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## Sighting of Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* at Kanha National Park (India)

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On 27.xii.2004 while moving within Kanha National Park, I found a lone Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* at a shallow pond near Indri camp. Phagun Singh Marava, the forest guide who accompanied me, did not recognise the bird and informed me that he had never seen this species in the park. He had a copy of D'Cunha's checklist (1998) in which it was not listed. Neither was this species reported from the park by Newton et al. (1986). The lone bird was swimming in the pond with four Greylag Geese *Anser anser* and there were not many other birds around. A juvenile Changeable Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatu*s was also present on a dry snag.

Ali & Ripley (1987) suggest that this species is rare in Gujarat and Deccan, but

leapfrogs as far south as Mysore in small numbers. The distribution map given in Kazmierczak (2000) suggests that there are only three records of this species from central, eastern and southern Madhya Pradesh. Tyabji (1994) saw this species once on 18.i.1987 in Bandhavgarh National Park. The two other records are probably from Pachmarhi and Pench. I surveyed ponds and lakes near Chhindwara town (southern M. P.) in the same week and found no signs of Bar-headed Geese in that area.

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## Recoveries from the Newsletter for Birdwatchers (1963) – 9

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Regional Secretaries were appointed on 23.xii.1962 at the second AGM of the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*, and this ensured it a wider publicity, and enabled the editor to draw in birdwatchers from the whole country. The persons appointed were Salim Ali, Bombay; B. Biswas, Calcutta; Mrs. Usha Ganguli, Delhi; Prof. K. K. Neelakantan, Trichur (Kerala); Dr R. M. Naik, Baroda; Mrs. Jamal Ara, Ranchi (Bihar); E. D. Avari, Darjeeling; K. S. Lavkumar, Saurashtra.

Several resident Englishmen at that time were very enthusiastic about the *Newsletter*. One of the keenest was S. K. Reeves. He reported the rare case of the arrival of a Houbara *Chlamydotis undulata* in Suffolk, England. This bird, which breeds in Afghanistan and Baluchistan, is a winter

visitor to north-west India and is the unfortunate target of sheikhs from the Middle East, who bring their falcons here to hunt it. The Houbara, in consequence, is the cause of some unfriendly exchanges between our government and the rulers of Middle Eastern sheikhdoms. Though not unlike the Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps*, this bird seldom occurs "south and east of a line from Delhi to Baroda", and its sighting by Reeves in England was an important event.

K. S. Lavkumar made a wise suggestion about protecting our greatly endangered Great Indian Bustards. "The best method to safeguard the Great Indian Bustard is to include it on the list of the 'farmers' friends'... to make them aware of the value

of the bird as a destroyer of locusts and other such pests. Our effort in this way to enlist positively their help in protecting the bustard would go further than all the legislation banning its shooting".

The calls of birds are often a leading clue in determining a species. Mrs. Jamal Ara had a useful note in the January 1963 issue, describing the calls of 12 species of cuckoos in Bihar, ranging from the soft "cook-koo" of the migrant Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* to the boisterous "coop-coop-coop" of the Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis*. Having noticed a Common Cuckoo displaying before its mate in July near Ranchi, she says, "Undoubtedly it breeds there". If true, this would be a significant discovery.

Peter Jackson's contributions have always been of unusual interest, and I quote from his visit to Ladakh, "I reached Leh on December 15<sup>th</sup>. It was a bright sunny morning with a sprinkling of snow on the ground...Magpies *Pica pica bactriana* (=Black-billed Magpie *P. pica*) scavenging around the town were the most noticeable birds...I went by jeep for about 140 miles south-east along the Indus. Some 30 miles from Leh the valley narrows to a gorge about 50 miles long... (and) the gorge finally opens out into a broad desert plain...The most common bird was the Shore Lark *Eremophila alpestris ewesi* (=Horned Lark) an attractive little lark with black horns, cheek patches and breast band. With them were Short-toed Larks *Calandrella acutirostris cinerea* (=Hume's Short-toed Lark)".

S. V. Neelakanta kept a careful watch on a pair of Black Kites *Milvus migrans*, which first built their nest on a banyan tree. Because of harassment by crows, the nesting was never successful. Then they moved to the framework of a water tank and built the nest 40 feet above ground. "The eggs were laid early in the cool weather, and the two nestlings are already (6<sup>th</sup> February) larger than house crows, and can be seen exercising their wings". Neelakanta observed later that a pair of House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* had become sub-tenants of the kites. "The sparrows are nesting under and partly within the kite's nest."

The *Newsletter* became a little more 'dressy' when S. V. Neelakanta made a sketch for the cover of the July 1963 issue consisting "of Whitebacked Munias (*Lonchura striata*) perching on a Casuarina tree (*Casurina equisetifolia*). The birds started building a globular nest on Sunday the 12<sup>th</sup>, and finished the same on the 14<sup>th</sup> May. By kneeling on the top of my car, I was able to put my finger on the lateral entrance of the nest on the 16<sup>th</sup>, and found no eggs." In the August 1963 issue Mr. Neelakanta's article on how birds fly, illustrated with eight sketches, is well worth reading if only to understand that the general belief that "birds fly by pushing the air downwards and backwards with their wings" is far from the truth. Things are not always, what they seem.

The April 1963 issue carried a fine article by Jasper Newsome, a nephew of Col. R. Meinertzhagen (formerly renowned for his researches, some of which have now been proved to be scandalously fabricated). Writing about birds around Bombay, Jasper

said "For a birdwatcher coming from England to step off a boat at Bombay is twice as exciting as it must be for an ordinary visitor...one entered...a new world full of wonderful new birds...A morning at the National Park was a great success. We saw an Osprey, some blackwinged stilts, a greenshank, some common sandpipers, endless little cormorants, which were new to me and several species of egret and heron".

In March, Jasper went by train to Delhi. "From the comforts of the air conditioned express I looked out at a cross section of Indian countryside. I saw almost 50 species of birds from the train, including many new to me, such as the Whitenecked Stork, Adjutant, Sarus Crane, White Ibis, Peafowl and others...(An) interesting thing about the birds of northern India in winter was that many of them I know in Europe in the summer were there for the winter, and behaving differently. For example the pipits were hard to identify because they did not call; similarly the Leaf Warblers, Lesser Whitethroats, and Moustached Warblers only became obvious when I sat down by bushes and waited for them to emerge or put up mist-nets and caught them...In May I go to Kashmir and then to Afghanistan. If the Editor chases me vigorously enough, I may produce a final article to conclude this wonderful visit to India and her birds." Alas, in Nepal Jasper succumbed to drugs, and that was the end of this splendid young man.

Joseph George wrote a fascinating piece on his observations of four species of young cuckoos. "Young cuckoos of four different species were seen in New Forest, Dehra Dun every summer. They were the Koel, the common Hawk-Cuckoo, the Pied Crested Cuckoo and the Indian Cuckoo. Crows were the fosterers of the first, and Jungle Babbler for the second and third. The calls of the fledgling cuckoos, as they followed their foster parents, were a poor imitation of the calls of the latter. The calls were also similar to, but distinguishable from the calls of the legitimate young of the fosterers themselves.

"The Black Drongo was the only bird seen fostering the Indian Cuckoo for several years. In 1960 and again in 1961 one young bird was seen fostered by Golden Orioles while two or three others were, as usual, fostered by Black Drongos. The call of the Drongo-reared Indian Cuckoo was, as to be expected, more or less the same as the call of young Drongos. But contrary to what

might have been expected, the Oriole-reared Indian Cuckoos also called the same call as Drongo-reared Indian Cuckoos. The only noticeable difference was that the 'Oriole Indian Cuckoos' sounded more musical than 'Drongo Indian Cuckoos'. Their calls were not similar to the calls of either adult or young Orioles."

Sometimes the *Newsletter* became scientific beyond its usual style, attempting to identify for example the seven subspecies of the Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*. Involved in this debate were Usha Ganguly, Julian Donahue and S. K. Reeves. The Wryneck, though allegedly a widely spread species, is often missed being sighted because it is "deceptively sparrow like particularly in flight". I would have missed seeing it in our garden in Dodda-Gubbi (Bangalore) were it not for Salim Ali's usual accurate description: "Has a comical way of stretching neck and bill upwards and twisting its head slowly from side to side..." How like the Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyrceros birostris* – though in all other respects so different.

Not many police officers these days are involved in birding, but Pratap Singh, A. S. P. Khargaon, W. Niniar (Madhya Pradesh) got interested through the *Newsletter*, and wrote a useful note on the Great Indian Bustard. "In July 1955, in my short round of 15 miles from my home (Kota, Rajasthan) I came across 17 birds. They were mostly seen in pairs. The hitherto bleak and forbidding landscape had become alive with the rains, and these birds were feeding on sprouting shoots or making short runs and catching grasshoppers and crickets". Other notes by him on the bustard are also helpful in understanding the status of the bustard 50 years ago.

Bird names or their mis-names keep arousing the ire of birders. Joseph George wrote, "Recently I assisted General (Sir Harold) Williams in the production of a revised check-list of the 'Birds of Delhi and District'...We ran up against a number of problems in naming some of the birds logically...The word 'Indian' is sometimes used before the names of birds. At other times, it is not used. In this connection, it is well to remember that the Tree Pipit and the Indian Tree Pipit are two different species (Ripley call the latter Hodgson's Pipit). Let us be certain where we want to use 'Indian' and where not...The use of the word 'common' bothers some people when used for a bird that is not common, as for instance the Common Cuckoo in Delhi..."

Responding to George's note, Salim Ali wrote, "Mr. Joseph George has touched upon a point of which the unsatisfactoriness – inconsistency, and even absurdity has long been felt...Most of the incongruities, of course, stem from the fact that English names for our birds were 'manufactured' or bodily transported from Britishers familiar with their own birds when up against species in their own country". Unfortunately the new names based on 'more' scientific discoveries relating to Families, Genera and Species has mad nomenclature even more confusing.

Descriptions of stretches of country of ecological value are invaluable for future planners and Prof. K. K. Neelakantan, writing of his home village, Kavasseri, in the Palghat Gap (Kerala) laments the passing of this avian paradise. "Now one does not see even one-tenth of the number of birds one used to some ten years ago...The very small number of unusual birds (the Red Spurfowl, the Greenbilled Malkoha, the Whitethroated Ground-thrush, to mention a few examples, are clinging on to the minute patches of scrub and woods that remain...rubber plantations attract few birds and unfortunately, it is rubber and tapioca that is replacing our scrub forest."

In another note, Prof. Neelakantan refers to an uncommon experience of "rare

birds...Knocking at our doors." In the heart of crowded Ernakulam in April 1963, a Drongo Cuckoo *Surniculus lugubris* and a Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis* arrived in his garden. "It is interesting to note that both these birds had been attracted to the place by the occurrence of a particularly suitable kind of food: The Drongo Cuckoo had undoubtedly come in search of the large caterpillars; the Oriole had come for the ripe fruit of a large mulberry bush growing 15 yards away from the mango tree."

Salim Ali often commented on the behaviour of birds – which suggested (if not confirmed) that they were just enjoying life. Here he refers to the cat-and-mouse antics of a cormorant.

"A note in my diary made at Keoladeo Ghana, Bharatpur, 3 years ago reminds me of this interesting incident. A large Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), obviously sated, dived and brought up a catfish about 6 inches long in its bill. It swam with the quarry to the shore some 30 feet away, dropped it struggling on the bank, obviously enjoying the spectacle. Presently it picked up the fish again and swam out with it some distance, released it in the water, dived after it, caught it again and carried it back to the shore. The bird repeated these maneuvers deliberately several times before

jerking the fish into position and swallowing it head foremost which it seemed in no hurry to do. This is manifestly the same play as a cat makes with a mouse it has caught and clearly for the fun of it."

The constraint of space makes it necessary to refer even more briefly than I have done above to the material in the issues October-December 1963. Based on information supplied by Zonal Directors of Lighthouses in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, Salim Ali wrote about the migratory movements of Openbill Storks. Usha Ganguli presented a detailed note on the nesting of Redvented Bulbuls *Pycnonotus cafer*. Julian Donahue continued his crake watching in Delhi. K. S. Lavkumar was enthusiastic, as always, about "the best place to watch birds...the home garden."; queries about S. V. Neelakanta's article on how birds fly. The Editor's roundup of birdwatching during 1963 ended with the cheering quotation from the Hazaribagh National park, about, "A Bird in the Bush worth two in the hand."

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## Editorial

On a dark moonless night in 1996 a few friends and I stood near Reddipalli village (Cuddapah district, Andhra Pradesh, India), in a dry scrub area, mesmerized by a torch-beam that illuminated a Jerdon's Courser *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus*. This Glareolid survivor of antediluvian continental fragmentation, this Sinbad of the adrift continental Indian plate floating inexorably across the Sea of Tethys, this frail witness to cataclysmic geological upheavals, survives by a toe-hold in a corner of Andhra Pradesh, furtively dodging everything that an uncaring human world throws at it. The instinct to survive, honed over aeons of evolutionary fine-tuning, has helped this Gondwanan relic cling precariously to its fast disappearing world. The irrigation canal that threatened it when it was re-discovered in 1986 looms once again over its dry scrub habitat. Twenty years ago, it was saved by N. T. Rama Rao, a chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, whose

pride in the Telugu people was judiciously exploited by Pushp Kumar, a legendary officer of the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department. He asked the chief minister how a hero of the Telugus could tolerate the extinction of the only truly *Telugu* bird in the world? When this riddle was explained to him, Rama Rao, to his credit, gave instructions to re-align the canal. Will Jerdon's double-necklaced (*bitorquatus*) courser be able to breast this fresh storm? A BNHS and WWF-India representation to the Chief Secretary and Secretary Irrigation Department was reassured that the Irrigation Department had no intention of harming the Critically Endangered endemic and that the canal would be re-aligned before work recommenced. If this is not done, here is a worthy case for judicial intervention.

With this last issue of *Indian Birds* for 2005 is enclosed an index to the *Newsletter for Ornithologists*, which was published in 2004. It can be bound in with the set for

ease of use. We hope to enclose a similar index to *Indian Birds* (2005) with the January-February 2006 issue.

Several people have helped tremendously in putting the 2005 issues of *Indian Birds* together and we would like to place on record our gratitude. Szabolcs Kókay, Sachin Jaltaré, Otto Pfister, Sumit K. Sen and Clement Francis M. for artwork and photographs that adorned our covers. Messers Pitti Laminations Limited and G. B. K. Charitable Trust for financial support. All our anonymous referees for their patience and diligent perusal of manuscripts and typescripts. S. K. Anwar Hussain for computer work and P. Rambabu for all the office work (printing and postage). We would also like to thank our contributors for their trust and support and our subscribers for theirs.

Wishing all of you a very happy and fulfilling 2006!

- Aasheesh Pittie