

The cover photograph of the White-bellied Sea-Eagles is outstanding. It brings out dramatically the aerial mastery of these attractive raptors, which happen to be my favorites, in a charismatic group. It was in February 1956 that the late Dharmakumarsinhji had visited Karwar and the Oyster Rocks lighthouse in his capacity as the Chief Wildlife Warden of the erstwhile Bombay State. Karwar was then part of the Bombay Sate (Presidency of British times). Dharmakumarsinhji was the first Wildlife Warden at a time when the post was first constituted and non-forest department individuals were appointed to the position. Being the great raptor expert that he was, he immediately noted a pair of these fine eagles nesting on a pinnacle of a stack to the west of the lighthouse island. On his return to Mumbai (Bombay of those days), he urgently called me over and directed me to proceed to Karwar to photograph the nesting pair. I was to be cared for by the

lighthouse keeper who was delighted to have me as his guest. The account of my experiences appears in the JBNHS. I spent several days in a hide observing and photographing the eagles during day and at night in a sleeping bag on the rocks below, just above the high tide mark. The experience was memorable; being the very first time I had spent days and nights alone by the sea. On my return to Karwar I was greeted by the news that I had become a father to a boy! My son now looks after the nature camps I first initiated in the 1980s at Hingol Gadh and his son, now in the last year of school, has extracted a promise from me to use my 'influence' with Romulus Whitaker to let him work at the Madras Crocodile Bank after he graduates! I hope the progeny of my pair of eagles is continuing to nest in the Oyster Rocks eerie. Incidentally, the illustrated pair shows the smaller male making a pass at the larger female.

—Reviews—

- Audio CD-call of Indian birds Vol 4. Produced by Nature Club Surat, Surat 395007, Gujarat, India. Price not mentioned.
- Audio-Visual CD-birds of Western Ghats. Produced by Birdsong, Sangli 416416, Maharashtra, India. MRP: Rs. 200/-.

Nature Club Surat have been quite active in the field of producing audio recordings of bird calls in India and the CD under review here is the fourth in their series. The collection on this CD consists of calls of 49 species of birds, recorded by Mukesh Bhatt. Each call is preceded by announcements of names of the bird in English and Gujarati. A booklet accompanies the CD and has illustrations of all the birds featured on the album. The illustrations (in colour) are by Dr Narasimhan, Falguni Patel and Vinit Patel.

Some of the interesting birds featured in this collection include Bronze-winged Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus*, Crab-Plover *Dromas ardeola*, Malabar Trogon *Harpactes fasciatus*, Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris*, Heart-spotted Woodpecker *Hemicircus canente*, Marshall's Iora *Aegithina nigrolutea*, Rufous-fronted Prinia *Prinia buchanani* and Black-breasted Weaver *Ploceus benghalensis*.

The recordings are of good quality, free from excessive background noise. They range from 0.27 to 1.33 min. in duration and the total duration of the CD is 46.04 min.

I have the following comments and suggestions on this CD.

The recordings of many species tend to lack variations in calls and tend to be too long (> 1 min). They are also repetitive for some species, e.g., Spot-billed Duck *Anas poecilorhyncha* and Bronze-winged Jacana. In some cases, only the song is included, e.g., Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*, but no indication is given as to the context of the call or whether the recording pertains to a song or a call. Since bird calls have

regional dialects, it would be helpful if the location from where the recording was made is mentioned in the booklet. For instance, I found that the call of the Common Woodshrike *Tephrodornis pondicerianus* is quite different from the calls I am familiar with in southern India. The Blyth's Reed-Warbler's *Acrocephalus dumetorum* calls sounded somewhat distorted in their tonal quality and appeared to be repeated more frequently.

I would also like to point out some ambiguity in the booklet. For the Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos nanus* (#22), the alternative name (?) is given in the bracket as Grey-crowned Pigmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos canicapillus*, which is a distinct species. One is not sure if the recording of Black-crested Bulbul *Pycnonotus melanicterus* pertains to the northern or the southern subspecies (ruby-throated *gularis*). The absence of additional information such as scientific names and location adds to the confusion.

I would urge Nature Club Surat to seriously consider bringing out CDs that cater to specific regions of the country as the present one contains a mix of bird species occurring in various regions.

The second CD under review seems to be an answer to the suggestions made above. Here, one gets to not only hear the bird calls but also see various photographs of the songsters as well as their habitats. Calls or songs of 40 Western Ghats species are found on this CD. These have been recorded by Sharad Apte. There is also a running commentary throughout the entire duration on the Western Ghats, importance of bird calls, habits, habitats, conservation, etc., of birds. A few interesting tidbits concerning local knowledge/lore concerning the calls have been mentioned, e.g., Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrike *Coracina melanoptera*. The total duration of the CD is 1.15.08 hrs. Also there are legends that give essential details about the bird species discussed. Photographs have been contributed by Sharad Apte, Clement Francis and other well-known bird photographers.

Several interesting bird species feature in this collection, including endemics like Blue-winged Parakeet

Psittacula columboides, White-bellied Shortwings *Brachypteryx major*, Wynaad Laughingthrush *Garrulax delesserti*, White-bellied Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis pallipes* and White-bellied Treepie *Dendrocitta leucogastra*. Here care has been taken to include wider repertoires of calls and songs and also to explain their context.

However, there are some errors that I wish to point out in this CD. The "Scops owl" call might actually be that of either a Long-tailed *Caprimulgus macrurus* or a Jerdon's *C. atripennis* Nightjar. The Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker's *Dinopium benghalense* calls have wrongly been substituted by the drumming and vocalisation by its bigger relative—the Greater Golden-backed Woodpecker *Chrysocolaptes lucidus*! I wonder if the calls attributed to Thick-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum agile* are correct. Some of the photos shown as Indian Jungle Nightjar *C. indicus* and Jungle Prinia *Prinia sylvatica* might need a closer look for correct ID.

I found the commentary too long, repetitive and redundant since some of the information is already displayed in a legend. By making it briefer, the entire duration of the CD could have

been reduced. Enough care has not been taken with respect to the spellings as well as accuracy of information. There were several cases where, for instance, the breeding season in the legend differed from the dates mentioned in the commentary. The background music too, I felt, was unnecessary in an audio CD of this nature (pun unintended!). Often I found it distracting, e.g., when calls of the Malabar Whistling-Thrush *Myophonus horsfieldii* was being played.

These are but minor criticisms of an effort that deserves to be praised and emulated. Both the CDs are valuable resource material for naturalists, environmental educators, serious ornithologists as well as lay persons. We should have more and more of such material so that we can better understand this poorly studied and sadly neglected aspect of Indian ornithology. I hope this effort would also be extended to include other life-forms such as frogs, mammals, insects, etc., which also have a wide repertoire of calls and sounds that need to be urgently documented.

— V. Santharam



Ashish Kothari. 2007. *Birds in our lives*. Hyderabad: Universities Press (India) Private Limited. Paperback (14 x 21.5 cm), pp. i-xvi, 1–292, 103 colour photos. Price Rs 550/-.

"*Birds in our lives* provides glimpses of the incredible diversity of India's birds: the ecosystems where different kinds of birds are found, the various ways—cultural and economic—in which birds have touched our lives, as well as a brief account of the history of ornithology in India. It stresses on the serious threats that bird habitats and populations face, and gives a sense of both the continued erosion of Indian birdlife, as well as the rapidly growing efforts to save it. Finally, it provides key pointers for what needs to be done if we want to save this precious natural heritage," (from the blurb on the front cover flap).

Most of the ornithological publications in India have been species, family or region specific. For several years I've felt the paucity of a work that would deal with birds in our lives—in a comprehensive yet synoptic way. Kothari achieves this with great success and lucidity in this compact book—little in size but thorough in content, lavishly replete with excellent colour photographs and primarily, eminently readable. Indeed, he may have penned a book that would have been on the tick-list of at least a handful of Indian ornithologists (this reviewer included)!

The first five chapters are about how birds have been a part of our lives—as the epitome of beauty, freedom,

inspiration and wonder, as the focus of extensive and intensive scientific study, as the ultimate trophy of a hunter's skills, as icons of culture and religion and as a source of food. Chapters 1–5: Birds, birds, everywhere! (pp. 1–52); Birds in Indian culture (pp. 53–67); Ornithology through Indian history (pp. 68–80); Brought in by the wind: The wonder of migration (pp. 81–89); What good are they to us? Birds in India's economy (pp. 90–106).

The sixth and seventh chapters, which I feel are the most important, as they show the way forward, highlight the effect of human ignorance and folly upon the lives of these same birds and what remedial measures, however meager, we have taken to conserve our avian heritage. Chapters 6–7: An ill wind blows: Indian birds in danger (pp. 107–157); The winds of change: Conservation of India's birds (pp. 158–205).

The book ends with four useful appendices. The first two are a testament of our callousness, listing birds that are today direly threatened and the third, to the remedial measures we can take to try and change the fate of birds in our lives—and thereby enrich the quality of our own. The fourth points towards sources that readers can use to further their ornithological interests. Annexures 1–4: Threatened birds of India (pp. 220–233); Annexure 2: Important Bird Areas of India (pp. 234–266); Annexure 3: Ramsar sites in India (pp. 267–286); Annexure 4: Some periodicals on Indian birds and related issues (pp. 287–290).

The publishers and the author are to be lauded for this work, which should find a place in the library of every Indian interested in birds. It also makes an ideal gift.

—Aasheesh Pittie

Errata

Indian Birds Volume 4 Number 4 (July–August) 2008

Page 140, 2nd column, 11th line from bottom, read 'Karaivetty' instead of 'Karavetty'.

Page 143, 1st column, 11th line from bottom, read 'Fregata' instead of 'Fregetta'.

Page 145, 1st column, 19th line from bottom, read 'Φ' instead of the first '?' and 'ϕ' instead of the second '?'.

Page 145, 1st column, last line of penultimate paragraph, read 'X' instead of the first '?' and 'χ' instead of the second '?'.

Page 145, 1st column, last line, read 'Ψ' instead of the first '?' and 'ψ' instead of the second '?'.