

style. Line drawings, graphs and tables, and subtle humour make the book readable and sustain the reader's interest. By giving personalised accounts and observations, the author has given the book a strong regional flavour – something we miss while reading similar books currently in the market, usually written in American or European context. Each chapter also has a suggested list of activities that serve as useful practical follow-up work and a list of references. A few boxed items give interesting snippets. The book is attractively brought-out with few typographical errors.

Six appendices at the end of the book provide information on: ENVIS Centres (bird-related); List and particulars of important bird organisations, publications and websites; hints on choosing and using binoculars and telescopes; environmental legislations pertaining biodiversity and habitat conservation; a list of threatened birds of India and a list of suggested reading, organised thematically.

I, however, have a few suggestions and minor criticisms:

One of the most crucial aspects of bird watching and bird study is taking notes and maintaining records of observations. This also is often the most neglected or overlooked one. A more detailed discussion stressing the importance of written notes, preparation of databases and trip reports will greatly enhance the value of this book. Perhaps the various software and resources available could also be discussed. The author mentions at the very outset that he had chosen topics somewhat arbitrarily for this book. However, I feel future editions could carry a more detailed treatment on topics like bird behaviour, foraging and feeding behaviour, recording bird calls, long-term monitoring of bird populations, remote sensing and its application in habitat evaluation and bird photography.

The book has not given adequate details of the resources currently available for students of avian biology – audio recordings, CD-ROMs pertaining to Bird identification (esp. Prof Madhav Gadgil's wonderful efforts in the Project LifeScape) and Bibliographies (eg Aasheesh Pittie's), etc. The photographs at the end of the book do not serve any useful purpose and perhaps could be dispensed with in future edition as this could bring down production costs and make the book cheaper.

Despite these minor shortcomings, I feel this is a wonderful effort. This book will

prove to be a valuable resource to all the serious birdwatchers and teachers and students of biology and environmental sciences at the high school and college levels. To the latter it may serve as a useful guide in designing projects to complement classroom lectures that give a better insight to the ecology and behaviour of birds in nature and their role in our environment.

–V. Santharam

A review and a critique.

Pictorial handbook - Shorebirds of Kerala (including gulls and terns). By: Sashikumar, C., Muhamed Jafer Palot, Sathyan Meppayur, and C. Radhakrishnan. 2004. 1st ed. Kolkata: Zoological Survey of India. Paperback. (18.5 x 24.0cm, with illus. cover, by; Sathyan Meppayur), pp. i-x, 1-165+2, endpapers (illus.), 71 pll. (col., by Sathyan Meppayur), 8 photos (col.), 73 maps, 4 line-drawings. ISBN 81-8171-047-9. Price: Rs700/-, \$50/-, £30.

Contents: Tit. (p. i); imprint (p. ii); Foreword (pp. iii-iv, dated vii.2004, by; Dr S. Balachandran); Preface (p. v); Acknowledgements (p. vii); Contents (pp. ix-x); Introduction (pp. 1-8); Systematic list (pp. 9-11); Kerala (p. 12, map); Topography of a bird (p. 13); Wing of a shorebird (p. 13); species texts (pp. 14-155); Selected bibliography (pp. 156-158); Glossary (pp. 159-161); Table 1: Identification of snipes - some hints (p. 162); Table 2: Identification of non-breeding terns (p. 163); Index to scientific names (p. 164); Index to common names (p. 165).

This is the second taxon-specific work published by the Zoological Survey of India in this new Century. The first was Alfred et al's '*Waterbirds of northern India*' (2001). It heralds, I hope, the renewal of a century-old 'tradition' when such taxon-specific works were published by Jerdon, '*Games birds and wildfowl of India*' (1864); Hume and Marshall, '*Game birds*' (1879-1881); and E. C. Stuart Baker, '*Indian ducks and their allies*' (1908, 2nd ed.), '*Indian pigeons and doves*' (1913) and '*Game-birds*' (1921-1930). In the early 1980s Sudhin Sengupta published a monograph, '*Common Myna*' (1982) and Suresh Kumar, '*Life history of the Spotted Owlet*' (1985). More recently S. M. Osman published his booklet on falconry, '*Hunters of the air*' (1991) and Prakash Gole his guide to the '*Cranes of India*' (1996). But these latter were almost anecdotal in character and content when compared with the detail and sweep of

information that the century-old works contained. Only Gole's book was embellished with the atmospheric and evocative art of David Rankin, comparable to the lithographs that enlivened the period volumes. The exception, of course, was Sonobe and Usui's '*A field guide to the waterbirds of Asia*' (1993), which covered more than the geographical area of Kerala or India and was well illustrated. What is more, it was distributed free to all participants of the Asian Waterfowl Census (up to that point in time), and still eagerly sought even now!

Sathyan Meppayur illustrates, in colour, the book under review. He has tried to render his subjects faithfully, but the spontaneous and confident brushwork of a birdwatcher-artist, who paints in the field, is lacking. To compete in the international marketplace, upcoming Indian artists need to go into the field and paint the bird in the flesh. If nature is to become the subject of a painter's career then all the tools necessary for the trade become essential, include good optics and situations that bring the artist and the bird as close together as possible, e.g., bird-ringing, museum skins and mounted specimens, and captive birds in zoo aviaries. He has to soak in the atmosphere that belongs to the avian world, study feather texture, anatomy, behaviour, master perspective and light, among several other things. Unless the subject turns his heart, the art will remain a mere proficiency in the use of its tools. The artist should portray the jizz of a bird more than any words can.

Shorebirds of Kerala describes and illustrates 71 species belonging to the order Charadriiformes, hitherto recorded within the political boundaries of Kerala. Through it, the authors "...hope that this group of birds will get the attention they deserve" (p. v). Each species is depicted on a plate with a map giving its wintering, resident and breeding range. This faces a page with text about that species. Points covered in the text include: Field characters; adult non-breeding [plumage]; adult breeding [plumage]; juvenile [plumage]; voice; habitat; habits; status; and, distribution. The useful endpapers have small pictures of all taxa, with numbers that lead a reader to the plate / chapter that deals with the taxon. Most of the textual information is available in the several field-guides, handbooks and specialist books available to the contemporary birdwatcher. The uniqueness of this book lies in the text under the sub-

title, 'status'. Herein the authors give the data for each species from Kerala. Alas, in almost all the cases, this is restricted to a few lines. This reviewer would have revelled in flocks of data for each taxon. Arrival and departure dates, census figures from the various wetlands where such an exercise was carried out, e.g. Kole and Vembanad, breeding areas of the resident waders, etc., are some of the points that come to mind. A map should have been produced for each

species – with details of distribution, of published breeding localities, etc. It is surprising and an eye-opener that “there is no ringing data at all on our shorebirds” (p. 1).

To popularise wader watching, we require a publication that lots of birdwatchers can buy (even if only in Kerala), study and use in the field. The '*Shorebirds of Kerala*' costs Rs700/-, which is a bit heavy on the pocket for the content that one gets in return,

especially with cheaper alternatives of superior quality and content easily available in the market. The publishers should realise that specialist books should necessarily contain a lot more about the subject than general works, especially so if the quality of the latter is excellent and the content wide-ranging.

– Aasheesh Pittie

Recent ornithological literature on South Asia and Tibet

Aasheesh Pittie

8-2-545 Road No. 7, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India. Email: aasheesh.pittie@gmail.com

Birding Asia

URL: <http://www.orientalbirdclub.org>.

Email: mail@orientalbirdclub.org

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