

in the bud, of whom I have high hopes, will find them so (- I hope). It is rather early as yet to say how many, and which, of the youngsters who are so enthusiastic at the moment will stay the course and grow old with the same interestness for birds. I feel certain, however that even if most of them fall by the wayside they will at least be able to bequeath to their children and grandchildren the correct prescription for telling a woodpecker from a duck! This in itself will be a definite advance. Among the more promising of my 'chelas' today I would name: Shamoon (son of Najmuddin), Jamila (daughter of Abu), Sadiq (s/o Adnan), Shums (s/o Mukhlis), Iqbal (s/o Mamoon), Ameeruddin (s/o Jabir), Nafisa (d/o Asaf), and last and smallest though not least Wasim (s/o Ilyas). Humayun who has also been under my wing, is past the fledgling stage and is already on the way to establishing himself as a bird man.

"A pair of Honey Buzzards has been nesting between Yali 'Retreat' for the last 12 yrs., to my knowledge – but never more than one pair. On 10th May a 14 day old chick from this year's nest in 'Retreat' compound was ringed. If it grows up, it may furnish some clue as regards the nesting pair next year. Does the same pair nest here year after year? Is its place taken in part or wholly by the new born youngsters? Or do altogether new birds occupy the place? And what happens to the yearly progeny? The same

problem needs solving re the 'Yali' pair of White-bellied Sea-Eagles. Raja, the emeritus Yali mali, tells me he has seen "this pair nesting every year in the same place since he was a boy – over 50 yrs., ago – Never has he seen more than the one pair about, and never have they succeeded in raising a family!" "Let the credit rest with the relator" as Babur would have said, but the matter is not without strangeness and certainly worthy of investigation. This season (ie., Decr. 1942) the Eagles had shifted to a Casuarina in the S-W corner of Shahinda's land. There were 2 eggs in the nest – abt., 100ft., up, which vanished after a week or so – rather unaccountably. Thereafter the birds lost interest in this nest, but they are still in the same neighbourhood. The desertion by the Eagles of their age-long nest site – the beehive Casuarina above the well N of Yali bungalow – was undoubtedly due to the large influx of White-backed Vultures that suddenly took a fancy to Yali compound and cluttered all the fine Casuarinas with their large and filthy [nests?]. The ire of the 'Squire' was justly aroused.

*He loaded his gun
And slew a dozen
Which sent the rest a-packing.*

It is hoped that the Sea-Eagles will now return.

All this is getting too long – so here a few items in brief:

2 flocks Flamingoes (50 & 26) flying N – 23 April.

2 prs. (=pairs) Green Bee-eaters and 1 White-breasted Kingfisher nesting in 'Al Murad' compound.

1 Fulvous Fruit Bat (*Rousettus leschenaulti*) ringed by me in April ('43) in an old cave on Elephanta Is., was found struggling with black ants by Shamoon in 'Yali' compound on 13 May! Believe it or not.

Pitta: Blue-cheeked (or Blue-tailed?) Bee-eaters appeared overnight 24th and 19th May respectively, after, rainy and stormy nights.

Last Blyth's Reed-Warbler at Bhonbar 25 May.

1 pair Quaker Babblers – for 1st time ever near 'Latifia' – 12-19 May.

[Sálim Ali, 27 May 1943]

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"The first attempt to catch birds with a mist net ended disappointingly. Between all yesterday (15 Nov.) and up to 2 p.m. today (16 Nov.) only 3 birds were caught – 1 Spotted Babler, 1 Grey Drongo, 1 Blyth's Reed Warbler. 1st & 3rd were ringed. No. 2 got away after much fighting & drawing blood. With a number of nets & enthusiastic netters, I am sure some very useful work could be done here in the intervals between eating and sleeping." [Salim Ali, 16.xi.1960.]

Recoveries from *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* – 6

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Seven months after the *Newsletter* was started, letters still came welcoming its existence. J. H. H. Peppe of Birdpur Estate, Basti, U. P. wrote, "I have much appreciated receiving the *Newsletter*...and would willingly pay a subscription...I have resigned my membership to the BNHS as I am only interested in the birding side..."

M. C. A. Jackson, Malajamullay Estate, Kerala, said, "I have found them (NLBW) very interesting and I strongly support the idea of an Ornithological Society."

Dr R. M. Naik, Faculty of Science, Zoology Department, Baroda, like the *Newsletter*, "I am glad you are developing it along the right lines."

B. V. Ramanjulu, Superintendent Zoological Park, "found that the *Newsletter* was performing a great service in the field of natural history."

Joseph George (well-known to our readers), then of New Forest, Dehra Dun, suggested that, "a very useful service which the *Newsletter* can do is publication of abstracts and papers on birds appearing in various journals."

Artificial nest box for Green Barbets

The July 1961 issue was a little better organised than the previous ones in having definite sections, articles, reviews, notes and comments, and correspondence. An interesting piece by Joseph George related to an experiment attempting to create an artificial nest for the Green Barbet. He noticed "A Green Barbet...near the entrance hole of one of the nest boxes put up in New Forest, Dehra Dun. The bird did not enter the box but it gave the impression that it would accept a suitably designed nest box." Taking the hint from this situation, he

designed a nest box from the internode of a giant bamboo. He learnt from books that the Green Barbet usually excavates a new nest hole every season. "A nest box that would require some tunneling seemed therefore to have the best chance of being acceptable to the bird."

He put up the box on 2.iv.1960, and three weeks later a small hole was visible in the wooden plug and wood chips were seen scattered on the ground. Matters seemed to be progressing well, but unfortunately a pair of Black-headed Mynas finally drove away the barbets and nested in the box!

Family parties of birds

I remember having read in *Bird Study* that a birdwatcher kept a close watch on the goings-on across the hedge in his garden. He found that there was always a flock of a dozen of the same species, which spent a

great deal of time in that area. He was not sure whether the party consisted of the same 12 individuals or whether different individuals made up the number.

But Salim Ali, about the same time, received a letter from his friend Lt. Col. R. S. P. Bates, the well-known photographer of Indian birds, and joint author of *Breeding birds of Kashmir*, which threw some light on this problem. I quote portions of the letter: "Between May and December 31st Peter Davis (an enthusiastic ringer) ringed no less than 400 Blue and Great Tits in his garden (in Surrey) of less than 1 acre. In other words there is a continuous stream, and when people talk about having the same 'dear little birds' at the bird table day in and day out they are more often than not seeing different birds every time. Two months or so ago I had a ringed Blue Tit and a ringed Great Tit on our bird tray at the same time. I put up my trap and failed to catch either; but 10 days later, and about another 10 days later, I again saw a ringed Blue Tit and a ringed Great Tit in the garden. Eventually on February 20th I caught the ? Blue Tit. (? Because I didn't see the Great Tit that day, so it could have been a different Blue Tit.) It turned out to have been ringed by Davis near Marley Common (just below his house) on November 21st. Do these feeding bands have their own pet beats I wonder, and how much ground do they cover? The direct distance in this case is 7 or 8 miles. The other point was about a family party of Longtailed Tits. In this case a party of 12 was often in his garden and eventually he ringed the lot. In doing so he noticed that once ringed they would come to an adjacent table but the ringed ones would not enter the trap. One day he saw an unringed one amongst the 12 (the total still being 12!).

That one went quite happily into the trap and was duly ringed. On next visit there were no less than 6 unringed ones. Eventually, out of that party which has never exceeded 14 birds and now seems to be 13, he has ringed no less than 25!! Strange, to say the least of it! In other words an interchange among these so-called family parties must occur. Perhaps two parties meet and one or two birds get lost from one to the other. If they are really family parties in the first place, such gains and losses would at least ensure against too much inbreeding."

Economic value of birds

On my 40th birthday my mother-in-law (Salim Ali's sister) presented me with: *An introduction to ornithology* by George Wallace, published by Macmillan & Co., New York, 1959. It is a book worth possessing. In those early days when conservation and ornithology were making some headway, it was important to highlight the material advantages which human beings received from birds. We were then far away from the period when birdwatching had become such a passionate hobby worldwide. I quote a few lines from the review I carried: "From the earliest times birds have always been a valuable item of food for man, but it is not realised what a staggering number of birds were shot in early days when new settlements were established on virgin soil. Chapman speaks of an 1864 shipment of 20 tons of prairie chickens, of 14 billion 850 thousand passenger pigeons shipped from a Michigan site in 1861, and of 5¼ million game birds from the New Orleans market in 1909. It is said that the recently re-discovered Cahow of Bermuda Petrel is known to have saved some of the early

colonists from starvation during the famine of 1614-18...But one of the most valuable products for which birds are responsible is guano the droppings of fish-eating birds, which is perhaps the finest fertilizer known to man. The most productive region is off the rain-locked coast of Peru among colonies of the Guanay Cormorant *Phalacrocorax bougainvillei*. The volume of guano accumulated over centuries is quite unbelievable and this fertilizer was the mainstay of the economy of Peru. In a fascinating talk on sea birds given in Bombay a couple of years back, Dr Cushman Murphy of the American Museum of Natural History, stated that cormorants did not defecate over the ocean but only on the guano islands thus ensuring the maximum accumulation of these deposits. It was suggested by him that this 'civic mindedness' of the cormorants was due to the necessity of keeping the waters clean so that the birds could see the fish for a long distance below the water."

Bird wing of the Indian Board for Wildlife

This organisation had just taken shape with Salim Ali as Chairman and Dr Biswamoy Biswas as the Technical Secretary. The non-officials were: R. S. Dharmakumarsinhji, Dr S. C. Law, Humayun Abdulali, and E. P. Gee. This body, among other things, kept in close touch with the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP), formed in 1922. One of the important achievements of this Bird Wing at that time was to persuade foreign countries to stop the import of Junglefowl feathers, which were being used as flies by fishermen. An American firm was fined \$10,000 for the import of this banned item. Humayun Abdulali played an important part in this decision.

Reviews

Birds: beyond watching by Abdul Jamil Urfi – Universities Press, Hyderabad, 2004. ISBN 81-7371-485-1 pp. 214 + X + 30 plates (29 colour photographs and 1 map). Price: Rs 285.00 (Soft cover).

Contents: Preface vii; Introduction –1; Birdwatching and observation –13; Bird Habitats – 32; Bird Names and Classification – 65; Bird Census – 82; Nesting and Breeding – 110; Understanding Migration – 132; Conservation and Action – 152; Glossary – 180; Appendices – 185; Index – 212.

The author of this book, Dr Abdul Jamil Urfi, is a scientist with long research

experience in ecology, biodiversity conservation and education. He is also known to birdwatchers for he frequently writes in both popular and scientific journals. Urfi is currently with the Department of Environmental Biology, Delhi University.

This book is aimed at the students of avian biology and serious amateur birdwatchers. It has come at an opportune time when various Internet discussion groups and web sites related to birds are active and when a spate of bird books with good illustrations and high production

quality have started hitting the market, arousing interest in birds among people all across the country. This book urges birdwatchers to take more serious note of the birds they observe rather than ending-up as tickers and non-serious birders on the lookout for "new" birds. It will, hopefully, encourage and motivate people to do more serious work that will help in enhancing scientific knowledge about birds and the habitats they live in.

Each chapter has concisely-written information on relevant topics and basic ecological concepts using a simple and clear