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Aims & Objectives

- To publish a newsletter that will provide a platform to birdwatchers for publishing notes and observations primarily on birds of South Asia.
- To promote awareness of birdwatching amongst the general public.
- To establish and maintain links/liaison with other associations or organized bodies in India or abroad whose objectives are in keeping with the objectives of the Trust (i.e. to support amateur birdwatchers with cash / kind for projects in ornithology).

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Photographer: Clement Francis.

Records of European Roller *Coracias garrulus* from southern Peninsular India, including the first sighting from Kerala

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Introduction

The European Roller *Coracias garrulus* Linnaeus, 1758, belongs to the family Coraciidae (Order: Coraciformes). Also known as Common Roller (Whistler 1949) and Kashmir Roller (Bates & Lowther 1991; Ali & Ripley 2001), though Blanford (1895) used the present common. According to del Hoyo *et al*. (2001) two sub-species are recognised, the nominate and *C. g. semenowi*; the latter breeds in Iraq, Iran (except northwest), Turkmenistan, south Kazakhistan and northwest China (west Sinkiang) and Kashmir in India. Blanford (1895) states that it breeds commonly in Kashmir and Bates & Lowther (1991) and Ali & Ripley (2001) have given account on its breeding grounds and habits. It winters in Africa (Blanford 1895), from Ethiopia, Congo and south to South Africa (del Hoyo *et al.* 2001). But Ali & Ripley (2001) state that *C. g. semenowi* winters mainly in Arabia and most probably in Africa.

Migration records from southern India

European Roller is a passage migrant in north-western India (Blanford 1895; Grimmet *et al*. 2000). Whistler (1949) mentioned that this species is plentiful during its fall migration in the plains of the north-western regions of India. It passes through Rajasthan, north and north-west Gujarat during mid August-October (Ali & Ripley 2001). The southern range figures only on the outward migration towards its wintering quarters (Bates & Lowther 1991). According to Ghorpade (2002) this species seems to be a regular winter straggler to the northern part of Peninsular India. But Prasad (2003) states that it is an uncommon passage and winter migrant to western Maharashtra. However the map in Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) indicates that western Maharashtra and Goa lie on the fall migration route. These passage migrants are quite rare in southern India and there are only a few records of the species from Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh (Sashikumar 2002). Therefore records of European Rollers from Peninsular India south of latitude 18ºN are collated and assessed in this note. Other than the sighting from Kerala, this species has been recorded at least 18 times from 15 locations in southern Peninsular India (Table 1). Of these, most of the records are from Goa followed by Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. So far there are no reports of this species from Tamil Nadu. It has been spotted twice at the International Crop Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) Campus of Andhra Pradesh and the Bhagavan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary in Goa. All available reports of the species in this region are during September–January, with most records in October–November.

First sighting of the European Roller from Kerala

On 29th September 2002, we had a birding trip to the Erupathinalayiram Kayal (Kayal = back-water/lake) (09°30'55''N, 76°27'37''E) paddy fields of the Alappuzha district, which is in the Kayal land agro-economic division of Kuttanad wetland region (Indo-Dutch Mission 1989). This area forms a part of the Vembanad Important Bird Area (Islam & Rahmani 2005) and Vembanad-Kol Ramsar Site (Sreekumar 2003). These paddy fields are in the command area of the Vembanad Lake. During our visit, water had been drained for cultivation purposes, leaving the entire area covered with black mud, the favourite foraging habitat for waders. Our objective was to observe waders and we watched birds from 0630hrs to 1130hrs. When we were returning, we saw an unusual bird with a brownish back and pale sky-blue head and under parts. We immediately identified it as a roller based on our familiarity with the locally occurring Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis*. The bird was perched on a bamboo stake planted in the muddy paddy field. It flew away after a few minutes and sat near a small channel close to a *bund* separating two paddy fields. The flight pattern was similar to that of an Indian Roller and we were able to clearly see the dark primary feathers and corners of the tail of the bird in flight. We later lost sight of the bird in

the fields. On returning home we confirmed it to be an adult European Roller-using descriptions from Grimmett *et al.* (2000), Kazmierczak (2000) and Ali & Ripley (2001). Ali (1984) and Neelakantan (1996) do not mention the occurrence of this species from Kerala nor has there been any record, published or anecdotal, from this state. Subsequent to our sighting, K. V. Eldhose and three British birders spotted a lone European Roller on 28th November 2002, at Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary (Idukki district), which is situated in the rain-shadow region of the Western Ghats (Eldhose, *verbally*, 2003).

Discussion

The earliest arrival record of this species in southern Peninsular India is 22nd September from Andhra Pradesh (Table 1) and the southern limit of this species was earlier considered to be Lingambudhi Lake in Mysore (Thejasawi *et al.* 2000). Our record thus extends the southern limit of the species (Fig. 4) and is also very early in the season. Of the 18 sightings, 65% are between 1999 and 2007. This may have been due to the growth of birdwatchers in these years and faster mode of reporting. Locations and sightings of this species, including Kerala were divided into three classes namely inland, west and east coast, with the west coast having the most sightings (Fig. 3).

As mentioned by Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) southern western Maharashtra and Goa lie on its fall migration path. We assume that European Rollers are stragglers to the rest of the southern region. Simpson (1984) recorded this species on two occasions (26th & 27th September 1983), 140km west of Thane (Maharashtra), in the Arabian Sea. Satheesan (1990) reported a bird-hit involving this species with an aircraft, at an altitude of 2,424m, 55km west of Dabolim, Goa. Could the birds straying to the south-western portion of the country be on passage to their wintering areas across the Indian Ocean? European Rollers are seen in the breeding areas in Kashmir mainly between April and September (Bates & Lowther 1991). The species was earlier placed in the lower risk / least concern category (BirdLife International 2000) as it had a large global population with the major global breeding population in Europe-however European populations declined 30% in 15 years and the species is now considered Near-threatened (BirdLife International 2007). There is however no evidence of decline in Central Asia (BirdLife International 2005).

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Fig. 1. European Roller (moulting), 23rd November 2007, Kachchh district, Gujarat.

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Fig. 2. Indian Roller.

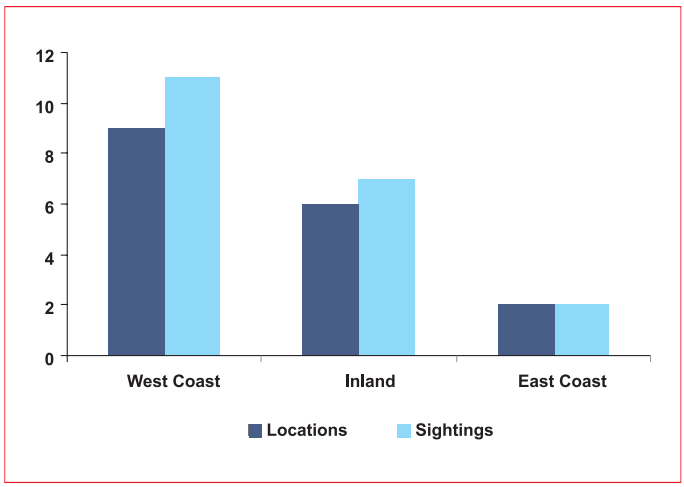

Fig. 3. Status of European Roller locations and sightings in inland, west and east coasts

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Table 1. Records of European Rollers from the Peninsular India (south of latitude 18ºN)

Sl No.	Date	Reference	Location	District
		Maharashtra		
1.	Nil	Showler *et al.* 2004	Nannaj Bustard Wildlife Sanctuary	Solapur
		Andhra Pradesh		
2.	22.ix.2000	Suhel Quader (Anon. 2000)	ICRISAT campus (Patancheru)	Medak
3.	18.xii.2000	Swati Kukreti (Pittie 2001)	Talakona (Tirupati)	Chittoor
4.	18.xii.2000	Swati Kukreti (Pittie 2001)	Srivaarimetlu	Chittoor
5.	27.x.2002	C.T. Hash (Pittie 2002)	ICRISAT campus (Patancheru)	Medak
		Karnataka		
6.	xi.1893	Davidson 1898	Majali	Uttara Kannada
7.	1990-91	Daniels 1998	Gokarna	Uttara Kannada
8.	1990-91	Daniels 1998	Near to Bhatkal	Uttara Kannada
9.	30.ix.1984	Subramanya *et al.* 1988	Ranebennur Blackbuck Sanctuary	Haveri
10.	2-7.x.1999	Thejaswi *et al.* 2000	Lingambudhi Lake	Mysore
11.	8.x.2006	Prince 2006	Hessarghatta Lake	Banglore Urban
		Goa		
12.	xi / xii.1972	Grubh and Ali 1979	Almost close to Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary	South Goa
13.	13.x.1998	Heinz Lainer (Pittie 1998)	Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary	South Goa
14.	x / xi.1999	Lainer 1999	Divar (Tiswadi) Island	North Goa
15.	x / xi.1999	Lainer 1999	Grassland between Mollem and Collem (Sanguem)	South Goa
16	9.i.2005	Barlow *et al.* 2005	Close to Biera Mar Resort, Baga	North Goa
17.	18.xi.2005	Anon. 2005	Backwoods Camp near to Bhagavan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary	North Goa
18.	16.x.2007	Aasheesh Pittie *in. litt.* 2007	Backwoods Camp near to Bhagavan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary	North Goa

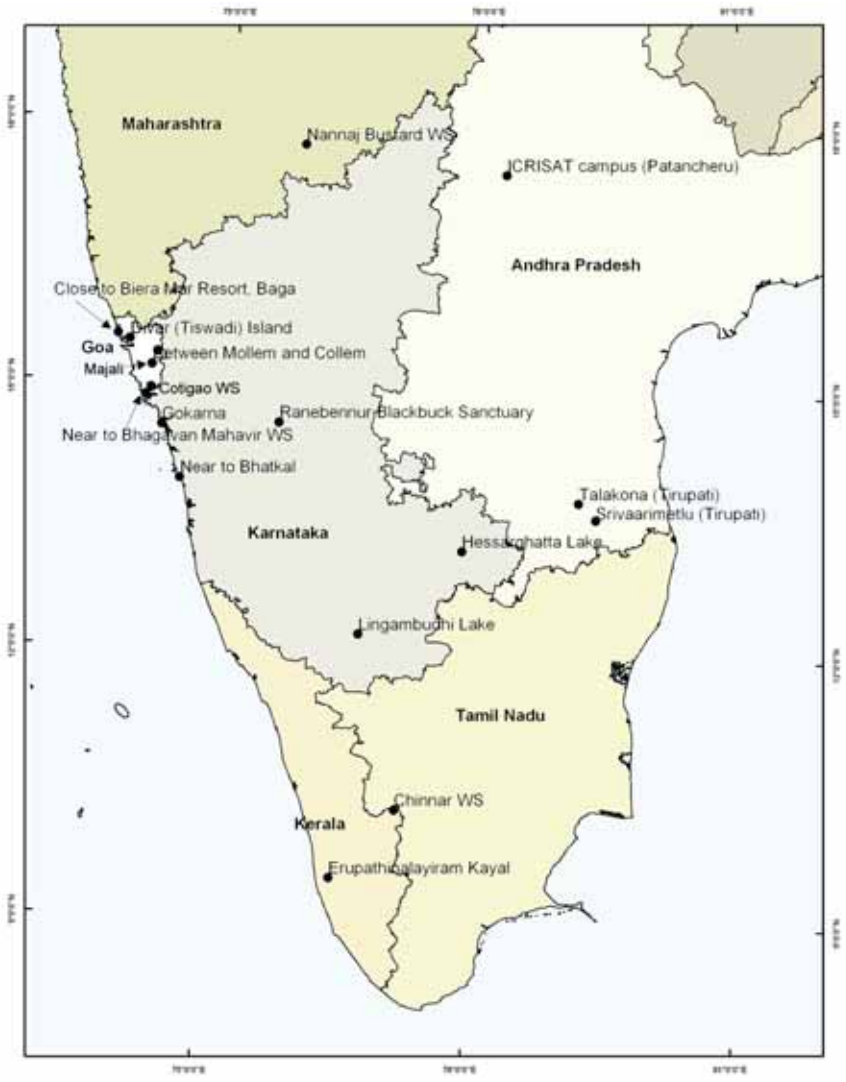

Fig 4. European Roller locations in southern Peninsular India

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First breeding record of Besra Sparrowhawk *Accipiter virgatus besra* from southern India

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The Besra Sparrowhawk *Accipiter virgatus besra* Jerdon, 1839 is a forest-dwelling, rare, resident raptor found in the southern Indian hills (Davison 1883). Besra was recorded in most of the parts during a general raptor survey conducted by Vijayan *et al*. (1992) in the southern Indian hills, but there was no evidence of its breeding. A recent ecological study of montane wet temperate forests and grasslands, conducted in the Nilgiris, southern India, showed that these birds were observed throughout the study period in the high altitudes but no nests were found (Zarri *et al*. 2005). Ali & Ripley (1987) gave the distribution and brief ecological information such as clutch size and nest characteristics of this species. The northern Indian race of Besra Sparrowhawk *Accipiter v. affinis* breeds in the high altitude evergreen forests in both Nepal and northern India, (Ali & Ripley 1987; Inskipp & Inskipp 1991). Nests of this species were observed near Kathmandu (Godavari Botanical Garden at an elevation of 1,525 m) and in Namche Bazaar (28°00'N 86°45'E, at an elevation of 3,440 m) by Hackett (1998). This is the only published information about the breeding of the Besra Sparrowhawk in its distribution range. Up till now, no other breeding information was available for the southern race. Here we record the breeding and nest-site information for *A. v. besra*. Its nesting was recorded for the first time in southern India in the montane wet temperate forests of the Upper Palni Hills, during March 2003-June 2004.

Study area

The study was conducted at Kukkal in the Palni Hills (10°1'-26'N 77°14'-52'E), a range of the Western Ghats, southern India. The Palni Hills consist of two well-marked topographic divisions, namely Upper Palnis and Lower Palnis. The Upper Palnis (1,500-2,450 m a.s.l.) has a moderate climate with mean temperatures ranging from 12ºC-23° C in summer, and from 8.3ºC-17.3°C in winter. The annual average rainfall is 165 cm. The Palni Hills is in the catchments of the rivers, namely Kodaganaru, Palar, Kuthiraiyar, Porandalar, Varadhamanathi, Manjalar and Aruthanathi, which drain into two major rivers; Vaigai and Cauveri. The vegetation is predominantly of the montane wet temperate forest type (Champion & Seth 1968). The flora includes species of *Syzygium*, *Ternstroemia*, *Sideroxylon*, *Meliosma*, *Elaeocarpus*, *Symplocos*, *Eurya*, *Litsea* and *Rhododendron*. The forest lies adjacent to exotic plantations such as *Acacia*, *Eucalyptus*, *Pinus* and agricultural fields (Matthew 1996).

Methods

We searched for nests at dawn and dusk, during the drier months, of January-June, wherever the bird's movement was frequently observed-generally in tall trees alongside streams. Once an active nest was located, the nearest trees were marked with paint and the following details were recorded: nest characters, nest-site, and, nesting habitat, following methods established by Titus & Mosher (1981), Bechard *et al*. (1990) and, Hullsieg & Becker (1990). In 2004 nesting activities monitored at an interval of four days up to the end of June.

Nest characters such as, nest height, cup width and thickness, nest tree height and, diameter at breast height (DBH) were recorded. In nest-site characters, numbers of trees above 30 cm DBH, numbers of shrubs, percentage of ground cover, distance to stream, distance to rocky cliff and, distance to trek path were recorded. Percentage of nest height was calculated from the nest height and the nest tree height [percent nest height = (nest height / nest tree height) x 100].

Nest concealment was estimated by viewing the nest from distances of 2, 5, 7 and 10 m, in each of the four cardinal directions (Martin & Roper 1988). Concealment was evaluated based on the number of points from where the nest was not seen, thus: low (1-4 points), medium (5-8 points), high (9-12 points) and very high (13-16 points).

A 0.07 ha circular plot (15 m radius), centred on the nest location, was marked for both nests and details of nest and nest-site characters, based on Titus & Mosher (1981), were recorded. Nest-patch variables such as canopy cover and ground cover (visually estimated in relative percentage terms), number of trees, number of shrubs, distance to nearest tree, distance to trek path or road and distance to water; were measured to identify the microhabitat required for nesting. Distance to road or trek path was included to ascertain whether the site selection was affected by human activity. The frequency of usage by humans or cattle was measured. Ground cover was visually estimated in

percentage. Canopy cover immediately over the nest was measured visually in percentage.

Results

Two breeding pairs were recorded in the 20 ha area between April 2002 and June 2004.

The first nest was located in the first week of May 2003 with a chick. The nest was located in the top-most branch of a 20 m tall *Turpinia nepalensis*, standing 15 m away from the stream (Table 1). The branches of the tree were dry and the tree seemed on the verge of completely drying. An old nest of the Indian giant squirrel *Ratufa indica* was used as a base. Its sides had been renovated with twigs and leaves. The nest size was recorded with the help of a measuring scale and it was about 30-40 cm wide and 4-5 cm thick. From above the nest was completely concealed by the tree's canopy. We watched from a distance of 25 m, as the female fed the chick with an Anaimalai spiny lizard *Salea anamallayana*. The next observation was in the middle of June when the chick was fully grown up and looked larger than the male at the end of the nesting period (Fig. 1). This indicates that the nestling may be a female-however we could not ascertain its sex. The nestling was seen in the study area only up to 10.vii.2003 but the adult birds were seen throughout the study period.

In 2004, birds were seen frequently in the same nesting area, from January onwards. Nest construction commenced on 6.iii.2004 in the top canopy of a *Phoebe paniculata* tree. Nest-material consisted of small twigs and leaves. This time a new nest was built, 10 m away from the previous one, though nest-site characters were similar in both years (Table 1). The tree was fully concealed by foliage. Nest building continued for a week with both birds taking part in nest construction. A single pale-bluish egg was laid on 17th March 2004 and incubation commenced immediately after the egg was laid. The egg hatched on 10th April 2004. The nestling left the nest in the last week of May 2004. Adult and the young one were seen in the nesting area up to the end of June. The incubation period and nestling period was 23 to 39 days respectively.

Discussion

The breeding of the southern race of Besra Sparrowhawk was recorded for the first time in the montane wet temperate forests of Upper Palni Hills, southern India during March-June, in 2003 and 2004. The nest-site characters of both the years were similar in the southern race. Incubation was observed in the month of April, whereas in the northern race it was recorded in June (Hackett 1998). This may be due to the local climatic variations between the regions. Nest characters like nest size, width, nest height, cup width and thickness, nest tree height and, DBH were similar in both the races but it differs from nest-site characters such as numbers of trees above 30 cm DBH, numbers of shrubs, percentage of ground cover, distance to stream, distance to rocky cliff and, distance to trek path (Ali & Ripley 1987;

Fig. 1. Chick of southern Besra Sparrowhawk.

Table 1. Nest-site characters of Besra Sparrowhawk in the Palni Hills.

Nest and nest-site characters	Year 2003	2004
Nest		
Nest height (m)	20	15
Cup width (cm)	36	32
Cup thickness (cm)	6	4
Nest tree height (m)	22	17
Nest tree DBH (cm)	85	60
Nest tree canopy cover (%)	85	90
% of nest height	84.2	88.2
Nest-site		
Number of shrubs	34	27
Number of trees	17	14
Ground cover (%)	70	65
Distance to stream (m)	20	15
Distance to rocky cliff (m)	8	12
Distance to trek path (m)	150	160

Hackett 1998). The southern race nested in montane wet temperate forest whereas the northern race in spruce forest (Hackett 1998). The reuse of other species' nests is common in many *Accipiter* spp. (Ali & Ripley 1987). Our study indicates that Besra Sparrowhawks prefer nesting near streams, like other *Accipiter* spp. (Reynolds *et al*. 1982; Ali & Ripley 1987; Boal & Mannan 1998; Nenneman *et al*. 2003). Percentage of nest height had a direct relation to the nest position in the canopy and most of the *Accipiter* spp., nest-characters studies shows that nest was in the middle of the canopy and the percentage of nest height was about 60-70 but in this study it was above 80 (Reynolds *et al*. 1982; Boal & Mannan 1998). Site fidelity is a common phenomenon in many resident raptors world-wide (Reynolds *et al*. 1982). We too observed Besra Sparrowhawk using the same area for nesting in two consecutive years.

Besra Sparrowhawk are reported to feed on different species of small birds, lizards and beetles (Davison 1883). We observed it feeding the chick with lizards six times and small snakes twice.

Davison (1883) reported that the Besra Sparrowhawk is a silent bird and rarely calls, but we noticed that during the breeding season it soared above the canopy, uttering loud double whistles frequently in the late morning and noon. Similar behavior was observed in the Nilgiris by Zarri *et al*. (2005).

The juvenile was last seen soaring with its parents in the study area on 10th July 2004 and after that day only the adults were seen in the area. Ali & Ripley (1987) reported that the normal clutch size was four or five. During our study period only one egg was laid in both years.

Ranganathan (1938) asserted that, both montane wet temperate forests and grasslands represent climax communities. But, there has been a loss of 50% of these habitats since 1850 (Sukumar *et al*. 1995). These forests have high endemism and harbour many habitat specialists, thus of high priority for bird conservation (Pramod *et al*. 1997; Vijayan & Gokula 1999; Vijayan & Gokula (in press); Somasundaram & Vijayan 2004). Further studies of breeding parameters of the Besra Sparrowhawk are required to better understand the requirements for its successful conservation.

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Crematogaster ants in shaded coffee plantations: a critical food source for Rufous Woodpecker *Micropternus brachyurus* and other forest birds

C. K. Vishnudas

Vishnudas, C. K. 2008. Crematogaster ants in shaded coffee plantations: a critical food source for Rufous Woodpecker *Micropternus brachyurus* and other forest birds. *Indian Birds* 4 (1): 9-11.
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This brief note recounts the foraging behaviour of Rufous Woodpecker *Micropternus brachyurus* (formerly *Celeus brachyurus*), the specialist ant-eater, and some other bird species associated with ant nests in coffee plantation and natural habitats. It is based on some opportunistic observations made during the past few years.

Rufous Woodpecker is one of twelve species of woodpeckers (Picidae), occurring in the Western Ghats. This woodpecker is known for its unique ability to nest in the carton nests of *Crematogaster* sp. ants as well as its peculiar foraging strategies.

Crematogaster ants are one of the commonest ants seen in Wayanad district (Kerala, India)-in coffee plantations as well as natural habitats. Apart from the carton nest they make in trees, they stay in coffee beans by making nest-type wrapping on the coffee beans. They feed on the sweet juice of ripened coffee berries. They also feed on the honeydew excreted by mealy bugs *Planococcus citri* and *P. lilaccinus* (Family: Pseudococcidae), a pest of coffee and a scourge in its plantations (Anon. 2000).

Ant-feeding behaviour of Rufous Woodpecker

I have observed Rufous Woodpecker attacking Crematogaster ant nests many times during the the past several years. On 22nd November 2007, I got an opportunity to closely observe a pair of Rufous Woodpeckers hammering an active Crematogaster ant nest in a coffee plantation at Kambalakkad in Wayanad district.

It was around 1130hrs when I saw two Rufous Woodpeckers perched on an Eachil tree *Aporusa lindleyana* that had a three-year-old nest of the Cremastogaster ant. At first, the female woodpecker started attacking the upper portion of the nest, while clinging on it. When the nest broke, ants started attacking her by climbing over her feathers, legs and beak. To ward off the attacking ants she often shook her head and after a minute flew to a nearby jackfruit tree *Artocarpus heterophyllus* where, by wing-flapping, shaking head and pecking, she removed the ants crawling over her body. She also consumed many ants during this process. After a while she returned to the nest and resumed hammering at it. Soon the male joined in and started breaking the nest on its lower portions and sides. The provoked and agitated ants attacked both birds, which continued belabouring the ants' nest. Since the nest was full of ant eggs (pupae) the birds consumed a good number of eggs from the nest.

As a result of the woodpeckers' attack, the ants immediately started shifting all the eggs from their nest-marching down the main stem-to the leafy litter on the floor-to safeguard the pupae. At this juncture, the woodpeckers stopped pecking the nest and moved onto another branch of the tree and began consuming the ants one by one as they came along the twigs. When the ants moved onto the bodies of birds, they flapped their wings to get rid of them. The woodpeckers continued breaking the nest and eating the ants and their eggs for nearly 20 minutes.

After this, the woodpeckers flew away from the nest tree and two Greater Racket-tailed Drongos *Dicrurus paradiseus* approached the nesting tree. (They may have been watching the woodpeckers breaking the nest from a near by tree). They positioned themselves very near the main stem of the tree along which the ants were moving down. Then it was their turn to join the feast. They fed on the eggs carried by the worker ants as well as on 'winged' ants. The drongos picked up the ants by fly-catching in their typical style from a perch and returning to it. They remained on the nest tree for nearly three hours, feeding on the ant eggs.

Around 1350 hrs a cock Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis* joined the drongos-to feast on the bonanza of ants' eggs. Interestingly they sang in low voice throughout the foraging period. Around 1530hrs a hen Oriental Magpie-Robin also joined the orgy.

Around 1540hrs a Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius* approached the nest tree and consumed a few ants' eggs. It was not that easy for a tailorbird to fight off the Crematogastor ants! The drongo and magpie-robins fed side

N. V. Krishnan

Fig. 1. Rufous Woodpecker (Female?) feeding young in nest inside Crematogaster ant nest on 4th October 2006 in Thrikkaipata, Wayanad district, Kerala.

by side without any confrontation, perhaps because there was plenty of food. The white colour of the ants' eggs was easily visible on the dark bark while the ants were carrying them away. This helped the birds to pick up ants easily. The drongo being insectivorous was keen on taking winged ants too. The drongos and magpie-robins left the nest tree at 1615 and 1640hrs respectively. During the course of 290 minutes of observation, the racket-tailed Drongos consumed ants 1155 times and the robin attempted 109 times. The birds periodically cleaned their beaks by rubbing them against branches. However I could not count the number of feeding attempts by Rufous Woodpecker since its feeding method was quiet different from that of Racket-tailed Drongo and Magpie-Robin. Mason & Lefroy (1912) identified 2,600 ants in the stomach of a Rufous Woodpecker (Ali & Ripley 2001). Santharam (1997) too reported Rufous Woodpeckers consuming several hundred *Oecophylla* ants at Peechi Wildlife Sanctuary, Thrissur district in Kerala.

Discussion

My first close observation of a similar behaviour of Rufous Woodpecker was in 1992, which I had mistaken as nest building. The hammering was on an ant nest, 2m above ground level, on a cinnamon tree *Cinnamomam malabatrum*. On that occasion, a pair of woodpeckers (male and female) had broken down the entire ant nest by hammering it. However, after the woodpecker attack, only one Oriental Magpie-Robin was found feeding on ants.

During the past ten years I have witnessed (opportunistic observations) 37 attempts by Rufous Woodpeckers of breaking down Cremastogaster ant nests. Of these, 24 nests contained eggs. Of the 37 nests, six were in natural forest whereas 31 were in shaded coffee plantations (Table 1).

Bird-ant association

Bird-ant association has been a topic of much interest for ecologists in western countries. In Western Ghats, Rufous Woodpecker is the only species of bird that is closely associated with ants. This note reports the association of other insectivorous birds such Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Oriental Magpie-Robin and Common Tailorbird as secondary predators of Crematogaster ant's eggs. Since the tree ants are very aggressive once agitated, Drongos or Robin have never been seen attacking the nest directly as the Rufous Woodpecker does. This may be the reason that these birds wait for Rufous Woodpecker to break down the nest to feed upon either the agitated ants or their eggs.

I have also seen mixed hunting flocks of birds following Rufous Woodpeckers-including, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Bronzed drongo *D. aeneus*, Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher *Hypothymis azurea*, Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*, Red-vented Bulbul *P. cafer*, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch *Sitta frontalis*, Common Golden-backed Woodpecker *Dinopium javanense* and Scarlet Minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus*. Flocks attending tree ants nest raids by Rufous woodpeckers need to be further studied to generate information on number of species feeding on the ants as well as duration of association.

Conservation

Another interesting aspect is the large number of Crematogaster ant nest seen in shaded coffee plantations.

Table 1: Details of ant nests found and attended by Woodpecker

Name of host plant species	Category	Number of nests	Habitat
Dalbergia latifolia	Tree	4	Forest + coffee plantation
Aporusa lindleyana	Tree	1	Coffee plantation
Erythrina indica	Tree	2	Coffee plantation
Coffee	Shrub	8	Coffee plantation
Silver oak	Tree	3	Coffee plantation
Mallotus alba	Tree	2	Forest+ coffee plantation
Cinnamomam malabatrum	Tree	3	Coffee plantation
C. verum	Tree	2	Coffee plantation
Olea dioica	Tree	3	Forest + coffee plantation
Gliricidia indica	Shrub	2	Coffee plantation
Hopea parviflora	Tree	1	Coffee plantation
Terminalia bellarica	Tree	2	Coffee plantation
Bischofia javanica	Tree	1	Coffee plantation
Syzygium cumini	Tree	1	Forest
Syzygium jambos	Shrub	1	Coffee+ home garden
Lagestroemia microcarpa	Tree	1	Coffee + forest
Total		37	

Control of ants in coffee plantations is one of the recommended practices by the Coffee Board as these ants *Oecophylla smaragdina* and *Crematogaster* sp., support mealy bugs-a pest of coffee. The ants drive away the natural enemies of mealy bugs and often take away bugs from one plant to another plant and foster them in their nest resulting in the spread of mealy bug infestation in coffee plantation. In the absence of ants, a good proportion of nymphs will get trapped in the honeydew and die. So 'ant control pesticides' have been recommended by coffee research stations as key management practices (Anon. 2000). Branded insecticides like Quinalphos and Parathion are sprayed around the bases of coffee plants as well as around those of shade trees. Application of such a toxic pesticide destroys the ant population *en masse* resulting in reduced number of nesting sites as well as prey base for woodpeckers. Though natural enemies such as *Trimta coccidivora* (Diptera: Cecidomyiidae) *Cacoxenus perspicax* (Diptera: Drosphilidae) are naturally present, farmers and researchers are seldom aware of them.

With the emerging demand for organic shade-grown coffee all over the world, planters are now reluctant to use toxic chemicals in coffee plantations. This helps maintain a reasonable number of Crematogastor ant colonies in coffee plantations at the moment. Shaded coffee plantations have a high conservation value, with their diversity of canopy tree species, as they can provide critical habitat for many forest-dwelling species (Perfecto *et al* 1996). It is high time that the conservation value of shaded coffee plantation, as a critical habitat for Rufous Woodpecker and other forest birds, be recognised and proper agro-ecological management practices developed and popularised amongst planters.

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Shiva Shankar

Fig. 2. Male Rufous Woodpecker, Karkala, Karnataka, India. 5th October 2006.

Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus* in Kachchh, Gujarat, India

J. K. Tiwari

Tiwari, J. K. 2008. Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus* in Kachchh, Gujarat, India. *Indian Birds* 4 (1): 12-13.
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Introduction

The first record of a Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus* from the Indian Subcontinent was a specimen collected in the Larkana district of Pakistan on 6th March 1875 (Blanford 1875). The second record also comes from Pakistan when on 26th April 1877 Duke reported it from Kalat in Baluchistan, Pakistan (Hume 1877; Roberts 1992). There was no record till 14th November 1930 when Sálim Ali collected a specimen at Kihim, Colaba district, Maharashtra, India (Ali 1931). After a gap of 30 years two specimens were collected from the Great Rann of Kachchh on 22nd and 23rd March 1960 at Kuar Bet (Shekar 1960).

On 23rd January 1990 S. N. Varu sighted one female Grey Hypocolius at Fulay village in the Banni grasslands of Kachchh district, Gujarat (Tiwari *et al* 1996). Subsequently a team of field researchers from Bombay Natural History Society carried out a detailed study. The maximum number of Grey Hypocolius seen was 150 birds, in three flocks, on 20th December 1993 (Tiwari *et al* 1996). On 24th March 2007 a total 175 Grey Hypocolius were seen in the scrub around Fulay village-perhaps congregating for their return migration. I have recorded the Grey Hypocolius here every winter from November 1990. The wintering birds stay till first or second week of April.

Ali & Ripley (1987) described the species as a rare vagrant to the subcontinent. Roberts (1992) referred to their comments on its status and noted that the recent sightings from Pakistan might indicate that it is an irregular but not uncommon visitor to the desert of Baluchistan.

Studies carried out by Tiwari *et al* (1996), Himmatsinhji *et al* (2002), and the observations in this note suggest that the Grey Hypocolius is a regular winter visitor to Kachchh district.

Study area and methods

The present study was conducted between November 2005 and April 2008 in mixed scrub habitat of thorn and *Salvadora persica* around Fulay village and near Watchtower No. 1, at the edge of Chhari-Dhand wetland in the grassland of Banni. At least 50 trips were made to the area between 0600-0900hrs and 1700-1900hrs in winter.

Grey Hypocolius were not seen near the watchtower during November 2006-April 2007. That habitat had been destroyed by charcoal-makers.

Observations

70 birds were present-22 near the watchtower-during 5th November 2005-6th April 2006. In the next season, 17th October 2006-15th April 2007, 175 birds were seen. In the third season, 12 November 2007-20 April 2008, 150 birds were present (Table 1). The presence of Grey Hypocolius around Fulay seems to be directly linked to the availability of food, which, in turn, is affected by a well-set monsoon. This is evident after the monsoon of 2006, when over 600mm of rain fell, and Grey Hypocolius stayed in Fulay for over six months.

Arrival and departure dates

Grey Hypocolius arrive in Fulay scrub forest in October-November and stay till March-April. Observations over 18 years (1990-2008) suggest that they are regular winter visitors here (Tiwari *et al* 1996; Table 1).

There were three sightings of this species away from Fulay village. The first, on 6th February 1994, was at Lyja Creek, on the seashore near Mandvi in Kachchh district. The second, on 17th January 1999, was in the Lakhpat fort area, on *Salvadora persica* trees, near the Pir Gosh Mohammed ka Kuba-on the edge of the Great Rann of Kachchh (Himmatsinhji *et al* 2002).

J. K. Tiwari.

Fig. 1. Male Grey Hypocolius in Fulay village, January 2007.

J. K. Tiwari.

Fig. 2. *Salvadora persica*

Kavi Taej and Ashwin Pomal came across one Grey Hypocolius at Sindhodi coast in Abdasa area of Kachchh on 2nd March 1999.

Feeding behaviour and vocalisations

Grey Hypocolius feed on the ripe berries of *Slavadora persica* (local name *Piloodi or Khari jar*). They also feed on the flower-petals and berries of another plant locally known as *Tankara.* They generally feed in small flocks but sometimes forage alone. A flock consists of 20-25 birds. They prefer feeding in the inner canopy of trees, but also glean off the top canopy and outer crown of the plant. From a distance they resemble a flock of bulbuls (Pycnonotidae) busy devouring *Salvadora persica* berries.

Other species that share the same habitat and feed on the berries of *Salvadora persica* include Rosy Pastor *Sturnus roseus*, and Red-vented *Pycnonotus cafer* White-cheeked *P. leucogenys* bulbuls.

When in a flock, the hypocolius emit a sweet musical two-note call '*piew piew*'. They are more vocal in March–April prior to their return migration.

Roosting behaviour

Till 2004 Grey Hypocolius roosted in areas where *Acacia nilotica* ('Desi babool') and *Salvadora persica* grew in close association. But during 2005-2007 they changed their preference and began to roost in *Prosopis juliflora* (an exotic weed) and *Salvadora persica* assemblages. Three such roosts were located during 2005-2008 in about 20 ha of scrub near Fulay village.

Pre-roosting behaviour consisted of feeding, preening and calling. Birds came in to roost 30 minutes before sunset. The birds would sink into the inner canopy of the tree to roost. They left the roost around 0700-0730hrs.

Herds of camels, feeding on *Salvadora persica* leaves, would sometimes disturb the roosting Grey Hypocolius-their nocturnal activities revealed by their droppings and hoof-marks the following morning. The disturbed birds would change their roost and spend the night in bushes *c.*50 m away.

Threats and recommendations

The decision of the Gujarat government to allow conversion of the exotic weed *Prosopis juliflora* to charcoal is being abused by local residents and immigrant labour who have begun making charcoal from any species they come across. The illegal cutting of *Salvadora persica* that has resulted, has led to an alarming rate of habitat destruction in Kachchh. It has also affected birdlife severely as frugivorous birds face a severe food shortage. People have not only cut the shoot system, they have uprooted plants using heavy bulldozers, etc. Where such machinery was not available people used heavy iron wire and tractors to uproot the plants. In spite of several reports in local newspapers and information sent to all concerned governmental departments, the destruction is rampant. If rectification steps are not taken immediately, the Grey Hypocolius habitat will be turned to charcoal in a short time.

Habitat protection from the charcoal lobby is required immediately. Ministry of Environment and Forests and the state government should tackle this issue urgently and a total ban on charcoal should be enforced. Several thousand trees of slow-growing native species (habitat of birds) are lost already-and what is left is exposed to the greed of charcoal-makers.

This charcoal business is flourishing in Kachchh since two years. The scanty forest cover of a fragile ecosystem cannot sustain this onslaught any longer.

Stop Press: Since this paper was written, the state government has banned charcoal making and now there is hope for the protection of *Salvadora persica* and other indigenous plant species in Kachchh.

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Table 1. Migration dates of Grey Hypocolius

Arrival	Departure	Population
5 November 2005	6 April 2006	70
17 October 2006	15 April 2007	175
12 November 2007	20 April 2008	150

—Short notes—

Sighting of the Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* at Kolleru Wildlife Sanctuary, Andhra Pradesh, India

Humayun Taher & Umesh Mani

Taher, H. & Mani, U. 2008. Sighting of the Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* at Kolleru Wildlife Sanctuary, Andhra Pradesh, India. *Indian Birds* 4 (1): 14.

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The Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh (BSAP) had organised a three-day camp at Kolleru Lake & Wildlife Sanctuary for the purpose of the Asian Mid-winter Waterfowl Census operations for 2008. The dates of the camp were 25-27 January 2008.

On 26th January, at 0630hrs the team visited an area called Atapaka (16°33'40"N, 81°13'57"E), which is about 5 km from Kaikaluru town (16°33'18"N, 81°13'9"E). This area has recently shot into prominence as the location of a newly forming pelicanry at Kolleru. There are about 400+ Spot-billed Pelicans *Pelecanus philippensis* at this place and they have started to nest on the acacia trees that stand on a small island in the water. During our brief visit we counted 30+ active nests.

While watching the Spot-billed Pelicans, we spotted one bird that was swimming around with the others in the water-and at first glance, appeared a little larger than the Spot-billed Pelicans around it. What stood out however was the colouration of that bird. It was almost completely white-with a hint of black on the wing quills. As the bird was swimming, we could not see the colour of its legs, however, its bill was yellow and the skin around the eyes, pink. Scanning the field guides-it became apparent that the bird was an adult Great White Pelican *P. onocrotalus.*

A little further on, other members of our group raised the alert about a second bird of the same colour. This individual was standing on a small earthen mound and showed more details. Closely observing the bird through telescope and binoculars, it was easy to see its completely white colour, bright yellow bill, pink skin around the eyes and pink legs. All these morphological characteristics clinched its identity as a Great White Pelican.

The description of the Great White Pelican, as given by Ali & Ripley (1987) is, 'Plumage mostly white, tinged with rose colour with a tuft of yellowish feathers on the breast; Primaries and some of the secondaries black; slight crest on the back of the head'.

Of the bird we saw, with the exception of the yellow on the breast (where there was no tuft of feathers but a tinge of buff colour), all other features exactly match to the above given description (Fig. 1). One other factor that further aided us in identification was the fact that it was seen in the immediate vicinity of the Spotbilled Pelicans, so an instant comparison was possible.

Great White Pelicans have been only very sporadically reported from Andhra Pradesh state. According to Ali & Ripley (1987) they are 'mainly winter visitor[s] to W. Pakistan (Baluchistan, Sind) and N. India from the Punjab to Assam (U.P., Rajasthan, Kutch, Saurashtra, N. Gujarat), Andhra (Visakhapatnam)?, and "Madras" (?)'.

Taher & Pittie (1989) do not list the Great White Pelican from Andhra Pradesh-just the Spot-billed Pelican. Kumar (1980) has reported the sighting of a pair of these birds on the Mir Alam Tank (near Hyderabad), in January 1973 (it was a year of drought).

Forest Department staff posted at Atapaka revealed that they had been seeing four Great White Pelicans in the area for the past few days prior to our visit.

This observation therefore seems to suggest that the Great White Pelican might be an occasional winter visitor to the state of Andhra Pradesh. Only regular annual monitoring of the wetland will reveal whether they are regular visitors.

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Umesh Mani

Fig. 1. Great White Pelican in flight, Atapaka, Andhra Pradesh.

Southern-most breeding record of the Comb Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos* from India

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The Comb Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos* was found to be breeding in Koonthakulam village (8°29'41"N 77°45'21"E), close to Koonthakulam Bird Sanctuary in Tirunelveli district, Tamil Nadu, India.

Initially a bird was found nesting inside a hollow space in a haystack, during the fourth week of December 2006. Ten eggs were found in the nest, and the bird was seen flying in and out of the haystack. The villagers demolished the haystack in a couple of days after its discovery, and the fate of the eggs is unknown. Later, on 18th January 2007, an adult duck was seen leading 12 ducklings in a small rain-fed temporary pond about 60 m long and 40 m wide, next to the Koonthakulam bus stop. A drake too was seen attending to the young, on and off. The birds appeared to be unafraid of the people around them, including a TV cameraman who happened to be there at that time.

When we were ready with a camera, the following day, there were only nine ducklings and the duck. It is possible that the drake had flown away and the missing ducklings were lost to predation. Now the duck was more wary and even the chicks kept a distance from us. The mother flew up and away abruptly every 20-25 minutes and came back in less than ten minutes. About five minutes before each of these temporary take-offs, the bird slowly drifted away from the chicks and stayed aloof. While returning too, the bird landed, far away from the young, and then moved very slowly towards them. The young ones too did not rush to the mother on her arrival. We could not hear any sound uttered by the young, or the mother, possibly due to our distance from the birds. The pond was completely open to the sky and there was no cover to shelter the young. However, the ducklings were seen diving under water occasionally. The duck was not seen to feed the young or lead them around to forage as long as we were around. We watched these birds from 09.30-11.40 hrs and planned to visit the site again the next day with a hide for close-up photographs. However, the villagers reported that the mother led the ducklings away that night, through the *Prosopis* patch behind the houses.

In addition to this interesting breeding record, we have been observing this species at Koonthakulam Bird Sanctuary throughout the year-since 2002-except when the wetlands were totally dry. Up to 255 birds were seen here, at a time, in March 2005.

We also observed the Comb Duck in 2004 at Suchindram (8°15'N 77°48E) and Theroor (8°10'N 77°28'E) wetlands of Kanyakumari district, which are located at the extreme southern tip of mainland India. At Suchindram wetlands we saw three individuals on 21st January 2004 (one of them with the 'comb') and four on 3rd February 2004. At Theroor wetlands we saw the following birds in March 2004: four birds on the 6th, three on the 10th and three on the 17th.

Two subspecies of *Sarkidiornis melanotos* have been globally recognised, namely *Sarkidiornis m. melanotos* (Pennant, 1769) and *Sarkidiornis m. sylvicola* H. & R. Ihering, 1907. The nominate race is resident and locally migratory in India. According to Ripley (1961) this subspecies occurs in most parts of India. However, Ali & Ripley (1961) limit its southern range of distribution to Karnataka. Ravindran (1998) recently sighted it farther south, in Kerala. Rasmussen & Anderton (2004) show its range up to northern Kerala. Breeding of this species has not been reported so far in southern Peninsular India.

Acknowledgements

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Arpit Deomurari

Fig. 1. Comb Duck

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* at Harike Lake, Punjab, India

Anand Prasad

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During a birdwatching trip to Harike Lake (31º18'N, 75º05'E; Punjab, India), 6th–10th February 2001, I spotted a duck, east of the gurdwara, on 7th February, which I did not recognise. The duck was at a range of about 300 m. I set up my Kowa ED TS613 telescope at 30x magnification, and after obtaining good views, sketched and took notes of all the visible features. Light conditions were good-it being a normal sunny winter day. The bird was awake, with its head upright, but it was not diving and showed very little activity. On this day it appeared to be about the same size as a Common Pochard *Aythya ferina.*

On 10th February, at about the same location, presumably the same bird was relocated. This time, after a closer comparison, it appeared to be slightly smaller than the Common Pochard, which were closer on that day, and hence gave a more accurate size comparison. During this second sighting the bird was sleeping with its bill tucked into its back feathers but with its head showing, which it would only occasionally lift to show the bill.

The overall impression was a duck with white under-parts and grey upper-parts but with a white and black patterned head. At that distance, subtle colour differences were not noticeable. The tail was held out of the water at 45º and was noticeably long and thin, about the same size as that of a Northern Pintail *Anas acuta.* On both days I only had side views of the bird.

Description from both sightings

An obvious duck-slightly smaller than Common Pochard-with a grey bill that was particularly short and thick.

Its head including the throat, neck and nape was white except for two dark grey to black areas. The first was a dark grey crown stripe, which extended and narrowed to a point near the bill and which extended narrowly down the nape and seemed greyer on the nape. The second was a blackish triangular wedge well below the eye, on the ear coverts. The wedge narrowed to a point near the bill and the rear thick end became more diffuse and gave a stripy effect towards the nape.

Apart from the head and nape the entire upper parts including the visible wing, wing coverts, scapulars, mantle, back, rump, upper-tail coverts and tail were grey, a paler colour than the dark areas on the head. On both days a medium-sized black area was noted at what appeared to be the primary tips.

On the first day there was no visible dark area on the breast and the entire under-parts including throat, belly, breast, flanks and under-tail coverts appeared white. On the second sighting the breast appeared to be grey, about the same colour as the upper-parts but as this was not seen on the first day it was probably localised to the centre of the

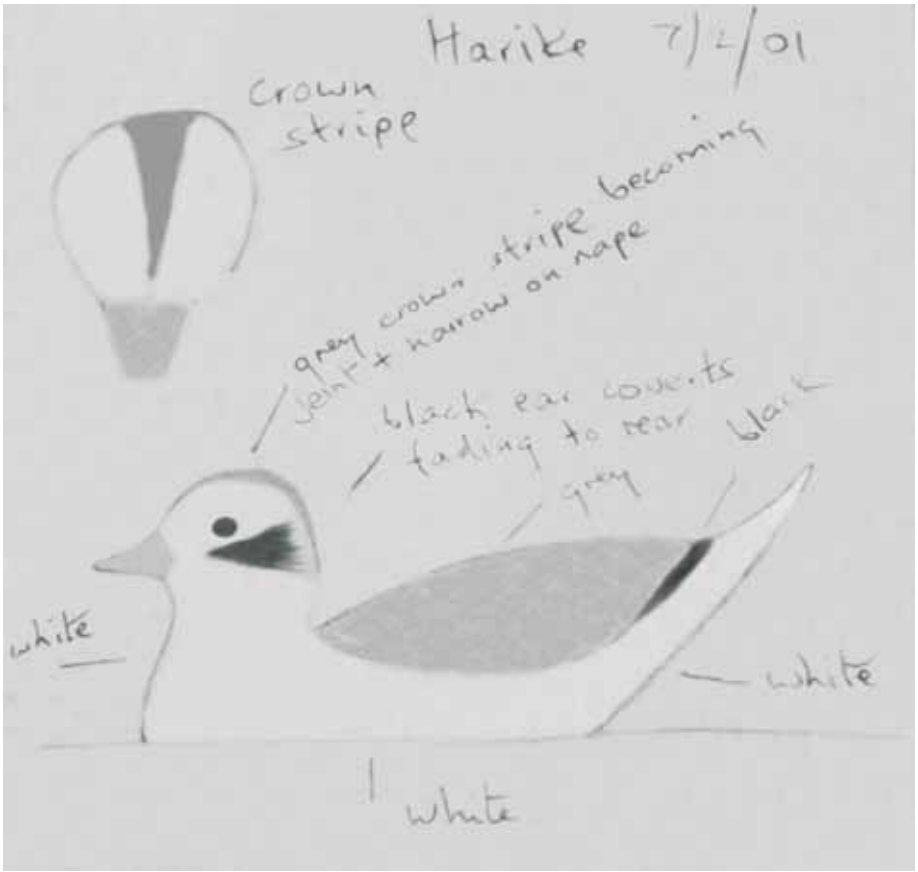

Fig. 1. Drawing of original field-sketch Harike: 7th February 2001

breast. The bird was seen from the side on both occasions so the view of the breast was not optimum. On the second day the tail under-parts presumably the under-tail coverts were seen to have a slightly yellowish tinge. The tail was long and thin, similar to a Northern Pintail.

After the first sighting I consulting my field guide and it became obvious that the bird was a Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* and a rare record for India, so when it was relocated three days later on the 10th of February in the same area, I was determined to get more detailed information. I again made further drawings and notes, but as the bird was sleeping and only raised its head occasionally, I could only gather as much information as possible from a static bird.

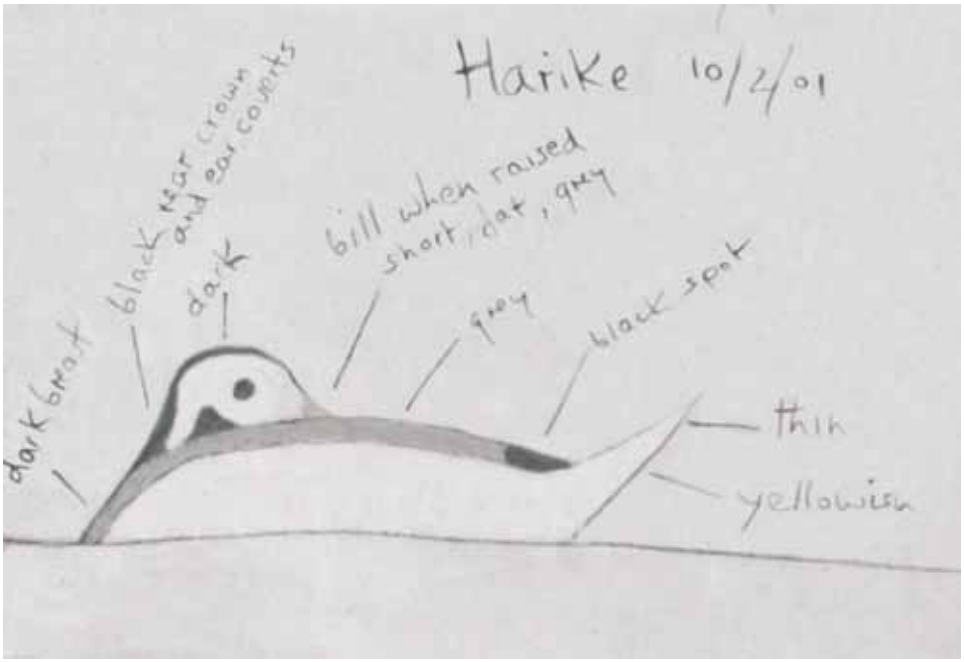

Fig. 2. Drawing of original field-sketch Harike: 10th February 2001

This Long-tailed Duck was in typical winter plumage but it is not easy to determine the sex in a species with so many plumage variations-suffice to say that it was probably a duck or first winter drake.

The lack of brown in the plumage does not in any way detract from this record, as at a range of about 300 m, browns and greys are not distinguishable except perhaps in contrast.

The raised tail is the typical non-feeding posture for this diving duck, which otherwise swims with the tail open against the water.

Previous records

Ali & Ripley (1983) give six records for the Indian Subcontinent: three from Pakistan at Baluchistan (1933 & 1938) and Sind (1936) and two from India at Hokarsar, Kashmir (1939) and Sadiya Frontier Tract, NE Assam (1935). These refer to the records of: Prater (1936) at Sind; Reeve (1938) near Quetta, Baluchistan; Ludlow (1940) at Hokarsar, Kashmir and Parsons (1935) from north-eastern India.

Ali & Ripley (1996) give three further records from Uttar Pradesh, Nepal, and Arunachal Pradesh. These additions presumably refer to records from Dehra Dun, Uttar Pradesh (Mohan *et al.* 1992), Kosi Barrage, Nepal (Grimmett *et al.* 1998; Inskipp & Inskipp 1991; Inskipp 1988; Kazmierczak 2000) and the Arunachal Pradesh record appears to be a correction of the record previously given as NE Assam. The Sadiya Frontier Tract is on the border between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. This correction is due to the fact that before 1947 Assam also constituted Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland. Before 1947 Arunachal Pradesh was The North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), comprising the Kameng, Subansiri, Siang and Luhit frontier divisions (Ali & Ripley 1983). Only one record is given from the north-east (Arunachal Pradesh) in the distribution maps in Grimmett *et al.* (1998) and Kazmierczak (2000).

Ali & Ripley (1983) state that some of the six records cited by them were records of small flocks of 'a half dozen or so,' and Grimmett *et al.* (1998) and Kazmierczak (2000) give the site at Quetta, Pakistan as a multiple record. Given that six of the eight previous records were during 1933–1940, it is possible that this species is being overlooked by birdwatchers of recent. A more careful watch in the appropriate areas might yield more records in the future.

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Photographic record of Forest Eagle-Owl *Bubo nipalensis* from Kanha National Park, Madhya Pradesh, India

Ajit J. Deshmukh

Deshmukh, A. J. 2008. Photographic record of Forest Eagle-Owl *Bubo nipalensis* from Kanha National Park, Madhya Pradesh, India. *Indian Birds* 4 (1): 18.

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The Forest Eagle-Owl *Bubo nipalensis* is a rare and resident owl of tropical dense evergreen and moist deciduous forest. It inhabits humid and riparian patches of forest. It is normally found at elevations of 900-1,200m but is also recorded up to 2,100m (Ali & Ripley 1981). This bird is distributed in India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam.

On the Indian Subcontinent it is found in the lower Himalayas from Kumaon eastwards through Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan up to Arunachal Pradesh (Dafla Hills), Assam hills, north and south of Brahmaputra River, Nagaland, and Manipur. In peninsular India it is mainly found in the Western Ghats south of Goa and also in the Shevaroy Hills of the southern Eastern Ghats. It affects dense evergreen and moist deciduous forest as in the tropical valleys, terai and duars in the north and sholas in the southern hills.

From 25th-29th May 2007, I was in Kanha National Park of Madhya Pradesh. On 26th May, at 0530hrs, as our vehicle approached an artificial saucer (water-hole) near the Jamun Talao area, approximately 4km from the park's entrance at Kisli, I observed a large bird drinking water from it. As the day was still young, I could not ascertain its identity from a distance, due to poor light conditions. However, the bird appeared to me like a huge raptor. On getting a closer look I was astonished to find that it was a Forest Eagle-Owl. The bird had seen our vehicle approaching it, but seemed to be quite comfortable with that. Even when we were just 15m away, it continued to drink for 3-4 minutes. It kept looking at us, intermittently, without any sign of alarm or fear. I managed to get a few photographs (Fig. 1). The bird flew away into the dense forest after two more vehicles approached the place. My driver and the guide, both of whom are fairly knowledgeable about the birdlife of Kanha, were unable to identify it and both confessed to never having seen this bird before.

After returning from the national park I reviewed all available literature on this species and found that it has not been recorded from Central India in the major works for the region and for the Strigidae (Ripley 1961; Ali & Ripley 1981; Grimmett *et al* 1998; del Hoyo *et al* 1999; König 1999; Kazmierczak 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). However, D'Cunha & Ali (2001) reported the sighting of a single in February 1994 in 'dense sal forest near Sondhar in Mukki range.' I was surprised to see that Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) did not report its occurrence in central India. Therefore this photographic record is significant and reconfirms that of D'Cunha & Ali (2001) regarding its occurrence in central India.

Further investigation on the distribution of this species is required, especially in moist areas of the central Indian highlands and the Satpura-Maikal ranges, to ascertain its status in the region. Significantly, Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) state, 'In S India, adult plumage as in SL [=Sri Lanka; *B. n. blighi*] but slightly larger; racial identity with *blighi* requires study.'

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Ajit Deshmukh

Fig. 1. Forest Eagle-Owl in Kanha National Park, Madhya Pradesh, India.

Orange-headed Thrush *Zoothera citrina cyanota*-a first record for Rajasthan, India

Gobind Sagar Bhardwaj & Harkirat Singh Sangha

Bhardwaj, G. S. & Sangha, H. S. 2008. Orange-headed Thrush *Zoothera citrina cyanota*: a first record for Rajasthan. *Indian Birds* 4 (1): 19.

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While surveying the area close to Sitamata temple in the Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary (Chittorgarh and Udaipur districts, Rajasthan) on 27.vi.2006, GSB was surprised to see an Orange-headed Thrush *Zoothera citrina cyanota*, a peninsular race of *Zoothera citrina*, not found in Rajasthan. Unfortunately, the distinctive bird was not seen again during subsequent visits to the area in winter. However, on 01.vii.2007 one Orange-headed Thrush was seen flying from a mohwa tree *Madhuca indica* and entering the thick canopy of saadar / asan trees *Terminalia tomentosa*. After a few minutes' search the bird was located and photographed.

A while later three more birds were found foraging in leaf litter close to the temple in a grove of mohwa, saadar, bahera *T. bellerica*, mango *Mangifera indica* and tendu *Diospyros melanoxylon*. One of the birds was heard singing (a very faint whistling). Later four more birds were seen near the temple.

12 races of *Zoothera citrina* are recognised worldwide and variation in these is largely clinal but marked in some races (Clement & Hathway 2000). However, Collar (2005) recognizes only 11 subspecies. The peninsular *cyanota* has white face, throat, and ear coverts with broad dark streaks below and behind eye and crown olive tinged (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005).

Z. c. cyanota is resident and a local migrant in much of peninsular India and has been reported from Gujarat (Navasari and Dangs districts), Madhya Pradesh (Satpura Range, but apparently not in the Vindhya Range), Orissa (Sambhalpur, Mahendragiri, Jeypore districts), Maharashtra, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala (Ali & Ripley 1998). Although largely resident in most of its central Indian range, numbers of *cyanota* increase from April to August in Bandavgarh National Park, north-eastern Madhya Pradesh (Clement & Hathway 2000). It is quite likely that some birds arrive in Sitamata in summer and during the monsoon months. In the absence of sightings in other seasons it can be presumed that they leave the area after the monsoon.

Although the nominate race *citrina* is quite regularly sighted at Bharatpur during winter the peninsular race *cyanota* has never been recorded before in Rajasthan. Thus the Sitamata birds constitute the first record for Rajasthan.

G. S. Bhardwaj

Fig. 1. Orange-headed Thrush *Zoothera citrina cyanota*

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First nesting record of Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher *Hypothymis azurea* in Rajasthan, India

Harkirat Singh Sangha & Gobind Sagar Bhardwaj

Sangha, H. S. & Bhardwaj, G. S. 2008. First nesting record of Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher *Hypothymis azurea* in Rajasthan, India. *Indian Birds* 4 (1): 20.

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An Oriental species, Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher *Hypothymis azurea* is found from south-east China, through Taiwan, the Phillipines and in India and Sri Lanka. It is practically absent from the dry north-western parts of the Indian subcontinent (Roberts 1992) although stray individuals have been occassionally recorded. C. B. Ticehurst collected a single specimen in Karachi, Sind, Pakistan on 18 February 1919 (Ticehurst 1922) and described it as a 'merest vagrant'. In Gujarat (India) the species has been collected from Kathiawar (Abdulali 1985) and recorded in Kachchh (Himmatsinhji 1964). Occassionally single birds have been sighted in Keoladeo Ghana Bird Sanctuary (Bharatpur, Rajasthan) during winter (Robson 1993, 1994).

An active nest of Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher was discovered on the bank of a stream, at Sitabari / Valmiki Ashram (24º15'N 74º30'E), Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajasthan. The sanctuary, at the confluence of three major geological formations-the Aravallis, the Vindhyas and the Malwa plateau, has type II dry tropical forest (Champion & Seth 1968).

When the nest was discovered on 1st July 2007 it appeared to be complete. However, both the parents were observed bringing small grass stalks / twigs to the nest continuously and giving finishing touches.

G. S. Bhardwaj

Fig. 1. Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher, Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajasthan.

The cone-shaped nest was placed in the fork of two branches, *c.*6 m above ground level in the canopy of a mango tree *Mangifera indica*. It was made of grass stems and well covered with cobwebs and spider egg cases.

On 15th July 2007 the flycatchers were found incubating. They rarely interacted with other species during this period. However, when an Orange-headed Thrush *Zoothera citrina caynotus* came near the nest both sexes attacked the intruder. Similarly the nesting birds attacked a Stork-billed Kingfisher *Halcyon capensis* when it perched on the same tree.

On 30th July 2007 both the parents were observed feeding the nestlings at approximately equal frequency and with variety of prey items, which appeared to include a large proportion of spiders.

In the available literature breeding of the species in the dry north-western parts of the Indian subcontinent is not mentioned except a nesting record at Malir (Pakistan) in April 1971 but the nest was robbed shortly thereafter (Roberts 1981).

Therefore, the above observations at Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary constitute not only the first successful breeding of the Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher in Rajasthan but also the north-western parts of the Indian subcontinent.

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A case of infanticide by a hen House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

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Patil, P. & Jathar, G. 2008. A case of infanticide by a hen House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. *Indian Birds* 4 (1): 21.

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At 0745hrs on 14th September 2007, we were standing on the porch of the second author's house at Kolhapur, Maharashtra, when we heard an unfamiliar chirping call of a House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*-emanating from the rooftop. While searching for the bird, we saw small bundles of cobwebs falling from the rooftop. We were shocked to see that it was a nestling sparrow entangled in some nest material. On reaching the rooftop we found a cock House Sparrow perched on the lattice, intently watching something. After about five minutes, a hen sparrow appeared on one of the openings of the lattice and as we watched she dropped a nestling that she was carrying in her beak! After a ten-minute search we located the nest on the joint of a rainspout and a concrete slab.

Due to our presence on the roof, the hen flew away and sat on the lattice. Therefore, we withdrew into one of the rooms and watched the nest from there. 15 minutes later the hen returned and went inside the nest cavity. We heard a chorus of nestlings' calls and after a while the hen popped out with a nestling in her beak. The nestling was alive and uttering distress calls. Holding the nestling in her beak, she flew up to the lattice and perched on it. After a few seconds, she dropped the live nestling to the porch below. Surprisingly the cock remained a silent spectator. The hen sat there for ten minutes and preened her feathers. After that, she re-entered the nest cavity. Within half a minute, she came out with another live nestling, flew to the lattice, and dropped it. After three minutes both adult birds flew away.

In less than an hour, the hen had thrown out four nestlings from the nest. None of them survived the 20-foot fall to the porch. They were approximately a week old-only few down feathers and contours of primaries were visible. All of them appeared to have been healthy, as there was no visible abnormality or sign of disease or parasites on their bodies. We examined the nest and found that it was empty and partially destroyed.

That same afternoon, a pair of House Sparrows appeared at the same nest site and the hen entered the nest cavity. We assumed that it was the same pair that was responsible for the infanticide. Next day we observed that the pair was engaged in repairing the nest. We monitored the nest for the next ten days and found that the hen had laid a clutch of four eggs and started incubating them.

This event suggests that there could be two reasons for the infanticide. In the first: an aggressive intruder (pair) might have been chased off the original owners of the nest, usurping it and killing the nestlings. In the second: the mother of the nestlings might have died or been chased off by a new female. We rule out the first case upon the premise that the cock was not involved in the actual killing.

The killing of unrelated young has been typically considered a male behaviour because it represents a sexual strategy (Hausfater & Hrdy 1984; Hrdy 1979; Packer & Pusey 1983; Sherman 1981; van Schaik 2000). Veiga (2003) suggested that in House Sparrows 'The killing of genetically unrelated young by males has been viewed as a strategy where infanticidal males gain a time advantage that may be crucial to maximize reproductive success.' On the contrary the commonest proximate causes of infanticide by hen sparrows are competition for breeding resources and infant exploitation (Blumstein 2000; Digby 2000). Veiga (2004) mentions 'the female house sparrows regularly committed infanticide when taking over a nest and replacing the previous female owner. Experienced females committed infanticide, as an alternative strategy to passive replacement, more frequently than novel females.'

It seems that the cases of infanticide in House Sparrow are common. A detailed study on the behavioural aspects of this common bird may reveal many secrets of its as yet elusive life.

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The oldest name of the mainland form of the Asian Golden Weaver *Ploceus hypoxanthus*

Aasheesh Pittie & Edward C. Dickinson

Pittie, A. & Dickinson, E. C. 2008. The oldest name of the mainland form of the Asian Golden Weaver *Ploceus hypoxanthus*. *Indian Birds* 4 (1): 22.

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Two races of *Ploceus hypoxanthus* are listed by Dickinson (2003): *P. h. hymenaicus* Deignan, 1947, and *P. h. hypoxanthus* (Sparrman, 1788). Although it is now just over 60 years since Deignan (1947) provided the name, *hymenaicus*, that he believed was needed for the first form, we have discovered that an earlier name for it provided by Hume (Hume & Davison 1878) was not, as Deignan claimed, a *nomen nudum*[1].

Hume (Hume & Davison 1878: 399) discussed what he called the Golden Burmese Weaver Bird and named it, saying 'In our museum it stand [sic] as *chryseus*'. This phrase is to be found at the end of Hume's footnote (idem.). Deignan argued that *chryseus* was thus named without description and therefore a *nomen nudum*; and he then in turn provided a new name, *hymenaicus*, for it, listing as type a specimen from Nong Boraphet, a large lake in the central plains of Thailand.

However, Deignan overlooked details in the text to which the footnote relates. In the text above on p. 399, Hume (loc. cit.) wrote 'the Golden Burmese Weaver Bird commonly called *hypoxanthus*, Daud., (a name which cannot possibly apply, the species thus named being totally differently colored and very closely allied to the South African *Crithagra sulphurata*) and to which the descriptions of Lesson's *javanensis*, the name most recently assigned to this species applies extremely ill, (seeing that when the bird becomes golden yellow, its bill is black and not yellowish), ...' There is, thus, a diagnostic description which may be paraphrased as 'differently coloured from the Javan population with, in adult breeding dress, the bill black not yellowish'. To this we may now add the characters put forward by Deignan (1947): 'in breeding dress separable in the male from *P. h. hyypoxantha* (as exemplified by Javan specimens) by having the feathers of the mantle fringed with a more greenish, less golden, yellow, and by having the upper breast, adjacent to the black throat patch, more strongly suffused with raw sienna; possibly also by greater length of wings and tail.'

A few words are necessary about the specific name. First, Hume was following Blyth (1852: 114) in believing the name *hypoxanthus* to be attributable to Daud. [= Daudin], for Blyth, with a query, listed *Loxia hypoxantha* Daudin; however, such a source was not accepted by Sharpe (1890: 475), who attributed the first use of the name to Blyth's Catalogue '1849' = 1852 (Dickinson 2004). But no description is to be found there nor a valid indication. The next citation listed by Sharpe (1890) is Bonaparte (1850: 443) where there *is* a description, and an attribution to Daudin. But, interestingly, there is also a reference in Bonaparte to 'Sparrman, Mus. Carls. III. t. 71 jun'. This is a reference to drawing 71 in Sparrman (1788), which was accompanied by text and is now treated as the source of the name (Sherborn 1902: 474).

The name *chrysaeus* was used as valid in the form *Ploceëlla chrysæa* by Baker (1926: 76) and, as implied by Deignan, it had, until 1947, been known by Hume's name. There is thus no obstacle to restoring Hume's name, *chryseus*, for the mainland Asian form of *Ploceus hypoxanthus*.

Thus the correct name for the mainland form is *Ploceus hypoxanthus chryseus* (Hume, 1878).

[1] Latin = 'naked name; a name published without sufficient descriptive information or definition to satisfy criteria required by the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature and thereby invalid' (Erritzoe et al. 2007).

Acknowledgements

We should like to acknowledge the advice of Richard Schodde, Chairman of the Standing Committee on Ornithological Nomenclature, for his advice on restoring this name to use.

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Freak accidental death of a White-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*

Kiran Vasant Purandare

Purandare, K. V. 2007. Freak accidental death of a White-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*. *Indian Birds* 3 (6): 23.
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Mss received on: 20th April 2006.

On 18th April 2004 while birdwatching in the Nagzira Wildlife Sanctuary (Sakoli tahsil, Bhandara district, Maharashtra), I was following a nature trail on the banks of a lake, when I saw a White-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* on a Mahua *Madhuca indica* tree, at the height of about 6 m from the ground. I instructed my fellow birdwatchers to be silent and approached the bird with my camera. Strangely, the kingfisher did not move at all. We started talking amongst ourselves about this strange kingfisher that did not take notice of our group, until we realized that it was dead. Adding to the mystery, there was a tuft of whitish feathers attached to the tip of its massive red beak, which indicated that the tragedy might have taken place fairly recently, possibly within 24 hours. Had the bird died earlier, those feathers would have been blown away by the westerly wind.

The dead bird was dangling upright as if glued firmly to the horizontal bough of the tree with its long partly open beak. To me the whole bird seemed quite intact, without any conspicuous external injury. However, both eyes were missing. I could not resist the temptation of climbing the tree along with Rupchand Tulshiram Bhalawi and Radheshyam Kevalram Ooikay, both of whom are nature guides in the sanctuary. On reaching the branch, I examined the bird carefully. The only part of the bird's body touching the branch was the tip of its lower mandible. Its left leg was held a bit upwards in readiness to perch. All the toes of both legs were drawn inwards and they had become stiff. There were greenish-yellow contour feathers caught in its beak and the tip of the lower mandible was embedded into the branch.

It seemed that the cosmopolitan kingfisher had unsuccessfully attempted to prey upon an Oriental White-Eye *Zosterops palpebrosus*. It missed its target and crashed into the branch of the mahua. The impact was so great that the bird's beak pierced the branch. The quarry might have escaped, leaving the predator anchored firmly to the branch in the most unbelievable fashion, even preventing the struggling bird from freeing itself. Ultimately it might have completely exhausted itself and died. Red tree ants had attacked the bird and eaten both its eyes.

I also found an opening near the lower part of the flanks into which ants were going. Bluebottle flies had also attacked the bird. Three maggots were found in its body. Close scrutiny of the bird revealed that 1.5 cm of its lower mandible was imbedded into the branch and as we took the bird off the branch, we realized that a part of the lower mandible was partly broken, perhaps due to bird's struggles and its body weight.

Kiran Vasant Purandare

Fig. 1. Freak accidental death of White-breasted Kingfisher

Mew Gull *Larus canus* at Harike Lake, Punjab, India

Anand Prasad

Prasad, A. 2008. Mew Gull *Larus canus* at Harike Lake, Punjab, India. *Indian Birds*. 4 (1): 24-25.
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During a birdwatching trip to Harike Lake, Punjab (India) from 6th to 10th February 2001, I was watching the young pupils at the Sikh temple on the 10th February, throwing chapattis, Frisbee style, to the gulls on the water. One particular gull amongst the Brown-headed Gulls *Larus brunnicephalus* caught my attention. Although it was superficially similar to and about the same size as the Brown-headed Gulls, its wing pattern and bill were totally different. As this bird was much smaller than any of the large gulls, I knew I was looking at something unusual for India but familiar to me. I was pretty sure I was looking at a Mew Gull *L. canus*, which I am very familiar with having been brought up in Britain and having spent many years' birdwatching there and elsewhere in Europe. Nevertheless I took detailed notes to make certain I was not looking at a similar species. I then went into my room in the temple where I was staying and checked my field guide to make sure there were no other confusion species and to check for any additional diagnostic features to look out for. With additional observations, along with original notes, I made the following description.

Description

Observations were made at a range of about 10–15m with a Kowa ED TS613 telescope at 30x magnification and at such close range the more suitable Zeiss 10x40 binoculars. The bird was present for at least a half hour.

The bill was noticeably thicker and less dagger-like than that of Brown-headed or Black-headed *L. ridibundus* gulls. It was distinctly yellow with a neat black sub-terminal band. This was not the often two or three coloured band comprising of different coloured spots of the larger gulls Yellow-legged *L. cachinnans* or Heuglin's *L. heuglini* but rather was a simple straight narrow black sub-terminal band running across a dull yellow bill. Neither was the bill as thick or as bulbous as that of the larger gulls.

From observations of the bird on water and in flight, the wings, mantle and back were a uniform medium grey which was slightly but noticeably darker than that of the Brown-headed Gulls close by for comparison. In flight there was a clear white trailing edge to all the grey of the wing. The outer primaries were totally black forming a clear broad black outer primary wedge except for the fairly large clear white sub-terminal spot. The black outer primaries contrasted with the medium-grey of the inner primaries and rest of the wing.

The head was all white except for the crown, which was slightly speckled. The forehead was steep and the eye was dark, which gave it a more handsome appearance than that of Brown-headed Gull. The legs were yellow. The tail was all white. The white head with only slight speckling and the lack of brown in the plumage point to it being an adult in winter plumage.

Confusion species

The outer primaries were totally black forming a clear broad black outer primary wedge, except for the fairly large clear white sub-terminal spot. Black-headed and Slender-billed *L. genei* gulls are not confusion species as the black in the webs of the primaries is negligible. Adult Black-headed and Slender-billed gulls show a diagnostic upper wing pattern with a clear black trailing edge to the outer primaries contrasting with the white outer primaries.

Compared to the adult Brown-headed Gulls nearby the bird had much more black in the outer primaries. Adult Brown-headed Gulls have a white inner primary panel, which contrasts clearly with the black outer primaries of the upper wing. The bird discussed had none of these features, the black outer primaries contrasted with the medium-grey of the inner primaries and the rest of the wing.

The bird was about the size of a Brown-headed Gull and therefore far too small to allow confusion with the larger gulls, Yellow-legged, Heuglin's, etc. The bill pattern and shape also ruled out those species.

The overall size of the bird, the shape, colour and pattern of the bill, the broad black primary wedge contrasting with the grey rather than white inner primaries of the upper wing identify this bird conclusively as an adult Mew Gull.

I am familiar with Brown-headed, Black-headed, Slender-billed, Yellow-legged and Heuglin's gulls from extensive gull-watching in Goa and also Black-headed Gull and as stated previously Mew Gull from Britain and Denmark.

Confirmatory records

Magnus Ullman, leading a bird group from Sweden, also recorded three Mew Gulls on 5th February 2001. Mark Beaman, from Britain, leading a Birdquest group, recorded one Mew Gull between 13th and 14th February 2001 (Mark Beaman, *in litt*.) and Werner Suter, in a group comprising Susanne Ruppen, Günther Helm, Wolf-Rainer Ilenburg, Werner Müller, Hermann Reinhardt and Chista Glauser, from Switzerland, recorded one Mew Gull on 1st February 2001 (Werner Suter, *in litt*.). Between one to three Mew Gulls

were therefore present at Harike from 1st to 14th February 2001.

Previous records

Mew Gull has been recorded previously at Harike (Kazmierczak & Singh 1998), probably by Per Undeland, who recorded most of the rarities at Harike (Krys Kazmierczak, *in litt*., 2001) but further details are necessary. Alström (1994) recorded this species near Delhi and Paul Holt *et al.* recorded a first winter bird at Morjim, Goa on 14th December 1996 (Holt 2000). There are also five records from Pakistan, two from Nepal, one more from near Delhi and another from Bhutan (Grimmett *et al.* 1998; Inskipp & Inskipp 1991; Inskipp 1988; Kazmierczak 2000; Robson 1993).

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Horned Grebe *Podiceps auritus* at Harike Lake, Punjab, India

Anand Prasad

Prasad, A. 2008. Horned Grebe *Podiceps auritus* at Harike Lake, Punjab, India. *Indian Birds* 4 (1): 25-26.
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During a birdwatching trip to Harike Lake, Punjab (India), from 6th to 10th February 2001, I spent many hours studying the grebes near the Sikh gurdwara (temple) at the west end of the lake. There were several Black-necked Grebes *Podiceps nigricollis* present but some birds were noticeably different from this species and so I took notes of all such birds. It wasn't until later-and after comparing notes with Werner Suter and Mark Beaman, who were also visiting at that time-that I realised I had seen at least one and probably two Horned Grebes *P. auritus*.

A small grebe was seen on 10th February 2001, south of the gurdwara, at a range of about 20m through a Kowa ED TS613 telescope at 30x magnification. The bird dived after a few minutes and was not relocated immediately-until later, when presumably the same bird, was spotted at a distance of *c.* 400m, to the east of the gurdwara.

Description

The overall impression was of a small, smartly two-toned dark-grey and white grebe, with none of the dusky or buff appearance of Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, it was also longer necked.

The eye was orange-red and this along with small size points to Black-necked or Horned Grebe. This bird had a very clear white spot on the lores. Another feature was the pattern around the eye, the black cap extending only to the middle of the eye and there was a rather straight line running straight back from the eye. The ear coverts were white and the lores pale. The hood was also well defined and contrasting with the white ear coverts.

The throat, breast and flanks were all white. The cap, nape, scapulars, wings and tail were all a very dark-grey. This contrast created the clear two-tone effect.

The bill was pale with a clear dark upper edge to the upper mandible.

When it dived there was a white zigzag on the wing-too fast to see if this was more than just the secondary panel-but the zigzag suggests a possible white leading edge.

The shape of the head was not clearly the triangular shape, supposedly typical of Horned Grebe but also did not show the high forehead of Black-necked Grebe.

Discussion

This bird had a very clear white spot on the lores, which is diagnostic for Horned Grebe (Jonsson 1993; Beaman & Madge 1998; Mullarney *et al.* 1999). Another diagnostic feature was the pattern around the eye, which exactly fits the illustrations in the three works just cited. The black cap extended only to the middle of the eye and there was a rather straight line running straight back from the eye; the ear coverts were white and the lores were pale. The overall result is that the eye was only surrounded by extensive black above a line extending directly above the eye, with no black below eye level or directly to the front of the eye, where there was the pale loral spot, i.e. black surrounding about 110 degrees of

the eye. On Black-necked Grebe the black cap extends well below the rear of the eye and so the black around the eye is extensive above, behind and in front of the eye (about 250 degrees). On Black-necked Grebe the ear coverts are blackish and the lores are black and the white has a clear hook back of white on the nape.

The hood was also well defined and contrasting with the white ear coverts, which on Black-necked is more blended or diffuse, the bird described had the black hood contrasting with the white ear coverts.

The bill was pale with a clear dark upper edge to the upper mandible, a feature not shown by Black-necked Grebe.

The shape of the head was not clearly the triangular shape, typical of Horned but was neither the high forehead shown by Black-necked. However whilst watching Black-necked Grebes in Denmark in the following (late) summer I saw that the head shape of Black-necked Grebe can be confusingly flattened when it has been diving. I therefore conclude that head shape cannot be completely relied on with quick views.

I have previous experience of Horned Grebe in summer plumage in Scotland and I am familiar with Black-necked Grebe in winter plumage from Britain, Denmark and Nepal. I am also quite familiar with Little Grebe, a common bird throughout India and western Europe. Although the eastern race of the Little Grebe *T. r. capensis* has white secondaries, and therefore a very different wing pattern in flight, which is poorly illustrated in the literature, from the European race-this bird was not a confusion species because of the lack of a red eye and overall plumage differences. Generally this bird is more brown above and less white below, and so confusion is possible only with a superficial view.

The bird is therefore clearly a Horned Grebe based on three key diagnostic features, the ruby eye, longish neck (compared to Black-necked Grebe), pale lores, the hood pattern and the dark upper-side to the bill.

Two separate and independent bird groups also recorded the Horned Grebe, south of the gurdwara at Harike. Werner Suter from Switzerland, in a group comprising Susanne Ruppen, Günther Helm, Wolf-Rainer Ilenburg, Werner Müller, Hermann Reinhardt and Chista Glauser, recorded at least one, probably up to three Horned Grebes on 1st February 2001 and five on 3rd February 2001 (Werner Suter: email dated 29th December 2001). Mark Beaman from Britain, leading a Birdquest tour, recorded four Horned Grebes on 13th and 14th February 2001 (Mark Beaman: email dated 2nd January 2002). One might therefore conclude that at least 1–5 Horned Grebes were present in the area from 1st to 14th February 2001.

Description from Werner Suter

'On 1st February 2001, at Harike Dam, we walked from the temple on the dam road towards the little tower (from where we crossed through the reed bed to the canal and bridge with the tea house). Before coming to the tower, we scanned the waterbirds on the lake repeatedly, and found three Black-necked Grebes, somewhat scattered and busily diving, at a distance of *c.* 300m (using Svarovski and other telescopes, up to 60x). One of the tour members, Susanne Ruppen, drew our attention to a grebe that looked slightly different, and asked whether Horned Grebe was a possibility. Since this bird and the Black-necked Grebes were constantly diving, it took some time until we had established his identity beyond doubt (it was less restless after some time), but we were not sure whether the numbers (1 Horned, 3 Black-necked) were in fact higher since further away, there might have been more grebes. Anyway, as I was quite familiar with Horned Grebe in winter plumage (it is a regular though uncommon winter visitor to Swiss waters, but I have done field work on over-wintering water-birds in Switzerland for many years, and have thus seen it from time to time in Switzerland, and elsewhere), it was clear quite soon that it was a Horned Grebe (we were aware of the rarity of the species in India).

'Two days later, on 3rd February, we were back at the same place. Again, there were a number of grebes busily diving, and we saw that there were more than just one Horned Grebe-in fact, most of the small, scattered group were Horned Grebes. After about 20 minutes of scanning and after the birds had paused for a short moment, we had now counted 5 Horned Grebes and only 1 Black-necked. As two days before, we were not sure whether there were more grebes scattered across the large numbers of ducks and coots stretching away into [the] distance. However, this time, the nearest grebes were slightly closer, about 250m away, and to be seen in very good light. However, to take pictures, the birds were still too distant (but a good sight in the 30x wide-angle lens of my Svarowski AT80 telescope).

'Size and shape: Marginally larger, perhaps somewhat longer body, looking less 'stubby' (and Little Grebe-like), slightly thicker-set, particularly at the neck, than black-necked, clearly flatter head with highest point at the back end (not above the eye), bill slightly stronger and not upturned.

'Head pattern: sharp demarcation between black cap and white side of the head, going through the eye and slightly upwards behind the eye (giving the impression of a grebe with a 'flat' black cap contrasting strongly with very white ear-coverts).

'Bill: On 3rd February, in good light, we were able to discern the whitish bill tip in at least 2–3 of the birds.'

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Mark Beaman and Werner Suter for sharing their observations.

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Nesting of Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii* in Kodiyampalayam, Pichavaram mangrove, Tamil Nadu, India

S. Sandilyan, K. Thiyagesan & R. Nagarajan

Sandilyan, S., Thiyagesan, K. & Nagarajan, R. 2008. Nesting of Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii* in Kodiyampalayam, Pichavaram mangrove, Tamil Nadu, India. *Indian Birds* 4 (1): 27.
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Three nests of the Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii* were found under bridges in the Kodiyampalyam area of Pichavaram mangroves (11º39'N, 79º79'E), Tamil Nadu, India. One nest was found under a bridge about 1.5km away from human settlements, but closer to agricultural lands and open water area, which offered the bird foraging habitat and nesting materials. Another nest was found under a bridge, amidst small patches of emerging Mangrove forests and some active prawn farms. The third nest was under a bridge, surrounded by dense mangrove forest. The nest construction started in the month of December in all the cases. The mud nest construction was completed in 17 days in all the three nests recorded.

The swallows constructed the nests on the underside of the bridges as they offer ideal nesting substrate as well as concealment, being out of reach of ground-dwelling predators like mongoose. Further it was easy to collect the mud for nest construction from the nearby water sources.

The nests were constructed on the underside of the bridges towards the middle part. The nests were on an average 150cm above ground level and 90cm above the water level. The half- bowl shaped mud nests were cemented on top of the vertical beam supporting the bridges, and were about 2cm below the ceiling. The average dimensions of these nests were as follows: nest base: 5.5cm., length: 9.2cm and circumference 28cm.

Mud pellets or balls were the predominant materials used to build the nest, consisting of sand, silt and clay. Swallow species, especially those that build mud nest, are closely related and have similar nesting behaviours (Kilgore & Knudsen 1997). Earlier studies of Bran swallows *H. rustica* and cliff swallows *H. pyrrhonota* revealed that their mud nests contained predominantly sand with moderate amount of silt and clay (ibid.). Similarly the Wire-tailed Swallow's nest also contained all the three types of soil particles. The inner regions of the nests are lined with grasses, feathers and some small leaves. The mean dry weight of the nest was 170g, in that 160gm. was sand and the remaining 10gm. was the lining materials such as roots, hairs, leafs, pebbles, small red stones, shells of molluscs and grasses. Both sexes were involved in the nest construction. It took 17 days for the birds to complete a nest.

Three eggs were recorded in the nest, and they were laid at the rate of one egg per day. The colour of the egg was pale with several dark patches. The eggs weighed 2gm. each, their average length and width being 1.5cm and 0.9cm respectively. Incubation began before the last egg was laid. Earlier studies on swallows report that incubation period lasted between 14 to 15 days but in some sub species it ranged from 12 –17 days (Gorenzel & Salmon 1994). In the present case of Wire- tailed Swallow, the incubation period lasted 12 days. During the incubation, the male spent most of its time near the nest, and their night roosting was also near the nesting site.

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Sighting of the Philippine Shrike *Lanius cristatus lucionensis* at Rameswaram Island, Tamil Nadu, India

V. Santharam

Santharam, V. 2008. Sighting of the Philippine Shrike *Lanius cristatus lucionensis* at Rameswaram Island, Tamil Nadu, India. *Indian Birds* 4 (1): 28.

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On a recent visit to Rameswaram Island (9°172N, 79°182E; SE coast of India: Tamil Nadu state) between 1st and 4th November 2007, I spotted the Philippine Shrike *Lanius cristatus lucionensis*. I located at least 8-10 solitary individuals perched on shrubs, especially *Prosopis* sp., in open areas around the following locations: Ramar Padam, Dhanushkodi, Kothanda Ramar Temple, beach front beyond Hotel Tamil Nadu and in the town, near the temple (southern road bordering the temple). The bird was easily told apart from the nominate subspecies-Brown Shrike *L. c. cristatus*-by its greyish crown and yellowish white under parts. The birds were quite vocal and their calls sounded similar to those of the nominate race.

Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) say that the Philippine Shrike is a scarce but regular winter visitor to Sri Lanka and SE coast of India. My earlier encounter with this bird had been in the South Andamans (Santharam 1997) and Srharikota Island in Andhra Pradesh where we were able to ring a bird (Mohapatra & Santharam 1992). Balachandran & Rajan (1994) felt that the Philippine Shrike might be a regular winter visitor to Point Calimere (Tamil Nadu state), where more than ten individuals were ringed during October 1991. They felt its population might equal that of the Brown Shrike. At Point Calimere, peak populations of both subspecies occurred during their autumn passage. At Rameswaram, however, I failed to come across the Brown Shrike or any other shrike species.

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Recoveries from the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* (1969)-19

Zafar Futehally

Futehally, Z. 2007. Recoveries from the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* (1969)-19. *Indian Birds.* 3 (6): 28-29.

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One of the great joys of editing the *Newsletter* was the pleasure of receiving fine articles by contributors who knew more about birds than the Editor, and where the editorial function was merely to change a comma into a semi-colon, if that. But a more lasting satisfaction was to have encouraged people interested in birds to take to pen. Many shied away, but some responded, and to them I always related the story of the poet, apocryphal though it may have been that he didn't know what to write. "Fool," said his Muse to him, " look into thy heart and write." In some such way the best pieces in the *Newsletter* were not necessarily from competent ornithologists but from amateurs who put their feelings into words.

In the previous issue I carried extensive extracts from an article by S. K. Reeves published in July 1969. I had decided not to hurry, and attempt to give the reader a better feel of the area and the subject, rather than just a short extract which would be only of historical interest. Now I go a step further, by going a step backwards and reproducing an article published in April 1969 by K. S. R. Krishna Raju. I am sure you will enjoy it.

Birdwatching around Visakhapatnam

"On 20 September 1968, I went on holiday to my native-place, Alamanda R.S., a village in the Visakhapatnam district of

Andhra Pradesh. The southwest monsoon had failed, and the scene from the bus was largely one of dying vegetation. Here and there by the side of the road the water-holes still had a little water in them, and would usually have contained some meditative egrets and herons, but I saw nothing on this occasion. Lack of rains had deprived them of food; and even without such a natural hazard, their numbers are rapidly diminishing. Unless preventive measures are taken quickly against the indiscriminate use of poisons like endrine, and of shot guns, such birds as herons, egrets, and also doves, which appear to be the most conspicuous casualties, will become scarcer and scarcer.

"The area around my native-place comprises both wet and dry lands, more or less dependent on the monsoon, surrounded by low hills with light scrub as well as the denser foliage of mango gardens and palm groves. This mixed vegetation is a suitable home for numerous species of birds and other small animals like porcupines, jackals, hares, and wild boar, it is indeed a paradise for the birdwatcher. The day after my arrival, at about four in the afternoon,

I went for a walk in a mango grove with my cousin. The first thing that attracted our attention were the shrill calls of Redvented Bulbuls that were hopping from tree to tree. The flock consisted of both young and adults, I counted 23 of them. With them were Common Mynas, but no Redwhiskered Bulbuls. On an acacia tree we saw a single White browed Bulbul. Just then a tiny little black bird caught our eye, with a white patch on its wing conspicuous in flight. This was a male Indian Robin. A few seconds later, the ashy brown hen, with no white wing patch, appeared on the scene.

We went farther in to the middle of the mango garden and were at once surrounded by a varied multitude of birds – munias, minivets, sunbirds, babblers, parakeets and flowerpeckers. Of these the most numerous were Scarlet Minivets, Small Minivets and Tickell's Flowerpeckers, the minivets dominating the scene with their brilliant plumage and calls. Jungle and Common Babblers were the babblers most in evidence, though we saw one or two of the yellow-eyed species too. Purple-rumped Sunbirds, Blackheaded Munias and Spotted Munias were also about, in strength. All these birds formed a single flock, enjoying each other's company. What a harmonious life they seem to lead. Even though they belong to different species there appears to be no caste and creed barriers between them, as there are amongst human beings. There seem to be no political or other petty quarrels in the avian kingdom. As Wordsworth says, 'Let nature be your teacher', and obviously man has yet to learn many things from nature, especially the art of peaceful co-existence.

"A few minutes later we came across a flock of Roseringed Parakeets. Alexandrine or Large Indian Parakeets were also to be seen, but in fewer numbers. On one mango tree we saw a couple of Goldenbacked Woodpeckers pecking for insects on the lower branches. Both of them were females, having the characteristic all black fore crown stippled with white. Coming out of the grove, we saw on some telegraph wires a pair of Spotted Doves. Even in the middle of Visakhapatnam, with all its hustle and bustle, they are to be seen in the trees, sending forth their curious calls as if to draw themselves to the attention of the public. There is a legend that if one of a pair of Spotted Doves is shot dead, the other bird will never pair with a new mate. We cannot verify this legend, but should not be surprised if it were true and that these birds do possess such a moral sense.

"Next, on a banyan tree, we saw three pairs of Koels along with a silent Brainfever Bird and two Golden Orioles.

"Now I shall conclude with some miscellaneous observations of mine made at various times and places in Visakhapatnam district that may be of interest.

"In the village of Alamanda I have noticed a couple of Green Bee-eaters and a Roller which curiously enough each alighted on the same perch and at the same times for four days running. The Bee-eaters arrived punctually at 3.45 p.m. and the Roller at 4.10. Emerging from the mango grove from the same direction they perched at the same spot on some wires for few minutes and flew back into the garden. This exactly repeated routine may have been a mere coincidence, and the birds may not have been the same individuals, but if so it is remarkable.

"I have been disappointed to see that Jerdon's Chloropsis, once common enough, has almost disappeared from the region during the lat two years. The local people catapult them and make them into cage birds. I have only seen one recently: on 20 October 1968, in the outskirts of the village of Bheemali in a solitary mango tree, along with Whitebellied Drongos and Scimitar Babblers.

"One of the *konda doras* (hill-tribesmen) in Chittivanipalem, a village on the Eastern Ghats in S. Kota taluk, told me last year that he shot a Peafowl while it was incubating its eggs. Out of curiosity, I asked him about the incubation being done by a male bird, instead of the hen. In reply he said that he was very confident that it was a male that he had shot, and that it was on a nest with 4 eggs. I can only take his word for it but it requires some more authentic report to test the veracity of this fact.

"On a sunny morning, I noticed a solitary Black Drongo applying red ants to its body, beneath the wings. It had picked up 5-6 ants and carefully attached them to its body. After leaving them a few minutes, it started picking them off and eating them. Probably the idea was to use its prey to get rid of lice and other parasites before feeding on it.

"More recently, on 25 October in Visakhapatnam, I observed the strange phenomenon of copulation in a pair of House Sparrows. It was rainy day and a few minutes after the rain a pair of them landed on a parapet wall. The female birds was shaking terribly; at once the male bird climbed onto her and for a few seconds copulated with her and then got down and hopped a few paces, calling softly. But the female bird remained standing where she was, rooted to the spot, still shivering. The male bird again crouched on the hen's back, turning his tail downwards while the hen raised here. Each time they took exactly 5-6 seconds, and after an interval of 5 seconds, repeated the same process. In this way they copulated nine times, till the female stopped shivering.

"Other birds I have seen on trips to different parts of Visakhapatnam district include pied and Whitebreasted Kingfishers, House and Palm Swifts, Common and Greyheaded Mynas (the Hills Myna is reported to occur in the ghat regions of the district), Large Cuckoo-Shrikes, Hoopoes, Grey Hornbills, Skylarks, Ring Doves, White backed and King Vultures, Spotted Owlets, Red-wattled Lapwings, Grey Partridges, Bustard-Quail, Coucals, Lorikeets and Crimsonbreasted Barbets. Finally, I must not forget the crows and the Little Grebe that is always such a pleasure to watch as it suddenly disappears into the water, leaving a series of shallow rings on the surface of the water.

"The observations will, I trust, give our readers a glimpse of the avifauna of Visakhapatnam district."

—*A flight down memory lane*—
The little brown puzzles-4

Lavkumar Khachar

Khachar, L. 2008. A flight down memory lane: the little brown puzzles-4. *Indian Birds* 4 (1): 30-31.
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During the very first BNHS mistnetting camp at Changalra outside Bhuj in Kachchh district and subsequently in the intensive mistnetting followed up around Hingol Gadh, apart from the Chiffchaffs *Phylloscopus collybita*, I do not recollect having captured any other member of the *Phylloscopus* tribe. Now, when I think back, the reason can be explained by the fact that as Chiffchaffs foraged in acacia, prosopis and other thorny trees and shrubs, and so came low down to get entangled in the nets, the other leaf warblers tended to remain in taller, full foliaged, evergreen trees, from where at least two species made their presence known by very distinctive calls. Whether there were other species present, I just cannot affirm. Observing them among the dense leaves was difficult not only because of their hyperactive movements but also because of the continuous motion of the crowns of trees, relentlessly blown about by the strong north easterly winds that are so typical of winter in Saurashtra and Kachchh. The moment a bird was located in the binocular field, it would be swept out by the wind tossed branch or would have flitted out of sight. I remember feeling quite exasperated at times as I attempted to get a proper view. One could not, however fail to register the very characteristic flicking of the wings and tail, the frequent hovering before a cobweb-festooned bunch of leaves or the quick ariel sallies after some unseen insects. The two calls that were very distinctive were a cheerful 'Chisavik' uttered at intervals and a rather pleasant 'Chivi-chivi-chivi'. The first was that of the Greenish Leaf Warbler *P. trochiloides* and the latter that took me a while to trace down, to the Western Crowned Leaf Warbler *P. occipitalis*. I am sure there were also a couple of other species from among those that winter along the Western Ghats and in S. W. India just as *P. occipitalis* does.

It was early in my birdwatching years that I saw a couple of small birds flitting up and down boles of large mango trees. Against the light I could not make out the colours and my immediate response was that I had a pair of Chestnut-bellied Nuthatches *Sitta castanea* in front of me. Manoeuvring carefully so as not to frighten them, I positioned myself with the morning sun behind me and immediately I realised I had a species of the then called willow warblers. It was after reading through Stuart Baker's volumes that I zeroed on to them being Olivaceous Leaf-Warblers *P. griseolus*-less from the physical description than from the recorded habit of flitting up and down boles of large tree trunks, and boulders and walls of fortresses. At Hingol Gadh there is a viewing point from where you can look down to the base of the fortifications. Among the rocks there you can invariably find a couple of these little birds flitting around. Seen in the field, it is the over all smoky colour that catches the eye. The sulphur yellow belly is not clearly visible.

During my Delhi days, I do not remember being guided through the intricacies of leaf warbler identification by Horace Alexander, the recognised expert on these birds. The reason would be that most of the outings were to some water body and the main attraction were wagtails, waders, and among the bordering plantations of *Acacia nilotica* where time was spent comparingBlyth's Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*, Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata* and Common Chiffchaff. The shady orchards that lined the road joining Timarpur to the Grand Trunk Road must have been full of a variety of leaf warblers, but we never went bird watching there, a pity.

In the Himalaya, including the species mentioned above there are 18 species of leaf warblers. They breed during summer from the mid altitudes right up to the meadows. They are a thoroughly confusing lot. Working out the combinations of green, olive-green or brown above, bright to suffused yellow or plain white below, a prominent light line down the middle of the crown or an uniform crown, yellow or white supercilium, two, one or no bars on the wings, along with or without a yellow rump patch is most difficult, especially, as indicated earlier, with birds that are continually on the move, often with others of their kind supplanting each other in the binoculars' field of view. To add to the difficulty is the harsh mountain light that throws shadows into deep contrast with the lighted areas and, as often as not, the tiny birds are frenetically feeding among the high conifers. I did, however get to know the Tickell's Warbler *P. affinis* well because it is a common breeding bird above tree line and across the high passes into Tibet. During my memorable 1954 trek into SW Tibet, I found several pairs very confiding, nesting in the dense juniper and caragana shrubs of the high plateau. I suspect I have seen this warbler in winter

Clement Francis

Fig. 1. Grey-hooded Flycatcher-Warbler at Pangot, Uttaranchal: 26th November 2007.

alongwith the other two in tall trees down in the plains. I can do no better than quote Salim Ali from his *Indian hill birds*: 'Numerous other species of willow-warblers also breed in the Himalayas and visit the plains and hills of the Indian Empire abundantly during winter. They are all tiny birds, mostly much smaller than the Sparrow, olive-green or olive-brown above, yellowish or dirty whitish below, without or with one or two bars on the wing. They flit about restlessly amongst the foliage of trees and bushes…and are never quiet for a moment…' He goes on to add, 'Many are so alike and confusing that it is difficult to tell them apart in the field. The call notes of the different species, however, and their nesting characteristics when once learnt, are sufficiently distinctive as a rule to furnish clues to their identification.'

As though causing confusion for the birdwatcher in recognising them is not enough, there is another group that shares the Himalayan landscape with them, the Flycatcher-Warblers of the genera *Seicercus* and *Abroscopus*. There are seven species all of which, though like the leaf warblers, small and active and mingling with them, are brighter in coloration. I am most familiar with the Grey-headed Flycatcher-Warbler *Seicercus xanthoschistos*. This little bird is possibly the most common among the mixed hunting parties of small birds that are so characteristic of the Himalaya; it is the one that can be most easily mistaken for one of the brighter leaf warblers, but it continually flashes its white outer tail feathers which are a great help in identification. During the 1954 summer trek in the Gharwal before I proceeded to Tibet, I had seen a little warbler, olive green above, bright yellow below with a broad yellow supercilium off setting a black mask. There was nothing like it in Salim Ali's *Hill birds* which I carried, but I had wonderful views and made quick sketches of the bird. It was several years later when Dr. Salim Ali gave me a bunch of printouts of the illustrations for his *Pictorial field guide* that I saw a bird matching my sketch! I had seen a Black-faced Flycatcher-Warbler *Abroscopus schisticeps*, considerably to the West of its recorded range!

J. M. Garg

Fig. 2. Brownish-flanked Bush-Warbler at Gunapani (2,591 m) in Kullu district, Himachal Pradesh.

There are two other genera of warblers that are extremely difficult to tell apart even in the hand, let alone in dense vegetation in which they skulk. These are the real "brown puzzles". They belong to the genera *Cettia* and *Bradypterus* and are collectively and very appropriately known as the Bush Warblers. There are nine species in the former and six in the latter genus!

The *Bradypterus* bush warblers, from the illustrations in field guides, are rather like reed warblers in colour, size and shape. They inhabit coarse grass and dense shrubberies in mountain country. All but one are to be looked for at high altitudes along the Himalaya, while one, the largest, is a resident of the Sri Lankan highlands. I am afraid I have not come across any of them during my treks in the Himalaya primarily because, I suspect, I have never penetrated areas that have the sort of undisturbed vegetation apparently favoured by these skulkers; even if I did see one along the wayside, I would have passed it over as one of the reed warblers. From the distributions shown in the three Field Guides (Grimmett, Kazmierczak, and Rasmussen) one gains an impression that as more and more birdwatchers trek into the mountains in formerly 'restricted' areas, the ranges will be expanded. At least, I am out of the race.

The *Cettia* bush warblers are smaller and more akin to the leaf warblers. Cetti's Bush-Warbler *Cettia cetti* is a winter visitor to the Punjab and I did not come across it in my Delhi days. Another is a winter vagrant to Assam; the remainders are shown as occurring along the Himalayan range, two extending up to Kashmir. Of these, the Brown-flanked Bush-Warbler *C. fortipes* is a resident around my house at Vashishta above Manali. This little warbler continuously utters its loud and distinctive "Cheeeee-whichikavu" and "Cheee-whichoo" throughout summer. The "Cheee" starts at a very low key growing louder to be followed by the explosive "which…" The bird itself, being nondescript and small is adept at remaining hidden among dense shrubberies and very difficult to locate. It is this little bird that brings me to the story I promised about earlier as to why careful notes should be kept of the sounds birds make.

The respected senior mountaineer Gurdial Singh and Nalni Jayal, former Secretary Environment, Forests and Wildlife, Government of India were my house guests; hearing this distinctive call through out the day Nalni asked me what bird it was because he remembered it from his mountaineering days in the Western Himalaya but had not been able to see the bird. Without hesitation I said "The Blue Chat!" Now the Blue Chat *Erithacus brunneus* (see below) is, or was a common bird above 7,000' (meters?) during summer and like the warbler it too was highly secretive and more often heard than seen. It lived in dense shrubberies in shaded and wet locations. I was familiar with the bird and its call long before I had heard the warbler; it two had a double call, a breathless "Se-se-se-se" followed by and explosive "-chivivivi". Over the decades that fruit farming became dominant in Himachal Pradesh, the formerly common Blue Chat seems to have become scarce and I have not heard its call for quite a good many years. I am ashamed to say I never really gave the absence of the very familiar sound a second thought. The matter would have rested there had not I, a couple of days after the guests had left, heard the chat calling from a cool, damp and heavily shaded bit of my orchard. Old memories came flooding back and I rejoiced that I had enhanced the ecology on my land-at the same time, with both the birds calling, I realized my mistake. Needless to say, I immediately wrote to inform of the mistaken identity, but I will never get over my faux pas. The little, nondescript warbler had given a power kick on the back side of a complaisant 'expert' and well it may, for its old English name was the Strong-footed Warbler! Oh! And incidentally, the Blue Chat is now the Indian Blue Robin *Luscinia brunnea*! [Concluded.]

—Reviews—

No way home: the decline of the world's greatest animal migrations.
By David S. Wilcove.

Washington D. C.: Island Press. Price: $24.95.

In my ornithology class at the University of Arkansas-Fort Smith, we delve deep into the mysteries of bird migration. I attempt to convert mundane scientific jargon into fascinating prose, as I explain migration, that complex natural phenomenon where organisms stage periodic movements between two different geographical areas. David Wilcove's *No way home* will be a welcome addition to my class reading assignments because this eminent Princeton University ecologist conveys the age-old mysteries of animal migration in the form of a very readable book.

In seven engaging chapters, Wilcove takes readers through the various challenges faced by a variety of creatures. He presents songbirds and monarch butterflies migrating across continents, whales wandering around oceans, ungulates moving in seething masses across plains, and schools of salmon migrating upstream from oceans. He explains why they do it, how they withstand it, and what we have done as humans to disrupt these migrations as we, in our relentless push for 'development', elbowed our way into their domains.

Wilcove highlights the four most pressing problems faced by migratory creatures: habitat destruction, man-made obstacles, over-exploitation, and climate change. The accomplished author, who once spent a night in California assisting rare salamanders cross a highway that separated their upland habitat from their breeding pond, uses his own lifetime's work along with a thorough review of literature to bring us the story of the lives of these itinerant creatures.

How organisms find their way from and to their destinations, often in pitch darkness or bad weather, has intrigued humans for millennia. Wilcove says some have tiny magnets in their bodies that help perceive earth's magnetic field; others depend on shapes of coastlines or prominent landmarks like mountains or even the pattern of stars on the night sky. He also presents evidence that some may actually rely on smell to identify familiar sites. Even stunning is the fact that they may have a combination of these cues, using one as predominant guidance system, while using others as backup in case the main one fails.

Migrating thrushes, according to Wilcove, may use stars on clear nights and may switch to detecting earth's magnetic field on cloudy nights. In many species, the 'how' of migration is still unknown-despite years of research. 'Somehow they manage to sniff, see or sense when to go, where to go, and when to return', says Wilcove.

Wilcove presents the sad irony that, just as migration itself is an endangered phenomenon, its scientific study has reached its peak. Scientists in Europe can now determine the exact part of Africa a warbler spent its winter, just by examining chemical signatures in the feathers it grew in its wintering grounds. Miniscule transmitters 'weighing less than a dime' can now be affixed onto small birds, which can then be tracked with sophisticated satellite-enabled detectors.

The decline of North American migratory songbirds has received a lot of attention from scientists in the past few decades, and nest parasitism by cowbirds has been implicated in this. Cowbirds are known for their habit of laying eggs in songbirds' nests, thereby forcing songbirds to raise alien offspring at the expense of their own breeding success. The traditional explanation for the songbirds' apparent naiveté has been that songbirds, being denizens of forests, did not originally evolve with cowbirds. Cowbirds were once birds of open grasslands, and the opening of forests by settlers have enabled them to invade once forested tracts.

But Wilcove presents a disturbing recent find, which may offer a more sinister explanation for the songbirds' willingness to raise cowbird babies. Research indicates that if a warbler removes cowbird eggs, the cowbird would return and destroy the rest of the warbler's eggs, thus forcing the warbler to minimize its losses and raise at least one cowbird! This mafia-style enforcement of compliance, if confirmed, may be unparalleled in the annals of zoology.

With cowbird parasitism as high as 90% in some areas, Wilcove suggests that the very fact that songbirds persist may be due to large forest tracts like the Arkansas Ozarks in the USA, which may serve as 'net exporters' of songbirds to areas where they don't breed successfully. It is heartening to note, therefore, that Arkansas' forests serve in conservation of migratory songbirds not just in Arkansas but elsewhere as well.

The story of the grey whale should inspire anyone engaged in the apparently futile efforts to save migrating organisms. This nondescript whale migrates annually from waters off Baja California to Alaska and back. In the late 1800s relentless hunting decimated these itinerant populations. Whaling vessels zeroed in on once bountiful whale meat and blubber, which was used to extract oil. From one lagoon in the Baja alone, over 20,000 barrels of whale oil from 600 whales was harvested between 1858 and 1862. By 1930, just a few dozen were left in the eastern Pacific.

After concerted efforts by American and Mexican governments, not the least of which was the addition of the grey whale to the endangered species list in 1970-the species rebounded. Today, whale watching has replaced commercial whaling as a means of livelihood. Whale watchers pumped $83 million into the economies of coastal communities in 1998 alone. So dramatic has been the turn-around in people's attitude toward whales that the whales seem to be reciprocating by their confiding demeanour. These days, a few wild grey whales allow themselves to be petted by tourists. Wilcove says, 'no one has come up with a compelling explanation for this change of behaviour on the part of the whales. I suspect they simply enjoy getting their heads scratched.'

But Wilcove is not as sanguine about the fate of another group of oceanic wanderers: the sea turtles. All seven of the world's species are endangered, with a future far more bleak than that of whales. Female sea turtles return to the very beach they were hatched years ago, despite having spent 'less than one-tenth' of their lives ashore. Evidence indicates that they either use magnetic fields or they literally smell their way to the beaches where they were born, to bury their ping-pong ball eggs in the sand. With beaches being subjected to rampant usurpation by resort-loving humans, they face the serious problem of habitat loss.

The text is interspersed with Louise Zemaitis's life-like line drawings of the various animals and the habitats they occupy, but the reader may still crave for photographs. After all, don't glossy pictures often go side-by-side with such fine writing? And that lacuna is perhaps the only drawback of this otherwise engaging and highly informative book. My ornithology students will find this a welcome change from the comparatively mundane prose in their textbook.

– Ragupathy Kannan
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University of Arkansas—Fort Smith.

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Paperback (29.5 x 21.0 cm, with illus. cover), pp. i-viii, 1-239, innumerable photos (colour, by several photographers), maps (distribution), graphs and, tables. Price. Not stated. Available from Natural History Book Service (www.nhbs.co.uk)

One of the largest cooperative activities that birdwatchers undertake worldwide annually is participation in the International Waterbird Census (IWC). In the South Asian region this is known as the Asian Waterbird Census and is conducted in mid January. The data collected by this juggernaut exercise is mind-bogglingly humongous. 'The IWC now compiles data annually from over 10,000 sites in more than 100 countries,' and the work under review, 'provides the most comprehensive coverage yet of our state of knowledge of the sizes and trends of the world's waterbirds' (p. vi), filtering data from *c.* 50,000 hours of fieldwork and scanning over 600 publications (p. viii). During 2002-2004, in South Asia alone, an average of 600 sites were surveyed annually, recording *c.* 3,500,000 waterbirds each year, with more than 20,000 waterbirds being recorded at 59 different sites and 239 sites recording more than 1% of the biogeographic population of at least one species of waterbird (Li & Mundkur 2007).

This work hammers all this data into coherence and presents information that is relevant in several spheres. It indicates the state, in 2006, of 878 waterbird species divided into 2,305 biogeographic populations worldwide, comparable with data presented in similar earlier works (Wetlands International 2002), thereby indicating the plight of the earth's wetlands, as covered by the IWC. This is of great relevance in its micro- as well as macro-interpretations by individuals and organisations. Moreover, it is a sobering graphic map staring in the face of governments, a map that unfortunately shows the pathetic condition of wetlands all over the world and our conservation efforts through the declines of such a large number of waterbird populations. "The state of the world's waterbirds is continuing to deteriorate and now 44% of waterbird populations for which there is data are in decline or have already gone extinct-but only 17% are increasing. This pattern of decline appears in all parts of the world but the situation is most alarming in Asia, where almost two-thirds (62%) of populations are in decline or extinct, and only 10% increasing," (p. vi). In focusing attention on what is known, it directs our vision towards the shadows, the unknown, to understand which we need to prioritise further research and surveys.

The main section of this work (pp. 23-217) is tabular in nature and comprises for each taxon, a range map, subspecies / population, breeding range and non-breeding range, Ramsar regions, population size, population status, 1% threshold for use in Ramsar Convention Criterion 6 and, notes. A cursory perusal of this section reveals more about what we do not know of waterbirds in India than what we do. There are species that are found either across the country, e.g., *Gallirallus striatus* (p. 121), or have a restricted range, e.g., *Amaurornis bicolor* (p. 130), for which there is no population data! There are range maps that do not show the accurate distribution of taxa, e.g., *Anser indicus* (p. 75), *Netta rufina* (p. 96) and *Limosa limosa* (p. 177), which are found much further south in the Indian peninsula than indicated. Admittedly, this may well be because the range maps cover the global range of a species and are reproduced from the *Handbook of the birds of the world* series (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996) that are now itself over a decade old. Hopefully, future editions of the *Waterbird population estimates* will be able to provide more updated maps and delineate boundaries of the different populations of species for easier interpretation. Also, I am not too sure about the "50-250" estimated population range of *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus* (p. 154), and think it is on the higher side.

Answers to all these queries and inconsistencies, of course, crave further coverage of sites, research and survey. Even after so many years of the AWC, I firmly believe that in India we've still got a lot of ground to cover. There are innumerable wetlands out there that need to be surveyed, including several large ones where coverage is inadequate. Indeed, if every country were to publish its own waterbird population estimates, it would strengthen the quality of data by retaining the levels of filtration closer to home and become a potent tool for conservation advocacy with local governing bodies. Such regional and global data compilations also remind us of the value of collecting count and observational data in a proper and consistent manner, and publishing them on a timely basis.

That said, I cannot detract the immense value of the work under review and recommend it wholeheartedly as a tool for research, advocacy and also, deeper introspection, for it is not just birds and other biological life that depends upon wetlands. We do too.

– Aasheesh Pittie

—*Postcard from The Netherlands*—
World Owl Conference-2007

Raju Kasambe & Pravin Charde

Kasambe, R. & Charde, P. 2008. An overview of the World Owl Conference-2007 held in The Netherlands. *Indian Birds* 4 (1): 34–35.

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The World Owl Conference-2007: Owls, ambassadors for the protection of nature in their changing landscapes-was held at Groningen in The Netherlands from 31st October to 4th November 2007. It was truly a world conference as there were more than 100 participants representing over 40 countries. The conference had in all 87 oral presentations and 45 poster presentations.

31st October 2007: survey and monitoring workshop

There were presentations on methods and techniques of census, survey and monitoring of owl populations. This took us through various methods for estimation of accurate data on species abundance and status of owls. Arvind Ambudoss of India presented a paper on 'a method of census survey and monitoring of Eurasian Eagle-Owls in South India'.

1st November 2007: owl behaviour and owl fauna

The day started with a plenary by Iain R. Taylor on 'Do owls follow the rules?' After the plenary there were concurrent sessions on owl behaviour and owl fauna and eye specialists, Jan F. G. Worst and Hein Bloom, gave a presentation on 'The accommodation mechanism of owl's eye-a new theory on the muscular contribution to the reflective changes of the lens crystallina of the owl'.

We presented a paper on 'A study of the mounting behaviour of Spotted Owlets *Athene brama* in Maharashtra, India'.

Reuven Yosef and the senior author presented a paper entitled 'Anthropogenic activity aids in the habitat selection and survival of the critically endangered Forest Owlet *Athene blewitti*' [Ed: now *Heteroglaux blewitti*]. Arvind Ambudoss presented his paper on 'Prevalence of owl trapping communities and its ethnobiological significance in Tamil Nadu, South India.' Reuven Yosef presented another paper: 'Uluka (owl) in Sanskrit literature' on behalf of Suruchi Pande and Satish Pande as they could not attend the conference.

Presentations on vocalisations of Great Horned Owls *Bubo virginianus*, on aggressiveness in Ural Owls *Strix uralensis*, on the moult of Northern Hawk Owl *Surnia ulula*, mobbing of the Striped Owl *Asio clamator* and Barn Owl were all a learning experience. Al Vrezec presented a paper on the competitive exclusion and indirect interactions in the forest owl guild.

Then there were concurrent sessions on habitat selection and population trends and their causes. Arnold B. Van den Burg's presentation on 'Limitations of owl reproduction in the wild: is there a role food quality besides quantity?' was interesting. The success story of 'come back of the Barn Owl *Tyto alba* in northern Netherlands: population growth in relation to landscape features', by Johan de Jong was much appreciated.

A session on cultural significance of owls saw two presentations from India by Arvind Ambudoss and Reuven Yosef for Suruchi Pande and others. In the evening two films were shown. 'How Dutch owls behave' (by Eddy Kuis & Arnold van der Burg) and 'Owls in the mist' (by Clauss & Ingrid Konig).

2nd November 2007

The plenary by Erkki Korpmaki was on 'Responses of owls and kestrels to spatio-temporal variation of their main prey'. Norman Smith's presentation on the satellite tracking of Snowy Owls was an eye opener as it revealed the poaching of Snowy Owls besides the migration data.

There were presentations on video observations and population trends and their causes. The presentation by Ronald van Harxen on 'On-line registration of Little Owl *Athene noctua* breeding behaviour and food supply by means of volunteer effort' highlighted results of a first-of-its-kind web cam season of 5,500 hours of observations-proving the utility of volunteer effort, modern technology and Internet in research and conservation of owls. Sessions on biology, status and conservation of various owl species of the world were going on simultaneously. A demonstration on 'egg candling' by Peter Beersma was held. Meanwhile a stereo 3-D presentation by J. Worst and Hein Bloom on the morphology and functioning of the avian eye was presented.

A presentation by Hans Dieter Martens on, 'A wireless cavity nest viewing system and the evaluation of video clips', seemed highly practicable.

Three presentations on Ural Owls, 'Impact of blood parasites', 'Life history and reproductive success' and 'Nesting places are not a limiting factor' were applauded.

3rd November 2007: excursion and Dutch owl-day celebrations

It is really unbelievable that an owl-day is celebrated here, considering the superstitions owls face around the globe. But those who participated were happy to see how the importance of owls is being highlighted in European countries.

We went on an excursion to the small island of Schiermonnikoog (Shirmanikov), in the Wadden Sea. Sighting nearly 60 species of birds in a single day of birding was very rewarding and a lifetime experience.

4th November 2007

Geoff *et al* presented the plenary on 'The population dynamics, dispersal and conservation of the Canadian Burrowing Owl *Athene cunicularia*'.

The day saw one more presentation by Arvind Ambudoss on 'Anthropocentric pressure induced decline in status and distribution of Eurasian Eagle-Owls and initiation of participatory conservation measures-a case study in Tamil Nadu, South India'. Motti Charter and others' presentation on 'Nest box use by Barn Owls in a biological pest control program in the Beit She'an Valley, Israel' seems really suitable for India. The team had convinced Israeli farmers regarding the utility of Barn Owls-now the farmers spend money to install nest boxes on their farms, thus helping increase the population of the owls.

Conclusion

The World Owl Conference was a great event towards research and conservation of the Owls. However the meagre representation from the Indian Subcontinent, with as many as 32 species of owls, was saddening. Only three species of owls were 'represented' by Reuven Yosef, Arvind Ambudoss and the authors, though there were more abstracts.

The conference discussed the causes of decline but stressed on research and conservation using the latest technological advances to help owls survive. Reintroduction, use of nest boxes, public participation, radio-telemetry-were buzzwords.

The conference resulted into a decision to form a World Owl Working Group.

—*Gleanings*—

Edelaar, P. 2008. Rediscovery of a second kind of crossbill for the Himalayan region, and the hypothesis that ecological opportunity drives crossbill diversification. ***Ibis*** 150: 405-408.

Crossbills are known for their remarkably curved bills that cross each other when closed. These unique bills are adapted to pry open tough scales of conifer cones. The bill size and depth of each kind of crossbill (whether a distinct species or a subspecies) has apparently evolved in response to natural selection for foraging efficiently on a particular size and shape of cone. Worldwide, there are more crossbill species in areas of more conifer diversity, leading to the hypothesis that crossbill diversity is spurred by the diversity of conifer species.

However, in the Himalaya, there is only one crossbill, the Himalayan Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra himalayensis* that occurs all the way from Himachal Pradesh (India) eastwards through southwest China-a range where at least 11 conifer species suitable for crossbills are found. Why is there only one crossbill species in an area of such high conifer diversity? Is the hypothesis that conifer diversity drives crossbill diversity wrong or inadequate? Or are there other crossbill varieties or species in the Himalaya that we are as yet unaware of?

Pim Edelaar, an animal ecologist from Uppsala University in Sweden, investigated this conundrum. He borrowed and examined 39 crossbill specimens from various bird museums in the USA. These birds had been collected within the known range of the Himalayan Crossbill. His results, which revealed striking bimodality in the data, show two clearly separated groups of crossbills, one distinctly smaller than the other in terms of bill depth, length of upper mandible, and tail length. Thus, he uncovered two kinds of crossbills in the Himalaya.

He calls this a 'rediscovery of a second kind of crossbill' because the larger ones were discerned as distinct enough to be named separately as *L. c. bangsi* by Griscom way back in 1937. However, in 1941, Stanford and Mayr lumped both large and small forms as *L. c. himalayensis*, apparently because Mayr felt that his measurements (of what he *believed* to be Griscom's specimens) did not agree with Griscom's published data. They also felt that the sample size for the comparisons was inadequate. Now, more than half a century later, Edelaar's findings have vindicated Griscom's opinion that the larger ones are distinct enough to be given a separate subspecies status. It is possible that Mayr used the wrong set of specimens.

Edelaar argues that the difference in bill depth between the two groups is 'more than enough for strong ecological differentiation' considering that bill depth in five distinct kinds of North American crossbills on average differs only by 0.10 to 0.61 mm, whereas here it differed by a whopping 1.07 mm. Also, based on a review of conifer distribution data, Edelaar hypothesizes that the larger crossbill maybe specialising on the cones of the Chinese Larch *Larix potaninii*, and the smaller one may be similarly adapted to feed from

the relatively smaller cones of the Himalayan Hemlock *Tsuga dumosa*. Since there is an overlap in the range of the two conifer species, Edelaar feels that there may be substantial geographical overlap in the two forms of crossbill as well. Edelaar writes that DNA and field studies in this region of overlap will be necessary to determine whether the two crossbills warrant elevation to distinct species, rather than just subspecies.

In a recent essay, I highlighted the importance of scientific collections of birds not just to describe new species, but also to 'spawn many unexpected and unanticipated surprises long after the specimens themselves are added to museum drawers...' (Kannan, R. 2007. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 104: 12-18). This case bolsters that argument. Edelaar did not do any fieldwork for this clever exposé, and his work stemmed from a careful examination of museum specimens that were collected by museum ornithologists, years ago. In fact, the two crossbill forms may never have been told apart by mere field observations. Thanks to museum collections and his intelligent and meticulous work, we know of a new crossbill for the Himalaya.

– *Ragupathy Kannan*

Round, P. D. & G. A. Gale. 2008. Changes in status of *Lophura* Pheasants in Khao Yai National Park, Thailand: A response to warming climate? *Biotropica* 40: 225-230.

There is a preponderance of evidence that global warming has affected bird populations in various parts of the world, but much of this evidence is in temperate or polar zones. The fact that birds are now arriving and breeding earlier in spring in northern latitudes is well established. Similarly, pole-ward and altitudinal shifts in bird distributions too have been documented. But to my knowledge, only one major paper has clearly documented such changes in avifauna from the topics: Pounds et al. (*Nature* 398: 611-615) reported that low elevation species in Costa Rica are now increasingly found in montane cloud-forest habitats, and linked this phenomenon to decrease in frequency of mists in higher elevations induced by spikes in air temperatures.

Now, Philip Round and George Gale of Thailand report an analysis of a series of sight records spanning a quarter century of two syntopic species of pheasants, one lowland, and other montane or submontane, in Khao Yai National Park, Thailand. Their results are strikingly similar to that reported above from Costa Rica. The lowland species, Siamese Fireback *Lophura diardi*, is increasingly encountered at higher altitudes in relation to those of the higher elevation resident, the Silver Pheasant *Lophura nycthemera*. Unlike the Costa Rica study, however, the authors were unable to establish a direct cause-and-effect relationship between climate change and these shifts in altitudinal distributions, and hence hypothesize that the shifts could be a response to a warming climate.

What makes this study of especial interest is it illustrates the value of maintaining long-term bird records with meticulous notes on elevations and other pertinent information. The authors pored over sight records archived in three organizations from 1978 to present. They also appealed for sightings of the two pheasants in a posting on the Oriental Birding Newsgroup and were able to get additional information. To all this, they added their own sight records and systematic survey data that they themselves gathered. They then used simple linear regression models to correlate changes in pheasant encounter rates with changes in rainfall and temperature across time frames.

This study should be a model to illustrate how simple maintaining and archiving of bird records could spawn interesting studies years after the birdwatchers made those observations. Even amateur birders can contribute significantly to the scientific study of birds, simply by maintaining, and periodically archiving, their bird records.

– *Ragupathy Kannan*

—*In the news*—

Compiled by Praveen J.

Migration time for Amur Falcons

There has been a wave of Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis* sightings from different parts of India in the last month of November. This species is believed to be a passage migrant through the Indian Subcontinent and is seen along the western coast and eastern parts of the country during November. The first report for this season was by Sumit K. Sen from Kolkota on 23.x.2007 where he photographed a single bird from his home. Bill Harvey reported a tiercel from Sunderbans on 14.xi.2007. A sizable flock of 250-300 birds was reported on 19.ix.2007 near Mumbai by Adesh Shivkar. Later on 22.ix.2007, he saw two birds at Gawlideo Hills near Mumbai. Shashank Dalvi photographed a massive bazaar of 1,000+ Amur Falcons at Nameri National Park in Assam on 11.xi.2007. Vaibhav Deshmukh reported three birds at Ramdharneshwar Hills near Alibag (Maharashtra) on 19.ix.2007 and one bird on 25.xi.2007. Around Hyderabad, J. Pranay Rao saw a falcon on 3.xi.2007 near Medchal and eleven birds over a grassy path around Shamirpet on 24.xi.2007. Raju S and Rajasree photographed a falcon from Punchakkari, Thiruvananthapuram on 18.xi.2007. With more bird-watchers going out in the field, an increase in

annual sightings of this handsome bird is bound to happen. Courtesy: *BengalBird, BirdsofBombay, KeralaBirder*.

A Sarus story

Bill Harvey and Mughda Sethi have framed a delightful children's story with rich paintings portrayed around the pair of Sarus Cranes *Grus antigone* that nests at Basai wetland (Haryana), an Important Bird Area near Delhi. The story, *Shoba and the Sarus Cranes*, is about a young girl who takes initiatives to convince her elders to protect the nesting site of her friends, a pair of Sarus Cranes. It was inspired by Harvey's visits to and his experiences at Basai, a wetland that has been, unfortunately, converted into fields in recent years. The author also touches meekly the Siberian Cranes *G. leucogeranus* that used to winter in Bharatpur years ago and conveys that it is too late to do anything now. Harvey and Sethi have donated the story to International Crane Foundation (ICF) and hope to inspire people across the world to work together to conserve cranes and wetlands. The full story, indeed a treat to read, can be downloaded freely from the ICF website http://www.savingcranes.org/about/whats_new/index.cfm

Dispersal of Malabar Whistling Thrush

Malabar Whistling Thrush *Myiophonus horsfieldii*, an endemic species in peninsular India, is known to have some local movements, which are largely unstudied. This season, it has sprung up in two surprise localities. On 22.xi.2007, Prasanth Narayanan reported a single bird from Nehru Zoological Park in Hyderabad. However, he did not see the bird during subsequent visits. On 24.ix.2007, C. Sashikumar reported it from Karikilli Bird Sanctuary near Chennai on the eastern coast. There have been stray sightings of this species during previous years from the outskirts of Bangalore, Chamundi Hills, Nandi Hills (all in Karnatka) and Rishi Valley (Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh). Courtesy: *KeralaBirder, TamilBirds*.

Celebration time for the Barn Owl Project

The Barn Owl Conservation Group, a unique venture initiated to protect Barn Owls *Tyto alba* in Bangalore city (Karnataka), tasted its first success when Ms. Mukta Nagaraj spotted an owl entering the artificial nest box installed near her kitchen. The experimental nest box installed in her apartment by the conservation group in October (one among eight other boxes distributed in the city) happens to be the first one to be adopted by a pair of barn owls. "Nest boxes are popularly used by doting birdwatchers around the world to give barn owls a safe nesting place - the owls are increasingly looking for places to nest in apartment complexes, which are replacing old tree hollows," says S. Subramanya, one of the founders of the 25-member group, comprising teachers, doctors, housewives, businessmen and scientists. "We would like to study the owls closely, perhaps with the help of a web camera, to learn more about their feeding and breeding habits." This information, he hopes, will be turned into educational material, "to make people see the positive role played by barn owls - they do us all a big service by consuming a couple of rats at night". Read more about it from *http://www.bangalorebarnowl.com*.

A course in basic ornithology

To promote scientific awareness about birds, avian ecology and conservation aspects amongst people, the M. E. S. Abasaheb Garware College and ELA Foundation (Pune) have jointly initiated a 'Certificate Course in Basic Ornithology'. This is the fourth consecutive year of this unique course, which begins on 17.xii.2007. The course is conducted on a no-profit-no-loss-basis and all participants are given a comprehensive book of lecture notes. Course participants, in association with NGOs and forest department personnel, counted Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* at Morachi Chincholi. A project on installation of artificial nest boxes for hole nesting birds is also undertaken. Several birds have been rescued and successfully released in nature by the course participants and some are also carrying their own research studies on birds.

Any person having completed 11th standard in any faculty is eligible to join this course, which is conducted in English. The previous two courses were attended by persons from all walks of life: doctors, engineers, software personnel, lawyers, journalists, junior and senior college students from arts and commerce faculty as well as from zoology, botany, biodiversity and environmental sciences and various other professions.

The course comprises about 40 bi-weekly audio-visual lectures and demonstrations on topics like avian anatomical adaptations, physiology, migration, bird flight, breeding and roosting behaviour, identification, bird photography, bird call recording, cultural aspects, archaeo-zoological aspects, birds as pest controllers, environmental law, etc. Four field visits are included as well as one each to the Zoological Survey of India and Bird Orphanage to learn about preserved bird skins, biometry and bird first aid and care.

Contact Dr. Sanjay Kharat, course coordinator or S. N. Suryawanshi HOD, Zoology Department of MES College between 10:30 hrs and 16:00 hrs, on working days.

Last chance to comment on the proposed Red List Category Changes for 2008

BirdLife International's (BLI) first round of review of the IUCN Red List assessments for threatened birds is coming to a close. BLI has assessed all the contributions from the Threatened Birds forums and information available from other sources. In the light of all available information, they have prepared a draft list of proposed revisions for the 2008 IUCN Red List. This has been posted on the Threatened Asian Birds forum at http://www.birdlifeforums.org. BLI now wants final comments on this list, which can be directly posted on the forum before 20.xii.2007. After this, BLI will reassess the draft decisions based on any new information obtained and frame the final decisions.

From the field

With winter setting in, there is a lot of action in the field.

Sharad Sridhar photographed a White-browed Bushchat *Saxicola macrorhynchus* at Sultanpur, Haryana on 17.xi.2007.

There are just a handful of records from Haryana in the recent past and it is listed by BirdLife International as Vulnerable. Courtesy: *Delhibird*

On 2.x.2007, Gururaja and his friends photographed a Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* from Yellapur-Haliyal road near Dandeli National Park, Karnataka. It is perhaps the second photographic record of this Near-threatened species from this region after Vijay Mohan Raj photographed it in 2001. The species is believed to be sparingly distributed throughout the Western Ghats. Courtesy: *Bngbirds*

The state-wide bird race in Kerala on 11.ix.2007 came up with two sightings of uncommon *Aquila* eagles. A photograph of a Tawny Eagle *A. rapax* was taken at Kole Wetlands by Sandeep Das and Vivek Chandran. As per Rishad Naoroji's *Birds of Prey of Indian subcontinent*, this is an extremely rare bird in the Malabar region. On the same day, Raju S., reported a Greater Spotted Eagle *A. clanga* from Punchakarai-Vellayani near Thiruvananthapuram, perhaps the most southerly record from the Indian Subcontinent. Courtesy: *KeralaBirder*.

K. V. Eldhose and Sudheesh reported a dead Orange-breasted Green-Pigeon *Treron bicincta* from Thattekkad, Kerala on 28.xi.2007. It is considered one of the rarest birds in the Western Ghats. Courtesy: *KeralaBirder*

Marshall's Iora *Aegithina nigrolutea* is now being recorded from several dry areas and scrub jungles in Karnataka. Recent reports in November are from Daroji Bear Sanctuary near Hampi by S. Subramanya and from Bommasandra in Kaveri Valley by Mike Prince and Vijay Ramachandran. S. Subramanya also reported several Rufous-fronted Prinias *Prinia buchanani* including several sub-adults and a flock of 250 Grey-necked Buntings *Emberiza buchanani* from the same area. Courtesy: *Bngbirds*

Bill Harvey and others saw a Mishmi Wren-Babbler *Spelaeornis badeigularis* among several other north-east Indian specialties from Mishmi Hills in Arunachal Pradesh during a weeklong field trip between 18-24.xi.2007. Courtesy: *OrientalBirding*

V. Santharam reported 8-10 individuals of Philippine Shrike *Lanius cristatus lucionensis* at several locations from Dhanushkodi-Rameshwaram area during first week of xi.2007. All individuals of *L. cristatus* he saw were of this race. Courtesy: *TamilBirds*

Vivek Chandran reported three White-tailed Lapwings *Vanellus leucurus* from Adat-Kole in Kerala on 23.xi.2007. This is the third winter, since 2000 that this species is being reported from Kole Wetlands. Courtesy: *KeralaBirder*.

Sumit K. Sen reported a new easterly limit for Common Babbler *Turdoides caudatus* when he recorded six individuals of this species from Purbasthali wetlands, West Bengal on 1.xii.2007. This species was known to be distributed only up till north-eastern Bihar. Courtesy: *BengalBird*

Kumar Ghorpade and his associates reported Isabelline Wheater *Oenanthe isabellina* from the outskirts of Raichur (Karnataka) on 01.xii.2007. This is an addition to the birds of Karnataka and perhaps the southern most record of this species for the subcontinent. Courtesy: *BngBirds*

Prasanth Narayanan and friends reported two Black Storks *Ciconia nigra* from Gauthami River near Kotiappli in Andhra Pradesh on 17.xi.2007. *Courtesy: KeralaBirder*

A Red-breasted Parakeet *Psittacula alexandri* was again reported among several Rose-ringed Parakeets *P. krameri* at GKVK campus, Bangalore by S. Subramanya on 13.xi.2007. Courtesy: *Bngbirds*

David Raju and Meena Haribal recorded nine Black Bazas *Aviceda leuphotes* at Thattekkad in 22.xi.2007. Courtesy: *KeralaBirder*

Adesh Shivkar reported an incident of a Pale Grasshopper-Warbler *Locustella naevia* caught in the web of a Giant Wood Spider *Nephila* sp., on 18.xi.2007 at Tungareshwar WLS in Maharashtra. This is the third instance of a bird in the web reported from Indian region. Courtesy: *BirdsofBombay*

There have been a few reports of Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* in the past two months. S. Subramanya reported one from Yelehanka tank on 03.xi.2007 and another from Hampi region on 23.xi.2007. Courtesy: *Bngbirds*. K.V.Eldhose reports having seen this bird every day between 1-11.xi.2007 at Thattekkad, Kerala. Courtesy: *KeralaBirder*

David Stanton reports a Nepal Wren-Babbler *Pnoepyga immaculata*, two Striated Laughing-thrushes *Garrulax striatus* and six White-throated Laughing-thrushes *Garrulax albogularis* from Kangra Valley in Himachal Pradesh on 1.xi.2007.Courtesy: *OrientalBirding*

A Large-billed Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus magnirostris* and a Pied Thrush *Zoothera wardii* were reported from Nandi Hills by Mike Prince on 27.x.2007. Courtesy: *Bngbirds*

Vishnu Das reported twenty chicks of Oriental White Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* from Panamaram heronry, from about eight nests, on 5.x.2007. This species has been recently found breeding in Kerala and this is one of the two nesting sites in Kerala. Courtesy: *KeralaBirder*

Launch of the AWC Strategy for 2007-2015

On 13.xi.2007, at the second meeting of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership in Beijing, Wetlands International launched a strategic document for waterbird monitoring in the Asia-Pacific region entitled *The Asian Waterbird Census: Development Strategy 2007-2015*. The Development Strategy was endorsed by the Flyway Partnership Meeting as a regional mechanism that contributes to the Flyway Partnership Implementation Strategy through the monitoring of waterbirds and their habitats. The AWC strategy is the major output of AWC Coordinators' Meetings held in 2003 and 2006; the aim of the meetings was to achieve a high standard of waterbird monitoring in the Asia-Pacific region. The strategy focuses on seven objectives, 28 actions and 84 implementation points for the development of the AWC. The target is that by 2015 a high quality monitoring programme, covering most of the internationally important wetland sites for waterbirds, will be carried out to a very high standard in all countries in the Asia- Pacific region.

A review of the development of the AWC over the past 20 years clearly reveals that the programme has seen many

achievements. Its greatest strength has been its ability to mobilise large networks of volunteers to undertake the census work. However, there have also been challenges, typical of the problems in many developing Asian countries. Major issues are the lack of adequate census capacity, equipment and financial support, and changes in levels of volunteer interest, resulting in inconsistent site coverage and data quality. The strategy is intended to function as a guide, not only for Wetlands International and the organisations that coordinate the AWC in the region but also for each individual who participates, supports or expresses interest in the AWC. It is highly recommended that AWC volunteers have a look at the strategy document at http://www.wetlands.org.

White Stork—an emblem for Indo-Russian relations

A European White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* pictured with the colours of Indian and Russian national flags have been chosen as the emblem for Year of Russia in India. Twelve works were on the short-list for the emblem. Nikolai Kiselev, 24, an artist from Novosibirsk, won. His sketch was also named the best by Kanwal Sibal, then Indian Ambassador to Russia, at the gala on the 60th anniversary of bilateral diplomatic relations.

"Storks spend the winter in India to fly to Russia for the warm season. These birds of passage build air-bridges between the two countries," said Anzhelika Zhukova, chief executive officer of IMA Dialogue and contest organiser.

The jury thinks the stork will also make a good emblem for the reciprocal Year of India in Russia, scheduled for 2009. "The bird flies right to left in the Year of Russia emblem. It needs only to reverse direction a year later," Ms. Zhukova said.

Read the full story at: http://www.hindu.com/2007/12/07/stories/2007120755682400.htm.

State birds of India

Since the news item of announcing the new state bird for Himachal Pradesh appeared in Jul-Aug issue of IndianBirds, Digambar Gadgil from Nashik requested for the complete list of state birds of India. Thanks to Wikipedia and Google, a complete list of state birds for all the Indian states is available and reproduced in Table 1. It is interesting to note that Indian Roller, Great Hornbill, Hill Myna, Green Imperial Pigeon and Mrs. Hume's Pheasant are state birds of multiple Indian states.

Table 1. State birds of India

State	Species	State	Species
Andhra Pradesh	Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis*	Maharashtra	Green Imperial Pigeon *Ducula aenea*
Arunachal Pradesh	Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*	Manipur	Mrs.Hume 's Pheasant *Syrmaticus humiae*
Assam	White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata*	Mizoram	Mrs.Hume 's Pheasant *S.humiae*
Bihar	Indian Roller *C.benghalensis*	Nagaland	Blyth 's Tragopan *Tragopan blythii*
Chhattisgarh	Common Hill Myna *Gracula religiosa*	Orissa	Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*
Goa	Black-crested bulbul *Pycnonotus gularis*	Punjab	Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*
Gujarat	Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*	Rajasthan	Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps*
Haryana	Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus*	Sikkim	Blood Pheasant *Ithaginis cruentus*
Himachal Pradesh	Western Tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus*	Tamil Nadu	Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica*
Jammu &Kashmir	Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis*	Tripura	Green Imperial Pigeon *D. aenea*
Jharkhand	Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea*	Uttarakhand	Himalayan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus*
Karnataka	Indian Roller *C.benghalensis*	Uttar Pradesh	Sarus Crane *Grus antigone*
Kerala	Great Hornbill *B.bicornis*	West Bengal	White-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*
Meghalaya	Common Hill Myna *G. religiosa*		
Madhya Pradesh	Asian Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*		

—Correspondence-

In *Indian Birds* 3 (3): 109 there was a report of Lesser Golden-backed Woodpeckers *Dinopium benghalense* feeding on rice put out for them. In context to this, please record in the next issue-a male Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker joining Red-vented Bulbuls *Pycnonotus cafer*, Jungle Babblers *Turdoides striata*, Common *Acridotheres tristis* and Brahminy *Sturnus pagodarum* Mynas and House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* along with squirrels *Funambulus* sp., to feed on bread pieces and uncooked rice put out for birds in a Chandigarh (India) garden. Sitting out in the sun on the morning of 22nd December 2007 with my host, I was pleasantly surprised to see this woodpecker join the other birds to glean rice and later fly to a bowl of water for a drink. Apparently he has been a regular visitor for quite some time.

–Lavkumar Khachar
23rd December 2007

—Editorial—

Indian Birds became an all-colour publication in 2007, sporting a laminated cover. In this third volume (6 issues), comprising 232 pages, we published 92 articles (papers, short notes, letters, book reviews, *etc*.) pertinent to South Asian ornithology. In addition to these there were items such as news, obituaries, gleanings, *etc*. During the year, three new columns were started. 'Postcard from…' will contain material from areas outside South Asia. 'In the news', compiled by Praveen J., will inform readers of goings on in the ornithological world. 'Gleanings', compiled by Ragupathy Kannan, will bring to readers summaries of important ornithological papers, published across the world, which are relevant to South Asian region. The 5th number was our first Special Issue-on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and contained a 7-page photo gallery of mainly endemic species of birds from that archipelago. We hope to bring you more photo galleries in the future with diverse and topical subjects.

In May–June 2007 we consolidated our editorial activities by forming an Editorial Board comprising 16 members including the Trustees of the New Ornis Foundation. We also christened our three columnists 'Contributing Editors' and Clement Francis and Arpit Deomurari, whose photography adorns *Indian Birds*, 'Contributing Photographer'.

Gleaning through an old issue of *The Auk*, I stumbled upon an editorial on peer reviewing and thought it would be appropriate to carry it verbatim here, for two reasons. One, to acknowledge the great debt *Indian Birds* owes its peer reviewers for their forthright cooperation in ensuring the quality of material published within its covers. Two, to educate its contributors about the role that referees play in transforming manuscripts submitted for publication into scientifically rigorous material fit for publication. Referees take time out of their daily work and review manuscripts-a reflection of their passion for ornithology. Sometimes manuscripts get delayed with them, much to the chagrin of contributors, but such work emerges so much the better after their perusal.

Several persons helped in producing *Indian Birds* in 2007 and it is with great pleasure that I acknowledge their contributions-whether as sponsors, layout experts, referees, photographers, artists or office help. *Indian Birds* would particularly like to thank: G. B. K. Charitable Trust, K. Jayaram, Niranjan Sant, Pervez Cama, Pitti Laminations Limited, P. Rambabu, and The Serenity Trust.

Peer review

'Whatever the reasons for doing research, the major, substantative product, a manuscript, often assumes a life of its own. The rewards and satisfaction of design, execution, and analysis of a project are axiomatic. But before the work, however brilliant, becomes "science" (i.e. a part of the permanent record), it must be published. This adds the criterion of undergoing the scrutiny of others in the field, plus checks for accuracy and expression. In other words, the manuscript is exposed to one or more steps of peer review. The variety of topics covered in contemporary ornithology and the introduction of new laboratory and field techniques, along with more through data analysis, have expanded the intellectual framework and added immensely to the demands placed on both author and reader. For these and other reasons, the role of referees in the publication process has become increasingly important. A thorough, thoughtful review puts a stamp of quality on a paper and acts as an aid to experts and non-experts who might cite it subsequently. Similarly, the professional acceptance and usefulness of the journal is improved.

'Peer review is a key element in editorial decision making. Even manuscripts that are ultimately rejected benefit from the process. Peer review identifies reports that are trivial, poorly designed, poorly executed, or unoriginal. The process ensures proper recognition and consideration for the work of others. One immediate benefit is that is leads to revision of the manuscript, occasionally to more observations or analysis of data, and to a consequent improvement in quality. The general effect is to improve the technical quality of the journal and of the field as a whole.

'The system of external review used by *The Auk* should not be mysterious. It involves a considerable investment of resources, but seems to work. I generally send each manuscript to three reviewers. Potential reviewers are solicited by mail. If a person agrees to review, the manuscript is sent and we request a 4-week return. I try to select reviewers on the basis of their expertise, experience, previous reviews, and, often, their point of view. The written reviews are then integrated, along with additional information, in the subsequent decision. This takes time and considerable effort, but the yield is great relative to any serious delays. Sometimes a revised manuscript is sent to additional reviewers, often on that did not participate earlier or a member of the editorial board. In addition to the manuscripts actual content, reviewers often provide comments on erroneous or poor work, redundancy, gross overstatement, or speculation. All of this is helpful to the editor and is encouraged in reviews.

'The review process involves time and the effort of many people. Still, it has several benefits. First, it provides the author with a check on experimental design and the subsequent analysis of data. Reviewers point out problems of organization or clarity of expression. Referees may be aware of multiple publication of material, potential overlap with the work of others, or other ethical issues. Second, the reader benefits as the review process helps ensure a high quality of papers. After all, the journal as a record ultimately becomes a source of authority in the field. The choice of topics and their treatment will influence the direction a field might take. Readers look to the journal as a place for the presentation of innovative ideas, useful records, and lively discussion of the current issues in the field.' [Alan H. Brush. 1986. Editorial: peer review. *The Auk* 103 (1): 248.]

–Aasheesh Pittie

Errata

Indian Birds Volume 3 Number 6 (November–December) 2007.

The map on p. 211 was cartographed by Dr P. V. Nair of the Kerala Forest Research Institute.