

Himalayan Pied Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos himalayensis</i> 3	Rufous-bellied Niltava <i>Niltava sundara</i> 3
Little Scaly-bellied Green Woodpecker <i>Picus xanthopygaeus</i> 1	Grey-headed Flycatcher <i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i> 1
Black-naped Green Woodpecker <i>Picus canus</i> 1 2 3	Asian Paradise Flycatcher <i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i> 1
Common Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i> 1 2 3	White-throated Fantail Flycatcher <i>Rhipidura albicollis</i> 1 2
Red-rumped Swallow <i>Hirundo smithii</i> 1 2 3	Red-headed Tit <i>Aegithalos concinnus</i> 2 3
Large Pied Wagtail <i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i> 1	Spot-winged Crested Tit <i>Parus melanolophus</i> 3
Scarlet Minivet <i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i> 1	Great Tit <i>Parus major</i> 1
Himalayan Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus leuconogenys</i> 1 2 3	Green-backed Tit <i>Parus monticolus</i> 2 3
Redvented Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus cafer</i> 1 2	Black-lored Yellow Tit <i>Parus xanthogenys</i> 1 3
Black Bulbul <i>Hypsipetes leucocephalus</i> 1 2	White-tailed Nuthatch <i>Sitta himalayensis</i> 1 2
Common Iora <i>Aegithina tiphia</i> 1 2 3	Eurasian Tree Creeper <i>Certhia familiaris</i> 3
Blue-headed Rock Thrush <i>Monticola cinclorhynchus</i> 2	Thick-billed Flowerpecker <i>Dicaeum agile</i> 3
Blue Whistling Thrush <i>Myiophonus caeruleus</i> 1 2 3	Fire-breasted Flowerpecker <i>Dicaeum ignipictus</i> 3
Oriental Magpie Robin <i>Copsychus saularis</i> 1	Purple Sunbird <i>Nectarinia asiatica</i> 1
Plumbeous Redstart <i>Rhyacornis fuliginosus</i> 1	Crimson Sunbird <i>Aethopyga siparaja</i> 1
Pied Bushchat <i>Saxicola caprata</i> 1	Oriental White-eye <i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i> 1 2
Grey Bushchat <i>Saxicola ferrea</i> 1 2 3	Crested Bunting <i>Melophus lathamii</i> 1
White-throated Laughingthrush <i>Garrulax albogularis</i> 3	Yellow-breasted Greenfinch <i>Carduelis spinoides</i> 2 3
Striated Laughingthrush <i>Garrulax striatus</i> 3	White-browed Rosefinch <i>Carpodacus thura</i> 2
Streaked Laughingthrush <i>Garrulax lineatus</i> 1 2 3	White-rumped Munia <i>Lonchura striata</i> 1
Red-headed Laughingthrush <i>Garrulax erythrocephalus</i> 2	House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i> 1 2
Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler <i>Pomatorhinus erythrogenys</i> 2 3	Cinnamon Tree Sparrow <i>Passer rutilans</i> 1 2 3
Black-chinned Babbler <i>Stachyris pyrrhops</i> 2	Grey-headed Sterling <i>Sturnus malabaricus</i> 1
Red-winged Shrike Babbler <i>Pteruthius flaviscapis</i> 3	Brahminy Sterling <i>Sturnus pagodarum</i> 1
Rufous Sibia <i>Heterophasia capistrata</i> 2 3	Common Myna <i>Acridotheres tristis</i> 1 2 3
Yellow-naped Yuhina <i>Yuhina flavicollis</i> 2	Jungle Myna <i>Acridotheres fuscus</i> 1 2 3
Brown Prinia <i>Prinia cryniger</i> 2 3	Eurasian Golden Oriole <i>Orilus orilus</i> 1
Franklin's Prinia <i>Prinia hodgsonii</i> 1	Black Drongo <i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i> 1 2 3
Common Tailor Bird <i>Orthotomus sutorius</i> 1 3	Ashy Drongo <i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i> 2
Western Crowned Warbler <i>Phylloscopus occipitalis</i> 1 2	Bronzed Drongo <i>Dicrurus aeneus</i> 3
Grey-headed Flycatcher Warbler <i>Seicercus xanthoschistos</i> 1 2 3	Black-headed Jay <i>Garrulus lanceolatus</i> 2 3
Rufous-breasted Blue Flycatcher <i>Ficedula hyperythra</i> 3	Red-billed Blue Magpie <i>Urocissa erythrorhyncha</i> 1
Little Pied Flycatcher <i>Ficedula westermanni</i> 2	Grey Treepie <i>Dendrocitta formosae</i> 1 2
Verditer Flycatcher <i>Eumyias thalassina</i> 1 2 3	Jungle Crow <i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i> 1 2 3

## Another pond

Shama Futehally<sup>1</sup>

Surely one test of loyalty in a reader of the *Newsletter* is a willingness to read articles written by the Futehally family about Kihim. In my youth I have been guilty of producing an annual essay on the Kihim pond, and ensuring that it got into print. That pond has remained in my imagination as the archetypal Indian *jheel* – rich and life-sustaining, and commemorated in our collective memory by Rajasthani miniatures as much as by medieval poetry. It was covered with lotus-pads, and in the early morning sun it sparkled with white and pink; here and there you picked out long-necked white birds; a little temple gleamed in one corner. It was of course a scene of ecological co-existence – buffaloes waded peacefully,

carrying their Cattle Egrets about with them; washerwomen washed; kingfishers and cormorants fished. So undisturbed a setting was naturally a haven for birds. The lake was dotted with Common Coot and Little Grebe, jacanas and lapwings, with Common Redshanks, Common Greenshanks and Black-winged Stilts. It had its own private Lesser Pied Kingfisher, sitting atop its own private pole. In winter, a half-hour on the bank would show you Common and Cotton Teal in the middle of the lake; Whistling-Duck, both Lesser and Large, as I recall; sometimes Northern Pintail, and once a pair of Spot-billed Duck. Occasionally flocks of Little Stint swept across the surface in miraculous formation.

That pond, alas, has now been leased out by the panchayat for fishing, and all has ended. The lotus has been ripped away and the birds sent packing; and the surface

of the water is as empty as a blank television screen.

Given this loss, we were much consoled to find another bird-rich lake in the vicinity of Kihim this April. It is astoundingly located in the middle of Alibag town. A small, tarred road winds out behind the main cinema hall, and to one side of this, tall bulrushes screen a *jheel*. Here the lotus has been allowed to spread over the lake, and stout formations of Bhendi trees *Thespesia populnea* rise out of the water. As we first approached it we were greeted by the flapping and squawking of Purple Moorhens in different parts of the lake, making enormous purple splotches in the landscape. There were Common Moorhens in equal numbers, and we saw one sitting on a rough straw nest among the bulrushes very near the edge. We later saw another gliding away with straw in its beak,

<sup>1</sup>Shama Futehally passed away on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2004. This previously unpublished piece, written in April 2004, was her last on birds.

presumably to make another nest. Incidentally, this was April, and the *Book of Indian birds* describes the nesting season as June-September. Is the *Book*, a little inaccurate, I wonder? (After all, there is nothing to prevent one from behaving like the boatman at Ranganthitoo, who is supposed to have snubbed Dr Salim Ali for his lack of knowledge of birds.)

With the jacanas too, both species were present in strength. The iridescent Bronzewing made ungainly landings on the lily-pads, their long legs stuck out behind them; the Pheasant-tailed, as always, picked their way over the pads as delicately as dancers. There were one or two magnificent male specimens of the latter in full plumage. At another site I have noticed these jacanas turning lotus leaves upside-down with their beaks, to examine? scratch? eat from? the underside. I did not see this happen here, but another member of the party did. Another revelation about this species was to see, on a thickly grassed part of the lake, a virtual colony of juveniles, perhaps twenty altogether, in a small area.

There were other good things on the grassy edge. White-breasted Waterhens darted distractedly about. What seemed to be a crane was startled out of a clump of

reeds by our approach, leaving us with an impression of earth-brown barred with black. Two egrets, one Large and one Median, stood silently back-to-back. We spotted a Chestnut Bittern among another clump of reeds, well hidden in spite of its bright chestnut colouring, enormous yellow bill and beady yellow eye. I think that this is now, for reasons unknown, also called Cinnamon Bittern. Rather carried away by the bittern theme, I was prepared to discover another bittern on the far bank, but this turned out to be an Indian Pond-Heron in breeding plumage. This plumage – red-brown back and elegant crest-feathers – makes it startlingly different from the dull bird for which we normally have so little time. A sandpiper, beautifully spotted, with yellow legs and a white eye-stripe, allowed us to have a pleasant little argument about whether it was the Wood or the Spotted. I now find that the two are the same.

Finally, the wildfowl, which were largely in the center, and the back of the lake. I was glad to see plenty of the fat comforting Common Coots, which always provide a lake with an air of all's-well-with-the-world. Little Grebes do the same, but here we saw only one or two, and that after some hard looking. In the process, though, we discovered a

Darter. I suspect there were some Lesser Whistling-Ducks in the distance, their small pinky-brown fronts distinctive, as I remember from the days of the Kihim pond. But the crowning glories of this group were the Garganey. There were one or two drakes, unmistakable with their handsome chocolate-striped heads. They were accompanied by many ducks that had an indeterminate buff colouring and black spots. We were in hopes that these might turn out to be Common Teal and provide one more species for our list – but finally it was clear that they were female Garganey, partly because of their largish size, and partly because they obediently followed the actions of the male, as happens with other creatures on this planet. The chief of these actions consisted of 'up-ending', that diverting performance which I have never before been able to observe so well. With a rude suddenness, as if interrupting a conversation, a duck disappears vertically into the water and remains so, its tail defying the sky. Let us borrow from this creature a little of its cheerful intrepidity, enough to hope that its homeland will remain untouched and unharmed.

## The day of the Indian Pitta

Lt Gen. Baljit Singh

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I was in the car park, some hundred yards from the entrance to Berwala Sanctuary and the first bird I heard loud and clear was the Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura*. I was enjoying the lingering resonance of that call in my mind yet, when a startled Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* flew up in the air with laboured wing-beats and hysterical cackling until out of breath. As he leveled in a powerful glide and passed overhead, he looked unbelievably invincible. Now that was an exciting start (06:00hrs on 6.v.2004) to a two-hour morning walk.

The Berwala Bird Sanctuary (30°41'N, 76°41'E; 300m a.s.l.) is about 15km from Chandigarh in the Morni Hills. It was created in April 2003. At 250ha it may well be the smallest of all in the country. Along its longest axis it is less than 4km and at the widest a mere kilometer. But within this compact space there is an amazing abundance of birds, mammals, butterflies and flora: taking the level trail through the

bed of a seasonal stream could result in four hours of uninterrupted wildlife sightings. During winter, you could spend the better part of a day walking over game-trails, which mostly follow the crests of ridges. Because Berwala is at the junction of the Shivaliks with the plains, it is a busy transition zone for the annual to-and-fro altitudinal movement of wildlife, synchronous with the seasons of the year.

I am lucky to be mostly accompanied by Sada Ram, a wildlife Inspector, whose store of jungle-lore is enviable. When we came by several cow-dung pats, freshly scattered by birds to pick food from, Sada Ram, taking one glance at the disturbed dung, pointed towards the thicket the birds were sheltering in. And sure enough we put up a few Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus*. For the first time, I saw two moulting cockerels. There was none of the splendour of colourful feathers or the strutting bearing associated with the male of the species.

Instead, they were two gawky birds in overall dark grey stubble. Mr J. C. Daniel of the Bombay Natural History Society, who told me of this litmus test for the genetically pure breed of the Red Junglefowl, would be glad to read of this encounter. And of course, I imparted some knowledge to Sada Ram!

On being persistently directed, I did pick up the notes of a faint birdcall, entirely new to me. We scanned but there were no birds to be seen. Sada Ram was sure that there were at least two Crimson Sunbirds *Aethopyga siparaja*. Shortly, we saw one on a eucalyptus branch. Last year too, I had seen them hereabouts and so I assume that they perhaps breed at Berwala. Otherwise these birds ought not to be here at their peak nesting time. As we watched, calls of Indian Pittas filled the background. May be, they too breed here. Looking at another eucalyptus cluster, there was a family of Indian Treepies *Dendrocitta vagabunda*, two adults and three juveniles, the size of