

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

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-