

paper on wood decay fungi in hornbill nest cavities from Thailand. Another new find was the documentation, by field observations, photographs, and DNA studies, of a hybrid between Great and Rhinoceros Hornbills in the wild in Thailand, which aroused disturbing implications on the impact of forest fragmentation.

The veterans of hornbill studies were all there. Alan and Meg Kemp gave a fascinating keynote address on diversity and radiation of hornbills, which summed up what we know about the evolution of the now 60 species—up from 45 with lots of splitting. With new evidence, they reiterated their support for the assumption that the hoopoes and woodhoopoes were the sister clade to hornbills, with the hornbill line having branched off about 49 million years ago. Pilai Poonswad continues to lead a team of enthusiastic and competent Thai researchers who continue to break new ground. She and her team impressed the audience with the amazing work they have done to successfully repair old nests in the wild (which had shrunk or become misshaped) to ensure continued usage. They also presented on their successful installation of artificial nest cavities in the wild. Margaret Kinnaird's keynote address on past and future directions in hornbill research analysed 700 publications on hornbills, of which, the bulk (27%) focused on ecology, and a miniscule (2%) addressed genetics. She highlighted the lacuna in seed dispersal studies and urged researchers to move away from nests and roosts into the forests to address seed dispersal queries.

Papers from the Indian Subcontinent included Sneha Vijayakumar's fascinating follow-up status survey of the Malabar Pied Hornbill in Dandeli, in which she re-surveyed tracts covered over 20 years ago by Reddy and fortunately reported no decline in this crucial hornbill area; Amitha Bachan and others' work on involvement of local Kadar tribesmen in monitoring and conservation of hornbills in Anaimalais of Kerala; Abrar Ahmed's report from TRAFFIC India on illegal trade in hornbills, which disturbingly reported 60 hornbills (including stuffed specimens and casques) of five species between 1995 and 2008; E. Santhoshkumar and P. Balasubramanian's study of fruit diet of Indian Grey Hornbills in the Eastern Ghats; Raju Kasambe and others' study of the same species from central India; and Amitha Bachan, R. Kannan, and Doug James' pilot study of installing artificial nest cavities for the Great Hornbill in southern India (which reported no usage in the wild so far, but the developments from Thailand lead them to believe that this may be just a matter of time).

The organisers have to be commended for successfully staging a truly grand international conference despite the severe worldwide economic downturn. The lush and bird-rich Singapore Botanic Gardens served as an attractive venue and participants were treated to some great Singaporean cuisine, which presented a delightful blend of Indian and Chinese fare with lots of seafood and other delicacies.

## — In the news<sup>1</sup> —

Compiled by Prashanth N. S.

### ***Pied Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus* campaign by MigrantWatch***

After covering two successive migration seasons, MigrantWatch, a first-of-its-kind web-based citizen science initiative in India, has launched the Pied Cuckoo Campaign on 13th May 2009, to track the movements of the 'rain bird', the Pied Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus*. The campaign is similar to the ongoing MigrantWatch initiative, wherein birdwatchers from all over the country are reporting first and last sighting information from particular locations, in addition to stray sightings of migrant birds from anywhere. In this new campaign, participants contribute information on first sightings of the Pied Cuckoo in this calendar year. This information, plus records of presence through the year will help to assess whether Pied Cuckoos really do proclaim the advent of the monsoon (and, if so, by how many days); and will also provide valuable data to separate migratory versus resident populations. MigrantWatch is the first volunteer-based project in India devoted to collecting information on the timing of bird migration. Baseline information collected in the first few years of the project will be used to assess changes in the timing of migration over the medium-to-long term. As of 22nd December 2008, on the MigrantWatch website, there have been 1,889 first sightings of 171 migrant species from the 2008–2009 season, contributed by 188 participants from 24 Indian

states. A blog was launched on 25th May 2009 to provide a forum for posting and discussing migrants' related information.

The website features details of the campaign, information on the Pied Cuckoo with identification tips, photos, illustrations and call recordings. Reporting the cuckoo sightings is similar to reporting any migrant sightings using the same login username and password. For those, who haven't yet logged in to MigrantWatch, here's a chance to be a part of one of the country's fast growing citizen science initiatives at: [www.migrantwatch.in](http://www.migrantwatch.in). See 'Mendiratta & Quader. 2009. *Indian Birds* 4 (4): 122–126 (2008)' for an analysis of the results of the second MigrantWatch season. For the blog, go to: [www.migrantwatch.in/blog/](http://www.migrantwatch.in/blog/).

### ***How well do you know your scientific names?***

Use of scientific names for birds reduces confusion, and increasingly, birdwatchers have adopted use of scientific names on the Internet, on discussion groups and blogs. A very basic application for self-testing one's knowledge of scientific names of birds of the Oriental region was launched in April 2009. Sharing the link on *Delhibird*, the author, Abhijit Menon-Sen, shared that the application is based on the database of common and scientific names available at the Oriental Bird Club Image database. For the tester, see: [www.toroid.org/misc/randomname.cgi](http://www.toroid.org/misc/randomname.cgi). For the OBC Image database, see: [www.orientalbirdimages.org](http://www.orientalbirdimages.org).

<sup>1</sup> For the period 15th May–15th June 2009.

### **New book on nesting behaviour**

A new book was released on nesting behaviour of Indian birds in May 2009. The book is written by China Sathan and Bal Pandi and is entitled 'Diary on the nesting behaviour of Indian birds'. The book is priced at Rs. 650 including postage within India. Details available on [www.nestingbook.webs.com](http://www.nestingbook.webs.com).

### **From the field**

Atul Jain reported several birds, including endemics, from Khonoma village, 20 km west of Kohima in Nagaland. The Khonoma Nature Conservation and Tragopan Sanctuary was declared in 1998 by the local people. It is owned and managed by the village of Khonoma. Among the birds he reported from Khonoma village in early May 2009 were Mountain Bamboo Partridge *Bambusicola fitchii*, Rufous-throated Hill Partridge *Arborophila rufogularis*, Black-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis atrogularis*, White-tailed Blue Robin *Myiomela leucura*, Purple Cochoa *Cochoa purpurea*, Crested Finchbill *Spizixos canifrons*, Yellow-rumped Honeyguide *Indicator xanthonotus*, Striped Laughing Thrush *Trochalopteron virgatum*, Spot-breasted Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus erythrocnemis*, Pygmy Pnoepyga *pusilla* & Naga Wren-babbler *Spelaornis chocolatinus*, Rusty-capped Fulvetta *Alcippe dubia* and Grey Sibia *Heterophasia gracilis*. Shashank Dalvi reported sighting of Gould's Shortwing *Heteroxenicus stellatus* (Courtesy: Delhibird). S Subramanya reported sightings of Laggar Falcon *Falco jugger* and the northern Indian race of the Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata bicolor* from Dharwad on 10th February 2009 and shared several links to the four Indian races of this bird from images on *India Nature Watch* (Courtesy: Bngbirds). On 30th May 2009, Adesh Shivkar and six others reported the Ceylon Frogmouth *Batrachostomus moniliger* from Phansad Wildlife Sanctuary, located 150 km south of Mumbai. This is the northern-most record of this bird yet (Courtesy: BirdsofBombay). On 5th June 2009, Umesh Mani reported several adult and juvenile Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala*, one Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus*, a flock of Eurasian Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia* and eight chicks of Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus* from ICRISAT campus in Hyderabad (Courtesy: Bngbirds). Harish Bhat reported nesting Jungle Babbler *Turdoides striatus* feeding a Hawk-cuckoo *Hierococcyx* spp. in Biligiriranga Swamy Temple Wildlife Sanctuary 200 km south of Bangalore, Karnataka (Courtesy: Bngbirds). Prasanth Narayanan reported nesting of Black-headed Ibis *Theskiornis melanocephalus* in an *Annona glabra* tree at Kumarakom heronry in Kerala on 10th June 2009 (Courtesy: Keralabirder). Subramaniam Chandrasekaran reported two flocks of over 30 and 40 White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* from Satyamangalam Wildlife Sanctuary in northern Tamil Nadu on 7th June 2009. Hopeland reported nesting of Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus* from the Pallikarandai marsh in Chennai on two occasions on 22nd & 31st May 2009 (Courtesy: Tamilbirds).

### **Pigeon deaths in Sikkim**

Animal husbandry department officials reported the death of over 10,000 pigeons during May 2009 in Singtam in eastern Sikkim. The deaths have been attributed to a bacterial infection. Samples were taken for analysing the cause of death. Bird flu has been ruled out, as a probable cause, by the officials. Local residents expressed anxiety over infection spreading to poultry (Courtesy: Indo-Asian News Service).

### **Migration of dragonflies across the western Indian Ocean**

A recent paper in the *Journal of Tropical Ecology* discusses the annual

appearance of huge numbers of dragonflies in the Maldives during October–December every year and in smaller numbers in May around the time when the south-west monsoon winds appear in the region. The paper discusses the possibility of Maldives being in the migratory path of these insects as they fly from India to East Africa, across the western Indian Ocean. Several birds that hunt dragonflies also make the crossing at the same time, including raptors like Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*, Lesser Kestrel *F. naumanni*, Eurasian Hobby *F. subbuteo*, and others like, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus*, European Roller *Coracias garrulus* and three cuckoo species. For a PDF please visit: [www.journals.cambridge.org/action/displayIssue?jid=TRO&volumeId=25&issueId=04/&iid=5645044](http://www.journals.cambridge.org/action/displayIssue?jid=TRO&volumeId=25&issueId=04/&iid=5645044).

### **Image database of Indian birds, butterflies and plants**

J. M. Garg, a contributor to *Wikipedia*, has created a resource of a few thousand images consisting of about 350 species of Indian birds, 175 species of butterflies, and 350 species of plants and trees. The images are arranged alphabetically and capture various aspects of plumage, habits and behavior. The images are uploaded to *Wikimedia Commons*, which is a media repository supporting various *Wikipedia* projects as well as providing these media under a license that allows for easy reproduction of images with minimal conditions (See 'Terms of Use' on the website). The above images are uploaded under a Creative Commons Attribution Share-Alike License that allows for easy re-use of images for conservation education and such other purposes. See [www.commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:J.M.Garg](http://www.commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:J.M.Garg).

### **BirdLife International announces more Critically Endangered birds than ever before**

BirdLife International's latest evaluation of the world's birds has revealed that more species than ever are threatened with extinction. A staggering 1,227 species (12%) are now classified as Globally Threatened, but the good news is that when conservation action is put in place, species can be saved. BirdLife International's annual Red List update, on behalf of the IUCN, now lists 192 species of birds as Critically Endangered, the highest threat category, a total of two more than in the 2008 update.

A recently discovered species from Colombia—Gorgeted Puffleg *Eriocnemis isabellae*—appears for the first time on the BirdLife/IUCN Red List, being listed as Critically Endangered. The puffleg, a flamboyantly coloured hummingbird, has only 1,200 Ha of habitat remaining in the cloud forests of the Pinche Mountain range in south-western Colombia and 8% of this is being damaged every year to grow cocoa. Sidamo Lark *Heteromirafra sidamoensis*, from the Liben Plain of Ethiopia, has also been uplisted to this category due to changes in land-use, and is in danger of becoming mainland Africa's first bird extinction. And coinciding with the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth, one of the Galapagos finches, Medium Tree-finch *Camarhynchus pauper*, also becomes Critically Endangered, partly as a result of an introduced parasitic fly.

But it's not only rare birds that are becoming rarer, common birds are becoming less common. In eastern North America, Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica* is fast disappearing from the skies. Following continent-wide declines of nearly 30% in the last decade alone, this common species has been uplisted to Near Threatened. Earlier widespread birds of prey are also disappearing at an alarming rate, and emblematic species such as Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus* and Martial Eagle *Polemaetus bellicosus* have been uplisted as a result. "These declines are mirrored in many species, in every continent", said Jez Bird, BirdLife's Global Species Programme Officer.