By 1965, its fifth year, the Newsletter had become fairly well known in the then small birding community of India, and a few articles from Pakistan relating to birds common to our two continents reassured us—as we are essentially a part of one subcontinent.

Rev. A. Navarro, to whom you have been introduced before, took a group of students from St. Xavier’s High School, Bombay, to Kendal in Ahmedabad district for bird watching, “instead of sitting at home for the Diwali holidays, firing crackers and feasting on sweetsmeats”… (1) Our first impression of the situation was one of dejection and disappointment…the countryside seemed devoid of any interest for bird watching…But first impressions are not always the best…At the end of six days, footing it out for miles, we found to our great surprise and joy a list of hundred varieties of different birds.” I quote one paragraph from this long four page article.

“Along the bullock cart ruts and nullahs, along side which there grew an abundance of green grass with bushes and small trees to break the monotony, we saw seven varieties of warblers. This was a pleasant and refreshing sight. Here we saw the Indian Great Reed Warbler, Blyth’s Reed Warblers, the Orphean Warbler, the Booted Tree Warbler, the Ashy Wren Warbler, and the Indian Wren Warbler. What a splendid company they made on the wing, bristling with the enjoyment of their environment. But of all this glorious company two of them—Blyth’s and the Booted Tree Warbler—we were destined to watch more often on trees, while the others preferred to rest on bushes, reeds and grass. Blyth’s Warbler, which was the most common everywhere, gave us the joy of hearing its rather monotonous ‘chat-chat-chat’ chant. But what was our surprised delight when we suddenly discovered him warbling at noon, trimming his throat to a sweet, melodious and soul-lifting song akin, we thought, to that of the Oriole: only his was a much softer and less high-pitched melody.”

Recoveries from the Newsletter for Birdwatchers (1965) - 10

Zafar Futehally

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in the evening at the foot of Fennel Hill two
more pairs came my way as they flew through
the thickest part of the forest. Once I got
home I examined the specimen more
carefully and saw that it was the Ashy
Minivet.”

D.A. Holmes and J.O. Wright continued
with their series of annotated list of birds
around Sukkur Barrage in Sind. Reading
about the commonest birds from experts is
ever boring, and the authors produced a
useful list of birds seen in different seasons.
For example, this is what they say about the
Koel Eudynamys scolopacea. “Only a few
decades ago this bird was very rare in Sind.
Now, however, it is a common visitor to
Lower Sind from April to November. Its
spread to the Sukkur region has not yet been
so successful. It did not arrive here till May
21st and remained scarce.” Then about the
Hoopoe Upupa epops. “This Hoopoe is a
winter visitor leaving about mid-April. The
first autumn arrival was noted on July 20th.
Although from its distribution the common
bird here is presumably the typical subspecies (U. e. epops). Few birds seen in this
area during the winter have had any visible
white on the crest.” The white on the crest
presumably is a feature of the migrants, if I
recall correctly my conversations with
Yuvraj Shivrajkumar in Kutch during the
ringing season.

S.D. Jayakar and Hari Pulugurtha of the
Genetic and Biometry Laboratory in
Bhubaneshwar, Orissa, (where J.B.S.
Haldane worked), discovered an impressive
roost of White Wagtails Motacilla alba and
three sub-species on the roof of the
secretariat in November 1964. Every day
around 17:00 hrs over 200 birds descended
there and then roosted in the neighbouring
karanj trees Pongamia pinnata.

I wish I had more space for T.J. Roberts’s
lovely article ‘Vultures in the desert’, but I
can only give you a taste of his writing by
quoting a paragraph from his 2,250-word
account. The detailed descriptions he gives
of the several species of vultures would be
useful for vulture experts, and if any of you
are interested I will be glad to send you a
Xerox copy of his article. In the June 1965
issue he wrote:

“I had to cross a stretch of some ten miles
of pure desert and in one of the ‘pats’ my
eye was attracted to the pathetic sight of a
three-quarter grown sheep lying on its side.
From its feeble attempts to rise and join the
flock which we had ridden past half a mile
previously, it was obviously ‘in extremis’. It
was not until about two hours later that I
was returning along more or less the same
track when I realized that in all the empty
waste, the lamb had attracted the ever
watchful vultures. There were some fifteen
birds wheeling high overhead and more
coming into view. I stopped and watched
the circling birds and was intrigued to realize
that apart from two or three White-backed
Vultures Gyps bengalensis, which is usually
the only species seen in the cultivated areas
of Bahawalpur, there were also eight or nine
slightly larger birds with pale khaki bodies
which were Griffon Vultures Gyps fulvus.”

At the end of April 1965 K.K. Neelakantan
was at Thekkady on a brief visit, “and was
dishheartened to see that a number of forest
giants had been felled to provide room for a
long line of buildings”. He went again on
25th July wanting very much to add Rufous
Woodpecker to his life listing. He failed to
do that but there was some consolation in
seeing three White-necked Storks on the
traditional nesting tree near the boat jetty.
He sent a list of 53 birds seen during his
visit and was surprised that no Grey Wagtail
or Grey-headed Mynah was seen during this
visit.

D.A. Holmes wrote a major article on the
water birds in Sind in the August issue after
he migrated to Pakistan. “My title” he said,
“may seem anomalous to some but the Sind
Desert is a widely held misconception.
Despite its indubitably hot desert climate,
most of this region is not desert. The annual
inundation of the Indus now contained a
regulated…an abundance of jheels and
water logging menaces the agriculture of the
region. The result is a wealth of water
birds which provided my most exciting bird
watching.

In autumn the paddy fields ring with the
lovely calls of green and wood sandpipers,
the forerunners of the waders that abound
in the area in winter. From November to
February the sound of guns (far too many of
them) keep the wings of thousands of
duck whistling over every jheel and crakes
and bitterns can be flushed from any
reedbed.” One of Holmes’ weaknesses was
fast driving and tragically he died while
speeding around a bend in Geneva. It was
the end of a very fine contributor to the
Newsletter.

In the December issue K.S. Lavkumar
wrote at some length about the birds around
Rajkot: “October” he said, “is a very
interesting month and our farm complex was
no exception, and all the passage migrants
one might hope to see in this part of the
country are here. Spotted Flycatchers are
frequent, but their inconspicuous
colourings make them ‘rare’. Pale Brown
Shrikes are commoner than at other times of
the winter, while for a period, Kashmir
Rollers are more numerous than the Indian
Roller which is a beautiful and typical bird
of cultivation. It is always good to see two
species closely related side by side as then
the comparisons are easy, and many of our
novice members had a fine opportunity of
gaining to know the two Rollers. The same
is true of the cock Pied Bush Chats and the
Pied Wheatears, both of which are frequent
and were also able to compare the hens of
the Pied Bush Chat with the mate of the
Collared Bush Chat, though the cock himself
has yet evaded us. Common House
Sparrows hang around in gossiping flocks
around the farm houses and with them
invariably are a couple of yellow-throated
sparrows, the yellow throat never
conspicuous at this time of the year, but
when side by side the two sparrows are
easily told apart.

The year ended with the Editor’s report
on a meeting in Delhi between representatives of IUCN and WWF with members of the IBWL and others. The
meeting was significant for the progress of
the conservation movement in India for it
paved the way for the IUCN General
Assembly meeting in New Delhi in
November 1969, which resulted in the
famous Project Tiger.