

—Obituary—

Dr Ravi Sankaran (1963–2009)

Ravi was different things to different people. He was an excellent field worker, biologist and dedicated conservationist; he had a—no-airs, no-nonsense approach to life—at the same time was warm and full of fun, a wonderful person with a delightfully sharp tongue and a true friend. He was a maverick in the sense he was unconventional, but he had all the good values. Unlike some biologists with their heads in the clouds, Ravi would mix freely with birdwatchers, conservationists, scientists, nature lovers and children. He had the knack of getting on with everyone. He often played by his own rules when he thought necessary, but always had an underlying sense of purpose. His research transcended into conservation. In his projects on the Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indicus* and the Edible-nest Swiftlets *Collocalia fuciphaga* he combined good science with dedicated, persistent conservation and would find practical solutions for the conservation and protection of the species he was studying. Even to date he was fighting for the conservation of both these species.

His scientific output was considerable. Sixteen published reports covering surveys in western India for identifying important habitat for the Lesser Florican and justify the identified areas. Ecology on some endemic birds of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, which included conservation of the Edible-nest Swiftlet and impact of nest collection on this species' population. He also studied the Narcondam Hornbill *Aceros narcondami* and the Nicobar Megapode *Megapodius nicobariensis*. In 1999 he studied the Lesser Florican in Rajasthan. Published six research reports. He has also conducted an ornithological survey of Nanda Devi National Park in 1993. Several papers on



Dr Ravi Sankaran on Doyang bridge, Andamans

Pankaj Sekhsaria

varied species on topics from Edible-nest Swiftlet, Lesser Florican, desert habitat and wildlife conservation, Narcodam Hornbill, Nicobar Megapode and avifauna of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. He gave numerous lectures and published popular articles to create conservation awareness. He also advocated conservation for the subjects he had studied actively through posters in local libraries. Recently he was involved in community conservation training young people in Nagaland.

Not being totally conventional, it was refreshingly surprising news for many people when he recently became Director of SACON. He immediately dived into bringing the organization up to his own high standards, at the same time continuing his conservation fieldwork in Nagaland and the Andamans. Long neglected meetings, policy decisions, regular evaluation procedures were being put into place. SACON was turning the corner.

I remember calling him up occasionally at 2200–2300 hrs (our favoured time for speaking) and he would still be in the office. It is a shame that he passed away so very suddenly just when he had so much to offer. His daughter, Yamini, was the apple of his eye and he doted on her. He was full of hope and ideas for SACON. He will be sorely missed. I hope someone is following up on Ravi's strategy to protect the Edible-nest Swiftlets in the Andamans with the cooperation of the local people. That would be the perfect tribute as this mission was very close to his heart.

—Rishad Naoroji

[Editors' note: A 'Facebook' page has been created for Dr Ravi Sankaran: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Dr-Ravi-Sankaran/59602514000>. An example of the 'Facebook' posts is given below. Please visit to learn more about him and his work.]

What can I say? And yet I must, for my friend Ravi would have glowered at my silence. The memory is alive with the clear light of purpose that shone from his eyes, for we met a few weeks ago in Bangalore. 'No one dare refuse an invitation from Zafar', he'd said. And characteristically announced his arrival with a booming, 'I'm going to throw a cat among the pigeons!' There were some there who did not know him from Adam and some who were relieved that Ravi had come too.

I didn't know him as well as his Bombay buddies, and yet I knew him so well! Admiration for the man and his work drew me to his world like a moth is drawn to the living flame. Ravi epitomized a science that was rigorous to the core. His approach to field ornithology was so refreshing that the sheaf of papers that his predecessors wrote, seemed bleak compared with his well-rounded work. The clarity of his thought was such that in meetings he had the uncanny knack of putting a person in a spot with a laser sharp query, but he was a

master of that weapon and wielded it with velvet gloves. Ravi was full of beans. Ravi could seize a momentous issue and spell it out with awesome simplicity. Ravi was a natural at his trade. During the early days of our friendship I often made hesitant plans to visit him at his outposts in the Andamans. But really I never had his guts or his amazing endurance. I couldn't think of washing up in Chennai wracked with malaria and returning to the Islands again for a repeat dose. But that was Ravi and can anyone question his selfless dedication, his blistering passion?

The last words he spoke, before we dispersed for lunch that afternoon were, 'I'm going to give my everything for my dream with SACON. I'm glad that the tide is turning.'

Ravi's left behind some very big shoes to fill...and a legacy that demands endurance. Fulfilling that is the greatest tribute we can pay this astonishing naturalist.

I pray for strength in trying times and forbearance and fortitude.

—Aasheesh Pittie

Ornithological publications of Dr Ravi Sankaran¹

Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

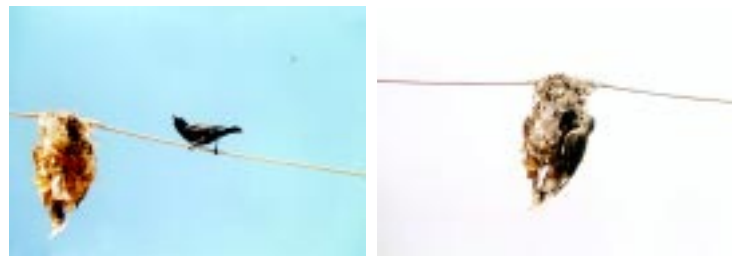
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¹ This list may not be complete. I would be grateful if readers could send me citations of papers that I've missed out.

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— Correspondence —

In their note on the Olive-backed Sunbird *Cinnyris jugularis*, Pande & Sant [*Indian Birds* 4 (3): 116–117] state that the nesting of sunbirds on electric wires has not been reported previously. In view of this I am sending two photographs of Purple Sunbirds *Nectarinia asiatica* nesting on an electric wire in Rajkot, Gujarat. The nest was observed on 13th March 1999. The pair raised two broods in the same nest. A note about this was published in the Gujarati bird newsletter *Vihang* (Grishma–99) along with a photo.



— Ashok Mashru. Email: mashruashok@gmail.com. 2nd March 2009