

Jerdon's Chloropsis *Chloropsis cochinchinensis*
 Golden-fronted Chloropsis *Chloropsis aurifrons*
 Orange-headed Thrush *Zoothera citrina*
 Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis*
 Indian Robin *Saxicoloides fulicata*
 Spotted Babbler *Pellorneum ruficeps*
 Black-headed Babbler *Rhopocichla atriceps*
 Jungle Babbler *Turdoides striatus*
 Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius*
 Asian Paradise-Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*
 Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher *Hypothymis azurea*

Tickell's Flowerpecker *Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*
 Purple Sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica*
 Loten's Sunbird *Nectarinia lotenia*
 Black-headed Munia *Lonchura malacca*
 Grey-headed Starling *Sturnus malabaricus*
 Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*
 Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*
 Black-headed Oriole *O. xanthornus*
 Black Drongo *Dicrurus microcercus*
 Ashy Drongo *D. leucophaeus*
 Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *D. paradiseus*
 Indian Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*
 House Crow *Corvus splendens*
 Jungle Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*

References

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Can we augment the Important Bird Area concept in India? The role of large landholdings outside Protected Areas

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Two crucial aspects to bird conservation are identifying areas that are important for birds and then protecting these areas from habitat destruction or other threats to wildlife. BirdLife International has made a promising start in finding key areas by coming up with criteria that can be used to identify Important Bird Areas (IBAs). A recent compendium of IBAs in India (Islam & Rahmani 2004), compiled by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) through the Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN) highlights the utility of this approach.

Once important sites are identified, how should we go about protecting them? Some of these areas are already under nominal protection by the designated government agencies: the Forest Departments of various States. These areas stand notified as Protected Areas (PAs), such as Biosphere Reserves, Ramsar sites, National Parks, Tiger Reserves, Sanctuaries, and so on. If these wilderness entities were to be afforded the protection that their designated status prescribes, most of India's current biodiversity would be likely to survive in the long term.

Sadly, the reality is quite different. Today the entire network of PAs is under an unrelenting siege (political, administrative, socio-economic and societal), which constricts it increasingly by the day. Hardly a year passes without one or the other of these critical wildernesses being violated through their denotification as protected landscapes. Conservationists do protest, but are largely ignored by the State. Given this scenario, the IBA programme is a laudable concept, in that it shines the spotlight on areas important for bird

conservation, regardless of whether or not these areas are under legal protection. But highlighting valuable wilderness areas is only the first step: what should we do next?

One strategy to protect key areas is to purchase them outright. This option has been successfully pursued by BirdLife International's partner in the UK, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). The RSPB purchases land where needed, and establishes a scientifically managed bird reserve under its own ownership. Where the looming extinction of a species is attributed basically to the loss of its habitat (e.g. Jerdon's Courser *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus*) and the fight for its survival has reached a critical juncture, the strategy of purchasing land would appear to be the only pragmatic course of action with high probability of success.

Regrettably, we in India have little chance of adopting this strategy. Wilderness areas in India usually fall under land classified by the government as agricultural, wasteland, or forest. The limit to private ownership of agricultural land under our laws is in the region of 20 ha, so there is little chance of acquiring a large, contiguous patch. Acquiring government "wasteland" or forest land is next to impossible. Furthermore, the demands on land for agricultural, industrial and urban needs are so extensive and growing by the day that altogether this strategy will find few enthusiasts. And lastly, it is a tall order indeed for the BNHS or any other Indian conservation organisation to be able to raise the funds for purchasing even one substantial area, say 1000 ha in extent, to provide space just for one species (like the

Jerdon's Courser) threatened with extinction by the loss of its habitat. So, we must look to other options.

Conservation outside Protected Areas

Today, with forest cover declining at alarming rates, our wildlife is being pushed to extreme limits of survival. This being so, we should press for the conservation of all remaining habitat that have the potential to support populations of wild species, whether or not these habitats are under the control of the Forest Department. I suggest that we should negotiate partnerships with establishments, public and private, that own vast real estate, which in many cases are already avian havens or have the potential to become so. Such areas are unlikely to hold much intact forest, but instead may contain woodland or other habitats, and still be valuable for conservation.

The kind of areas that come to mind are on the very extensive campuses that are under that control of large government establishments and private enterprises. Such areas exist in every biogeographic zone of India. Large wooded areas have become a common feature in the layout of the work places and living spaces of these organisations. Almost as a rule, these spaces are inviolate to trespass, with their perimeters being walled or fenced. Besides providing security to the inhabitants and equipment, these measures also ensure that the enclosed wooded areas are relatively undisturbed. In large part, these areas will not fit the criteria for inclusion as IBAs. Nevertheless, they are of potential importance for conservation (as I describe below), and the IBCN would do well to use

these as a second tier of areas (outside IBAs and outside PPAs) worth conserving for birds.

Some examples

A good example is the very large and excellent wilderness surrounding the Sriharikota missile launch establishment in Andhra Pradesh. Right now, BNHS researchers, Ranjit Manakadan and S. Sivakumar are working on a 3-year assignment to catalogue the rich biodiversity, including avifauna, of this island. Also on the east coast is the Indian Navy's training establishment at Chilika in Orissa. As an interesting aside let me recount that the BNHS had strongly opposed INS Chilika as the site was considered a critical wilderness area. The BNHS relented once an undertaking was given in Parliament that the wilderness safeguards stipulated by the late Salim Ali would be complied with. As a part of these safeguards the BNHS was to inspect the site annually to monitor their implementation. That wilderness within the perimeter of INS Chilika remains intact (a road signpost I saw in 1991 declared "Partridge crossing, drive slow") and its future well-being looks good. A further example is provided by the National Defence Academy, Khadakvasla (Pune district, Maharashtra), which had a "reserve" forest on its estate, later given the status of a sanctuary. Again, the BNHS and Salim Ali were closely associated with the development of this wilderness. How an Army cantonment can be made into stable bird holding and breeding areas is illustrated in Singh (2000).

Some well-known wooded areas under the Army's ownership are worth mentioning here. Lavkumar Khachar spent a few days in 1995 at an Army depot at Pulgaon (near Nagpur). This wooded area is close to 260 km² in extent. He had also evaluated another depot in north Sikkim as a potential home to the Kaleej Pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos*, Impeyan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus*, a *Tragopan* sp., and the red panda *Ailurus fulgens*. Erach Bharucha made several visits in 1993 to the Army depot at Dehu Road (Pune) and later, in 1998, to the artillery firing range at Deolali (Maharashtra); he found their wilderness potential to be high enough that he suggested they be declared wildlife sanctuaries. There is clear international precedent in using military land for conservation. For example, all firing ranges

of the armed forces in the USA double as wildlife refuges by congressional legislation. Camp Pembleton, the largest US combined forces' firing range, which is active every day of the year, is a sanctuary for about 90 prairie bison *Bison bison*.

Prakash Gole has assisted in improving the wilderness around the College of Military Engineering (CME), Kirkee (near Pune). I have first-hand knowledge of a few hundred hectares of tropical forest inside a walled enclosure (yes, forest inside a walled enclosure!) at Narangi, a military cantonment on the outskirts of Guwahati, Assam. In 1990-1994 it housed the largest heronry of the Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* that I had ever seen, and Lesser Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna javanica* bred there in the hundreds. Moreover, it is a promising home for the endangered Greater Adjutant-Stork *Leptoptilos dubius*, two pairs of which were found nesting in 1990-1991.

In Delhi, the cantonment on the Delhi Ridge has probably the single largest collection of Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* in any city in the country (have I invited protests?). The national bird in the nation's capital: what could be more deserving of attention from the IBCN? Midway on the road from Delhi to Meerut is the Army's Equine Breeding Stud Farm at Babugarh, which teems with Peafowl and other birds, and its boundary is wire-fenced. I doubt if Lavkumar Khachar would easily forget an afternoon spent there in 1993-1994, driven in a gig harnessed to a handsome chestnut mare, with Peafowl continuously flying across its path.

There are several Border Security Force establishments across the country of similar merit. Not far from where I live, the Indian Explosives, Gomoh (Jharkhand) boasts of a large wilderness for which they had sought the status of a sanctuary; WWF-India's Eastern Region Office evaluated it in 1992-1993, but I am not aware of the outcome. The wooded areas of the Forest Research Institute, Dehra Dun are well known, and so are those of many an Indian Air Force base.

Wilderness areas are not under the exclusive control of government bodies, by any means. To mention one private enterprise, the Mann Tea Estate, Dharmsala (Himachal Pradesh), has been owned by one family for the last hundred years; they have let a third of the total area remain forested and preserved as best possible to this day. It is home to almost all bird species of the

Kangra Valley. In Mukteshwar (Uttaranchal) there is an ashram set amidst a large wilderness, which is nurtured by its rishi and is a home to the flourishing wildlife of the area. One of my several failures as a trustee of WWF-India was my inability to get the board to sanction or raise funds for the rishi to put up a stone enclosure to keep the animals from simply walking out and into the laps of poachers.

Conclusions and the way forward

These are a few examples of woodlands outside PAs that have immense conservation potential. I have focussed largely on land under the control of the armed forces because these are the areas I have become most familiar with over 40 years in the defence services. But the concept is certainly not limited to woodland or to military establishments. Artificially created water-bodies on the precincts of oil refineries at Mathura (Uttar Pradesh), and more recently, the refinery at Panipat (Haryana), have been or are being accorded "ecological park" status by their managements. The IBCN will discover a rich patchwork of suitable sites, with varying habitat, under both government and private control, and covering all biogeographic zones of the country. These areas should be evaluated for inclusion into a second tier of IBAs in India. To best protect bird life in India for the future, the IBCN must have some such strategy in addition to its usual IBA site selection criteria, devised with Indian conditions in mind. Such sites could be called "Special Bird Preserve" or "Bird Preserve". Though they may not have any legal protection, their security will be determined by the stewardship of the organisations on whose land they are established. This will be new ground for Indian conservationists, and the task of setting up these areas as sites for conservation will be hard to accomplish. But because when nothing is ventured, nothing is gained either, I feel that the time is right for a wide-ranging discussion on the utility and acceptability of this strategy for conservation outside traditional protected areas.

I would suggest that the following steps need be taken for this idea to proceed.

1. Take a closer look at existing information on non-PA sites under the control of public or private organisations. Detailed biodiversity reports already exist for several such areas, and should be in the libraries of

the BNHS or WWF-India. These include reports by Erach Bharucha on Army establishments around Pune and on the Field Firing Ranges at Deolali; by Prakash Gole on CME, Kirkee; by Lavkumar Khachar on the Army's establishments at Pulgaon and a few in North Sikkim. The BNHS has similar information on many estates of corporate houses such as that of Godrej at Vikhroli mangroves, Tata's (Telco) land near Pune, Indian Oil Corporation's refineries at Mathura and Panipat, and so on. The BNHS has a fair idea of the habitat status at Sriharikota, at several Indian Air Force facilities and in the Indian Navy's training establishment at Chilika. These reports need to be studied to see whether they support the ideas presented here.

2. If the conservation potential of these areas matches what I have claimed above, the search should be broadened. IBCN partners and other interested organisations and individuals should submit the names of sites they consider suitable. A preliminary evaluation of key areas could be carried out. This should include discussion with the management of these areas to identify opportunities, and to listen to their

suggestions. It will be particularly important to the success of such a scheme to design it in a way that maximises the cooperation of those who are in charge of these areas.

3. It is likely that we will need a way to confer some sort of recognition on these areas, perhaps by calling them "Special Sites of Conservation Interest" or "Special Bird Preserves"—basically, a way to generate a little publicity, and reward organisations for their conservation efforts. The management of the selected sites could be given "Conservation Stewardship Awards", for example.
4. We will have to decide on a set of criteria by which to judge an area's conservation value, and to decide whether it is worth pursuing for conservation goals. These criteria could include the size of the area, the intactness of habitat, the commitment of the management to some form of conservation, and the number and species of birds that use the area (including for nesting, roosting, and so on).
5. We also need a way to regularly monitor the sites, and to provide conservation advice and consultancy to the management of the sites. This

will also provide a mechanism to upgrade or downgrade sites accordingly (there could be different levels of conservation value, for example).

6. In carrying out these steps, all interested individuals should be encouraged to contribute to the discussion and implementation of these ideas, and a nationwide consultation is desirable. In this, the lead should be taken by organisations like the BNHS, with discussion and debate being facilitated by publications like *Indian Birds*.

References

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Lt. General Baljit Singh has been interested in nature conservation for the past 50 years and has been a Trustee of WWF-India and a member of the advisory committee at BNHS. He was instrumental in getting officers of the Indian Army actively involved in nature conservation.

Recoveries from the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* (1964) – 9

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In 1963 the *Newsletter* was sent to 415 people though the total subscribers were only 165. The complementary copies must have helped to create a growing interest in birdwatching. The total expenses for the year amounted to Rs 2,888/-, which was underwritten by a business house. The annual subscription remained at Rs 5/-.

In the January 1964 issue there is a fine article by Horace Alexander, the internationally acclaimed Quaker, a great supporter of Mahatma Gandhi as well as a keen ornithologist and a friend of Salim Ali. On his return to Delhi on 25.x.1963 he said, "We had a brief outing with General Harold Williams. Mrs. (Usha) Ganguly had advised us that we might do well to visit the River Jamuna (= Yamuna) above Delhi, near the new bridge. So thither we went. Before we even reached the river, we found a vast concourse of Terns beating up and down over the dirty brook that flows past the

ancient mosque just before Timapur. It was impossible to estimate exact numbers, especially as the population was constantly changing. But as we stood beside the stream, with the birds flying to and fro within a few yards, I concluded that three hundred would not have been an over estimate. The great majority was River Terns, but one Gullbilled Tern came close past, already in winter plumage with almost white head, and at least two much smaller Whiskered Terns, one of them still showing slight flakings of its dark breast plumage. After a time a single Brownheaded Gull appeared in the throng. Perhaps it had that moment arrived from further north."

Brother Navarro SJ of St. Xavier's High School, Bombay, during his visit to Mussoorie, was delighted with the sight of White-capped and Plumbeous Redstarts, and forktails; but it was the Brown Dipper which thrilled him. "It was a most amusing

sight to see the ease with which they used to dip into the stream. Sometimes it looked as if by accident the dipper had slipped from the boulder and fallen into the water. Their entrance into the water was effortless and certainly there was not a single time when the act of submerging could be called a dive. The legs were always first when touching the water and the rest of their bodies followed without a change in this position. The dipper appears at the surface of the water as easily as it submerges and then jumps to the boulder. This operation is performed so neatly that it looks as if the dipper springs from the bottom of the stream to the top of the boulders in a single continuous action as if there were no water at all. This is a different way from that of the divers and other aquatic birds which rise from the surface of the water."

Another note by Br. Navarro was about "Round the Clock Vigil at a Coral Tree". This