

# —In the news—

Compiled by Praveen J.

## Indian Federation of Ornithologists—an initiative

Padmashri Zafar Futehally, at the request of Dr Dominique Homberger, Secretary, International Ornithological Congress (IOC), has initiated a dialogue to explore the possibility of launching a union of ornithologists from our region. He has requested Dr S. A. Hussain to do the groundwork for creating a network by reaching out to amateurs and professionals across the country. *Courtesy: BngBirds.*

## Pelagic birds blown inland by monsoon winds

The recent monsoon has seen a spate of pelagic birds on the Indian coasts, most reported being Lesser Frigate-birds *Fregata ariel*.<sup>1</sup> One bird even managed to reach Ranganathittu near Mysore (Karnataka), a good 150 km inland! Other pelagics include Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*, Brown Skua *Catharacta antarctica*, Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus* and Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*. Most of the sightings were made between 20.vi.2007–10.vii.2007. The following table lists all the pelagic bird sightings reported from the Indian coast during this year's rains in various e-groups. Readers should bear in mind that these are unchecked reports.

**Table 1. Pelagic bird sightings from Indian coasts in 2007**

Species	Date	Location: Observer(s)	Source
Booby sp.	07.v	Coloba, Mumbai, Maharashtra: K. B. Singh	BirdsofBombay
Frigate-bird sp.	02.vi	Marine Drive, Mumbai, Maharashtra: Mehboob (R. Naoroji)	BirdsofBombay
Lesser Frigate-bird	20.vi	Aaranattukara, Thrissur dist., Kerala: P. O. Nameer	KeralaBirder
Lesser (?) Frigate-bird	22.vi	Vadakara, Kozhikode dist., Kerala: A. Merveed	KeralaBirder
Lesser Frigate-bird	24.vi	Elliot's Beach, Chennai, Tamil Nadu: Vageeshwar, A. Rajaram	TamilBirds
Brown Noddy	27.vi	Colaba, Mumbai, Maharashtra: B. Ali, M. Macker, N. Jamdar	BirdsofBombay
Bridled Tern	27.vi	Colaba, Mumbai, Maharashtra: B. Ali, M. Macker, N. Jamdar	BirdsofBombay
Lesser Frigate-bird	29.vi	Ranganathittu, Karnataka: Ajit Huilgol (S. Subramanya)	BngBirds
Masked Booby	30.vi	Kali River Lodge, Karwar, Karnataka: V. M. Raj	BngBirds
Lesser (?) Frigate-bird	02.vii	Bommaiyarpalayam Beach, Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu: R. Ali	TamilBirds
Brown Skua	09.vii	Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala: S. Elamon, (Gopikrishnan)	KeralaBirder
Lesser Frigate-bird	10.vii	Chavakkad Beach Thrissur dist., Kerala: P. O. Nameer	KeralaBirder
Lesser Frigate-bird	09.viii	Colaba, Mumbai, Maharashtra: K. B. Singh	BirdsofBombay

## Confusing ioras – Karnataka Iora Watch

Bird surveys in the Marikanive-Lakkhahalli State Forest of Chitradurga district located in the remote corner of Karnataka by Dr S. Subramanya (a.k.a. Subbu), has led to a focus on the confusing plumage of ioras, some of which were photographed during these weekend forays. The photographs of certain individuals matched very closely, if not totally, with Marshall's Iora *Aegithina nigrolutea* (Fig. 1), found in northern and north-western India, with a population in Salem district, Tamil Nadu, while some other photographs matched the Sri Lankan Iora *Aegithina tiphia multicolor* (Fig. 2), which is found in Sri Lanka, southern Tamil Nadu and Kerala, up to about the Palghat (=Palakkad) Gap. These new developments have triggered Subbu



Fig. 1. A.K. Raju  
Marshall's Iora

to call for an "Iora watch" across Karnataka where photographs of ioras are requested, depicting the "side posture" showing head, neck, wings, belly and tail and "back posture" depicting the back of head, neck, upper back, both wings and the tail. Birdwatchers across peninsular India need to be alert to iora plumages, taking detailed notes and photographers wherever there is a suspicion of Marshall's Iora plumages. *Courtesy: BngBirds.*



Fig. 2. H.L. Prakash  
Sri Lankan Iora

## Changlang district survey—photo documenting birds

Tanmoy Ghosh and his associates conducted a biological survey in the Tangsa Community Conservation Reserve of Changlang district in eastern Arunachal Pradesh. They did an excellent photo documentation of many of the lesser-known bird species from this region like Rufous-vented Laughingthrush *Garrulax gularis*, Spot-breasted Laughingthrush *G. merulinus*, Grey-headed Parrotbill *Paradoxornis gularis*, etc. A detailed report is available at the Kolkatabirds website. <http://www.kolkatabirds.com/hillbirdssofind/changlang.htm>

## Eaglenest—Vacations for Conservation (VfC)

Ramana Athreya is running the VfC at Eaglenest for the second year in succession. This programme has five different batches of which two batches in March 2008 are primarily targeted at birds. Kaati Trust, Pune, and the Bugun Welfare Society, Arunachal

Pradesh, are organising this initiative to study the bio-diversity of Eaglenest Sanctuary. For details, contact Ramana at [ramana.athreya@gmail.com](mailto:ramana.athreya@gmail.com).

## Braving the rains and leeches—Silent Valley monsoon survey

P. K. Uthaman led the monsoon survey of Silent Valley National Park in Kerala during the first week of August—the third survey in the series after the summer and winter surveys in 2006. Twelve birdwatchers braved the rains and leeches in the evergreen forests to spend three field days at four base camps inside the national park. The significant finding of the survey is the absence of several common and easily detectable species like Small Sunbird *Nectarinia minima*, Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes leucocephalus* and Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica* from these wet habitats indicating an altitudinal migration to less wet areas. *Courtesy: KeralaBirder.*

## Hebbal Lake in distress

Much to the chagrin of Bangalore's birding fraternity, Hebbal Lake, one of the largest wetland bodies in the city, with an excellent avifauna to boost, was leased out by the Bangalore Lake Development Authority (LDA) to Oberoi group for lake restoration. A huge furor among activists saw several press statements followed by a "candle-



Uma Shankar Hebbal protest

<sup>1</sup> It is worth a mention that Lesser Frigate-bird *F. minor* of the *Handbook* (Ali & Ripley 1984) and other contemporary literature is called Great Frigate-bird in the recent guides of Grimmett *et al.* (1998) and Kazmierczak (2000). Least Frigate-bird *F. ariel* of Ali & Ripley (1984) is now Lesser Frigate-bird in recent guides. This confusing nomenclature is enough to warrant a re-check of all these sightings to certify the exact species.

light vigil” in front of the lake to mark the protest. Further to it, there has been a set of dialogues between some of the senior members of eco-groups and the Oberois. Post discussion, the eco-groups expressed their satisfaction in having impressed upon the Oberois on the need to have lake development done on sound ecological lines. However, it is to be seen how this translates into actions at ground level. Activists are also working towards tackling the much larger problem of LDA's interest to lease out lakes for private management.

### **MigrantWatch**

The first nation-wide migrant watch programme by National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) and Indian Birds has started in full swing with more than hundred birdwatchers across the country registering for the programme. The news was also publicized in regional and national dailies and has evoked good response from bird enthusiasts. Dr. Suhel Qader, who is driving this initiative, publishes the updates frequently in the MigrantWatch web page at <http://www.ncbs.res.in/CitSci>.

MigrantWatch is a participatory activity in which volunteers across the country note the arrival and presence of nine bird species that spend the winter in India. No special travel or effort is required other than noting the days on which the species is observed. The nine species have been chosen to keep the species list small and manageable for the first year. These species are widely distributed, fairly common, can be found not far from where people live and work (i.e., around cities, towns, villages, gardens, farms, campuses, etc.), and winter over a relatively wide latitudinal range. These nine species are: Northern Shoveller *Anas clypeata*, Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*, Common Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*, Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*, Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*, Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* and Rosy Starling *Sturnus roseus*.

There are two levels of participation.

Level 1. Keep an eye out for these nine species and note the date when it is first observed in the second half of 2007.

Level 2. Keep a regular (e.g. daily or weekly) record from 6.viii.2007 to 30.iv.2008. If some days or weeks are missed during this period, it is still okay to contribute information from those days/weeks on which the observations were made. A datasheet for filling this information is available at the MigrantWatch website.

Pooling information from volunteers all over the country will enable construction of countrywide maps of first arrival dates, regular presence dates, and dates of return migration for each species. The information gathered will be used to investigate the timing and speed of migration; also whether migration times are changing from year to year.

All information contributed will be freely accessible to all through Internet. A summary of the results will be published in *Indian Birds*. Target dates to have the first arrival results available are xii.2007 and the detailed wintering results by v.2008.

Interested people should send an email to [MigrantWatch@ncbs.res.in](mailto:MigrantWatch@ncbs.res.in) with the following information.

Your name

Location of observations (Town, District, State)

Latitude (if you know this)

Longitude (if you know this)

Level of participation (1 or 2)

Date observations started at this location (after 01.viii.2007)

How often do you look for birds at this location?

Sending this information will help to gauge the amount of coverage, and will enable the MigrantWatch team to make extra efforts to find people to make these observations in poorly represented locations of the country.

Observations can be entered in the Excel or OpenOffice spread sheets available in the MigrantWatch website. If this

is not possible, the document may be printed and used. For Level 1 observations, one can simply send the records in the text of an email. However, Level 2 participants should send the Level 1 datasheet as soon as the first observations are in so that this can be compiled immediately.

Results may be sent by email or by regular mail to:

Citizen Science, National Centre for Biological Sciences, GKVK Campus, Bellary Road, Bangalore 560065, India.

Email: [MigrantWatch@ncbs.res.in](mailto:MigrantWatch@ncbs.res.in)

### **From the field**

Sangeeta Dhanuka and friends have photographed a female **Crimson-backed Sunbird** *Leptocoma minima* in eclipse plumage at Nandi Hills near Bangalore on 12.viii.2007. This is perhaps the first time that this Western Ghats endemic is found outside normal range. *Courtesy: IndiaNaturePixs*.

Everyone in Delhi seems to be after the **Bristled Grassbird** *Chaetornis striatus*, which has been reported from Sultanpur and Dadri wetlands. Several sightings have poured in from these localities after the first report for this season by Bill Harvey on 4.vii.2007. *Courtesy: Delhibird*.

Karnataka state had a new bird added to its list this year when Sudhir Shivaram photographed a **Rufous-fronted Prinia** *Prinia buchanani* on 30.vi.2007 in Gaunahalli, Chitradurga district along with S. Subramanya and Ashwini Kumar Bhat. Shashank Dalvi and friends observed this species further north, around Badami, on 27.v.2007. The bird was also spotted by Mike Prince and friends at Mydenahalli Blackbuck Reserve in Tumkur district on 12.viii.2007 and 23.viii.2007 providing four sightings in four months—a typical case of a cryptic species that got overlooked until a sighting triggered everyone else to look for it. *Courtesy: BngBirds*.

### **Trevor Price receives E. O. Wilson Naturalist Award**

Dr Trevor Price, who has been studying the evolutionary biology of Indian birds for three decades, has been conferred with the prestigious E. O. Wilson Naturalist Award for 2007. The American Society of Naturalists grants this award to any active investigator, in mid-career, who has made significant contributions to the knowledge of a particular ecosystem or group of organisms. Few Indians know that Nitin Jamdar, the Mumbai-based lawyer and ornithologist, has been a constant volunteer since many years now, assisting Dr Price in his work on Indian birds. *Courtesy: BirdsofBombay*.

### **Threatened birds of the world—your chance to contribute**

BirdLife International (BLI) is seeking inputs and updates for *Threatened birds of the World* for the year of 2008. 'Globally Threatened Birds Forums' at the BirdLife website is active with several proposals to up-list and down-list the existing threatened species, e.g., the recent distribution information of Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti* has triggered a discussion to down list this species from Critically Endangered to Endangered. Such discussions can be monitored and responded to by freely logging into the Threatened Asian Birds Forum on this website:

[http://www.birdlife.org/action/science/species/global\\_species\\_programme/gtb\\_forums.html](http://www.birdlife.org/action/science/species/global_species_programme/gtb_forums.html)

### **“Healthy Wetlands, Healthy People”**

Ramsar Convention secretariat is moving ahead with the interpretation and material preparation for the theme “Healthy Wetlands, Healthy People”, chosen for the World Wetlands Day for next year—an event celebrated every year on 2<sup>nd</sup> February. Ramsar invites people to participate in the event and will distribute material that is hoped to help the celebration of this event. The basic mailing will include hard copies of the poster and stickers, as well as a CD-ROM containing printable thematic fact sheets and a surprise giveaway for children. The mailing is planned for early October 2007, and one can receive these materials by contacting

Valerie Higgins at the Ramsar secretariat ([wwd@ramsar.org](mailto:wwd@ramsar.org)).

A second CD is being prepared with the original design files of the poster and stickers for those who wish to customize the materials or translate them into local languages, but that will be sent only on special request. For more information, visit: [http://ramsar.org/outreach\\_index.htm](http://ramsar.org/outreach_index.htm).

### **Network to save the Siberian Crane**

Conservation history was made on 18.v.2007 in Almaty, Kazakhstan, where the countries of West and Central Asia joined together to form an international network to save the critically endangered Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus*. The historical partnership aims to protect globally significant natural wetlands, home to tens of millions of migratory water-birds.

The Western and Central Asian populations of the Siberian Crane migrate thousands of kilometers from their breeding grounds in the far north of Siberia, southward through six countries to their wintering grounds in Iran and India. The Siberian Crane is deeply embedded in the cultures of all the countries of the region. Since ancient times these great white cranes have been revered as models of virtue and symbols of good fortune, long life and fidelity.

The network formally accepted ten sites from five countries. With the establishment of the Western / Central Asian Site Network for Siberian Cranes and other water-birds, the sites of importance for the Siberian Crane now receive formal recognition across all its three flyways. For more information, visit <http://www.savingcranes.org> and <http://www.scwp.info>.

## **—Obituary—**

### **William C. Selover (1938–2007)**

Bill earned his Masters in foreign affairs at the University of Virginia, specialising in South Asian affairs. Granted a Fellowship by the Carnegie Foundation, he came to India in 1962 to serve as a US Information Officer in Bombay, lecturing on US foreign and domestic policy. That is when we met him and immediately established a life-long relationship. He stayed with us at our home in Andheri on several occasions and enjoyed being introduced to the hobby of birdwatching. Evidence of this is recorded in his article (Lavkumar & Selover 1963) relating to his birding with Lavkumar in Rajkot. In 1972 after attending the Second World Conference on National Parks in Yellowstone I spent a few days with Bill and his family in Washington DC. It was a lovely visit, and among others Bill introduced me to Robert Cahn, a Member of the Presidents' Council on Environmental Quality from whom I learnt a great deal about their policies relating to National Parks. Robert wrote a remarkable series of fifteen articles in the *Christian Science Monitor* entitled, "Will success spoil the National Parks," for which he was awarded a Pulitzer in 1969. With literally millions visiting the parks, (6,000 in one night at the Grand Teton) the American landscape was under great strain. But they kept a close watch on events and took appropriate ecological steps as necessary. Though we have known Bill intimately for several decades, it is only now that I learn from his daughter,

Victoria, how widespread were his interests and connections. He was on the editorial staff of the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Canberra Times* (Australia) and several others. For sometime he was special assistant to the Secretary of the Navy. Perhaps the appointment, which gave him most satisfaction, was acting as speechwriter and environmental policy advisor to the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the highly respected Russell Train.

We met Bill for the last time in April 2004, a crucial month for New Ornithologists Foundation. We had just learnt that the plans for Aasheesh to be editor of the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* had crashed as the publisher had decided to take on the dual role. We had just decided to start the *Newsletter for Ornithologists*, the forerunner of *Indian Birds* and were anxious about its financial viability. On hearing about our problems Bill said, "Zafar, count on me for \$500 immediately on my return." This Rs 25,000 and the Rs 30,000 sent with the same dispatch by Aamir Ali, gave us much relief. Subscribers to IB must remember their debt to Bill Selover.

### **References**

- Lavkumar, K. S. & Selover, W. C. 1963. A birdwatching outing in Rajkot. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 3 (5): 4–5.  
Selover, W. C. 2000. Birdwatching from Lalpuri Reservoir to Crissy Field. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 40 (1): 10–11.  
Selover, W. C. 2004. The birds of Bharatpur. *Newsletter for Ornithologists* 1 (3): 36–39.

—Zafar Futehally

## **Errata**

*Indian Birds* Volume 3 Number 2 (March–April) 2007.

Page 46, column 2, fifth line from top: insert an 'E' at the end of the coordinates for Bhitarkanika.

Page 48, column 1, eighth line from bottom, above Table 2: Delete "These areas where they were often sighted were."

Page 66, column 2, fourth line from bottom, read "144145" as '144–145'.

Page 66, column 2, last line, read "88 (3):" as '88 (3): 452.'

Page 69. Photograph captioned 'Rivering forest' should read 'Riverine forest' and be credited to Shashank Dalvi, not Praveen J.

Page 70. Photograph captioned 'Striped Blue Crow' should be credited to Shashank Dalvi, not Praveen J.

Page 72, column 1, 23<sup>rd</sup> line from top: Replace 'A. hercules' with 'A. atthis.'

Page 72, column 2, 27<sup>th</sup> line from top: Replace 'Myiophonus caeruleus' with 'Myiophonus caeruleus.'

Page 72, column 3, 15<sup>th</sup> line from top: Replace 'S. froalis' with 'S. frontalis.'