they serve such a useful purpose?

While keeping our eyes open for Junglefowl we saw a black, furry creature on four legs, running off into the trees. If I didn't think that bears were extinct here, I would have thought it was one of them. Later we saw several and they were Nilgiri Langurs. Though there were many of them, they were so shy that they denied us a clear long

look. For some unfathomable reason, the editor launched theories about the length of their tails, opining that these were short - shorter than those of ordinary langurs. To prove that even an editor can be wrong, we came across a magnificent specimen, sitting on a bare tree, his tail hanging down as if asking for it to be measured. It was definitely longer than his body. Having established this for the benefit of science, it was possible to admire this beautiful animal: rich black, with a golden mane, so much more handsome than an ordinary langur. He did not seem overly disturbed by our presence or by the traffic on the road: I suppose that was a good sign.

=====

---

Some Zambian Reminiscences by L.A. Hill, 64 North Parade, Grantham, Lincolnshire, NG31 8AN, England.

There are some who are not too certain where exactly, in Africa, Zambia is: I was not myself until I went to work there. It used, of course, to be called Northern Rhodesia until it achieved independence in 1964.

It lies below the equator, from 12°S - 18°S, and is thoroughly landlocked, being bordered by no less than eight countries. These are named below, and for the convenience of those who are long in the tooth and remember the days before so many African countries gained their independence from their various European yokes, in the 1960's, the old names are shown in parenthesis.

Zaire (Belgian Congo): Tanzania (Tanganyika): Malawi (Nyasaland):  
Mozambique: Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia): Botswana (Bechuanaland):  
Namibia (German South West Africa): Angola.

For some strange reason, possibly because they have been in constant internal turmoil since independence from the Portuguese motherland, Mozambique and Angola have not yet troubled the map makers.

Zambia, together with Zaire, Chile and Peru, is amongst the largest of the copper producing countries of the so-called Third World, and the area where the copper mines are situated is known as The Copperbelt.

I was involved with the sinking of a sub-vertical shaft at Mufulira, one of the largest mines. For the uninitiated, "Sub-vertical" means that it was not sunk from the surface but started below ground, in the existing mine workings. It was 20' in diameter, and concrete lined, and extended from 1500' below the surface to 4,500'.

Most of Zambia, unlike neighbouring Zimbabwe which is topographically scenic, is flat uninteresting "bush". Livingstone must have had an unpleasant time wandering around in this characterless area: he died near the swampy surrounds of Lake Bangweulu, a haunt of the Shoebill (or whale-billed) Stork.

At an average elevation of around 4000', the climate is very equable and pleasant, dry most of the year and with rain on and off from November to March.



There are some interesting national parks, the largest being Kafue National Park (not far from the Victoria Falls at Livingstone) and Luangwa National Park. In the latter, walking safaris were initiated by Norman Carr, where small parties walk some ten miles or so every day, guided by park rangers, to bush camps. These, although relatively primitive, provide all mod-cons, from hot water to good food to gin-and-tonic, ice and lemon. It is on foot that one best feels the excitement and thrill of being in the natural wilds of Africa, and can appreciate the insignificance of man.

Having said that however, modern man in the form of poachers is unfortunately having a significant effect on reducing the numbers of black rhinos and elephants in this park.

I spent much of my spare time monitoring the birds at the sewage ponds on the mine farm. There were three huge rectangular ponds, each about 60 x 200 yards, with water being decanted from the top to the centre to the lowest, and the eventual outflow being used to irrigate the water meadows for the cattle. The sun shining on the large surface area of the ponds performed a mysterious oxygenisation and break-up of the sewage.

The combination of water, cattle and large open spaces with scattered trees and areas of shrub, was an attraction for birds: and also for crocodiles, there being two small ones measuring around four feet in residence for many months in 1985.

As in most African countries south of the Sahara, Zambia has a great variety of birds: these are resident, locally migratory within Africa, or Palearctic migrants coming south during the European winter.

Regarding the last, it is interesting to read in R.E. Moreau's "Palearctic - African Bird Migration Systems", his estimates of the numbers of birds that migrate south into Africa every autumn. Excluding seabirds and shorebirds, he estimates an overall total of 5000 million! These include a staggering 900 million Willow Warblers (i.e. nearly one fifth of the total), 375 million Sand Martins, 260 million Tree Pipits, 250 million Spotted Flycatchers, 220 million European Swallows, 200 million Blackcaps and 200 million Garden Warblers.

It is easier to accept large numbers of Swallows and Sand Martins, since they can be seen in large concentrations while feeding over water or lining up on telephone wires and barbed wire fences, than it is to accept large numbers of the other species, which do not normally tend to congregate. However I did once count over fifty Willow Warblers in a large clump of bushes on the farm. (Chiffchaffs do not venture much further south than the Sahel).

The Zambian Ornithological Society prints a monthly newsletter which includes species and numbers seen by monitors over the country. The monitors tend to be almost exclusively European, and so coverage tends to be concentrated on urban areas: however, there are some missionaries, and also people attached to governmental agricultural projects and the game parks, who report from the more out-of-the-way places, or in local parlance, "away from the-line-of-rail".

In spite of being so far from the sea, some waders were seen regularly on the mine farm, some species clearly wintering there, others

Ruff, Greenshank, Sanderling, Little Stint, Common, Green, Wood and Curlew Sandpipers and Caspian and Little Ringed Plovers. I was once delighted to see a Curlew, and on another occasion a Turnstone. The Z O S recently reported that some Knot had been seen, a first sighting for Zambia.

A school master friend, Phil Gregory, a twitcher "par excellence", went off post haste to see the Knot at a neighbouring mine farm sewage pond. Not being up in twitcher parlance I do not know whether he would have described the sighting as a megastick or a crippler. When I left Zambia in August 1985, he had over 570 ticks for the country, and still reckoned he had a long way to go.

Walking round the ponds of an evening, away from the hurly burly of the day's work and the never-ending and maddening frustrations that are the daily norm in African countries, it was balm to the soul to see a flock of 700 Ruff wheeling and jinking and swooping in synchronised unison, often so near to the surface of the still quiet water that the number would be doubled by the reflection. I remember another memorable occasion when I watched a single White Pelican foraging with six Yellow-billed Storks, three Sacred Ibis, five Little Egrets and two Great White Herons which all flew off together when I disturbed them from an enormous fig tree growing from the top of an anthill by the lowest pond. The Pelican looked like a stately Short Sunderland flying boat compared with the elegance of the other birds.

Incidentally, these anthills which are very common in that area, where they are situated very regularly about one hundred yards apart, were constructed by a species of termite that is now extinct! I always wished I could find someone who could tell me more about their history. They are immense in size, some being 20' high and 30' in diameter.

There are times when an expatriate working in a foreign land, and particularly when living on single status away from his family, experiences an "Oh-to-be-in-England-now-that-April's-there" type of nostalgia.

It was at just such a time, soon after I arrived in Zambia in 1981 (but the month was October), and when I was much depressed by mishaps and a slow rate of progress in the shaft that, taking a pre-breakfast stroll one morning I saw close by, sitting upright on a branch, a Spotted Flycatcher (one of the 250 million).

The effects of this visual sighting of an old friend were electric. My spirits soared, my heart glowed, my depression departed.

"Nothing, but nothing in the way of foul-ups that you guys can do in the shaft today", I said to the Master Sinker, "is going to get me down. I'm on the crest of an ornithological wave of good feeling towards all men."

They did their best though: lost eight hours of work on the shaft bottom due to a misfire of the complete round of 120 charged holes.

The Palaearctic migrants seen in my area included White Storks, Yellow Wagtails, Swallows, Sand Martins, Rollers, Bee-eaters, Red-backed and Lesser Grey Shrikes, and Sedge, Willow, Great Reed and Garden Warblers. Many of the Swallows, Sand Martins, Yellow Wagtails and the Warblers wintered at the mine farm, and I had one or two one-year and two-year retraps of ringed Swallows and Sand Martins.

At present there is little ringing being done in the country. When I left the number of operating ringers dropped by 50%. One erstwhile ringer, whom I met, an Englishman, had had all his gear taken off him by a gang of armed guerrillas in woods near Lusaka in the 1970's, and had taken up bowls as a hobby instead.

Alistair Scott, a school master at one of the mines, is in charge of ringing in Zambia and periodically produces a report. His last, for the years 1980-84, shows a total of only 2800 birds ringed during that period. Some of the recoveries are interesting :-

- A White-faced Owl ringed in 1983 and a Black-eyed Bulbul ringed in 1982 "were killed because of the rings on their legs. Those who killed them stated that the birds had come to bewitch them. There are doubtless many recoveries made in this way which are never reported."
- There were two recoveries in Zambia of Swallows ringed in Finland and three in Russia of Swallows ringed in Zambia.
- A White Stork ringed at Schleswig Holstein in West Germany in 1981 was recovered in Zambia in 1983. Another, ringed at the same site in 1983, was recovered that same year.

Both the White Stork recoveries were reported from Primary Schools. Alistair Scott has done a series of radio broadcasts, aimed at children, to help in creating an interest in birds and an understanding of the reasons for ringing: hopefully this will in time result in an increasing number of recoveries and a fewer number of the Owl/Bulbul incidents.

I heard recently from him that two of "my" Swallows ringed at Mufulira mine farm in February 1985, were recovered in June that year in Russia, one in Leningrad (brought in by a cat), and the other well over to the east, near Mongolia (flew into a house, ring removed, bird released).

A Greenshank that had killed itself by flying into an overhead cable near the farm was brought to me in March 1984. It had a South African ring "Inform Zoo, Pretoria", which I did. In due course I received a very detailed computer printout from the South African Bird Ringing Unit at the University of Capetown, which showed that the bird had been ringed by one A.J. Tres at Darwendale Dam, Harare, Zimbabwe, on 13 January 1982.

At Konkola mine, some 30 miles from Mufulira the sewage ponds, one of which was reed fringed, were even better for birds than those at Muf. The reasons for this were that they were located not only near the mine farm, but were also adjacent to the 9 hole golf course, which wound its way round a lake and was dotted with trees, clumps of bamboo and stretches of thick woodland.

On one particular visit I noted Spurwing, Pygmy and Knob-billed Geese, Red-billed and Yellow-billed Ducks, White-faced and Fulvous Tree Ducks, a large group of 150 Dabchicks, Blacksmith, Yellow-wattled, Spurwing and Kitlitz Plovers, Purple and Grey Herons, Fish Eagles and Bateleurs, African Jacanas, Black-winged Stilts and a whole host of shorebirds: while the woods and golf course produced Ross Turacos, Scimitarbills, Lesser Blue-eared Glossy Starlings, Black-collared Barbets with their distinctive call, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbirds and so on.

The ponds were even better, if that is the right word, for crocodiles, and I once counted seven, two of which measured an awesome 12 feet in length.



On the visit described above, my son, who was Assistant Underground Manager at Konkola's No.3 Shaft, told me that the previous week a young lad, part time caddy, had been fishing up to his knees in water in the reed-fringed pond, when he was taken by a crocodile. On hearing his screams two golfers ran to his assistance and, after beating the animal over the head with their putters, managed to rescue the boy: he was badly mauled but fortunately lived to tell the tale.

I recounted this story to two single handicap friends back in Muf, who after due consideration reckoned that in the given set of conditions they rather questioned the choice of clubs: one said he would have opted for a Sand Wedge, the other for a No.3 iron.

Konkola boasts that its golf course is one of the few in the world where a local rule allows one to remove a ball from a hippo's footprint without incurring the loss of a stroke. A footnote on the card also cautions golfers to beware of crocodiles on the 4th, 5th, 6th, 8th and 9th fairways (the hazards on the remaining four holes are restricted to those on normal courses).

Another "boast" is that the mine is the wettest in the world. My son told me that No.3 Shaft hoists 2000 tonnes of ore per day and pumps 80,000 m<sup>3</sup> (= 80,000 tonnes) of water. He reckoned they were helping to drain adjacent mines in Zaire, just across the border!

In many Third World countries there is a certain neurotic aversion to foreigners taking photographs: one forms the opinion that their governments believe that patriotic nationalism can be bolstered and concern regarding national shortcomings can be averted by promoting a suspicion of foreigners with cameras.

As an interesting example of this type of neurosis I remember the day when Phil Gregory showed me a very large "conurbation" of Angolan Cliff Swallows under a large road bridge on the outskirts of Kitwe, the "capital" of the Copperbelt. These nests are made of mud, and are built one onto another, like town houses, each with its long, vertical tunnel entrance tube: according to the Zambian "bird bible" this bridge had the only known nesting colony in Zambia. The first time he and his wife had seen it they had to leave in a hurry, as quite a large crowd of locals collected. Since to them binoculars equal cameras and a bridge is obviously of interest to foreign spies, the people were hostile.

On my way back home, the road crossed over the same river in its upper reaches and away out in the bush. So I thought I had better check out the bridge for Angolan Cliff Swallows. However, as luck would have it there was a passing local who became instantly suspicious: "Why you take picture?" he shouted. I tried to explain the difference between binoculars and a camera but got nowhere, and so proceeded to look under the bridge. There I found Zambia's second, albeit very much smaller, colony of Angolan Cliff Swallows' nests!

I heard later that for the next three days there was a police check point on the bridge, with all cars being stopped and thoroughly searched.

It is not only bridges that cause concern: a friend was arrested and all his photographic equipment confiscated for taking photographs of the local market.

I also heard of a tourist who was taking photos of the main street in Lusaka where, unknown to him, was situated the main Post Office. He was arrested, imprisoned and then deported. The story goes that he was in the Royal Navy and that, when he eventually left the service he was given as a farewell gift, a framed photograph of Lusaka's Post Office!

However, to end on a happier note, I believe that there are no known instances of this type of unpleasantness when photographs are taken in the game parks.

---

Asian Waterfowl Census - 1987 by S. Asad Akhtar

The Asian Waterfowl Census under the aegis of the International Waterfowl Research Bureau (IWRE), Slimbridge, U.K., conducted a waterfowl census on a national scale, in India. Census sheets were sent out to reliable and enthusiastic birdwatchers all over the country. In fact, people had already started asking for details and showed their eagerness to participate much before the actual preparations for the census had been done. The census was carried out on 11th and 18th January 1987.

The response was good and eager teams of birdwatchers fanned out in the countryside and brought little known marshes and tanks to the notice of conservationists. Incidentally, one major spin off of this effort was that hitherto unknown and little known wetlands and marshes received attention.

The reports, received from 15 States and Union Territories and one neighbouring country, Nepal, covered 159 sites. The most systematic report was received from the Wildlife Association of Ramnad District. In all 92 individuals and wildlife societies participated in the count. The enthusiasm shown by army personnel was praiseworthy.

Most of the participants took pains to give a detailed map of the areas surveyed and censused. To aid the participants in identification of waterfowl in the field, a small booklet has been prepared and despatched to all those who responded. A limited stock is still available which can be sent out on request. This census is intended to be organised again next year, and interested birdwatchers can get in touch with Mr. S.A. Hussain, the National Coordinator for the Asian Waterfowl Census, in India. There was a small amount of overlapping of efforts; the same area being worked out by several people. To eliminate this, we intend sending out a list of participants from a particular area, so that the teams can work out the areas after due consultation among themselves. Interested birdwatchers will be despatched the census sheets by end of November. They can ask for the same from the following address :

Mr. S.A. Hussain,  
National Coordinator,  
Asian Waterfowl Census,  
Bombay Natural History Society,  
Hornbill House,  
Bombay - 400 023

18/8/86

A Review. Birdwatcher's Digest, by Amir Ali, 14 Ch. de la Tourelle, 1209 Geneva, Switzerland.

The Birdwatcher's Digest is a bi-monthly journal published by Pardson Corporation, P.O. Box 110, Marietta, Ohio 45750, U.S.A.

Everything explodes in our day and age: not only nuclear devices. We've had the population explosion, the information explosion, the computer explosion, the pollution explosion and many others. So now we have a birdwatcher's explosion too. A generation ago, birdwatching - in India at least - was an arcane pastime; no longer so. This explosion is matched everywhere in the world, usually more so. Just as our Newsletter has played such a notable part in arousing and maintaining interest, so dozens of bird journals and bulletins do the same elsewhere.

Perhaps the most sophisticated and readable is the Birdwatcher's Digest, published from Ohio. It is a bi-monthly of about a 100 pages, excellently printed, with outstanding colour photographs (both photography and reproduction are outstanding) and interesting articles, both scholarly and chatty.

As exciting as the articles are the advertisements; quite fascinating. What a variety of bird feeders there are: the finch feeder (which comes with 3 pounds of thistle) should not be mixed up with the humming bird feeder (four floxinia feeding flowers) or the oriole feeder (glass and high impact plastics). Or the Redwood Cafe "designed by San Francisco furniture designer/craftsman Steven Sawitch". Or Funflag Windsocks, "featuring unique flower and bird images", or Bird Rubberstamps "beautiful for your stationery needs", or shirts for Birders.

And there are the tours, of course - birding tours to any place you can think of and many that you can't. The Western Himalayas as also Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, seem popular, but not so much as Ecuador/Galapagos, Costa Rica or Okefenokee.

The classified ads. also offer quite absorbing reading - but this is meant to be a review of a very worthwhile journal, not of its ads.

Roger Tory Peterson is Senior Advisor to the Digest. No need to say any more.

---

Correspondence:

Painted Storks by S. Theodore Baskaran, 124 Ashoka Pillar Road, 1st Block, Jayanagar, Bangalore - 560 011

On 7.4.87. we had been to Kokrebelur, a bird refuge about 12 km. off the Bangalore-Mysore road, near Maddur. Here, painted storks and pelicans nest in tamarind, pipal and portia trees that dot the villages. Neem trees are avoided though there are quite a few in the area. By the time we went, the stork chicks had hatched out. The storks, in addition to bringing food to the nestlings, were assiduously lining the nests with neem leaves. They would periodically fly to one of the neem trees close by and pluck a small bunch of leaves with their beaks and line the nests. We noticed similar behaviour by nesting cormorants at Mathikere, on the main



road between Mandya and Chennapatna on the Bangalore-Mysore road, where there is a mixed heronry on a gigantic pipal tree.

Were the birds doing this to counter the heat of April? If so, why only neem leaves?

=====

---

Ringing in Zambia by L.A. Hill, 64 North Parade, Grantham, Lincolnshire NG31 8AN, England.

I've been doing quite a bit of ringing in this locality, for the past year or so. My big "Pie-in-the-sky" or "Castle-in-Spain" venture at the moment is the hope that I may go out to the Cote Donana in Spain for 4-5 weeks or so in September/October this year, in order to help the Spanish staff there with their autumn ringing programme. I'd stay in the local village of Rocio. Will have to see if funds can be arranged! That's one of the troubles with retirement: the bits of pension from here and there don't add up enough for one's needs!

=====

---

Jamnagar Birds by Bantu Nansey, C/o Dr. K.S. Shah, Jamnagar - 361 008 (Saurashtra)

Jamnagar, capital of former Navanagar State, is located in Saurashtra. It is a fine place for birdwatching. Starting from the Lake, we have wire-tailed swallows and the Dusky Martins in plenty. The old monument in the centre of the lake is a favourite place of painted storks, cormorants and snake birds. The marsh formed by the lotus plants is one of the breeding places of purple moorhens, coots and pheasant tailed Jacana. At the moment the lake is dry but this November, for the first time, we saw about 300 pelicans right in the centre of the city. The greater flamingo are found throughout the year. In the lake there are shovellers, pintails, spotbills, common teal, blue winged teal, black winged stilts, avocets and occasional spoonbills.

In the Salt Works there are sea birds and waders. In the small forested area we have white cheeked bulbuls and the great Indian stone plover. We have also black necked storks, night herons, reef herons, bitterns, black winged godwit, ringed plover, redshank, terns, black headed seagulls and several more.

Even in the centre of the city we have a variety of birds and we think we are justified in calling Jamnagar a birdwatcher's paradise in Saurashtra.

=====

---

Capturing a Guillemot by Thomas Gay, 122/4A Erandavani, Pune - 411 004

The small Devonshire town in which I was born and spent my boyhood, is noted for the mile-long stretch of railway line (once the famous Great Western Railway) which runs between soft red sandstone cliffs, where the Sand Martins tunnel their nesting-holes, and the edge of the English Channel. Indeed, the sea lies so close to the permanent way that local

legend told of one high tide, years ago, when one enormous wave burst right over a running locomotive and put out the fire in the boiler!

At the mile's northern end, a huge flock of wild-duck could be seen, throughout the winter months, tossing all day long upon the waves not far from the shore, with their heads tucked warmly into their backs. At the southern end, just where the railway plunged into the first of five tunnels, a tall stone breakwater protected a small cove where ancient fishermen in navy-blue jerseys kept their rowing-boats, when not in use, drawn up on the shingle above the high tide mark.

To this cove, one evening in late summer, came my teenage cousin and I, to stroll along the edge of the in-coming tide. Suddenly I noticed a dark, spear-shaped body just beneath the surface, half moving and half being pushed towards the beach. It took me a few seconds to recognise it as a bird, but as soon as I did, I stepped into the shallow water and tried to catch the creature. It shrank from my grasp in such a half-hearted way that I quickly grabbed it and found that it was a Guillemot (*Uria adge*) greatly exhausted and with its white underparts blackened and oily.

My cousin and I carried the bird home and placed it in a half-filled hip-bath in our roomy greenhouse. For two days we fed it on fresh sardines, which it seized and swallowed greedily, but soon brought up again. It seemed to be unable to retain any food, and by the third day it was dead -- as we presumed, of starvation. We never realised that the unfortunate guillemot was a victim of one of the oil spills which were afterwards to become so well-known, but in those days had scarcely begun to attract public notice. What we should have done, I suppose, was to bathe the bird in kerosene ("paraffin" to the British) and rid it of all trace of oil. But even that might have been ineffective if "Little William" (which is what the name means) had swallowed enough oil to rot all his insides.

Capturing this wild bird was a great thrill for a schoolboy; but it would have been an even greater thrill if we could have saved its life and returned it to a clean ocean.

---

Oriental Bird Club, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, U.K.

The Oriental Bird Club (OBC), established for all those interested in Oriental birds and their conservation, is hoping to attract more members from India, with its new facility allowing subscriptions to be paid in rupees.

The Club was set up in 1985, and has since grown rapidly with membership now spanning 30 countries around the world. Its sphere of interest - the Oriental region - embraces the entire Indian sub-continent, South East Asia, the Philippines, Taiwan and much of Indonesia and China. OBC aims to encourage an interest in the birds of the region, of which there are over 2,000 species, both resident and migratory, and their conservation. It liaises closely with other organisations with similar goals.

The Club has recently established a conservation fund which has already supported the work of the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP) in its project in Thailand for the recently rediscovered Gurney's

Every year members receive FORKTAIL, the Club's journal, the first two issues of which have been widely acclaimed. Just some of the papers published so far include:

- \* Gurney's Pitta Pitta gurneyi, a detailed analysis of the birds past and future, an article which was instrumental in identifying the species last known, range and habitat, a search of which led to the bird's rediscovery in Thailand during June 1986.
- \* A study of some important birds and forests in Nepal, including a survey of habitat threats and population changes of more than 30 birds for which Nepal is thought to be a vital area.
- \* An analysis of how selective timber logging in peninsular Malaysian rainforest is affecting the area's avifauna.

In addition, OBC publishes two Bulletins each year containing news, features and reviews relating to birds in the region.

Membership of the Club has always been open to all but many people living in India have found it difficult to pay subscriptions in pounds sterling. After much negotiation OBC has now opened a new bank account in India allowing payment to be made in rupees. Membership costs Rs.125/- (£6), or for those living in the region and belonging to other ornithological or natural history societies, Rs.105/- (£5).

Full details of the account are as follows :

Bank : Grindlays Bank plc, 90 Mahatma Gandhi Road,  
Post Box 141, Bombay - 400 001.

Account Name : Oriental Bird Club.

Account Number : 11155-2

If subscriptions or donations to the OBC Conservation Fund are paid into the account, it is essential that members also inform the Club (in England) how much they have paid in and what it is for.

With this new facility it is hoped that many more will be able to join the OBC. The Oriental Bird Club can be contacted c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, United Kingdom.

---

---



Grams: PORTRAIT

Phone: 570776



# Messrs. G. G. WELLING

PHOTOGRAPHERS & DEALERS

113, MAHATMA GANDHI ROAD, BANGALORE - 560 001



FOR EVERYTHING  
IN  
PHOTOGRAPHY

# DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES

—a non-profit society

22, PALAM MARG, NEW DELHI - 110 057

In his quest for a better life, man has come a long way. He has probed and solved many mysteries of the universe—of time and space, of matter and mind, of life and death. He has conquered long dreaded diseases, built complex systems and miraculous machines, extended his reach into the most inhospitable corners of this planet.

## Development

Science and technology have given him now the ability to choose a future and design new paths of development: the ability to be a master of his destiny to a degree inconceivable only a few generations ago.

## For whom?

Yet one half of the world's people live in poverty. And everywhere, the environment, on which our and our children's well-being so heavily depends, is rapidly deteriorating.

## Science and Technology

Science and technology offer the knowledge and tools to fashion a just and long-term development—one which improves the quality of life for all without destroying the resources which will sustain future generations. The challenge is to translate the scientific knowledge and technological tools into products for the welfare of the people.

## How?

This technology must be relevant, adaptable and in tune with local resources, skills and needs. In other words, Appropriate Technology. Technology that is useable, affordable, renewable. Technology which opens the doors to opportunities, work satisfaction and material rewards that never existed before. A co-operative effort in which every-one gains and no one loses.

\*A technology where man is the master, not the slave.

\*A technology which enhances man's spirit without cramping his mind.

\*A technology which generates sustained benefits rather than temporary relief.

\*A technology that conserves resources and respects the limits of the environment.

\*A technology which creates wealth for the community and not merely money for the few.

\*A technology that is economically viable, and widely available.

—A technology for the people

Front Cover: BAYA

Editor: Zafar Futehally

Dodda Gubbi Post, Bangalore - 562 134

Courtesy E. HANUMANTHA RAO

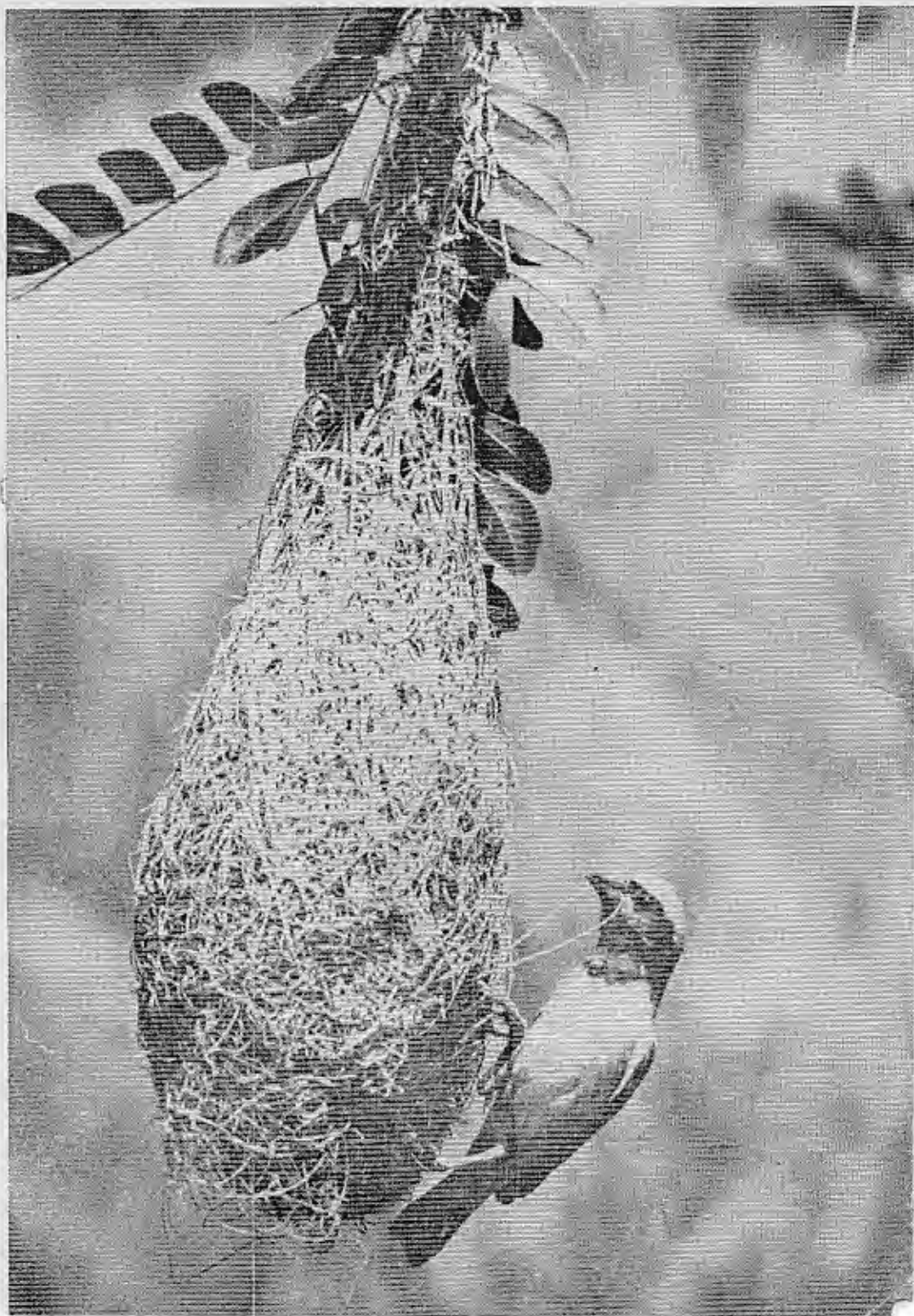
Annual Subscription Rs. 20/-

# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

---

VOL. XXVII NO. 11 & 12

NOV. - DEC. 1987





BETTER COVERAGE AND A SOFTER FABRIC  
FEEL IS AN ASSURANCE FROM  
**BARODA RAYON**

Baroda Rayon offers innumerable and very versatile varieties in  
POLYESTER TEXTURISED, POLYESTER NYLON  
& VISCOSE FILAMENT YARNS

**S U P R E M O**

Supremo tangled Polyester Yarn a better  
alternative to twisted yarn, comes  
in 72/32 denier

**S A N G A M**

Sangam yarn for shirtings a unit blend of  
Nylon and Polyester filament  
yarn in 120/34 denier

BARODA RAYON  
the House of Quality Yarns

**THE BARODA RAYON CORPORATION LIMITED**

HOECHST HOUSE, 193, NARIMAN POINT  
B O M B A Y - 4 0 0 0 2 1

Telex : 011 3436 / 4719

Phone : 232030, 230734

*Regd. Office :*

P. O. Baroda Rayon, Udhna, Dist. : Surat 394 240

Telex : 0178 217

Phone : 88371

NEWSLETTER  
FOR BIRDPATCHERS

VOL. XXVII

No.11 & 12

November-December 1987

---

CONTENTS

Editorial

- \* 1987
- \* The Asian Wetland Bureau.
- \* Oriental Bird Club.
- \* Asian Waterfowl Count by S.A. Hussain.
- \* Kadalundy - A Unique Bird Preserve by L. Namassivayan, P.K. Uthaman  
and R. Venugopalan.
- \* Some Rare Birds Reappear in Kutch by M.K. Himmatsinhji.

Correspondence:

- \* Comments on the Newsletter by Lavkumar Khacher,
  - \* Editorial Problems and Errors by Thomas Gay, Daniel Wesley and  
Indira Kumar Sharma.
  - \* Weaver Birds by M. Shashidhara and Praveen Karanth.
  - \* Sense of Smell in Birds by U. Harish Kumar.
  - \* Save the Birds, Book of the Year by Christoph Imboden.
  - \* Swift Disposal by T.R. Sridhar.
  - \* Neem Leaves in Bird Nests by S. Devasahayan.
-

Editorial

1987

Undoubtedly bird watching is catching on and the most unlikely people are now getting interested in observing the presence and movements of feathered creatures. The lack of cheap binoculars is a major handicap and I wish that our ordinance factories would produce a cheap model for civilian use, apart from what they manufacture for the Army. We now have several subscribers (donors from 1988 onwards) from the Army. Will one of them explore the possibilities?

My pleasantest memories of the present year are connected with harriers and kestrels. It is difficult to erase from memory the sight of a kestrel hovering overhead, or of a harrier skimming over the land in search of prey. I was apprehensive that with large open grazing areas near our home over which the birds reconnoitered, being converted to ragi, harriers would vanish to other regions. But I find that not only harriers, but also brahminy kites are able to make a living by scouring areas thickly planted with ragi. In any case, the ragi will soon be cut down and the land resume its open character. What has possibly affected bird life is the extensive planting of eucalyptus. Though some eucalyptus plantations with which I am familiar, have become a roosting place for crows and mynas, on the whole eucalyptus is not a tree which birds welcome. I am not very sure about this but I think that the leaf litter below eucalyptus (and even below exotics like acacia auriculiformis) harbour little insect life, and hence one sees no groups of earth scratching babblers beneath them. This lack of bird and insect life must also be detrimental to the soil.

Looking back on the Newsletter volumes of the year, I find that there are very few articles which reflect the pleasures of bird watching. We want more of the type of articles written in the past by Neelakantan, Lavkumar, Stairmand, Stewart Mellaish and several others. Some of the best writings of naturalists consist of a healthy blend of scientific facts, with readable accounts of the environment in which these observations were made. Good writing is on the decline because we don't spend enough time over creating a well written article. Let us not be so rushed in 1988.

=====

The Asian Wetland Bureau

A most attractive and useful brochure has been received from the Institute of Advanced Studies, University of Malaya, Lembah Pantai, 59100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Let it speak for itself:

"What is the IPT Asian Wetland Bureau? The IPT Asian Wetland Bureau is an independent international organisation which aims to promote protection and sustainable utilization of wetland resources in Asia, in conjunction with both governmental and non-governmental agencies.



"The history of IPT Asian Wetland Bureau goes back to 1983. In that year, INTERWADER was established principally to identify wetlands of importance to migratory waterbirds and promote their conservation. It set up a network of coordinators and projects in 10 Asian countries. Over 40 projects were completed, including wetland evaluation surveys in 6 Asian countries. The emphasis of its work changed progressively from species studies to wetland habitat studies, combined with training and education."

"As a result of this change in emphasis, INTERWADER and the Institute of Advanced Studies (IPT) of the University of Malaya created the IPT Asian Wetland Bureau in March 1987. The IPT Asian Wetland Bureau will be operated by former INTERWADER staff. It will also be able to draw on the expertise of IPT and all other Faculties of the University of Malaya. INTERWADER projects will be continued as a programme of the IPT Asian Wetland Bureau. AWB deals with wetland inventories, research and management, waterbird studies, training and education, EIA's and provides a wetland database and information centre."

"How can IPT-AWB help you? If your agency works in the field of wetland conservation or management, you can request technical assistance or, in some cases, funding for joint projects."

"If you are developing education and training materials or management guidelines for wetland areas anywhere in the world, we can provide advice and assistance. "

"If you are a wetlands researcher, you can ask for publications and advice from the wetland information service or participate in our regional research programmes."

"If you are a company or agency planning development of wetlands areas, you can ask IPT-AWB to conduct feasibility studies or Environmental Impact Assessments. The risk to the environment is minimised and official environmental quality criteria are more easily met. A sound ecological development means a sound socio-economic development."

"How can you help IPT-AWB? Funding is urgently needed for many conservation, management and basic research projects on wetlands throughout Asia. This is where you can help. Every donation, however small, will be greatly appreciated."

"If you are a wetland developer, note that earnings from environmental impact assessment consultancy work by IPT-AWB are ploughed back into further conservation projects."

=====

Oriental Bird Club

Bulletin No.6, Autumn 1987, has been received. It carries an interesting piece on India (Page 36), though I cannot find any reference to *Phylloscopus schwarzi* in the Synopsis by Ripley.

"A new species for India was recorded in February; a Radde's Warbler Phylloscopus schwarzi at Ranthambhor on the 15th (SCM). Two other interesting species recorded from the latter locality during February were Spotted Creeper Salpornis spilonotus (SCM) and Stoliczka's Bushchat Saxicola macrorhyncha (AP, SCM).

"The failure of the monsoon during 1986 resulted in the marshes at Bharatpur being reduced to two pumped pools. Egyptian vultures Neophron percnopterus were unusually abundant, feeding on the exposed pond turtles. During February heron Ardea and egret Egretta numbers were well below the norm, while pheasant-tailed jacanas Hydrophasianus chirurgus were virtually absent. In addition, only one pair of Dusky Eagle Owls Bubo coromandus successfully bred owing to disturbance. The lack of water did, however, result in spectacular dusk concentrations of cranes Grus on one of the pools. On 21 February 400+ sarus cranes Grus antigone, 38 common cranes G. grus and 32 siberian cranes G. leucogeranus were present (PJ). During this month two pied harriers Circus melanoleucos were seen on a number of occasions and a Tytler's leaf warbler Phylloscopus tytleri was observed on the 5th (AP). This last record is of particular interest, since Bharatpur is well north of the few other winter records of the species from the Western Ghats. "

=====

Asian Waterfowl Count by S.A. Hussain, National Coordinator, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, A.B. Singh Road, Bombay - 400 023

Mr. Hussain has sent in a useful report about the effort which was made in 1987, together with some guidelines, about what needs to be done in 1988 - which, incidentally, is round the corner.

I suggest that all of you who are interested in participating in the count, write to Mr. Hussain for these guidelines, and also purchase a copy of the Waterfowl Indicator, 2nd Revised Edition, by S.A. Hussain and Carl D'Silva - Price Rs.10/-.

From S.A. Hussain's report it seems that during the 1987 count a total of 147 species were listed from such rare ones as the Great Crested Grebe, the Long Toed Stint, to the Cattle Egret.

In the report S.A. Hussain says "As it happens the first count this year was an initial exercise, which enabled us to get a grip on modus operandi. We now have a committed group of participants who, we are sure, will provide a solid basis for a regular, annual exercise."

"Waterfowl counts are an essentially volunteer effort by all those who care for our waterfowl and wetlands. It is neither high scientific nor purely amateurist but a responsible and sincere effort by birdwatchers and conservationists to understand and assess the waterfowl and wetland resources of our subcontinent. "

=====

Kadalundy - A Unique Bird Preserve by L. Namassivayan, P.K. Uthaman and R. Venugopalan, 13/369 Kemmath Lane, Kozhikode - 673 002 (Kerala)

### Introduction

The Kadalundy Estuary, some 20 km south of Calicut town is exceptionally rich in birdlife, especially the winter migrants, and has the potential of a bird sanctuary. The concentration and diversity of bird species recorded here by a team of the Kerala Natural History Society (KNHS), Calicut, points to its potential as a bird preserve which has to be and can easily be preserved in perpetuity. As far as is known, no other place in Kerala harbours a comparable richness of a bird species.

### Location and Topography

Some 20 km south of Calicut town, the Kadalundy river joins the Arabian sea, near the Kadalundi town. This small town is noted for its trade in marine products, coir and lime-shell. Before joining the sea, the river empties itself into a lagoon some 50 acre in extent lying between the rail bridge over the river and the sea. This lagoon is connected to the sea in the southern corner by a narrow channel 10-12 metre broad. A piece of dry land abuts into the lagoon beneath the rail-bridge, and during low tides extensive mud-flats are exposed in the estuary. These observations have almost exclusively been confined to these mudflats.

While the lagoon's approximate area would be around 50 acres, the area of the tidal mudflats during low tide would be around 15 to 20 acres. As the lagoon opens to the sea at one corner through a narrow channel only, the turbulence of the sea does not intrude into the lagoon. The water is brackish, and the surface of the mudflats teems with micro-fauna. It is normal to see a number of fishermen catching fish and collecting mussels, crabs, etc. from the lagoon.

### Birdlife

The observations from 1985 to date have proved that the estuary is exceptionally rich in birdlife. When the current series of observation began in early September 1985, the onward migration of birds was surprisingly in full swing. It seems likely that the first migrants had started arriving even earlier. Hundreds of waders and thousands of gulls and terns are seen in the estuary throughout the migration season. Also our observations indicate that Kadalundy may be an important staging/feeding area where migrants on their way to the south rest and feed. It has also been found that a sizeable population of migrants over-winter here.

The following list will have some idea of the birds that have been recorded here during our observations. It is worth remarking that some of the birds like the oystercatcher, the grey plover, the bartailed godwit, the dunlin, the sandwich tern, the avocet, etc., are either new additions to the Kerala list or have been very rarely reported. There are very few places like this elsewhere on the Kerala coast. Kadalundy also demonstrates the urgent need for further field enquiries with a view to locating any other similar places that might have gone unrecorded.



### Man-Nature Interaction

Retting of coconut husk, and dredging of the river bed for sand are two of the important economic activities carried on in the estuary. Retting is done on an extensive scale on the mudflats. As coir manufacture is a major economic activity in the area, any shortsighted crying halt to this activity, without due consideration of the various socio-economic aspects involved, might not be in the long term interests of conservation. At the same time, it is pointed out that retting has a definite degrading effect on the estuarine ecosystem and that it has been responsible for killing off the emergent mangroves and reeds in the estuary. Further research into this aspect and actions based on its finding is necessary. As indicated above, fishing, catching crabs, mussels, etc., are done regularly in the lagoon, and this may not pose any threat to the estuary or its birdlife. Needless to say, all these organisms form the major source of protein for a section of the local population.

### Prospects for Conservation

At present the main threats to the estuary and its avifauna are from retting activities and shooting of birds. Also it has long been recognised that in respect of Wetland ecosystems like this, the source of disturbance can lie in far away places, in some cases even across national boundaries, as in the case of acid-rain. The discharge of harmful effluents upstream can wreak havoc with the estuarine ecosystem. Hence whatever happens to the river throughout its entire length is likely to have an impact on the estuary. The fragility and vulnerability of this ecosystem has to be borne in mind while developmental issues upstream are decided upon. Thus a decision to conserve the estuary, would in effect mean a decision to conserve the entire riverine ecosystem.

### A KNHS Initiative for Conservation

There have been reports of shooting of birds at the estuary. The KNHS, Calicut, had made the conservation of the Kadalundy estuary the focus of its Wetland Conservation Campaign conducted in connection with the Environmental Month, 1986. As part of this campaign a memorandum was submitted to the Assistant Collector, Calicut, to prohibit the shooting of birds in and around the estuary. The response was immediate and the necessary directions have been given to local Government officials. This was widely covered in the press and has generated tremendous enthusiasm and awareness among the local people. Students from some of the local schools have been taken on field trips and the importance and value of such wetlands impressed upon them. Slide shows have also been held at various places, including Kadalundy and nearby villages, highlighting the need for conserving such ecosystems. Hoardings in the vernacular prohibiting the shooting of birds in and around the estuary are put up.

### Conclusion

Shallow coastal estuaries, like the one at Kadalundy, are some of the world's most productive environments. In a sense these wetlands are an international resource. Migratory bird species which breed elsewhere use the estuary as wintering grounds, and these wetlands provide important nurseries

for fish that are caught many miles off-shore. They support whole ecosystems, and millions of people the world over. Conserving the Kadalundy estuary will, in effect, be a valuable contribution by the people of Kerala to international efforts in the conservation of migrant birds and marine life. Moreover this contribution can be made at very little cost to the State exchequer.

Resident Birds (which nest and breed within the State) : Little grebe, grey heron, little green bittern, pond heron, large egret (R)?, little egret, reef heron (R)?, night heron, chestnut bittern, pariah kite, brahminy kite, roseringed parakeet, koel, crow pheasant, palm swift, pied kingfisher, whitebreasted kingfisher, storkbilled kingfisher, small blue kingfisher, redrumped swallow, black drongo, ashy swallow shrike, redwattled lapwing, common myna, grey headed myna, house crow, jungle crow, wren, large pied wagtail, house sparrow, yellow throated? sparrow, openbill stork.

Migratory Birds: Spotbill duck, common teal?, osprey, oystercatcher, snipes, blackwinged stilt, small Indian pratincole, grey plover, great stone plover?, golden plover, large sand plover, little ringed plover, lesser sand plover, kentish plover, whimbrel, curlew, bartailed godwit, redshank, greenshank, marsh sandpiper, green sandpiper, wood sandpiper, terek sandpiper, common sandpiper, turnstone, eastern knot?, sanderling, little stint, temminck's stint, dunlin, curlew sandpiper, ?? spoonbilled sandpiper, lesser blackbacked gull, brownheaded gull, whiskered tern, gullbilled tern, caspian tern, little tern, large crested tern, lesser crested tern, sandwich tern, bluetailed bee-eater, eastern swallow, grey wagtail, white wagtail, yellow headed wagtail, marsh harrier, avocet.

=====

---

Some Rare Birds Reappear in Kutch by M.K. Himmatsinhji, Jubilee Ground, Bhuj, Kutch

Before writing about the occurrence of the rare birds, it would not be out of place to briefly describe the geographical position of this district and the migration of birds that takes place in it. For Kutch, excepting a big portion of the Rann, situated between 22° 47' to 24°N and 68° 25' to 71° 11' E, is ornithologically a very important and interesting west-north-west portion of India, in that it lies on the migration route of many birds which come into our country from beyond our borders via Baluchistan and Sind (Pakistan). In this process of migration a regular stream of these incoming birds arrive or start coming in autumn, some staying in Kutch, while the others passing on after brief stops and spreading into the other parts of the country. This movement is reversed towards the end of the cold weather and the beginning of spring when the birds return to their summer quarters. Then there are the passage migrants which arrive here towards the end of the rainy season, stay on for a while and then fly on continuing their journey to their wintering grounds on the African continent following the Arabian route. However, on their return in spring, they follow a different route and miss Kutch altogether.

What is stated above regarding the migration of birds only holds good in normal years having moderate to good rainfall. For then sufficient amount of food is available to the avians. Whereas in famine years the volume of bird

migration is much less. In this respect the situation this year is unprecedented; for after three seasons of scarcity of rain, during the last monsoon season we had no rain at all and as a result of which very severe famine conditions prevail; and the position in the neighbouring areas of Sind (Pakistan) and in Rajasthan is no different. So birds that rarely come into Kutch have been seen recently.

The first one was the barheaded goose - Anser indicus - which was seen at the Rudramata Dam, about 14 km north of Bhuj. Three geese were observed on 6.11.87. Even when in the years gone by the greylag geese - Anser anser - used to come in large numbers regularly to Kutch (they have stopped coming here since about the last five decades), the barheads were extremely rare. My grandfather used to have a duck pond in our garden in which many of the wild ducks used to be kept. As a small boy I used to go regularly to watch these ducks; and I remember that amongst these captive waterfowl there used to be a barheaded goose. This one was perhaps winged (wounded in the wing) in one of the shoots they used to organize in those days; and this childhood memory goes back over fifty years! Thus the present record of this goose comes after well over half a century.

The second rare waterfowl was the common shelduck - Tadorna tadorna - which was seen on 13.11.87. at the same dam. This duck was first recorded in Kutch in 1921. Thereafter two of them were seen near Mandvi on 4.12.66. by the Maharao of Kutch. Thus the present sighting of the common shelduck took place after a lapse of 21 years. Some numbers of this waterfowl visit Sind regularly.

On 3.12.87. two Spotted billed or grey pelican - Pelicanus philippensis - were observed. One of our club members reported having seen the little gull on the Rudramata Dam, so I went there, but failed to come across the gull; however, along with four rosy pelican there were these grey pelican which is also a rare occurrence, and as far as it is known, this is the first record of P. philippensis for this area.

The fourth bird seen, also at the abovementioned dam, was the trumpeter bullfinch - Carpodacus githagineus - which too is a rarity here. This finch has visited Kutch for the third successive cold season. It was first reported as visiting Kutch during the last century by one Capt. C.D. Lester who had then revised the Kutch Bird List. The late Dr. Salim Ali did not meet with it in the course of his survey of Kutch prior to the publication of the 'Birds of Kutch' in which he remarks: "I do not know how far Lester is justified in including this species in his Kutch list." This bullfinch first appeared at the 'Khari' river near Bhuj in February 1986. I saw them on 7.3.86, then on 23.2.87, and recently they were reported seen at the Rudramata Dam in November this year (I came across them there on 3.12.87).

We have a nature club called the Pelican Nature Club of Kutch whose members take a keen interest in nature in general and birds in particular. It is a matter of great pleasure and satisfaction for me to observe their enthusiasm and keenness for this hobby. A couple of them have acquired good knowledge about birds; and now more often than not I can safely rely on their identification of birds. In fact the rare birds mentioned above were all first



seen and reported by our member, Mr. Navin Bapat, who had gone bird watching on his own to the dam concerned. I sincerely hope an increasing number of people in our country take constructive interest in and study nature and its denizens and add to the knowledge of the vast subject in which there still remain many gaps to be filled.

=====

---

Correspondence:

Comments on the Newsletter by Lavkumar Khacher, Sundarvan, S. Mangaldas Marg, Jodhpur Tekra, Ahmedabad - 380 015

With reference to the Newsletter for Birdwatchers, Vol. XXVII, No. 9 & 10. My congratulations for having kept the Newsletter going for 27 years. Perhaps other readers will be amused when I write that on my first visit to Madras I had made up my mind to meet and go out birdwatching with a regular contributor to the Newsletter - V. Santhanam. I had expected someone quite aged and doddering. What a surprise when my "hero" turned out to be a youngster not yet in college! I must here mention the names of some youngsters I have been privileged to know: Teaj Mundkur, Tejas Gole, Parves Pandya, Farhan Thakur Prakash(?) Gogte and Rishad Navroji, quite made by pragmatic standards of society, sits out in hot stuffy hides observing and photographing raptors.

One of the great tragedies of the times has been that the joy of being a plain and simple birdwatcher seems to be a thing of the past. Everyone apparently is wanting to be a scientist.

May I comment on Dr. Ravi C. Nayar's notes on birds seen on his trek to Gangotri and Gaumukh in the Himalayas. Recording 19 species is indeed very very poor batting average. Of these, at least ten could be seen in any garden in the plains. Is Dr. Nayar sure of his Indian robin, pied bush chat and purple sunbird above Gangotri? This would be an all time high for the species concerned. I'm not too happy with his pale harrier in the Himalayas and may not his black drongo be largely the grey drongo? Surely too, a yellowbill'd chough as low as Uttarkashi is a record, and what is that silver fox?

May I suggest that we follow a common practice of writing bird names? Remove hyphens in case of red-rumped swallow (page 11) and make it redrumped swallow, and write redbilled blue magpie instead of red billed blue magpie (page 8). The Handbook should be standard and names checked against those in it.

=====

Editorial Problems and Errors by Thomas Gay, 122/4-A Erandavane, Pune - 411 004;  
H. Daniel Wesley, 126 Ramalinganagar South, Tiruchirapalli - 620 017; and  
Indra Kumar Sharma, Bhagwati Bhavan, Ratanada Road, Jodhpur - 342 020.

This refers to your Editorial in the Sep-Oct issue of the Newsletter, and the para about "The Problems of Editing."

I am sure all your readers will endorse and support the policy you propose to follow. Clarity and intelligibility are of the first importance. To this I would only add that sometimes even those whose mother tongue is English are not above writing unclear matter. I have noticed this tendency even in "scientific" writers for whom clarity should be a matter of especial care.

Let me quote two imaginary examples:

1) Mr. Joshi met Mr. Apte as he was coming out of the Bank.

(Which of them was coming out of the Bank?)

2) There are tricky words in English whose exact meaning is capable of varying from one extreme to the other. Consider the sentence: "The apparent benefits of this course of action will soon be found illusory, as will become apparent to all observers."

(Here "apparent" is used in two mutually contradictory senses: (a) seeming, but not real; (b) evident, obvious).

"Indian English", which I have learned to regard with affection and respect, will suit us all very well, so long as it is clear and intelligible. Success to your Editing Pen!

Thomas Gay

-----  
Going through the Newsletter one gets the impression that there is no editing done at all. On page 8 & 9 there are many errors in the spellings of the scientific names of the birds mentioned. The present name of the Lesser Flamingo is Phoeniconaias minor.

H. Daniel Wesley.

-----  
Kindly note my genuine complaint that you give preference to writings of your friends who hold high posts or status instead of worthwhile articles. The Editor should give more weight to original and critical findings instead of whimsical views of some persons.

Indra Kumar Sharma  
-----  
=====

Weaver Birds by M. Shashidhara, State Bank of Mysore, Kanakatte, Arsikere Taluk (Karnataka), and K. Praveen Karanth, 1706, 17th Cross, Magadi Chord Road, Vijayanagar, Bangalore - 560 040.

Baya Weaver Birds - whether harmful to paddy crop? It is a pretty sight near our house, where four coconut trees hanging over paddy fields are usually full of baya nests during July to September of each year, coinciding with the monsoons. But one evening I see a sad sight of bayas' plight. A man armed with a stick was removing all the baya nests, numbering about 60, and collecting the chicks wherever present in the nest. He belongs to a community which relish baya's meat. On enquiring, he said that the bayas, numbering hundreds, eat much of the paddy of the surrounding fields during the breeding season. I argued a little and failed to convince him that bayas are not harmful to paddy crop. Moreover, I had no knowledge whether the bayas feed mainly on insects or cereals during breeding season. Please inform me of the details. Other readers and birdwatchers might have also faced a similar situation.

Anyhow, within two days, two nests are already built by the baya weavers but, I presume, the breeding season was over.

M. Shashidhara

(During the breeding season - which in many places coincides with the growing season of paddy - seed eating birds like bayas, feed their young on soft bodied insects harmful to agriculture. Farmers appear to be mistaken in the belief that birds are harmful to agriculture. On balance it is almost certain that they do more good than harm. (Editor) )

Strange Nesting Habits of Munias. On the way to Magdi on 12.9.87. we found a pair of white throated munias nesting in the abandoned nest of a baya. The munias were filling up the half built nest of the baya with fibres. On another occasion also we came across white throated munias nesting in a baya's nest in Panchavati farm near Bannerghatta on 8.11.87. I wonder whether these munias appropriate only bayas' nests or also nests of other species.

K. Praveen Karanth

=====

---

Sense of smell in birds by U. Harish Kumar, "Merlin Nature Club", 13, 8th Cross, 30th Main Road, Sarakki, I.T.I. Layout, J.P. Nagar I Phase, Bangalore - 560 078

While writing about the development of sense in birds, our late Dr. Salim Ali says, "..... smell is practically absent." Well, this has held good until now, but, let us see what the latest experiments have got to say regarding the sense of smell in birds.



I recently read an old 'Reader's Digest' magazine, wherein I came upon an article which will be of some interest to our birdwatchers and to the readers of this Newsletter. This article is a compilation from the "Sunday Times", London, by Bryan Silcock under the title "Do pigeons smell their way home?"

Furnished below is an extract of the above-mentioned article :

"Homing pigeons probably use their sense of smell to get back to base, according to new research in Europe. Among experiments that suggest this conclusion are the following :-

- (a) Birds deprived of their sense of smell, either fail to get home from distant, unfamiliar release sites or do so only after long delays.
- (b) Birds kept in aviaries protected from wind-borne smells cannot orient themselves homeward at the start of a flight. If the wind direction in the aviary is reversed with a fan, most pigeons set off in a direction away from home.
- (c) Pigeons allowed to breathe only filtered air on the journey to the release site are often confused in choosing the right direction at the start of their homeward flights. They can also be systematically tricked into setting off in the wrong direction by giving them air collected at other places to breathe during the outward journey.

"Professor Floriano Papi of the University of Pisa in Italy, and other Italian and German scientists involved in the experiments do not suggest that smell is the pigeon's only means of navigation. This means of navigation is almost certainly integrated by the use of the sun and of visual landmarks, and these birds may also have some kind of biological magnetic compass."

"However, the latest experiments suggest that smell may be important even over distances of hundreds of kilometres. When pigeons from a loft in Florence were taken with plugged nostrils to northern Bavaria on the other side of the Alps, they showed no sense of the homeward direction on release, whereas birds transported with unplugged nostrils did."

=====

---

Save the Birds, Book of the Year by Christoph Imboden, Director, ICBP,  
219c Huntingdon Road, Cambridge, CB3 0DL, U.K.

You might be interested to hear that ICBP has been closely involved in the preparation of a popular book (Save the Birds) which was recently published in Britain, Germany, Switzerland, Netherlands and Sweden. The main concept of the book is to show the conservation problems in the world's major ecosystems and how they affect the birds and ultimately man also. The book has been very well received and at the recent Frankfurt Book Fair was chosen as the 'Book of the Year'.

=====

Swift Disposal by T.R. Sridhar, No.4, Second Street, Bakthavatsalam Nagar, Adyar, Madras - 600 020.

The Kapaleeswarar temple in Madras, like all sizeable temples, has its resident colony of house swifts (Apus affinis) which have been noticed to nest in the corners of the wall under the entrance 'gopuram'.

On the morning of 22nd August 1987, at around 10.30 a.m., as I was leaving the temple premises I glanced up at the nests of the swifts. The nests were built in the corners of a loft and were attached to the ceiling and sides of the wall. The parent birds swooped down at astonishing speed and halted in front of the nest in a flutter of wings. It was truly amazing that they did not crash headlong on to the wall.

Perched on the loft was a jungle crow. In the brief moment that I glanced up I saw a swift fly through the entrance towards the clustered nests. In what seemed an instinctive action, the crow on the loft threw its head to one side and caught the hurtling swift in its beak! The loud squalls of the unfortunate house swift showed that the crow had been quite effective with its catch. Swift disposal ?!

=====

---

Neem Leaves in Bird Nests by S. Devashayan, National Research Centre for Spices, Post Box No.1701, Marikunnu, Calicut - 673 012

I read with interest the observation of Sri S. Theodore Baskaran that storks and cormorants were lining their nests with neem leaves (Newsletter for Birdwatchers 27 (5&6):10-11). It is well known that neem leaves possess insecticidal properties and the behaviour of these birds would have definitely kept under check the mallophagans, mites and other parasites of birds that abound in the nests. An examination of nests lined with neem leaves and those without the same would have been quite interesting.

## THE NEWSLETTER 1988

As was indicated earlier, henceforth the Newsletter costs will be covered by donations and not subscriptions. Any amount of Rs 20/- or over from India, and £ 10/- or \$ 20/- from abroad, will be the charge for the calendar year 1988. Send Money Orders (not Postal Certificates) or cheques, in the name of Newsletter for Birdwatchers.

Do look out, regularly, for the birds of your surroundings and write about them. Articles relating to conservation of bird habitats would be particularly welcome. Also about birds which have got used to the human habitat and survive happily in our cities.

Hope 1988 will be peaceful and ecologically satisfactory. All good wishes.

ZAFAR FUTEHALLY  
Dodda Gubbi  
Bangalore - 562 134

## DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES

- a non-profit society

22, Palam Marg, New Delhi - 110 057

In his quest for a better life, man has come a long way. He has probed and solved many mysteries of the universe - of time and space, of matter and mind, of life and death. He has conquered long dreaded diseases, built complex systems and miraculous machines, extended his reach into the most inhospitable corners of this planet.

### Development

Science and technology have given him now the ability to choose a future and design new paths of development; the ability to be a master of his destiny to a degree inconceivable only a few generations ago.

### For Whom?

Yet one half of the world's people live in poverty. And everywhere, the environment, on which our and our children's well-being so heavily depends, is rapidly deteriorating.

### Science and Technology

Science and technology offer the knowledge and tools to fashion a just and long-term development - one which improves the quality of life for all without destroying the resources which will sustain future generations. The challenge is to translate the scientific knowledge and technological tools into products for the welfare of the people.

### How?

This technology must be relevant, adaptable and in tune with local resources, skills and needs. In other words, Appropriate Technology. Technology that is usable, affordable, renewable. Technology which opens the doors to opportunities, work satisfaction and material rewards that never existed before. A cooperative effort in which everyone gains and no one loses.

- \* A technology where man is the master, not the slave.
- \* A technology which enhances man's spirit without cramping his mind.
- \* A technology which generates sustained benefits rather than temporary relief.
- \* A technology that conserves resources and respects the limits of the environment.
- \* A technology which creates wealth for the community and not merely money for the few.
- \* A technology that is economically viable, and widely available.

- A technology for the people.



213  
For

BIRDWATCHING IN THE HIMALAYAS

Contact

Lavkumar Khacher's Himalayan  
Environment Center,  
Vashishta,

MANALI - 175 131

---

Front Cover: BAYA

Editor: Zafar Futehally,  
Dodda Gubbi Post,  
BANGALORE - 562 134

Courtesy: E. HANUMANTHA RAO

Donation Rs.20/- or above.

# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

---



VOL. XXVII NO. 7 & 8

JULY - AUG. 1987

BETTER COVERAGE AND A SOFTER FABRIC  
FEEL IS AN ASSURANCE FROM  
**BARODA RAYON**

Baroda Rayon offers innumerable and very versatile varieties in  
POLYESTER TEXTURISED, POLYESTER NYLON  
& VISCOSE FILAMENT YARNS

**S U P R E M O**

Supremo tangled Polyester Yarn a better  
alternative to twisted yarn, comes  
in 76 / 32 denier

**S A N G A M**

Sangam yarn for shirtings a unique blend of  
Nylon and Polyester tangled filament  
yarn in 120 / 34 denier

**BARODA RAYON**  
the House of Quality Yarns

**THE BARODA RAYON CORPORATION LIMITED**

HOECHST HOUSE, 193 NARIMAN POINT  
B O M B A Y - 4 0 0 0 2 1

Telex : 011 3436 / 4719

Phone : 232030, 230734

*Regd. Office :*

P. O. Baroda Rayon, Udhna, Dist. : Surat 394 240

Telex : 0178 217

Phone : 88371



NEWSLETTER  
FOR BIRDPWATCHERS

VOL. XXVII

No. 7 & 8

July-August 1987

---

C O N T E N T S

Editorial

- \* Salim Ali
- \* Wing Tips
- \* Captive Breeding of Condors
- \* Bird Problems of Mali by Marc Thauront
- \* Crane Distribution by Prakash Gole
- \* Avifauna of a Temple Environment in Kerala during May-June  
by Mr. E. Narayanan
- \* Birds of Mannar by Mr. T.R. Sridhar
- \* Brood Care by Jamal Ara

Correspondence:

- \* Roosting Habits of Grey Partridge by Harkirat S. Sangha
  - \* A Week in Silent Valley by Mrs. Shantha Ravikumar
  - \* Partridges by M.K. Himmatsinhji
-

Editorial:

On Salim Ali

So much has been written about Salim Ali in the last decade that it is difficult to say anything which is unknown to most of our readers. His autobiography, *The Fall of a Sparrow*, which was reviewed in the Newsletter (Sept-Oct 1986), revealed his talent as a superb writer, not merely on matters connected with birds, though it was his capacity to describe so accurately what he saw with his eagle eyes which won him admirers from the birdwatching fraternity in all parts of the world. One reason why his books so often adorned the bookshelves of people not really interested in birds was because of the good writing they contain. And let it be noted that he took enormous pains over finding the right word before it was selected. Dictionaries were always at hand. One finds very few clichés in his writings, but quite often a refreshingly simple word most effectively conveys the exact nuance required. Reproduced here are extracts from a circular letter by Shivraj Kumar Khacher, and an obituary by Richard Fitter which appeared in the Times, London.

Extracts from a letter from Shivraj Kumar Khacher, Darbargadh, Jasan 360 050, Gujarat.

"A documentary was being filmed on the life of Dr. Salim Ali and one of the episodes was to be shot in the Rann of Kutch at the "Flamingo City". He wrote to me to join him. I joined the party at Bhuj and we went on camel back from Khavda. We reached Nir after dark for a night's halt, in the open. It was a tiring ride but Dr. Salim Ali was so cheerful and up and about the next morning. We rode out into the Rann eager to see the Flamingo City. My camel went ahead and I had powerful binoculars. I looked at the distant colony and was excited to see the Lesser Flamingo also on nests along with the Greater Flamingo. I shouted to Dr. Salim Ali about this and he hurriedly came up. We went nearer and then dismounted and approached on foot and excitedly surveyed the scene and tried to estimate the number of birds. This was a very important discovery as the Lesser Flamingo had till then not been found to breed anywhere except Africa. Dr. Salim Ali told me "You write an article on this for the BNHS Journal as you saw it first". I was struck by his generosity and large heartedness but refused and asked him to write the article as a senior ornithologist. That night we camped on the island under the stars. At sunset, Dr. Salim Ali asked if he could have some hot soup. It was winter and quite cold. Our supplies had soup packets but unfortunately no fuel. I gathered all the cardboard cartons of our biscuit and other packets, dug a hole in the sand, lit a fire and boiled the water enough. My cooking efforts were rewarded with watery eyes from the acrid smoke but a warm thank you from the Doctor. "I never knew you were also a good cook". I had to tell him this was my first attempt.

On our return to Khavda we went straight from the Flamingo City and rode on to Khavda. We reached at sunset. The long camel ride was exhausting and I even had temperature. I woke up at sunrise (it was winter, January 27th 1978, and looked at Dr. Salim Ali's bed. It was empty. I washed and went out and sure enough he was busy filming White Eared Bulbuls, Common Babblers, Red Vented Bulbuls, Purple Sunbirds, Brahmany Mynahs and Rosy Pastors feeding on the nectar of the lovely Rohida-*Tecomella*, flowers which were in full bloom in the whole hedge around the rest house. What energy and enthusiasm and what stamina at his advanced age. He asked me to try for the seeds of these trees and I got some for him next June. One tree

was growing at his Bombay residence, 33 Pali Hill, Bandra, and the others are now blooming trees at Telco near Pune."

Dr. Salim Ali by Richard Fitter, Drifts, Chinnor Hill, Oxfordshire OX9 4BS, UK.

"Dr. Salim Ali, the doyen of India's ornithologists and conservationists, who died last month, will be chiefly remembered for his predominant part in the ten-volume Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan, which he produced with the assistance of Dr. Dillon Ripley between 1968 and 1974. At the time of his death, he was still working on Volume 6 of a revised edition. Born in Bombay in 1896, he worked for virtually the whole of his adult life as an ornithologist, making numerous expeditions to all parts of the subcontinent. This extensive field work was the basis of his many books, not only on the birds of regions such as Kerala and Sikkim, but also of his pioneer field guide, A Book of Indian Birds (1941), supplemented by Indian Hill Birds (1949). He was, for many years, a pillar of the Bombay Natural History Society, the leading such society in Asia, and finally its President. Among many other achievements, he played a key part in saving the world famous Bharatpur Sanctuary in Rajasthan.

He was much honoured in his own country, especially by being made Padma Bhushan for distinguished service to Indian ornithology, and later a member of the Rajya Sabha, the upper legislative chamber. His many international honours and awards included the John C. Phillips Medal of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources in 1969, the Insignia of Office in the Netherlands Order of the Golden Ark in 1973, and the J.P. Getty International Prize for Wildlife Ornithologists' Union in 1967. Indeed, in his most readable autobiography, The Fall of a Sparrow (1985), he was able to list 18 awards, "to prove to Doubting Thomases like some of my late lamented elders, that even such a seemingly futile occupation as birdwatching is not entirely barren of rewards if pursued with persistence and dedication". This was typical of his wryly humorous approach to life."

---

### Wing Tips

I do not know who was good enough to send me a copy of Wing Tips, but it appears to be a very worthwhile publication. The Editor is Helen S. Lapham, Wing Tips, Box 226, Lansing, NY 14882, USA.

In an article on "Chernobyl and Migratory Birds" the editorial says: "Chernobyl, in southwestern Russia, is situated some 80 miles north of Kiev, capital of the Ukraine. The region is a major flyway for migratory birds many of which winter from Eastern Africa to India. In spring, those from Africa swing east to miss the Mediterranean Sea while the Asian ones head west to avoid crossing the Himalayas. They all funnel up along the eastern edge of the Mediterranean and, from there, northward past the Black and Caspian Seas to the Ukraine. The region around Kiev Reservoir and the Ukraine's many wetlands may constitute a major staging ground for aquatic birds, a place where they rest and feed before continuing on to their nesting areas. Non-aquatic species using the flyway may also stop there for food. During autumn, migrants reversing their spring route may again pause to fatten up in the Ukraine on the way to their winter homes. Any one of these birds may feed in the land that was evacuated around Chernobyl, some 1000 square miles.



The Soviet Union has declared it too dangerous for resettlement and probably will bar human incursions for years to come, perhaps beyond our lifetimes. Yet, twice a year, migratory birds will stop to feed there -- no one can keep them out of such a large region -- and each bird will carry the radioactive isotopes it absorbs on to its winter home in Africa or southern Asia, on to its summer home in Europe or northern Asia."

On the other hand, an editorial in Hornbill, Vol.4, 1986, says: The recovery of Indian ringed birds in Russia over the years has given precise information on the origin of the birds migrating to India from Russia, which is from an area bounded by latitudes 40° and 110°E. Therefore when the Chernobyl disaster occurred in European Russia, 3000 Km. to the west of the area of origin of birds migrating to India, we were able to assure Government that there is no possibility of birds coming to India being contaminated. This was confirmed when migrants trapped by us at Bharatpur on behalf of the Department of Environment, Forests & Wildlife, were examined by the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre and found negative for radiation."

May we hope that the BNHS finding is correct and that we have not eaten any radioactive duck this season.

=====

---

#### Captive Breeding of Condors

In January 1986, there were only 5 free ranging Condors in the world, and by July 1986, only 3 were left "Afraid the genetic pool was too small for those still free to revive, the US Fish and Wildlife Service demanded that all be captured." The captive breeding programme for Condors costs \$20,00,000 a year, and leading ornithologists and Zoos of America are doing their utmost to revive the population of this splendid bird. The Condor is the largest flying bird on the continent of North America, "it soars on wings that span three metres. With the flap, it can travel 10 kilometres, coasting thermals. In a day it can cover 250 kilometres at speeds upto 100 kilometres an hour.

Condors are docile, shy birds, inhabiting the high country along the western edge of the Americas. Their entire life is governed by a rugged mountainous terrain that is largely inaccessible to people. The birds require altitude, for they are scavengers, and their principal hunting equipment is their keen eyesight.

"The importance of the Condor is not what it means to nature but what it means to civilization. The Condor is a biological indicator telling that something is going wrong with our environment. For the present the Californian Condor has disappeared from the open skies. Perhaps its absence will be temporary. Perhaps it will never fly free again."

=====

---

#### Bird Problems of Mali by Marc Thauront, Secretary of ICBP, France.

I have reproduced an article on Mali from World Birdwatch, the Newsletter of the International Council for Bird Preservation, Vol.9, No.1, Spring 1987. It will be seen that a very determined effort is being made to save the wonderful birds of the region and in some cases their problems

"Mali is a country of contrasts, including areas of extreme geographical diversity: the Sahara of Sahel, the sandy plateaus of the Dogon with their sheer cliffs, the river Niger and its flood plains, the Sudan area, and the forests of the south. Here, more than 500 species of birds find good wintering grounds, breeding areas, and stopover sites during migration.

In this country of the Sahel, the 30,000 sq.km. of Niger delta land, of which 20,000 are flooded almost every year, constitute an extraordinary source of life. The productivity of pasture land here is five to ten times higher than in the rest of the Sahel. The large flood plains and lakes harbour nearly 350 bird species, of which 31% are completely or partly of Palearctic origin. With Lake Chad and the Senegal delta, it is one of the most important wintering grounds for the Garganey, the Pintail and the Ruff as well as for marsh terns and the Yellow Wagtail among others.

Perhaps the most important element of survival in Mali is one that affects much more than just birds - that is, the drought and the desertification, which have ravaged the country for at least 15 years. The ground cover is much affected by the drought. And the wooded areas are threatened because the annual harvest of wood by the local population surpasses the sustainable yield, in addition, many ponds have dried up. Particularly in the delta area, flood control measures, wood harvesting, and grazing of goats in the woodlands, which prevents their regeneration, have seriously decreased the number of habitats available for birds.

The impact of these factors on the avifauna, although evident, is unfortunately not measurable because data on birds of Mali is still fragmentary, and very few studies on the importance of this impact upon birds have been undertaken. One species, the Ahinga, for example, has practically disappeared because of overhunting and because of the drought. To combat the effects of the drought, the authorities in Mali banned hunting in 1978.

#### Poaching and Black Magic

But hunting has always held a place of great importance in Mali society; there will exist today many communities of hunters using the traditional methods with which the culture of Mali is strongly imbued. In addition, the fauna and particularly birds, constitute a resource that cannot be ignored in a country that is still having difficulty producing enough food to feed its own people. Thus, one can easily understand that poaching is a very widespread practice. Unfortunately, it is one of the major reasons for the dramatic decline in mammals and in certain birds.

This poaching can take several forms; the removal of young or eggs from colonies, the shooting of species such as the White Stork (roughly a hundred of which were killed in 1985 in the Dia region), or the netting of birds. The Bozo fishermen of the delta for example, drag their fishing nets above the water in order to capture ducks and waders. A study by M.B. Trecca, a researcher from ORSTOM (a French institute of scientific research for development), estimates that in 1984/1985 season nearly 20,000 anatides, 75% of which were Garganey may have been captured in this way; in local markets these ducks are four to eight times cheaper than chicken.

Furthermore, in certain areas birds can become victims of thoughtless hunters or trappers because of either a very good or a very bad reputation. For example, the Crowned Crane is frequently sold as a pet because of its beauty, but it is unable to reproduce in captivity, especially in the confines of a house. And Strigidae are considered to be magic birds that can cause newborn babies to fall ill or even die. Hunters, therefore, do their best



- 6 -

to eliminate these birds, in spite of the fact that this results in a plague of rodents in the rice fields. It should also be noted that it wasn't so long ago that it was common to nail Barn Owls above the doors of barns in the French countryside because they were considered to be birds of the devil. Bird conservation organisations have spent many years trying to educate and inform rural populations in order to curb these practices.

### AMPO's Struggle

This is the kind of work the Association Malienne pour la Protection des Oiseaux (AMPO) must undertake in order to ensure the protection of the birds of Mali. The rate of literacy and education is still very low in Mali, and such widespread popular beliefs will not make AMPO's task any easier. Although the Muslim religion is the most widespread in the country, animism still has a great deal of influence. One still finds people in the big market squares of Bamako who are selling the dried heads of the Ground Hornbill or the Crowned Crane, among others, for they are reputed to bring good luck, and many traditional home remedies call for parts of birds, certain raptors, for example, which are thought to cure malaria.

The government of Mali, aware of the role that it must maintain in the conservation of its natural heritage, signed the Bonn Convention on migratory species and the Ramsar Convention on wetlands in 1985. In the near future, a site in the interior delta of the Niger must be chosen as an instrument for ratification of the Ramsar Convention. Let's hope that this will prevent the creation of a large hydroelectric project that would profoundly alter the water levels of this region, which is so important both to man (for fishing, raising of livestock, etc.) and to the birds.

The Eaux et Forêts of Mali is also encouraging projects to replant forests as well as to educate people about conservation issues with programmes like the IUCN/WWF one in villages of the delta where heronries are located, or like the Migratory Birds Programme conducted this last winter by the French section of ICBP.

### Visiting Schools by Donkey

From October 1985 through March 1986, Bouba Fofana, ICBP's representative in Mali, Abdulaye Mahamane, an engineer from Eaux et Forêts seconded to our project, and I, have twice visited each secondary school in the interior delta region of the Niger and in the Dogon countryside. The difficulties of transportation in these areas necessitated the use of a variety of means of transport, including Land Rover, canoe, and even a donkey cart.

In the schools, we were able to make a lively presentation in the form of a game by using displays depicting the birdlife of Mali, the phenomenon of migration, the ringing of birds, and the usefulness of certain of these birds to man. The first of our visits was designed especially to awaken the curiosity of teenagers. We distributed notebooks whose covers showed the birds we had been discussing. Students then were asked to learn to recognise them by sight and by name, and to colour them in with pencils provided by the Societe Commerciale des Potasses et de l'Azote (SCPA). Then the presenters and the students were able to discuss the habitats in which the birds live, their feeding habits, and their protection.

This exercise also allowed us to collect the local vernacular names for these birds, as well as several anecdotes: the Kittlitz's Sand Flower is, for example, called "donko donko" in the Bambara language, which means the dancing bird. He earned this nickname because "he cannot sit still, he



he is always moving". And among the Dogons of Sangha the Lily-trotter is considered to be a manifestation of the water nymph, because he walks on the water lilies.

Our second visit was designed to give us an opportunity to explain the amazing adventure known as migration. Although occasionally officials return bands that are found on the legs of dead birds, more often hunters consider them to be magical objects and will refuse to eat or even touch a bird that is found thus banded. Not surprisingly, the students were full of all sorts of questions concerning both the migration of the birds as well as the methods that could be used to protect the rice fields against ducks and other birds. We even managed to touch on the problems of the disappearance of habitat and species, and on the role that people can play in this phenomenon.

On each one of our visits we gave a slide show with a commentary in the evening; sometimes more than 600 people attended this audio-visual display, because the students' friends and parents often came as well.

Throughout the project two birds were chosen as symbols: the White Stork and Abdim's Stork. Both these birds undertake long migrations, one of them between Europe and Africa, and the other from the Sahel to the south of the continent. And both have similar feeding habits in Mali: they feed off locusts, those ravagers of agriculture that the pharaohs of Egypt called the eighth plague. Abdim's Stork is considered to be a bird of good luck because it announces the return of the rainy season and nests in the very heart of the villages in Mali. This is why we had already associated it with the White Stork on the poster that we have distributed in West Africa urging protection for the White Stork.

Let us hope that this project will help the avifauna of the delta and that it will allow the Association Malienne pour la Protection des Oiseaux to discover among these students some future defenders of African migratory birds.

---

Crane Distribution by Prakash Gole, Ecological Society, 1B Abhimanshree Society, Pashan Road, Pune - 411 008

Prakash Gole through the Ecological Society, has produced a most interesting map of Cranes sighted in various parts of our country. Unfortunately, the map cannot be reproduced, but among other things, the note containing the map says "the numbers of Cranes reported during 1986-87 were: 551 Sarus; 6238 Common or Eurasian; 13617 Demoiselle; 42 Siberians. This of course, does not cover the whole crane population of the sub-continent. A census of cranes will be organised from the 1987 season. It is also interesting to note that a couple of cranes killed by irate farmers who accused cranes of destroying the crops, when dissected were found to contain green caterpillars that were in fact destroying the crops. The cranes were obviously eating the insects on the crops and not the crops. This is an important finding which needs to be publicised.

---

Avifauna of a Temple Environment in Kerala during May-June by Mr. E. Narayanan, Entomologist, Department of Micro-biology, JIPMER, Pondicherry - 605 006

Hindu temples in Kerala have a peepal tree in front and often an adjoining bathing tank. Observations during May-June on such temple environment over a few years showed that at least 8 species of birds regularly visit the tank and immediate surroundings, 18 species visit the peepal tree and in addition the environs support another 5 species of birds.

Pazayanmur village where these observations were carried out, is situated approximately midway between the towns of Trichur and Palghat in the Trichur district of Kerala. The observation site, the Vettaikorumagan temple and surroundings, is located away from the main centres of human activity of the village. The peepal tree in front of the temple is fairly large and about 65 years old, and the tank situated immediately behind the temple is about 40 m. in diameter and about 7 m. deep. Birds frequenting the area were observed and recorded, and their identity confirmed by referring to Salim Ali (1969) and Salim Ali and Dhillon Ripley (1983, 1983a). Climatically the period ranged from dry hot summer days followed by pre-monsoon and monsoon rains.

Tank visitors:

Before the onset of monsoon only a shallow sheet of water was present in the tank, but it got filled up rapidly after the onset of monsoon.

1. The Pond Heron
2. The Small Egret

About half a dozen of each appear at dawn and leave after about an hour's feeding; scarce thereafter. Feeding behaviour of these two species was more or less similar in general. They stand still separately along the edge of the water and carefully pick fish and other items of food from the water as described by Salim Ali (1969). Occasionally they fly across just above the water surface towards the opposite bank possibly to provoke fish into leaping into the air, or to drive them nearer to the bank from where they can be caught. Only the Pond Heron was once found to alight on water as reported by Germwood and Brockhurst (1984).

3. The White Breasted Waterhen. This species is resident in the area for decades.
4. The White Breasted Kingfisher. Constantly present throughout the day. Sitting on an electric wire 7 m above ground, one was found to locate, fly towards and capture a garden lizard some 25 m away.
5. The Small Blue Kingfisher.
6. The Pied Kingfisher. More frequently seen after the water level in the tank increased.
7. The Little Cormorant. Also more frequent after the water level in the tank increased.
8. The Brahminy Kite. One or two appear when fishermen are active in the tank. Under similar circumstances a few decades ago, along with the Pariah Kite, it used to appear in large numbers.

Peepal Tree Visitors:

The tree was in fruit during the period.

1. The Rose Ringed Parakeet. Appears usually at midday in a group of about six.
2. The Grey Hornbill. Appears in a group of 3-5, at about 7 a.m. but leaves within an hour. One once chased two flying insects (winged termite or damselfly) and devoured them one after the other.
3. The Green Barbet.
4. The Indian Myna. A dozen or so of these are constantly present in the locality.
5. The Black Headed Oriole. A pair or two could be seen during most of the day.
6. The Black Drongo. Constantly present.
7. The Jungle Crow.
8. The House Crow.
9. The Indian Tree Pie. Constantly present. Never tires of re-examining an old electric lampshade nearby in which a pair of Magpie Robins had nested earlier.
10. The Magpie Robin. Frequently uses the tree for singing and transit halt. The song of the present resident male hardly resembles that of one studied earlier. (Narayanan, 1984).
11. The Red Whiskered Bulbul. At least two pairs active in the area.
12. The Purple Rumped Sunbird.
13. The Koel.
14. The Common Hawk Cuckoo.
15. The Jungle Babbler.
16. The whitebrowed Fantail Flycatcher. At least three active in the area, mostly feeding on insects on peepal bark, occasionally straying near buildings. Shows definite antagonism towards crows and the Tree Pie.
17. The Jerdon's Chloropsis.
18. The Indian Spotted Dove.

Three more species of birds frequenting the peepal tree are yet to be definitely identified.

Birds active in the immediate neighbourhood:

The neighbourhood consists of independent houses with compounds, separated by twig and bamboo fences which are gradually being replaced with brick and granite walls. (The fence which is supported on a number of small



trees planted at intervals is a unique ecological niche in itself, supporting a variety of fauna and flora like the sunbird, the crow pheasant, the chameleon and several plants especially climbers).

1. The Crow Pheasant.
2. The Baya. A number of these nest on a nearby palmyra tree, ownership of which is disputed, and therefore not trimmed periodically.
3. The House Sparrow.
4. The Blue Rock Pigeon.
5. The Indian Palm Swift.

Nocturnal bird visitors to the locality were not recorded. The peepal tree was however frequented by a number of fruit bats at night.

In the absence of previous records it is difficult to comment on the level of present bird activity in the area. Most of the birds recorded could be seen on any day between 6 a.m. and 9 a.m. from a single vantage point. The observations however, underline the importance of the peepal tree in the life of both frugivorous and insectivorous birds.

---

Birds of Mannar by Mr. T.R. Sridhar, No.4, Second Street, Balthevatsalam Nagar, Adyar, Madras - 600 020

The summer of 1984 will always remain a pleasant memory for me. Between the 21st of April and 8th of May 1984 - a mere 18 days - I was introduced to 42 new species of birds in the village of Mannar, lying 8 km. away from Chengannur town in Kerala and situated on the banks of the river Rampa. The birding began with the sighting of a spectacular lifer.

Arriving at my relative's spacious residence in Mannar surrounded by a huge area of mango, cashew, jackfruit and other trees, I was treated to an astounding number of bird calls emanating from a particular corner. My brother Sriram and myself zeroed in on the one tree from which the calls were pouring forth. It was a huge mango tree and we identified the calls of Red-vented Bulbuls, Black Drongos, Golden Orioles, Common Terns, Magpie Robins and other birds. But our two pairs of eyes could not spot a single bird! Until it moved, at least. It was a shimmering grass-green bird with a jet black throat and neck, which we instantly recognized as the male Jardons Chloropsis. The sprightly bird's camouflage was perfect and if it wasn't for the glossy black front, we might have missed seeing the bird altogether. We saw the female too, foraging nearby.

That set us on our feet and we were soon happily bird hunting, armed with a copy of 'Common Birds' by Dr. Salim Ali and Mrs. Laseq Futchally, and a book called 'The Young Birdwatcher' - a Hemlyn guide.

The garden just teemed with birds. Excluding the crows (both House and Jungle) and the Common Myna, the commonest birds were: Magpie Robin (*Copysychus saularis*), Black Drongo (*Dicrurus adsimilis*), Tree Pie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*), Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*), Koel (*Eudynamys scolopacea*), Coucal

(*Centropus sinensis*), Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*), Small Green bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*) and Blossom-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*). (Note: Many of the birds we saw could not be identified with the guides we had. Their descriptions were taken down and the birds were identified later when we consulted more detailed books).

Of the lot, Magpie Robins were by far the commonest and their melodious calls and songs were heard all day long everywhere. Magpie Robins were seen coming to drink water from a dripping tap at the side of the house every afternoon. Crows and Jungle Babblers (*Turdoides striatus*) were also seen nearby.

The 'ke-ke-ke-ke' call of the Tree Pie was incessant as were the deep oop-oops of the Coucal or Crow Pheasant. The Tree Pie could be seen everywhere fluttering from tree to tree in an undulating flight. The Coucal was more solitary and kept to itself. The Blossom-headed Parakeet intrigued us all through the stay with its plaintive questioning 'why? you?' calls.

Black Drongos and Indian Rollers were seen on exposed perches as were the Small Green bee-eaters. One noteworthy sighting was that of a solitary Chestnut-headed bee-eater (*Merops leschenaulti*) with its crimson head, yellow throat, bluish rump and no central pin feathers - on an electric line along the road. They are very probably common in the remoter outskirts and farmlands.

Of the kingfishers, all the three commonest species - White-breasted (*Halcyon smyrnensis*), Pied (*Ceryle rudis*) and Common (*Alcedo atthis*) were present in large numbers. On a bus one day, I had a fleeting glimpse of a tiny blue-winged kingfisher with a black nape (and cap?) sitting on the bank of a small irrigation canal. I have not identified the bird till today.

The Mahratta woodpecker (*Picoides mahrattensis*) and the Golden-backed woodpecker (*Dinopium benghalense*) were common, the latter more so. The Mahratta was a little elusive at first, but the 'click-clicker', as we nicknamed it, was soon seen frequenting the coconut and mango trees in the area. Three species of barbet - the Crimson breasted (*Megalaima haemacelphala*), the Large green (*M. zeylanica*) and the Small green (*M. viridis*) were spotted.

Hawk Cuckoos (*Cuculus varius*) were rarely seen but more commonly heard and a bird resembling the Large Cuckoo Shrike (*Coracina novae-hollandiae*) was seen 3 or 4 times but was never conclusively identified. My relatives in Manner referred to a Cuckoo with a four-note call that went 'na-ra-ya-na' and I myself heard it on a number of occasions. The 'na-ra-ya-na' call could not be described as anything else and the bird apparently was calling to the Lord Narayana to help solve a problem! Much chasing proved futile and the bird remains an enigma - a question mark - till today. One one occasion I saw the bird fleetingly though, fly overhead calling significantly but it disappeared behind the trees quickly. It was overall greyish and had stripes on the underparts and wing (horizontal?). It was most probably the Indian Cuckoo (call: bo-kotako) (*Cuculus micropterus*), but I can't be sure.

Of the Raptors, Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) was the only one conclusively identified. Others, looking like Shikra, but not quite, weren't. A raptor much bigger than a Shikra with a brownish back, brownish crimson (or dusty red) head and nape and vertical stripes or dashes on the underparts, was seen only on one occasion. Legger?? But I dare not venture. Spotted Owlets (*Athene Brama*) were common and the Great Horned Owl (*Bubo bubo*) was seen only once. Parich kites were also seen.

Of the 'trouper' or birds moving about in groups, there were the Jungle Babblers (*Turdoides striatus*) - the only babblers we saw; the White-Eyes (*Zosterops palpebrosa*), Grey Tits (*Rorus major*) and White-headed Mynas (*Sturnus malabaricus blythii*) - the last being 'posthumously' but definitely identified.

Hunting parties too were common, especially in the afternoons. The main birds in these parties were the gregarious ones mentioned above, accompanied by a varying assortment of Jerdon's Chloropsis, Magpie Robins, White-browed fantail flycatchers (*Rhipidura aureola*), woodpeckers, Black-headed Orioles, etc. The party initially would congregate on a mango tree in front of the house and then slowly work their way around the house feeding and preening, to a huge jackfruit tree in the backyard. Some birds, mainly babblers would alight on a prickly jackfruit and leave some feathers behind, which I would dutifully collect and classify mentally.

The other terrestrial/arboreal birds seen here were the Common Tora (*Agihina tiphia*), Spotted Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*), Palm swift (*Cypsiurus parvus*), House swift (*Apus affinis*), Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), Large Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*), Common Wood Shrike (*Tephrodormis pondicerianus*) (?), Scarlet Minivet (*Pericrocotus flammeus*), Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*), Ashy Swallow Shrike (*Artamus fuscus*), White-browed Fantail Flycatcher (*Rhipidura aureola*), Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicata*), Purple Sunbird (*Nectarini asiaticci*), Purple-rumped Sunbird (*N. zeylonica*), Tickell's flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchus*), Thick-billed flowerpecker (*D. agile*), White-backed Munia (*Lonchiera striata*), Baya (*Ploceus philippinus*), Jungle Myna (*Acridotheres fuscus*), Black-headed Oriole (*Oriolus zanthornus*), Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*), Tailor Bird (*Orthomus sutorius*) and the Crows.

In the surrounding farms and in a miniature jheel in Mannar, we were able to see Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*), Paddybird (*Ardeola grayii*), Openbill Stork (*Anastomus oscitans*), Dabchick (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*), a sole Watercock (*Gallinago cinerea*) seen by my brother, Common Sandpiper (*Tringa hypoleucos*), Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*) (?), Black-winged Stilt and a horde of other unidentified birds.

The trip proved several things to me. First, birding even at the young age of 11 is more rewarding. (I had experiences with red ants, insects, beetles, caterpillars and an unidentified 4 feet long snake that gave me the shock of my life). Begging the pardon of Mr. Gerald Durell, Mannar was like a Corfu unto me. Second, I learnt that birding is contagious, for my cousin Shankar caught on and was responsible for discovering a drongo's nest, a chloropsis' nest which was raided by an unidentified raptor, and spotting the Blossom-headed Parakeets and taking us around Mannar.

Last, but not the least definitely I learnt the sordid tale of deforestation and its effects on damaging the ecosystem. A visit to Mannar in 1985 - just one year later - showed the ugly scars. In many areas, trees had been cut down and many a shady corner was being burnt by the sun. Rapid urbanisation too had drastically reduced the numbers of birds. Many of the species I had spent hours watching were not to be seen. If I had stayed longer I would have probably known the extent of the damage. As it was, I had to leave early.

---



Brood-Care by Jamal Ara, M/7 Single Storey, Harmu Housing Colony, Ranchi - 834012

The eggs and young of birds have so many enemies, it is a wonder any survive at all to grow to adulthood. Eggs, in particular, are the favourites of a whole horde of animals. Some lizards and snakes use their keen sight to find out the best concealed crannies either on the ground or in the tallest trees and plunder the eggs. Many mammals, such as rodents, squirrels and stoats, purely vegetarian for the bulk of the year, become egg robbers during spring. Amongst their own kind, gulls, magpies, crows, treepies, will go long distances to devour eggs. Above them all are primates and men. I do not think any monkey will even refuse an egg!

Nonetheless, bird species perpetuate themselves, and the population is even increasing. Nature accomplishes this through various means. Birds that lay eggs on the ground without any concealment, deposit large numbers. The ostrich lays about 30 eggs, and partridges, pheasants and other ground birds lay as many as twenty. On the other hand, sea-birds and waders in general lay a small number of eggs but in such surroundings on the ground that it is very difficult to spot them.

Nest building birds favour two kinds of architecture. Owls, parakeets, sparrows and others favour holes in trees or walls, where as the kingfishers bore a long tunnel in an earthen bank. In all these cases, the eggs are a pure white, since the hole itself provides sufficient concealment. But the vast majority of birds build open nests. In these cases the eggs are usually blotched and spotted.

It cannot, however, be said that the colours and markings on eggs are in the nature of a camouflage. Perhaps that was the original reason, but birds have great powers of locomotion, and the same species frequently nest under widely varying conditions. Therefore, eggs that were perfectly camouflaged under one set of conditions, may be very conspicuous under another set. It is quite possible that under such circumstances, the species may be wiped out in its new surroundings before the eggs have changed their pattern. On the other hand, it is equally possible that the advantages of the new conditions more than counter-balance the disadvantages of the old colour. Birds have remarkable powers of adaptability, and amongst them are numerous cases where colour has outviewed the conditions for which it was meant.

The trouble of the feathered folk do not cease with the laying of the eggs! The hard work really commences after that. Eggs have to be incubated and guarded. Birds are very hot blooded animals and their body temperature ranges from 98°F to 105°F. Throughout the period of incubation, the eggs have to be kept at this temperature, though temporary cooling, such as the departure of the brooding bird for feeding does no harm. But in some cases, the incubating bird sits very close indeed. The female hoopoe never leaves her nest, not even for feeding, and the female hornbill plasters herself up inside her nest hole. In all such cases, the male assiduously feeds the female, that being his share of the work. The period of incubation varies from ten days (in some small singing birds) to two months in the ostrich. Within the same family, the smaller the bird, the shorter the period. Thus the smaller ducks take about three weeks and the swans about 40 days. As a general rule, the smaller the eggs, the shorter the period, as in the passerine birds. This is partly explained by the different amounts of nourishment available inside the eggs, and the state in which the young ones emerge: the more advanced the

state of development at the time of emergence, the longer the period of incubation. But comparing groups with groups, there are a number of differences which cannot be explained easily.

Once the chicks are hatched, brood care of another kind begins. In the Megapodes the chicks are able to fly from the day they hatch out, and therefore, the parents take no interest in them at all. Amongst living birds, this is the only instance. The largest number all hatched; alert, active, able to see and pick up their food, and clad in a coat of down. The chicks of large and powerful birds, well able to defend their young, are born helpless, but have a coat of down. Lastly, there is a group in which the young emerge naked and helpless. The pigeons and herons almost come into this group, which includes gannets, cormorants, pelicans and parakeets; all birds which most Anatomists would classify as the most highly evolved.

Even in the case of active chicks, parental care is mostly protection against enemies. As soon as the alarm is sounded, the young either hurry to take shelter under the wings of their parents, or squat close to the ground as the parents attempt to lure away the intruder. The plovers and partridges pretend to have a broken limb, attract attention to themselves, and by slow fluttering movements, decoy away the enemy. Fowls, pheasants and gulls launch a fierce attack. A few carry their young about. The Woodcock carries them between her legs, whilst grebes and swans swim about with the young grebes and cygnets on their back.

Where the young are helpless, parental care is assiduous. Birds, naturally timid, will fiercely attack disturbers of their nests and eggs, whereas strong ferocious birds are very dangerous to approach at this time. Except for a few like Hoopoes and Kingfishers, all take great pains in keeping the nests and the body of the young ones scrupulously neat and clean. Initially the droppings are removed by the parents, later on the young are taught to evacuate over the edge of the nest.

One or both parents work hard to feed the nestlings. Even in cases where the adults are fruit-eaters the food of the chicks is insectivorous. The sparrows are seed-eaters but they feed their young on insects. In a number of cases, partially digested food is given. Parakeets throw up vegetable matter, and some woodpeckers, martins and others throw up insects. Petrels discharge into the beak of their young an oil secreted from the fish they eat, and Cormorants thrust their bills down the throat of their mother and take food from her stomach. Pigeon chicks insert the beaks into that of their mother and imbibe 'pigeon milk', which is partly digested food and partly a secretion from the crop.

A further duty devolves on the parents of naked chicks. They are extremely sensitive to cold, and for a few days the mother has to keep them warm. In the case of the small singing birds, the mother hardly leaves the nest unless the young are able to walk about, and during this interval the father has to do all the foraging.

This final period of brood care lasts from three weeks to several months, and always comes to an abrupt end. Either the parents go away or drive away their offspring. The abandoned young generally stay together till the next spring, when sexual maturity awakens new instincts and battles for mates are joined.

If the total period from the selection of the best to the final parting from the offspring is added up, it will be noticed that the major part of the year is spent in parental duties, since most birds breed annually. This is the main reason which has worked towards limitation of families in birdland.

=====

---

Correspondence:

Roosting Habits of Grey Partridge by Harkirat S. Sangha, D-2, Ramn Marg, Tilak Nagar, Jaipur - 302 004

With reference to Nazir Latif's note on the roosting behaviour of grey partridge (*F. pondicerianus*), I would like to tell my observations. My experiences are confined to Punjab, Haryana, U.P. and mostly Rajasthan. Grey partridge always roosts in trees and does not change the tree unless persistently disturbed. At my farm, near Jaipur, I know which trees are used for roosting by the partridges. Sometimes they can be heard calling from trees even during the day. Here, I may add that grey partridge can use any vantage point for calling. Once I saw a male calling from a four feet high pole. Another one I saw calling from the top of the building (roughly 80 feet high!) in the Rajasthan University enclave.

=====

---

A Week in Silent Valley by Mrs. Shantha Ravikumar, Craignore Plantations, Kullackamby - 643 218

Last weekend, with a few others I had been to Silent Valley. One has to trek about 22 kms. to reach the valley. The track leads through thick verdant jungle. The beauty of it is indescribable. The valley abounds in birds which are, of course, brilliantly coloured. I saw many fairy bluebirds, tree pies, barbets, and heard lots of thrushes. But I couldn't identify all the calls from the descriptions Dr. Salim Ali has given in his book. I suppose that would be possible only by learning about the calls in the field.

Some of the fairy bluebirds, presuming they are those, were deep violet and black. Are they the young ones? Or are they something else? Colours are deceptive. The dictionary says violet is blueish purple. The Handbook says that the males are "Above: brilliant ultramarine blue; below: deep velvety black with blue undertail coverts."

My trip was too short to spend more time on birds as the trek took up most of the time, but I am planning to re-visit the valley next month and spend more time on the birdlife.

=====

---



Partridges by M.K. Himmatsinhji, Jubilee Ground, Bhuj, Kutch

If I remember right, I last wrote to you how to lure partridges in your ground. But in one of the recent issues of the Newsletter I read that you had introduced some partridge in your grounds. If they have settled down then they would remain there. I have five covies in my grounds - about twenty birds. Only one covey raised a brood of three chicks. Practically all the hens laid eggs, but between a pair of mongoose, two cobras and a pair of crow pheasants, all the eggs were shared! Before the breeding season began there were about forty partridge in my compound which is quite large - about 10 acres. But as a rule the previous year's brood of grown up young ones are driven away by the parents as the breeding season approaches. I think this is part of nature's scheme of preventing inbreeding. And there is also a vandal who goes about catching partridge in nets, so I hope he is not responsible for the reduction in the partridge population in my grounds! I think I shall send a write-up to you on the birds found in my garden for the Newsletter. I had started doing this some years ago, but gave up (I do not know why) the effort half way.

---

---

# DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES

—a non-profit society

22, PALAM MARG, NEW DELHI - 110 057

In his quest for a better life, man has come a long way. He has probed and solved many mysteries of the universe—of time and space, of matter and mind, of life and death. He has conquered long dreaded diseases, built complex systems and miraculous machines, extended his reach into the most inhospitable corners of this planet.

## Development

Science and technology have given him now the ability to choose a future and design new paths of development; the ability to be a master of his destiny to a degree inconceivable only a few generations ago.

## For whom?

Yet one half of the world's people live in poverty. And everywhere, the environment, on which our and our children's well-being so heavily depend, is rapidly deteriorating.

## Science and Technology

Science and technology offer the knowledge and tools to fashion a just and long-term development—one which improves the quality of life for all without destroying the resources which will sustain future generations. The challenge is to translate the scientific knowledge and technological tools into products for the welfare of the people.

## How?

This technology must be relevant, adaptable and in tune with local resources, skills and needs. In other words, Appropriate Technology. Technology that is useable, affordable, renewable. Technology which opens the doors to opportunities, work satisfaction and material rewards that never existed before. A co-operative effort in which every-one gains and no one loses.

- \*A technology where man is the master, not the slave.
- \*A technology which enhances man's spirit without cramping his mind.
- \*A technology which generates sustained benefits rather than temporary relief.
- \*A technology that conserves resources and respects the limits of the environment.
- \*A technology which creates wealth for the community and not merely money for the few.
- \*A technology that is economically viable, and widely available.

—A technology for the people

With best compliments of:



**Tata Engineering & Locomotive  
Company Limited**



**Jamshedpur, Bombay, Pune**

*Front Cover:* BAYA

**Editor:** Zafar Futehally

Dodda Gubbi Post, Bangalore - 562 134

Courtesy E. HANUMANTHA RAO

Annual Subscription Rs. 20/-



# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

---

VOL. XXVII NO. 9 & 10

SEPT. - OCT. 1987



BETTER COVERAGE AND A SOFTER FABRIC  
FEEL IS AN ASSURANCE FROM  
**BARODA RAYON**

Baroda Rayon offers innumerable and very versatile varieties in  
POLYESTER TEXTURISED, POLYESTER NYLON,  
& VISCOSE FILAMENT YARNS

**S U P R E M O**

Supremo tangled Polyester Yarn a better  
alternative to twisted yarn, comes  
in 76 / 32 denier

**S A N G A M**

Sangam yarn for shirtings a unit blend of  
Nylon and Polyester filament  
yarn in 120 / 34 denier

**BARODA RAYON**  
the House of Quality Yarns

**THE BARODA RAYON CORPORATION LIMITED**

HOECHST HOUSE, 193, NARIMAN POINT  
B O M B A Y - 4 0 0 0 2 1

Telex: 011 3436 / 4719

Phone: 232030, 230734

*Regd. Office :*

P. O. Baroda Rayon, Udhna, Dist.: Surat 394 240

Telex: 0178 217

Phone: 88371

NEWSLETTER  
FOR BIRDPATCHERS

VOL. XXVII

No.9 & 10

September-October 1987

---

C O N T E N T S

Editorial

- \* The Problems of Editing.
- \* Observing Common Birds.
- \* Annual Report of International Council for Bird Preservation.
- \* The Oriental Bird Club.
- \* Reducing Production Costs of Our Newsletter.

The Pond Heron - Its Local Movements, by Mr. V. Santharam.

Bird Sightings on a Trek to Gomukh, by Dr. Ravi C. Nayar.

Abnormal Concentration of Aquatic Birds at Sardarsamand Lake in Western Rajasthan, by Indra Kumar Sharma.

Birds of the J.P. Nagar Tank, by Milind Desai.

Birds of the Mula-Mutha Sanctuary, Pune, by Mrs. Jamal Ara.

Correspondence:

- \* Crows by Dr. V.G. Prasad.
  - \* Do Birds Play, by Acharya Dwarkanath.
  - \* Birds Harassing their Companions, by T.V. Jose.
  - \* Albino Crows, by C.K. Ser.
  - \* Brown Booby, by S.N. Varu.
  - \* Birds of the Kaveri Valley - Additions, by Eric J. Lott.
  - \* Second Bird Hospital of India, by Bantu Nansey.
-



Editorial:

The problems of Editing

One problem which Editors of English journals face in India is the extent to which the language of a contribution should be corrected or improved. There is often a vernacular flavour in the Indianisation of English which is worth preserving. On the other hand, if the meaning is not clearly conveyed, the Editor must step in and make the piece intelligible. Comments from readers would be welcome.

Observing Common Birds

V. Santhanam's article on the Pond Heron indicates how rewarding it is to keep careful notes of the commonest species. Mrs. Hamida Sariduszaffar once wrote about the disappearance or reduction of the Blue Jays from the stretch of road between Aligarh and Delhi. Our resolution for 1988 should be to keep notes in the form of a ledger for each species. It might yield unexpected dividends.

Annual Report of International Council for Bird Preservation, 219 Huntingdon Road, Cambridge, CB3 0DL, England.

Bulletin XIX, containing the Annual Report for 1986 of the I.C.B.P. has just been received. It reveals the extraordinary spread of its activities in all corners of the world, and it has succeeded in pressing home to Governments of many countries that saving the world's birds is not merely an aesthetic hobby but of crucial importance for preserving the life support systems of the planet on which we all depend. In the Preface, the President of I.C.B.P., Russel W. Peterson says: "As I travel around the world, I am frequently asked how ICBP can focus on saving the birds when all life on our planet is faced by the enormous threats of nuclear war and the increase in human population. It is true that in the face of such problems, which threaten the very survival of the human race, the saving of an endangered forest bird on a lonely mountain somewhere seems to shrink into insignificance. But I answer by saying that although all of us world citizens need to do what we can to support efforts to prevent nuclear war and to stabilize human population, it is also essential that the world's biological diversity be preserved. And of all forms of life, birds appear to be outstanding indicators of the health of the world's ecosystems. To save birds, we will need to protect the air, water and land and in so doing help to save all life."

"The study of birds has done much to provide the understanding necessary to furthering an environmental ethic. It is no coincidence that in countries where conservation values are well established, many of the groups that are now the environmental leaders started by working to save the birds. It is this progress toward environmental enlightenment that ICBP continues to stimulate worldwide. And with such enlightenment, the long-term biological consequences of nuclear war and population growth become more apparent, and the motivation to do something about them grows."

In the general report, the Director, Christoph Imboden says: "This has received strong support from the local councils and people and is an excellent instance of how an initial concern for birds such as Bannerman's Turaco can evolve to promote ecologically sound development. "

As far as India is concerned there is a report on the Ecology and Conservation of Cheer Pheasant (*Catreus wallichii*): "The Cheer Pheasant is an endangered species, now restricted to only a few mountainous localities in India and Nepal; it seems to have become extinct in Pakistan. This species inhabits high altitude Cheer Pine forests providing an elegant symbol for the conservation of these woodlands, which serve as a first line of defence against montane soil erosion. This project has been developed by the World Pheasant Association (which leads the ICBP Specialist Group in Galliformes). Its aims are firstly to undertake an intensive ecological study of the Cheer Pheasant in Uttar Pradesh, and secondly, to establish a captive breeding centre in or near natural habitat where birds can be closely monitored for food preferences. As soon as possible, captive reared birds will be released into areas where wild birds appear to be absent but conditions still seem to be suitable for Cheer Pheasants. "

The ICBP has Specialist Groups on Birds of Prey, Bustards, Cranes, Flamingoes, Galliformes, Grebes, Herons, Hornbills, parrots, Pelicans, Piciformes, Seabirds, Storks, Ibises, Spoonbills, and Waterfowl. Those of our readers who may be interested in these groups, would benefit by keeping in touch with the Chairman of these specialist groups. Addresses will be forwarded on request.

The Oriental Bird Club, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, U.K.

In the May/June 1987 issue of our Newsletter, information was given about this Club and of the account in Grindlays Bank, Bombay, to which subscriptions could be forwarded. Bulletin No.5, Spring 1987, has just arrived. The article which is rather interesting is about the Sind Sparrow (*Passer pyrrhonotus*). Among other things it says: "The sparrow genus Passer is not one to inspire the imagination of many birdwatchers, and a superficial glance at a picture of the Sind Sparrow Passer pyrrhonotus is unlikely to kindle great interest. Yet unlike its familiar congener, the House Sparrow P. domesticus, which has a nearly global distribution, the Sind Sparrow has an extremely restricted range, making it worthy of special attention."

"Like the House Sparrow, it has benefited from the activities of man. Apparently rare at the beginning of the century, this species has spread as a result of the extensive irrigation schemes which have transformed the plains of Pakistan and created lengthy water ways, reservoirs and seepage tanks. In the north-east it has spread along the Indus tributaries, the Sutlej and Ravi Rivers, into north-west India; in the extreme south of the country, T.J. Roberts has recorded it in tamarisk Tamarix scrub at the Indus delta. Surprisingly (in view of its association with the Indus river), there also appears to be an isolated population in extreme south-east Iran. "

Incidentally, S.A. Hussain of the B.N.H.S. is the O.B.C. Representative in India and I hope he will keep us supplied with information of interest to our readers.

Reducing production costs of our Newsletter

This Newsletter comes to you with a waistband instead of inside an envelope. Loke Wan Tho would have said it is over-exposed and under-developed, but it does save on costs. The last issue cost Rs.811/- for the printing and despatch, and this one will be around Rs.250/-. The balance in the Newsletter account is Rs.3275/- so we must economise.

Also, from 1988, there will be no regular subscription for the Newsletter. I understand that a paid publication can run into several difficulties with the authorities, while one which runs on donations is a free bird. So, gear up for 1988, and some time in December just send any amount of Rs.20/- or over as a donation to the Newsletter. You will be reminded about this in the November-December issue.

I cannot fail to thank Ashheesh Pittie of Hyderabad for kindly producing the address slips of our subscribers/donors on his computer. This has been most helpful, and I hope that mistakes in the addresses will gradually be eliminated.

=====

---

The Pond Heron - Its local Movements, by V. Santharam, 68 I Floor, Santhome High Road, Madras - 600 028

During the last nine years that I have been watching birds around Madras city, I have been noticing the total disappearance of the Pond Heron or Paddy Bird (*Ardeola grayii*) between mid-June and late September. This is true at least for Adyar Estuary which I have been visiting every week and, perhaps, also true for other wetland habitats in the immediate neighbourhood of the city where I have paid visits at random during the above period.

I regret I do not have any statistical data to support my observations showing the movements of this species. But it is obvious that (at Adyar Estuary) there is a gradual build-up in the numbers of Pond Heron in March-April. This could perhaps be a result of drying up of other sources of water in this area. The Adyar river-mouth, however, always has a good amount of water at all times of the year, especially during the summer months, due to the blocking of the mouth by a sandbar, resulting in the accumulation of water. By April, the Pond Herons start acquiring their breeding plumage although some individuals continue to sport the drab winter plumage even as late as early June. By the last week of May, there is a decline in the number of Paddy birds at the Adyar Estuary but some birds are still to be seen. By middle or third week of June even these are gone, and after this the Pond Herons are totally absent.



During the next three months - between mid-June to about mid-September, the Pond Heron is rarely seen in other wetlands and fields around Madras, and even when seen, they are found in small numbers. I must, however, admit that my visits to other habitats during these months have been irregular and limited.

By late September, small numbers of Pond Herons start trickling in. But it is only between end-October and mid-November that this species becomes once again well-established and seen in good numbers at Adyar and the environs of Madras. Most of the birds are in worn-out summer plumage on arrival but soon revert to the winter plumage.

I have not yet come across the bird's nest in the vicinity of Madras either in isolated colonies or at the heronries such as Vedanthangal, Karikkudi, Nelapattu and the Simpson Estate, which are generally active in the months November to March. The nesting of the Pond Herons seems to be taking place in the summer months as is evident from the development of breeding plumage. Ali and Ripley (1983) have given the nesting season of Pond Heron as May to September in most parts of the sub-continent, and November to February in South India and Ceylon. At the latter place the season may prolong to August. Henry (1971) says that the nesting season in Ceylon is December-May, sometimes later. Perhaps, the Pond Heron breeds in the vicinity of some perennial water sources such as Pulicat and Kaliveli Tank which are not really far from Madras. A detailed survey could throw more light on this.

Ali and Ripley (1983) and Hancock and Kushlan (1984) say that the Indian Pond Heron is sedentary and that its movements are governed by droughts and floods. However, in the present case, there appears to be an annual movement of the birds coinciding with the onset of the monsoons. The south-west monsoon sets in by early June and the north-east by mid or late October. It must also be remembered that the Coromandel Coast receives most of its rain from the north-east monsoon.

This summer, the Pond Herons moved out as usual by late May-early June and were scarce by mid-June. However, some individuals were to be seen as late as 28th June. Earlier, on a drive from Madras to Pondicherry, I was only able to see 6 individuals (20.6.87) during the journey. However, there was a small surprise on 26th July at the Adyar Estuary when a Pond Heron in full breeding plumage turned up and was seen hunting. Similarly, on 1.8.87. I was able to see a single bird in non-breeding dress at Simpson Estate. It was earlier noticed by Mr. Guruswamy who is keeping a watch over the bird movements of that area.

I shall keep my eyes open and report to you in case there are any other interesting observations.

---

It would be interesting to compare these observations with those of the readers from different localities to get a better picture of the movements of this species in relation to the two monsoons.

References

Ali, Salim and Ripley, S.D. - The Handbook of Birds of India and Pakistan (Compact Edn.) - 1983

Hancock, James and Kushlan, James - The Herons Handbook - 1984

Henry, G.M. - A Guide to the Birds of Ceylon, 2nd Edition - 1971.

= = = = =

---

Bird Sightings on a Trek to Gomukh, by Dr. Ravi C. Nayar, Asst. Professor, Dept. of E.N.T., St. John's Medical College Hospital, Bangalore - 560 034.

Between March 27th and April 15th 1987, I was conducting Medical Studies on members of an Advanced Mountaineering Course, of the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering, at Uttarkashi. As I was not technically a course participant I made use of my free time compiling a check list of birds.

On March 27th, en route, at Hardwar, during a brief stopover, I saw many birds like the Bee eaters, Redvented Bulbuls, Drongos, Kingfishers, Parakeets and Mynas, all common plain birds. Hardwar is the place where the Ganges enters the plains in right earnest, and the proximity of the river and fields to the town, contributes to the abundance of bird life here.

The bus journey to Uttarkashi was an experience in itself. Quite apart from the tortuous route the road took to reach the altitude of 9000 ft. above sea level, the view of the Bhagirathi river, below us all the way, was awe inspiring. This segment of the river has many rapids, and is a spot for White water sports. Occasionally we had glimpses of the Garwal Himalayas, but as I was soon to learn to the chagrin of my feet, distances in this region are deceptive. The mountains were in fact over two days journey away. On the way I saw a Blue Rock Thrush, perched on a rock, quite boldly watching the bus. It had a shrill piercing call which I was to hear quite frequently in the next few days but surprisingly I was not able to spot the bird again.

The Nehru Institute of Mountaineering itself, is situated on the hills overlooking Uttarkashi. Situated in a picturesque area, almost invisible because of the trees, the Institute gardens (if I may call the section of the forest enclosed within the compound walls, a garden), abound in bird life. Here I faced my first problem, with bird watching in coniferous forests. The light is poor, the trees are many, the flight of the birds is swift, and hence the period they spend in the open is so brief, that it is difficult to have a clear view of them. I am now convinced that proper identification of bird calls is the clue for successful Check-listing of Birdlife in such areas. The calls are often shrill and the cold mountain air and the quiet environment carry them far.

Undoubtedly the surest sighting of all was the Red Billed Blue Magpie, the bird immortalised by John Gould in his Birds of Asia. It is a large bird, with a distinctive musical hiccough, and a peculiar flight pattern wherein it takes a few rapid beats then is content to glide. One hardly gets time to observe any of the details of its plumage. All I retain in my mind's eye is its long tail tipped with white dragging behind it in its flight, the rest of the details are still thanks to John Gould.

I saw many White Cheeked Bulbuls, and spotted only one Red Vented Bulbul (?). I watched a Jungle Crow being chased by a pair of Drongos, and almost dismissed the next black bird I saw as another Crow, until its graceful flight caught my attention. It was a Yellow Billed Cough, a bird I was to see a lot of in the next few days.

The journey to Gangotri was by bus and for me sitting in the front seat quite a nail biting experience. The road is in a state of dynamic equilibrium between the landslides induced by thoughtless felling of trees, and the shoring up efforts of the GREF, a division of the Border Roads Organisation. Thanks to the hydel exploitation of the Ganges, the river is for the most part merely a stream. As the bus gained height, a pair of Steppe Eagles and a Pale Harrier kept us company. (Do Harriers soar?).

Gangotri was deserted at that time of the year, and seemed to be devoid of bird life too. Until I spotted a White Capped Bush Chat on the rocks by the river, when it advertised its own presence by a shrill cry.

We trekked to Gomukh, 18 km. in the snow. Let me confess that the fatigue of the trek and the load on my back, coupled with the fear of losing my foothold, prevented me from even raising my head to check on strange calls till we reached the camp site.

At camp site, 15,000 feet above sea level, there were only snow rocks and an iced river to look at, as this was above the tree line. I did not expect to see any birds, but scarcely had the quartermaster sounded the gong for dinner, when the Choughs came, in a flock of about 10 or 12.

It was a treat to watch the aerial acrobatics of these birds. There were no insects in the air, but in a manner reminiscent of the Bee Eaters, the Choughs would fly in the air, stop, loop and glide back to the rock. They seemed to be in no hurry, almost reflective fliers, strangely silent, and I was reminded of Richard Bach's 'Livingstone Seagull'. The air and the environs lend itself to philosophy, maybe the birds are affected too. (Sorry for this flight of fancy, but the thought entered my mind while I watched them).

At night it snowed heavily, and we had only the silver foxes to keep us company.

The return journey had nothing of interest to the naturalist save a mention must be made of the hot springs at Gargnani. These are natural geysers, which have been channeled into a concrete pool. A dip washes away much of the fatigue, and almost all of the dirt accumulated during the trek.



I have listed the birds I saw during the trek, and would like to place on record my observation that as far as hill birds are concerned, the Handbook has less to offer than "Birds of Nepal and Kashmir" by Fleming Sr. and Jr.

Uttarkashi, and Trek to Gangotri

- |                              |   |                             |
|------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. White Breasted Kingfisher | - | Halvyon symmenses           |
| 2. Black Drongo              | - | Dicruvus adeimilis          |
| 3. Red Vented Bulbul         | - | Pycnonotus cafer            |
| 4. White checked Bulbul      | - | Pycnonotus leucogenys       |
| 5. Rose Ringed Parakeet      | - | Psitta cula krameri         |
| 6. House Swift               | - | Apus affinus                |
| 7. Common Myna               | - | Acridotheres tristis        |
| 8. Scarlet Minivet           | - | Pericrocotus Flammens       |
| 9. Red Billed Blue Magpie    | - | Cissa Erythrorhyncha        |
| 10. Jungle Crow              | - | Corvus macrorhynchos        |
| 11. Yellow Billed Cough      | - | Pyrhocus gracilus           |
| 12. Blue Rock Thrush         | - | Monticola rufiventris       |
| 13. Steppe Eagle             | - | Aquila rapox (? Nipalensis) |
| 14. Pale Harrier             | - | Circus macrocuris           |

Gangotri and on Trek to Gomukh

- |                            |   |                            |
|----------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. White Capped River Chat | - | Chaimarornis leucocephalus |
| 2. Pied Bush Chat          | - | Savivola caprata           |
| 3. Indian Robin            | - | Sexicoloides Fulicata      |
| 4. Purple Sunbird          | - | Nectarinia asiatica        |
| 5. Yellow Billed Cough     | - | Pyrhocrorax graculus       |

=====

Abnormal Concentration of Aquatic Birds at Sardarsanand Lake in Western Rajasthan Desert Region, by Indra Kumar Sharma, Bhagwati Bhawan, Ratanada Road, Jodhpur - 342 020, and Sunayan Sharma, Wildlife Warden, Jodhpur Division, Jodhpur.

Sardarsanand Lake is a large earthen dam lake of about 20 sq.km. water spread with a depth upto 30 m. This lake is at the fringe of the Thar desert in semi-arid region about 60 km. from Jodhpur. The water is somewhat brackish and Potamogeton spp, is the major large size floating flora. It is rich in various species of carp and cat fishes. Because of uneven contours of the bed of the lake, several islands are present and provide a fine resort to water birds.

This lake is richest with water birds in the western Rajasthan in varieties of species and so also in population. In the first week of February 1987, about 1700 White Pelicans (Pelecanus onocrotalus) were observed. Most of these were either basking at islands or fishing in large groups. Pelicans were not observed in any other lake of western Rajasthan. Probable causes why this lake is so rich with Pelicans, according to the authors, are 1) This lake is shallow and rich with fishes hence easily satisfy food demand of a large

population of pelicans. 2) The lake is considerably saline, which suits the pelicans and the flamingo, as these birds prefer creeks and lagoon brackish water, particularly for breeding. Flamingo is rare in lakes and wetlands of western Rajasthan, except the Sardarsamand. About 1200 Lesser Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus minor*) were observed in three long rows at shallow water. The probable reasons for the extraordinary high population of the flamingo at the lake are - the water is shallow and widespread and rich with planktons.

The Brownheaded gull (*Larus brunnicephalus*) and the River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*) were observed in large numbers in hundreds, hunting fishes at low flight and resting on the shores or islands.

Eight Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) were observed. These are not observed in other wetlands of western Rajasthan. Other notable birds observed there were - Spotbill (*Anas poeclorhyncha*) about 50, 150 Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*) and 4 Darter (*Anhinga rufa*). Large numbers of the Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) and hundreds of Blackwinged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*), Little Stints (*Calidaris minutus*), Little ringed plover (*Charadrius dubius*) and Sandpipers (*Tringa spp*) were observed at shores hunting insects and their larvae and other invertebrates). Seven pairs of the Saras Crane (*Grus antigone*) were also observed at cultivated sites of the lake. Two pairs of the Common Teal (*Anas crecca*) were also observed. It was not noted at other lakes of western Rajasthan.

Conservation Aspects: Drying shores of the lake are cultivated by villagers with Linseed (*Linum usitatissimum*), wheat and mustard, that does not leave the shores with natural aquatic flora and invertebrate fauna which provide considerable food to water birds. Hence cultivation of crops should be made restricted with enough reservation of much suitable natural shores for thriving of birds with enough availability of food and shelter. Shore area cultivation farmers much disturb the birds as pests to their cultivation.

Water of the lake is exclusively used for irrigation of agricultural farms hence the lake rapidly begins to get dry, even as early as mid-February, that badly reduces carrying capacity of the lake for water birds. Hence enough water should be retained as reserve for water birds.

At shores and islands Desibabul (*Acacia nilotica*), Prosopis juliflora, Banyan (*Ficus bengalensis*) and Peepal (*F. religiosa*) should be grown at banks and large islands to provide suitable roost and breeding sites, that may enhance carrying capacity of the lake and may avail good breeding site too. It was observed that many species of birds have to fly upto 25 km. from here for suitable roost trees. Nests of Painted Stork, Darter and other birds were observed 20 km. from here at large Banyan tree close to a village tank.

Commercial fishing is made at this lake, which considerably disturbs flocks of birds. Fishermen should be instructed that their movements and activities in the lake should be adapted to least disturb the water birds.

=====

Birds of the J.P. Nagar Tank, by Milind Desai, No.181, 7th Block, P.W.D. Quarters, Wilson Gardens, Bangalore - 560 027

From 1984 onwards I grew more and more familiar with the J.P. Nagar tank and its foul odour. Its intensity too changed with the months of the year and so also did the birds of the tank. There were harriers, cottontails, snipes, garganeys and spotbilled ducks. The hot months brought in the black bellied finchlarks and other resident birds.

The ever-present smell was caused by the sewage being deliberately discharged into the tank. And then, on one fateful day, I heard that B.D.A. sites would come up at the place and it was as if I really would lose a very loving friend. It sounded ludicrous that someone was thinking in terms of filling up the whole tank. And so, the glory that was once the Bolikinshalli pond, started to crumble.

The place was bulldozed, bunds created, trucks rolled in, vegetation (shrubs mainly) vanished, water level receded and birds decreased, everything happening in seemingly no time at all.

Even to this day, the coots, dabchicks, stilts and jacanas are trying to defend their home. In the first week of August, a truck load of industrial waste, having the unmistakable smell of D.D.T. was dumped to fill up the lake.

Netting and shooting too have been going on in this place. A fellow birdwatcher has once seen about 7-8 rat snakes butchered near the lake.

The birdwatchers of Bangalore will henceforth be missing one of the fabulous venues of their outings. Presently, however, at least 10 pairs of jacanas are breeding here.

I could see the fifty plus group of blackbellied finchlarks (2nd Feb 1986) and a large group of waxbills (are these the Munias? Editor) (July 1987) as they flirted around in the bushes or what remained of them. The Kingfishers were also present.

Suddenly, I wanted to turn back, for the smell was unbearable. I left the J.P. Nagar tank with the calls of the survivors trying so hard, and yet so unsuccessfully, to tell their tales of woe to the town planners of Bangalore. I append a list of 110 species of birds seen in the J.P. Nagar Tank. (The Editor will be glad to send copies of this list to anyone interested).

=====

Birds seen at Mula-Mutha Sanctuary, Poona, 17.3.79. 1715-1830, by Mrs. Jemel Ara, M-7 Single, Harmu Housing Colony, Ranchi.

1. House crow. F
2. Jungle crow. F. (flocks of crows flying about outside sanctuary).
3. Common Myna. About 6 flying over river, walking along fish dam.



4. Red Munia. Flock of 24, no red cock, flitting among riverside weeds, hopping along path very close to us.
5. Common Swallow. M. at first, but presently disappeared; swooping down to water, hawking above river and bank.
6. Red-rumped Swallow. F. With common Ss.
7. Pied Wagtail. 1 on mid-stream rock.
8. Yellow Wagtail. M. Hunting among rocks and grass.
9. Yellow-headed Wagtail 1.1. Standing on rocks.
10. White-breasted Kingfisher 1. Sitting on rock.
11. House Swift, at first M; Then, after departure of swallows, VM flying in clouds above river, dipping to water, hawking single.
12. Pariah Kite. Abt.5. Wheeling above river, plucking objects from water, 2 playing in air.
13. Pheasant-tailed Jacana. M. Distributed all over river, by individuals; resting, walking, feeding; no tail plumes, but plumage acquiring colour.
14. Gull-billed Tern. M. Sitting on shoals, wheeling up and down river, plunging, fishing among Egrets.
15. Red-Wattled Lapwing. 1.1. Standing on rock, flying, calling once.
16. Black-winged Stilt. M. But not so many as last month; many males in full black-and-white plumage, not so many in immature or winter plumage; flying, stalking, wading, feeding; some flocks resting on shoals.
17. Little (?) Stint. M. Individuals and flock at rest among other waders.
18. Spotted Sandpiper. 1. Wading, walking, hunting.
19. Green Sandpiper 1. Flying in mid-stream-
20. Redshank, 1.1. Wading, feeding, in mid-stream.
21. Fan-tail (?) Snipe, 1. Settling at water's edge, flying up at our approach.
22. Little Cormorant. Abt.3. Sitting on rocks, flying.
23. Little Egret, M. Fishing, watching, especially below fish dam; one bird in pale grey plumage.
24. Cattle Egret. 1-2. Along with above.
25. Paddy Bird. VF. Hunting, flying.
26. Garganey. Abt.100-150. Swimming and feeding individually; resting in small parties; flying when alarmed in a big flock but returning in small parties or in pairs; plumage bright in drakes.
27. Cotton Teal. Party of 4 and 1+2 individuals; Drakes in full plumage; swimming, feeding.
28. Dabchick, M. Distributed all over river; swimming, diving; one pair placing nest materials in very small clump of hyacinth in mid-stream.

M. Many; F. Few; VM. Very many. VF. Very few.

Thomas Gay & Jamal Ara

Birds seen on the Terrace of Thomas Gay's House (Poona), 17.3.79. - 9 A.M.

1. Common Hawk - Cuckoo (Only heard pee-kahan)
2. Black-headed Myna, 1. Walking.

3. Redvented Bulbul, 2. Hopping on branches, new tinkling, drinking water.
4. Ashy Wren-Warbler, 1. Hopping on Bougainvillea creeper.
5. Tailor Bird, 1. Amongst Bougainvillea creeper, searching leaves and flowers, calling sharp towee, towee, towee.
6. Grey Tit - 2. Calling, searching among leaves.
7. Magpie Robin, 1 male. On tree branch, uttering swee, swee, swee; harsh chur-r.
8. House Sparrow, 16, 14. Hopping, calling chirrup, tsi, tsi, tsip; now male feeding on bread-crumbs, female joins.

=====

---

Correspondence :

Crows by Dr. V.G. Prasad, Consultant, Pest Control, 51 Maruthi Nilaya (3rd Floor), Temple Street, Malleswaram, Bangalore - 560 003.

Crow - A hated bird in many nations. (Indian Express dt. 11.10.86.)

The Indian house crow that has invaded many parts of Indian Ocean has been declared a serious pest in these countries and remains the most hated bird except in its native land.

Crows are loveable birds. (Indian Express dt. 17.10.86.)- Taranath Kemath.

I have been friendly with crows and I find that they return love. Everyday quite a few of them, including the big deep-dark ones of Coorg, visit me and eat from my hands. Many softly peck at my fingers or palm to say "thanks".

Crows being omnivorous are good scavengers. Without them our garbage would be really unmanageable, and the resulting stench unbearable. They feed on anything rotting from waste paper, and dead animals to even human waste. In fact, in villeges, the scavenging of crows contribute a lot to rural hygiene.

Crows following a plough or tractor, is again a very common sight. Studies have shown that they are efficient predators of root grubs, crickets, and other insects which inhabit the soil. These insects are major pests of many commercial crops. This role played by crows in checking these insects is overlooked especially in the light of the fact that insects multiply in leaps and bounds. In fact, regions where crows and sparrows have been exterminated, the problem of pests have risen in tremendous proportion, calling for increased use of pesticides, thus raising the cost of the cultivation and reducing the returns to farmers. The economy of the farming community is, therefore, closely linked to the presence of crows and other birds, a fact many developed nations are now realizing.

Crows have that special ability to sense a ripening crop, be it grains or fruits. In fact their attraction to these crops must be viewed more as a boon than hard, as it tells the farmers that the crop is getting ready for harvest.

In this context, the news "Crow - a hated bird in many nations" (Indian Express, 11.10.1986) will only serve to cast wrong impressions about birds - the crows in particular. At the same time one cannot really say that crows are lovable as Mr. Taranath Kamath has written (Indian Express, 17.10.1986) for crows though venerated are neither attractive nor good songsters.

=====

---

Do Birds Play? by Acharya Dwaraknath, 12-4-16B Convent Road, Kadabattu, Udipi - 576 101-

I have observed on many an occasion at more than two places, a jungle-crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*) pulling the tail of a juvenile of a house-crow (*Corvus splendens*). The pattern is usually like this. When there is a large group of mixed parties of both the Jungle-crows and House-crows at a bird-bath or at a feeding place (say, when I put the customary "crow-feed" before I partake any food), the jungle-crow whenever it fancies and feels like teasing a young one of the other urban species, it pulls at the tail and holds the bird for some time. The young helpless one just pleads "Please don't" or "Help! Help!" and the Jungle-crow condescendingly leaves the victim only to catch it again. This goes on for some time. Methinks both these birds enjoy this "Play" because the young one does not make any attempt to leave the place. The elders also do not bother to interfere.

=====

---

Birds Harassing Their Companions in Distress, by T.V. Jose, Reena Apts., Flat No.8 1st Floor, Chincholi Bunder Road, Malad (W), Bombay - 400 064 (Maharashtra).

I refer to the note under the above heading appeared in the Jan-Feb issue of the Newsletter by Smt. Kamala Venkataramani.

The quoted part of the note says "I saw a group of 7-8 mynahs crowding around a mynah hanging upside down on the wire." Mere crowding cannot be interpreted as a hostile activity, much less an attempt to kill. But pecking as was done "by a group of crows" is definitely hostile and likely to kill the bird. Crows however do not belong to the "clan" of the dangling mynah.

Lack of clarity apart, what interests me is the part of the note: "Presumably they (mynah?) prefer to have a member of their own species dead rather than captured by man." This is the typical human way of interpretation. I have also seen such "incomprehensible" acts. Once an injured rock pigeon was found attacked by other pigeons. Again, a domestic hen was seen pecking its own chick, which was deformed and was unlikely to lead a normal life. I do not know whether other birds too indulge in such cruel acts in similar circumstances. This appears to be a process by which members of the same species weed out those that do not conform to normal shape and posture. Animosity of this type among the members of the same species against deformity (which is a strange experience) is of interest. Yet we know no crow, or for that matter any foster parents, are found able to detect strangeness in the young ones of birds belonging to other species in their nest, or detected strangeness they do not seem to detest.



Is it a case of parental instincts overpowering the instinct to attack the strangeness in the young so alien to their own? Or is this strangeness not regarded as such since the foster parents get accustomed to them and are not able to detect? Some simple experiments will prove the truth.

Through this note I wish to draw the attention of the readers that there are many points at which we differ from other animals. Some are mental and others physical, and both are inter-related in having these dissimilarities. To begin with, we know animals including birds do not have as much freedom as we have with our limbs, particularly with hands and fingers, and they do not seem to have the power of comprehension in kind or extent that we have. These two points, not being unconnected, along with our being social beings different from any other animal of gregarious nature, make their life style different from ours. We have a language to communicate; in that sense hardly any other animal has. Most of the animals depend upon their sheer reproductive power to maintain their number, whereas we humans depend less on that but more on protecting ourselves from being killed. To solve our problems we humans depend more upon our superior brains. Animals too have brains but in quality and quantity theirs differ not only from ours but also among themselves. Animals in general depend mainly upon instincts, not on reason, in their life. This is not to say that we are not governed by any instincts; we depend upon reason too.

An instinct is an in-built arrangement that passes from parents to offspring. Under the influence of these instincts, birds make their nest, court and copulate. We however, should not be under the impression that these animals are capable of only responding to external stimuli in a purely mechanical way. Instincts are subject to variations, small as they are, according to some changes incidental to their environment. This latitude of adaptability has in it the nascent qualities of intelligence.

Many animals again differ from us in perceptive abilities. We as well as birds have good visual perception, but many other animals are poor in this quality, but they are much better in other perceptive abilities. An elephant or a dog is far better in olfaction. A tiger, again, is endowed with good hearing ability. As these faculties differ in their functional characteristics, they are bound to have their merits and demerits which have their own corresponding part to play in the world these animals possess. Memory to us often, if not always, involves recollection, but to an animal it is just a matter of association. In matters like space and time, the two most important basic elements which support life experience of any organism, too, there is difference.

So, before we make an anthropomorphical attempt on animals, let us remember at least these points and free ourselves from being mixed with animals we observe. Yet it is true many animals do experience pain and pleasure as we do and are capable of expressing anger, fear, happiness, sorrow and even curiosity, and in a very few of them we see even traces of reasoning too. In these mental operations our claim of 'superiority' lies more in degree than in kind. Again, if we are able to dive into deeper layers of our own mind, it is reasonable to assume, we are sure to meet with a mind identical with theirs irrespective of the differences at the top.

=====

In this context, the news "Crow - a hated bird in many nations" (Indian Express, 11.10.1986) will only serve to cast wrong impressions about birds - the crows in particular. At the same time one cannot really say that crows are lovable as Mr. Taranath Kamath has written (Indian Express, 17.10.1986) for crows though venerated are neither attractive nor good songsters.

=====

---

Do Birds Play? by Acharya Dwarsknath, 12-4-16B Convent Road, Kadbetu, Udupi - 576 101-

I have observed on many an occasion at more than two places, a jungle-crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*) pulling the tail of a juvenile of a house-crow (*Corvus splendens*). The pattern is usually like this. When there is a large group of mixed parties of both the Jungle-crows and House-crows at a bird-bath or at a feeding place (say, when I put the customary "crow-feed" before I partake any food), the jungle-crow whenever it fancies and feels like teasing a young one of the other urban species, it pulls at the tail and holds the bird for some time. The young helpless one just pleads "Please don't" or "Help! Help!" and the Jungle-crow condescendingly leaves the victim only to catch it again. This goes on for some time. Methinks both these birds enjoy this "Play" because the young one does not make any attempt to leave the place. The elders also do not bother to interfere.

=====

---

Birds Harassing Their Companions in Distress, by T.V. Jose, Reena Apts., Flat No.8 1st Floor, Chincholi Bunder Road, Malad (W), Bombay - 400 064 (Maharashtra).

I refer to the note under the above heading appeared in the Jan-Feb issue of the Newsletter by Smt. Kamala Venkatarasani.

The quoted part of the note says "I saw a group of 7-8 mynahs crowding around a mynah hanging upside down on the wire." Mere crowding cannot be interpreted as a hostile activity, much less an attempt to kill. But pecking as was done "by a group of crows" is definitely hostile and likely to kill the bird. Crows however do not belong to the "clan" of the dangling mynah.

Lack of clarity apart, what interests me is the part of the note: "Presumably they (mynah?) prefer to have a member of their own species dead rather than captured by man." This is the typical human way of interpretation. I have also seen such "incomprehensible" acts. Once an injured rock pigeon was found attacked by other pigeons. Again, a domestic hen was seen pecking its own chick, which was deformed and was unlikely to lead a normal life. I do not know whether other birds too indulge in such cruel acts in similar circumstances. This appears to be a process by which members of the same species weed out those that do not conform to normal shape and posture. Animosity of this type among the members of the same species against deformity (which is a strange experience) is of interest. Yet we know no crow, or for that matter any foster parents, are found able to detect strangeness in the young ones of birds belonging to other species in their nest, or detected strangeness they do not seem to detest.

Is it a case of parental instincts overpowering the instinct to attack the strangeness in the young so alien to their own? Or is this strangeness not regarded as such since the foster parents get accustomed to them and are not able to detect? Some simple experiments will prove the truth.

Through this note I wish to draw the attention of the readers that there are many points at which we differ from other animals. Some are mental and others physical, and both are inter-related in having these dissimilarities. To begin with, we know animals including birds do not have as much freedom as we have with our limbs, particularly with hands and fingers, and they do not seem to have the power of comprehension in kind or extent that we have. These two points, not being unconnected, along with our being social beings different from any other animal of gregarious nature, make their life style different from ours. We have a language to communicate; in that sense hardly any other animal has. Most of the animals depend upon their sheer reproductive power to maintain their number, whereas we humans depend less on that but more on protecting ourselves from being killed. To solve our problems we humans depend more upon our superior brains. Animals too have brains but in quality and quantity theirs differ not only from ours but also among themselves. Animals in general depend mainly upon instincts, not on reason, in their life. This is not to say that we are not governed by any instincts; we depend upon reason too.

An instinct is an in-built arrangement that passes from parents to offspring. Under the influence of these instincts, birds make their nest, court and copulate. We however, should not be under the impression that these animals are capable of only responding to external stimuli in a purely mechanical way. Instincts are subject to variations, small as they are, according to some changes incidental to their environment. This latitude of adaptability has in it the nascent qualities of intelligence.

Many animals again differ from us in perceptive abilities. We as well as birds have good visual perception, but many other animals are poor in this quality, but they are much better in other perceptive abilities. An elephant or a dog is far better in olfaction. A tiger, again, is endowed with good hearing ability. As these faculties differ in their functional characteristics, they are bound to have their merits and demerits which have their own corresponding part to play in the world these animals possess. Memory to us often, if not always, involves recollection, but to an animal it is just a matter of association. In matters like space and time, the two most important basic elements which support life experience of any organism, too, there is difference.

So, before we make an anthropomorphical attempt on animals, let us remember at least these points and free ourselves from being mixed with animals we observe. Yet it is true many animals do experience pain and pleasure as we do and are capable of expressing anger, fear, happiness, sorrow and even curiosity, and in a very few of them we see even traces of reasoning too. In these mental operations our claim of 'superiority' lies more in degree than in kind. Again, if we are able to dive into deeper layers of our own mind, it is reasonable to assume, we are sure to meet with a mind identical with theirs irrespective of the differences at the top.

=====



Occurrence of Albino Jungle Crow (*Corvus Macrorhynchos*) in Bilaspur, Himachal Pradesh, by C.K. Sar, MAB Project, Central Fisheries, Bilaspur - 174 001

Loss of body pigment is not a rare phenomenon among birds, partial or total albino birds have been reported by many ornithologists (Acharjyo and Mishra 1973; Sandhu and Dhindsa 1982). But the albinism in jungle crow, *Corvus macrorhynchos*, has not been reported so far. The present note communicates the occurrence of albinism in jungle crows.

Bilaspur is a small township in the Shivalik hill range of Himachal Pradesh (31° 20' N; 75° 46' E). In addition to the normal coloured jungle crow, albino jungle crow was occasionally recorded here, specially during the months of August-September 1984 (one in number), 1985 (three in number), after February 1986, two were observed occasionally throughout the year at roosting place near district hospital. (Number has been counted during roosting time at evening in eucalyptus plantation in front of the hospital).

It is interesting to note that this town remained devoid of house crows (*Corvus splendens*). The albinism of jungle crows has been clearly ascertained to observe the size of the albino crow and normal jungle crow. The total absence of house crows in Bilaspur further support the albinism in jungle crows. Most of the time during observation hours the albino crow was surrounded by a large number (2-26) of jungle crows, those were not harming him. Food was exactly same for both the normal and albino crow.

The albino jungle crow has a complete creamy white colour (one specimen with few black tail feathers), bill heavy and greyish white with black tip.

References: Acharjyo, L.N. and Mishra, R. 1973: Occurrence of albino house crow (*Corvus splendens*) in Orissa. Prakruti Utkal Univ. J. Sci., 10 146-146.

Sandhu, P.S. and Dhindsa, M.S. 1982: An albino Indian Myna (*Acridotheres tristis tristis*) (Linnaeus) from Ludhiana (Punjab). Pavo., 20 (1&2) 73-74.

=====

---

Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*) in Kachchh Coast, by S.N. Varu, Junawas, P.O. Madhapur, Ta. Bhuj, Kachchh - 370 020.

On 22.8.87 while watching birds at Mandvi Seashore opp. town and near port with my friends, viz. Mr. Bapat, Mr. Chauhan and Mr. Solanki. Fisherman drew our attention towards big bird resting on stones of breakwater. We were amazed to see this bird as this was an unusual sighting. On first instance, we decided that it is some sea bird but could not perfectly identify at once. The bird was unable to fly due to illness or internal injury which was not visible.

According to the fisherman the bird is seen first time that morning. Then I wrote description of this bird in my diary. At home, I referred to the book "A pictorial guide to the Birds of Indian Sub-continent" of Dr. Salim Ali and Ripley, and saw picture of sea birds, and found that the bird we saw

was "BROWN BOOBY". Then I referred to book "Handbook of the Birds of India & Pakistan, Volume 1" of Dr. Salim Ali & Ripley, and confirmed that the bird we saw was Brown Booby.

To see this bird in Kachchh coast is unique as this bird occurs commonly at the Bay of Bengal and a specimen has been taken on the Malabar coast as per the above volume. Thus, this is the only record for the west coast of India.

=====

---

Birds of the Kaveri Valley - Additions, by Eric J. Lott, UTC, 17 Millers Road, Bangalore - 560 046

Thank you for publishing my article on Birds of the Kaveri Valley in your Newsletter, though the article was originally intended for people with very little knowledge of birdlife. It's a bit elementary and unsystematic.

Since writing that article in mid-1985, I've identified several further species of birds in the 'Sangam Valley' stretch. Our total list is now 140. I might mention the following: Grey Heron and Purple Heron, White Necked Stork, Great Stone Plover, Great Snipe (probably), Mottled Wood Owl, Green Boarded Bee-Eater, Black-Backed Woodpecker, Crested Tree Swift, Scarlet Minivet, Large Cuckoo-Shrike and Black-Headed Cuckoo Shrike, White-Winged Black Tit, Slaty-Headed Scimitar Babler, Blue-Headed Rock Thrush, Brown Breasted Flycatcher, Verditer Flycatcher, Common Rosefinch.

We should take special note of the white Winged Black Tit, as in A Pictorial Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent (Salim Ali and S.D. Ripley), only the North West is given as its location. My wife and I identified it in forest scrub country on the north bank of the Kaveri just 4 miles upstream from the Arkavati-Kaveri Sangam, late in October 1985.

=====

---

Second Bird Hospital of India, by Bantu Mansey, C/o Dr. K.S. Shah, Ganinagar - 361 008

Shani Memorial Charitable Trust formed in memory of a young lady, late Smt. Shani Kothari of Rajkot, has taken up the task of starting a Charitable Hospital for Birds. This was the desire of the late lady who unexpectedly died of Jaundice.

Shani's husband, father and mother, thought of starting this charitable hospital from the dowry given to her at the wedding time. This comes to something about Rs. 1 lakh. This charitable Trust is recognised by Government Animal Welfare Board and S.P.C.A. London.

Trustees include Sri Rasikbhai Mehta (President), Khanakbhai Parekh (Managing Trustee) and other six Trustees. At present they have started a clinic at Shri Khanakbhai Parekh, late lady's father's home, and are treating

birds with minor as well as major injuries, with the kind assistance of Dr. Joshi of Animal Welfare Board. They are planning to have a big hospital with the 5 lakh rupees collected by donations and contributions sent to them. This place will have, along with the hospital, an operation theatre, doctors' room, information about birds will be imparted to the lay person, house for injured birds, library, auditorium and workshop illustrating the way of preparing bird cages and bird-houses.

You are welcome to send your contribution to this Trust to the below address, and for further information contact or write to :-

Sri Khandbhai Parekh,  
'Kalol' 1/10 Shreejeeve Society,  
Bhd. Gurukul,  
RAJKOT - 360 001

=====

---



## DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES

- a non-profit society

22, Palam Marg, New Delhi - 110 057

In his quest for a better life, man has come a long way. He has probed and solved many mysteries of the universe - of time and space, of matter and mind, of life and death. He has conquered long dreaded diseases, built complex systems and miraculous machines, extended his reach into the most inhospitable corners of this planet.

### Development

Science and technology have given him now the ability to choose a future and design new paths of development; the ability to be a master of his destiny to a degree inconceivable only a few generations ago.

### For Whom?

Yet one half of the world's people live in poverty. And everywhere, the environment, on which our and our children's well-being so heavily depend, is rapidly deteriorating.

### Science and Technology

Science and technology offer the knowledge and tools to fashion a just and long-term development - one which improves the quality of life for all without destroying the resources which will sustain future generations. The challenge is to translate the scientific knowledge and technological tools into products for the welfare of the people.

### How?

This technology must be relevant, adaptable and in tune with local resources, skills and needs. In other words, Appropriate Technology. Technology that is usable, affordable, renewable. Technology which opens the doors to opportunities, work satisfaction and material rewards that never existed before. A co-operative effort in which everyone gains and no one loses.

- \* A technology where man is the master, not the slave.
- \* A technology which enhances man's spirit without cramping his mind.
- \* A technology which generates sustained benefits rather than temporary relief.
- \* A technology that conserves resources and respects the limits of the environment.
- \* A technology which creates wealth for the community and not merely money for the few.
- \* A technology that is economically viable, and widely available.
- A technology for the people.

NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Office: 17/1 Victoria Road,  
Bangalore - 560 047.

Tel: 578379

Dodda Gubbi Post,  
Bangalore - 562 123

Tel: Kothanur 32

-----

In the book of Indian Birds by Salim Ali, there is a reference to the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India. This rather informal Club was established in December 1969, with the object of undertaking field work, and to publish the findings in the Newsletter for Birdwatchers. The Club has been dormant all these years but the Newsletter has continued to be published initially every month, but now as a bi-monthly. Articles from experts and beginners are welcome. Sometimes there are complaints that some of the articles are amateurish, but experts must remember that they were fledglings too at some stage and needed to be assisted before they became airborne. But constructive criticism is always welcome.

With regard to the subscription rate, as was mentioned in an earlier issue, according to the law, a magazine sold for a fixed subscription entails certain legal requirements, while one which is not sold for a fixed price but is supported by voluntary donations, does not attract these restrictions. Hence, in future, anyone who wishes to receive the Newsletter should send a minimum donation of Rs.20/-. Cheques should be made in the name of Newsletter for Birdwatchers. Please add Rs.5/- for upcountry cheques.

I shall look forward to your support.

Zafar Futehally  
Editor

---

Front Cover: BAYA

Courtesy: E. HANUMANTHA RAO