antics of the two species of choughs, one with its coral red bill and legs, (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*), and the other with a yellow bill and red legs (*P. graculus*). "…A chough is a bird of the unfettered Himalayan elements, forever circling and tossing, rising and falling, and as free as the winds that breathe across these magnificent mountains."

In July 1961, I accompanied Salim Ali to Rudrapur, in Uttar Pradesh, from where there was news about the recently re-discovered large-billed weaver bird (Finn's Baya). Our host was Mr C. M. Chaudhri, a retired Chief Conservator of Forests from Orissa. His farm of 350 acres, covered with grass and reeds, typical of "Bhabar" country, was an especially good habitat for warblers, and from elephant-back we listed 85 species within the confines of the farm. Among these was the yellow-headed fantail warbler (*Cisticola exilis*) recorded for the first time in Kumaon a few years ago. Three species of bayas were nesting on the farm, the common, the striated and the black-throated, and it was instructive to see the differing architecture of each species. My only disappointment was that we had not seen a tiger. These beasts are frequent visitors to the farm and our host showed us a few damp and shady spots where they occasionally have their afternoon siesta. However, not having come across tigers on the premises also has its advantages.

One of the keenest and most reliable birders of this period was Mrs Usha Ganguli. On 28.v.1961, she waded through knee-deep water at Najafgarh Jheel to find live nests of black-winged stilts, and she gave a very useful account of birds present there in May – where she had "never seen as much water", and again on 23.vii.1961, when "the waters had been drained to a very great extent". In spite of this she was able to say that the place was "not only a paradise for water birds but the greatest variety of raptors is to be found here. I have seen 7 kinds of eagles, apart from buzzards, harriers, falcons."

Capt. N. S. Tyabji (October 1961) expressed his surprise at Mrs Ganguli not mentioning the little Indian pratincole (*Glareola lactea*), seen by him in large flocks of 3,000-5,000 birds. Among the several other birds reported by Tyabji was a flock of about 200 pheasant-tailed jacanas, 20 sarus cranes and 50 black-necked storks.

Salim Ali followed up Tyabji's note in the November 1961 issue, questioning some of the identifications. Rain Quail: "Is it not more likely that the 'small flock (about 12 birds) observed in a newly ploughed field' were in fact bush quails? The place and habit certainly suggest that latter. For the benefit of future observers it seems desirable to straighten out these doubts."

In the September 1961 issue Salim Ali produced a useful note on "Field Identifications of some Migratory Song Birds". In this "a beginning (was) made with a group of wagtails in whose plumage yellow is predominant." This should be of great interest to birders even today, for in spite of several illustrated books which are now available, the different races of migratory wagtails are difficult to separate one from the other. With his characteristic caution he wrote "Subspecies of individual examples of wagtails are often impossible to determine with certainty even from museum skins in breeding plumage; in the field it would be rash and of doubtful scientific value to attempt to do so…" If any wagtail-ophile is interested in a copy I will be glad to forward it.

In 1961 the *Newsletter* was sent free to all "subscribers". When we wrote to the Postmaster General for a concessional postal rate because the publication was of "educational value", his reply was that since the *Newsletter* was being sent free, there can be no question of concession. From January 1961, the subscription was Rs. 5/- per annum for 12 issues. In spite of its not being "free" all subsequent attempts to get the concession failed. I hope we have better luck with *Indian Birds*.

Many of the persons who encouraged the *Newsletter* during its initial year by letters / articles have fallen by the way or are out of sight, but I mention them here as a mark of gratitude. I am listing only those who have not featured in Recoveries. So far Prof. K. K. Neelakantan, Y. S. Shivrajkumar, M. K. Fatehsinhji, M. Sasikumaran, C. Nandini, George P. V., S. Thomas Satyamurti, Lalsinh M. Raol, R. A. Stewart Melluish, R. N. Chatterjee, P. V. Bole, M. M. Mistry, Anwar Khan, Naresh Singh (WLW UP), Ahi Rudra (DFO Darjeeling), P. K. Rajagopalan (Virus Research Centre, Shimoga), J. T. M. Gibson, K. Janaskuraman, P. W. Soman, Amir J. Ali, M. Sasaikumar, R. S. Prasad (Haffkine Institute, Bombay), Mrs Desiree Proud (Kathmandu), Dr W. Rydzewski (Editor, *The Ring*), H. G. Acharya, Dr J. P. Joshua (Liberia, West Africa), A. S. Tyabji (Jamshedpur), Mrs Jamal Ara (Ranchi), B. A. Palkhiwala and, B. G. Ghate.

## International Conference on Bird and Environment, Haridwar, India

Vinaya Kumar Sethi[1], Vivek Saxena[1] & Dinesh Bhatt[1]*

[1]*Avian Diversity & Bioacoustics Lab., Dept. of Zoology & Environmental Sciences, Gurukula Kangri University, Haridwar, Uttaranchal, India.*

** Corresponding author (dd_bhatt@yahoo.com) and Organising Secretary of the Conference.*

A four-day international conference on 'Bird and Environment' was held in Gurukula Kangri University, Haridwar from 21-24.xi.2004. Over 160 ornithologists, conservation biologists, government representatives and naturalists, including 31 from 17 countries, participated in the meeting. There were 9 plenary lectures, 25 invited talks, 60 oral and, 51 poster presentations during the sessions.

In the first and second sessions namely, "The biology of avian vocal behaviour" and "Advances in avian bioacoustics", speakers examined numerous biological aspects of vocal behaviour such as diversity of acoustic communication, sexual selection and neurobiology of bird song, discrimination of temporal fine structures of songs by birds, etc.

In his Plenary, in the first session, entitled, "The science of bird songs: nature's music", Peter Marler (University of California, Davis, USA), the father of 'avian communication system', said, "Environmental factors influence the communicative efficiency of acoustic signals and thus their evolution with consequences for their use by conservationists in monitoring population of endangered species." In the first session, presentations were made on various aspects of the uses of songs and calls in the social life of birds by Dietmar Todt (Free University, Berlin Germany), J. E. Vielliard (University Estadual de Campins, Brazil), Ole Neasbye Larsen (University of Southern Denmark, Denmark), Nicolas Mathevon (University Jean Monnet-Saint-Etienne, France, Anil

Kumar (Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun) and Vinaya Kumar Sethi (Gurukula Kangri University, Haridwar).

The second session began with a Plenary by Clive K. Catchpole (University of London, UK) on the neurobiology of birdsong. He pointed out that the main driving force behind the evolution of song is sexual selection and female choice has exerted pressure to make male songs more complex and attractive to females. Maria Lusia da Silva (University do Guama, Belem, Brazil), R. A. Suthers (Indiana University, Bloomington, USA), Theirry Aubin (University of Paris, France), Robert Dooling (University of Maryland, USA), Kazuo Okanoya (Chiba University, Japan), Miki Takahashi (Chiba University, Japan), K K Sharma (Jamshedpur Cooperative College, Jamshedpur) and Christina B. Castelino (Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, USA) contributed significantly to the theme of the session.

The role of birds in agricultural ecosystem is well known. In the session, "Agriculture Ornithology", participants discussed and developed strategies for the management of avian diversity in agricultural ecosystem so that the requirements of all the species are met, benefits of insectivorous birds in pest control could be explored and the pressure of granivorous birds on crops could be minimized. In his invited talk, B. M. Parasharya (Anand Agricultural University, Anand, Gujarat) pointed out that for the conservation of birds found in agricultural areas, eco-friendly management of agricultural landscapes is required. K. L. Mathew (Gujarat Agricultural University, Jamnagar, Gujarat), V. R. Reddy (A.N.G.R. Agricultural University, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad), Mani Chellappan (Kerala Agricultural University, Thrissur, Kerala), and C. S. Malhi (Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiyana) presented their findings in this session.

With increasing industrialization and urbanization of the landscapes in India and abroad it has become important to protect ecologically important habitats from further human impacts. Under the sessions, "Avian biodiversity and conservation" I and II, this conference discussed the current status and distribution of birds in IBAs (Important Bird Areas) and other landscapes. In addition, the presentations provided an update on the situation in India highlighting a number of critically threatened sites of high biodiversity values. It has been realized that a systematic and regular biomonitoring of the wetlands in bird sanctuaries and wildlife habitats of India is required.

Lei Fumin (Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing) delivered a Plenary lecture in the session, "Avian biodiversity conservation I" on the topic 'An alternative hotspot for the avian diversity conservation priority' and emphasized that Hengduan Mountains to Qinling Mountains in south eastern China along the eastern, southeastern and northeastern Tibetan Plateau should be promoted as the hottest area of Chinese biodiversity with the highest conservation priority. Lalitha Vijayan (SACON, Coimbatore), H. S. A. Yahya (Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh) described the avifauna of Andaman and Narcondom Islands respectively and suggested that some mangrove forests and moist deciduous forests in Middle Andaman may be declared as protected area. Other speakers of the session such as Shwartz Assaf (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel), S. Somasundaram (SACON, Coimbatore), Anika Tere (Gujarat Agricultural University, Anand), Romesh Kr. Sharma (Z.S.I., Dehradun) presented data on avian biodiversity of different parts from India / Israel.

Under the session, "Avian biodiversity and conservation II", the Plenary was delivered by Lalitha Vijayan (SACON, Coimbatore) on the conservation of wetland birds in India. She pointed out that a total of 655 wetlands were identified and surveyed for birds all over India and all the wetlands showed contamination by heavy metals and pesticide residues. Aeshita Mukherjee (University of Capetown, South Africa), Arun Kumar (Z.S.I., Dehradun), P. K. Saikia (Guwahati University, Guwahati ), P. C. Tak (Z.S.I., Dehradun), R. C. Gupta (Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra), Kailash Chandra (Z.S.I., Jabalpur) presented papers.

The session "Avian endocrinology, photoperiodism and seasonal reproduction", highlighted the role of hormones, annual changes in day length, temperature and humidity in causing or phasing seasonal events in birds, like migration and reproduction. This knowledge has implications to issues related to conservation and management of threatened and endangered species and adaptation of birds to the threat of global warming. The Plenary lecture was delivered by Prof. Asha Chandola-Saklani (Garhwal University, Srinagar) on seasonal reproduction in birds of tropics. In her lecture through two superb models, namely Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus* and Spotted Munia *Lonchura punctulata*, she explained how tropical / subtropical birds have provided significant insights into environmental control of seasonal reproduction in birds. During this session Vinod Kumar (Univeristy of Lucknow, Lucknow) in his invited talk, pointed out that melatonin, which is a part of the avian circadian system, did not play a direct role in photoperiodic induction of circadian rhythms mediated seasonal reproduction. Saumen Kumar Maitra (Viswa Bharti University, Shantiniketan) showed that the seasonal recovery of gametogenesis might not be a function of photoperiods and / or the pineal organ in Rose-ringed Parakeet. Besides these invited talks in this session oral presentations were made by B. K. Tripathi (Regional Institute of Education, Bhopal) Sangeeta Rani, Sudhi Singh, Amit Kumar Trivedi (University of Lucknow, Lucknow) and Anushi (Meerut University, Meerut).

Global climatic change is probably the most important environmental challenge that faces our planet. In the session "Avian ecology and breeding biology I", this conference discussed the impact of these changes on birds' lives. In her invited talk, Michele Loneux (Zoological Institute, Van Beneden, Belgium) reported the effect of climatic fluctuations and global warming on European Black Grouse population dynamics. Lo-Liu-Chih (Shu-Te University, Taiwan) and Anoop Das (SACON, Coimbatore) also presented their findings on avian ecology and breeding biology. It was discussed that aspects of avian behaviour and ecology could be used as informative indicators of large scale climatic change.

Under the session "Avian ecology and breeding biology II", Wina Meckvichai (Chulalongkorn University, Bankok, Thialand) and T Shivanandappa (Central Food Technology Reseach Institute, Mysore) delivered invited talks on the breeding biology of island birds of the Andaman Sea and Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary respectively. Other speakers, namely, N. Gomathi (B.N.H.S., Mumbai), K. C. Soni (Lohia Post Graduate College, Rajasthan), V. C. Soni (Saurashtra University, Rajkot) also presented their data. In her studies Gomathi found a decreasing trend

in the population of Long-billed Vulture, a most critically endangered species, at Bayana, Bharatpur (Rajasthan).

The senior Indian ornithologist, S. A. Hussain (Karkala, Karnataka) and, Hans Winkler (Austrian Academy of Sciences, Austria) delivered invited talks in the session, "Avian migration, habitat use and general behaviour". S.A. Hussain described the bird migration pattern in the Indian Subcontinent. He gave an overview of the most recent research work conducted in this field. Hans Winkler reported that migrants possessed smaller brains than residents. The other participants of this session, A. Mukherjee (University of Cape town, South Africa), Sangeeta Rani (Lucknow University, Lucknow), Pratyush Patankar (M S University of Baroda, Vadodara), Mohd. Arshad (B. Z. University, Pakistan), V. K. Tomar (I.A.R.I., New Delhi), D. M. Jathewa (Junagarh Agriculture University, Jamnagar), and M. Soma (University of Tokyo, Japan) highlighted research in the field of habitat use and behavioural biology.

Three poster sessions (51 participants) exhibited avian biodiversity on a global scale including reports from deteriorating habitats of the world and their impact on bird biodiversity.

In the valedictory session, chief guest R. S. Tolia (Chief Secretary of Uttaranchal) stated that India is one of the 12 mega-biodiversity countries of the world which provide suitable habitat for the conservation of all kinds of biodiversity. Peter Marler (University of California, Davis), Co-chairperson of the International Advisory Committee of the conference presented the conference report and suggested that there is need for such conferences to fill the large-gap in the conservation efforts at global level. The recommendations of the conference were presented by S. A. Hussain (Karkala, Karnataka). It was recommended that:

(a) There is a need to increase knowledge and awareness of wetlands and their values and all wetland-type habitats should be conserved through legislation and government policies.
(b) Studies should concentrate on satellite tracking of migratory birds involving both laboratory and field scientists in developing a richer understanding of the subject and for the conservation of migratory birds.
(c) The state and central government should establish an integrated conservation and development network for newly identified IBAs and strengthen national legislation for the protection of sites that are of exceptional importance for biodiversity.
(d) Detailed studies on the ecology and breeding behaviour of endangered avian species should be undertaken for better conservation and management measures.

## Indian White-backed Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* nesting in Sakrohar village, Khagaria district, Bihar, India

Sunil K. Choudhary, Santosh Kr. Tiwari, Sushant Dey & Subhasis Dey

*University Department of Botany, T. M. Bhagalpur University, Bhagalpur 812007, Bihar, India. Email*: *sunil_vikramshila@yahoo.co.in*

On 3.iii.2004 while on a distribution survey of Greater Adjutant-Stork *Leptoptilos dubius*, we saw 20 Indian White-backed Vultures *Gyps bengalensis* in Sakrohar village (25°36'26.0"N, 86°49'53.7"E), which is located in the floodplain area of the Kosi River in Khagaria district of Bihar, about 107km north-east of Bhagalpur. Local people reported that the vultures had arrived in the village 10-12 days ago, around 20-22.ii.2004. We located two nests on Palmyra Palms *Borassus flabellifer*. We could not see inside the nests at that time, as we were on a different mission.

We visited the village again on 11.iv.2004, especially to document the details of the nesting of the vultures. Both the nests, one each on a Palmyra, were located at a height of about 20m. The nests were built at the junction of three fronds' bases. The insides of the nests were not visible from the ground. A bamboo ladder was erected close to the palms that could be climbed up to a height that matched that of the nest. This was done with great difficulty with the help of local people. One researcher climbed up to peep into the nests. Each nest was 90cm long, 45cm wide and 12cm deep and had no distinct shape. The base of the nest was made up of haphazardly arranged dried twigs and leaves of Arjuna *Terminalia arjuna*, palm trees, and of other unidentified plant material. Only one chick (*c.* 70cm long) was present in each of the two nests. The chicks were able to move around the nest on their own. A parent attacked the researcher and his palm was injured in defending himself. We watched the nests for three days after this observation and found to our satisfaction that the vultures did not desert the nests. From interviews with local residents about the vulture's arrival in the village (around 20-22.ii.2004), and our first sighting of the vultures in the village on 3.iii.2004, when the nests were already built, we estimated the age of the chicks as one-month old. At great risk we were able to take some photographs and took some video-footage of the nests, chicks and the surrounding place in general. It will be interesting to mention that we had spotted a group of 50 Indian White-backed Vultures feeding on a buffalo carcass, in an Navtola (25°31'48"N, 86°41'45"E, Khagaria district, *c*. 80km from Bhagalpur), adjacent to the present sighting on 8.vii.2002. That flock had many juveniles in it.

Our present observation of two Indian White-backed Vultures in north-east Bihar has been documented by The Peregrine Fund, as part of their Asian Vulture Population Project (http://www.peregrinefund.org/vulture/coverage.asp?speciesID=2). A map on this website displays active nesting sites of *Gyps* vultures in India (26 in all, 1985/86-2003/04). This record was the first one from Bihar.

We have numerous secondary reports about the sighting of *Gyps* vultures in this locality. In view of the Critically Endangered status of Indian White-backed Vultures (Islam and Rahmani 2002), more search trips in the locality are required to establish its range of distribution in the area, and a study on annual basis on its habitat, population abundance and nesting.

**Acknowledgements**

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