

flown down and would first form a circle of vociferous spectators and then they too would, one by one, join the fray. The whole thing would end as abruptly as it had started and the flock would disperse or move off together as though nothing unusual had happened. This sort of thing seems to be more frequent during the summer months.

"Having strayed from the topic of quarrels between birds of different species, let me conclude with the accounts of quarrels between birds and other animals, and birds and insects. The best example of the former is the quarrel between a squirrel and a shikra which I witnessed some 22

years ago. One would have thought that no self-respecting shikra would let a squeaking palm squirrel disturb its rest, but I found the shikra deserting its perch on being asked 'to get a move on' by the squirrel. The shikra sat on a wall up the side of which the squirrel ran. The squirrel's tactics consisted in making sudden rushes from one side of the wall towards the shikra. I do not remember now whether the squirrel uttered its usual ear-splitting alarm calls, but it had no difficulty in persuading the shikra to seek some other perch.

"On many evenings some months ago I used to enjoy the sight of a dispute between

a Loten's Sunbird and a dragonfly for the bare twig at the top of a tamarind tree. The twig was probably used more regularly by the dragonfly. Whenever the sunbird occupied this perch, the dragonfly would come and, by merely flying in a determined fashion towards the bird, force it to fly off. But the sunbird would return at once and take possession only to be driven off again by the insect. As the sunbird seldom spent much time on this perch the technical victory may be said to have gone to the dragonfly. "Watching such incidents and trying to find the reasons for them can be an absorbing pastime."

## Correspondence

### Comments

"We most certainly have come far since the get together in Zafarbai's delightful garden in Andheri, Mumbai (then Bombay) to agree on bringing out a *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. Earlier in the morning, at breakfast, Zafar and I were nonplussed at the call of a bird in the tree branches shading the house. It was the bemused look on the face of Zafar's teenage son that made me realize we were making fools of ourselves. The "strange" bird was a Five-striped Palm Squirrel *Funambulus pennanti*! While I could be excused for my ignorance since I was till then familiar with the Three-striped Palm Squirrel *F. palmarum*, but that Zafar who probably heard the "chirrup" every day of his Bombay life should be confused would seem inexcusable by any standards. Much, much later, after getting to know legions of birdwatchers, I am now not surprised that the then Honorary Secretary of BNHS and today's Editor Emeritus of *Indian Birds* could not tell a common rodent from a bird! Most of the birding fraternity does bird watching, literally. Sound just does not play any significant part in their appreciation of birds! Evaluating our progress since that delightful, very properly "old fashioned" breakfast, I can caution my large numbers of young birdwatcher friends that they do not need to be too concerned about being recognized as great birdwatchers or ornithologists. If they regularly enjoy their birds and the world they live in long enough, they will, as a matter of course become "recognized". They should however also enjoy writing.

"While I was a precocious birdwatcher having had the good fortune to have been a boy in times when birds were common and everywhere and was growing up in a privileged environment dominated by the likes of Dharmakumarsinhji, Salim Ali, Horace Alexander, General Williams—my greatest regret has been that I got intimate with the incomparable Humayun Abdulali rather late in life, Zafarbai just could not escape getting some avian "flu" infection from his already acclaimed relatives. I think he and I both have gained immensely in our desire to see more and more people infected. The *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* will remain a tremendous tribute to my friend and now this *Indian Birds*! Look at your Trustee Board! Taej and Santharam, both of whom I knew as boys! Good friends like "Subu" and Rishad! Suhel I do not know of. I also like the way you do not prefix names with "Dr". "Dr" Taej Mundkur would make me imagine he has started carrying a stethoscope round his neck instead of a pair of binoculars!

"The talk of prefixes and suffixes reminds me of how long it took me to get rid of the "KS" to my name. It was quite irritating at first, though amusing in later years, to have myself addressed "Mr. K.S. Lavkumar". There was a period when I almost agreed to try for a Ph.D.—my very good friend, Professor R.M. Naik Ph.D., was adamant that I acquire the suffix and he took me to the Vice Chancellor of the Saurashtra University to have me registered for Ph.D. on the Vice Chancellor's quota. The whole thing came to an end when the VC instead

suggested I regularly lecture the M.Sc. students! Thinking back, would there have been a period with myself being labeled Dr. K.S. Lavkumar? Taej will remember the day I literally set him afloat in the Gulf of Kachchh to produce a report that still keeps popping up in learned seminars on the Gulf of Kachchh to think of what Taej wrote as an enthusiastic student being included in the environmentalists' arsenal against the Reliance refinery coming up at Jamnagar, is quite mind boggling—the pen is more powerful than the sword and all that?

"Well this garrulous piece has become quite long. Let me conclude on a more serious note. Anand Prasad's description is indeed that of a female Gold-naped Finch *Pyrrhoplectes epauletta*. I have seen a flock years ago in Ladakh, beside the track beyond Sissoo. This was long, long before motor vehicles had arrived at Rahla on the Kullu side of the Rohtang Pass. The males are very distinct. The birds I observed were gleaned seeds among sparse grass absolutely in the open and were extremely confiding. Just a word of caution though, the Plum-headed Parakeets *Psittacula cyanocephala* could have been the Slaty-headed Parakeet *P. himalayana*.

"In the "Correspondence" section, Nirmala Chathoth refers to me and the grandala she saw. Last Sunday—16<sup>th</sup> April—I happened to visit Surat and there, at a nearby lake, this time, I had to disappoint her and a large group of keen birdwatchers by identifying a flock of duck far out on the water as being Lesser Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna javanica*

and not Large Whistling-Duck *D. bicolor*. I was almost tempted to make them all feel happy by adding a new bird to the Gujarat list! I did precisely comment how indeed we all would have had a new record had I not taken a harder look to decide the dark markings on the neck were shadows and not plumage colour—the next edition of ‘Grimmett et al.’ would have shown Surat as in the range of the Large Whistling-Duck!”

**Lavkumar Khacher**

14, Jayant Society, Rajkot 360004,  
Gujarat, India.  
20.iv.2006

### More birding news from Puttur

“This season—December to March—has been very good for me as I have had the good fortune to see species that I have never seen before near my house. It is all a matter of being at the right place at the right time and for all I know, these birds

might be regularly visiting and I have been totally unaware of it.

“One Sunday in December, I saw a pair of Heart-spotted Woodpeckers *Hemicircus canente* for the first time near my house. This is my only sighting of them here...I was so thrilled to see them high up in the *Carea arborea* tree. Then, one Sunday in January, I reached my favourite bird watching spot—a log in front of the *Carea arborea* and *Terminalia paniculata* trees—rather late in the morning. It was nearly eight and I did not have any hope of seeing anything. Just then, a grey blur flew over my head from behind and disappeared into the shrubbery on my left. I just got a glimpse of something grey. Then I began to hear the most weird laughing cackles, not like the flameback woodpecker but rather like a child mocking another. The prancing movements of a female Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher *Hypothymis azurea* for a while distracted me. It would puff out its chest and fan its tail comically as it searched in the foliage for insects. What a strange looking bird it is—like a dull coloured thing which has dipped its head in blue dye! Then suddenly I

saw a large grey bird just in front of me some distance away and it just took my breath away! It was a Malabar Grey Hornbill *Ocyrceros griseus*! Though I have seen this bird before in Nagarhole, this is the first time I saw it in Puttur. The weird laughing sounds were made by this bird.

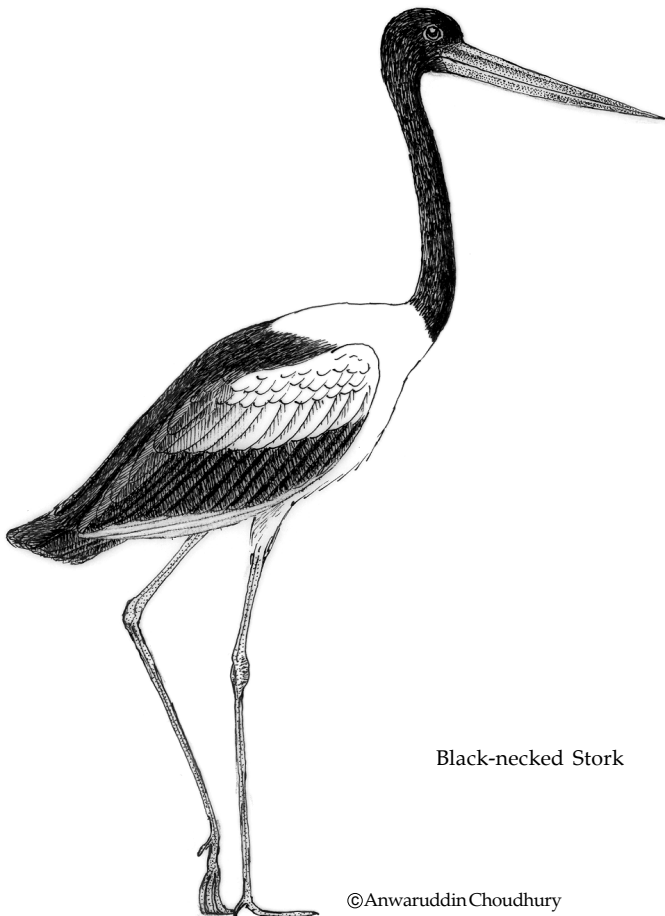
“Then in February, I watched a small active bird outside my bedroom window and identified it as the Franklin’s Prinia *Prinia hodgsonii*. There are many birds here, which I have a lot of difficulty in identifying as they do not keep still at all. I was pleased to be able to identify this one. It’s quite common here but I was never able to pay much attention to it due to its habit of not sitting still for even a single nanosecond. While I was busy watching the prinia, I was aware of a largish bird in the foreground. Watching it from the tail of my eye, I thought it was a drongo and so paid no attention to it. When I finally looked at it properly, I saw that it was a different shape—more like an oriole or myna and I trained my binoculars on it. You could have knocked me down with a feather when I realized what it was—an Asian Fairy-Bluebird *Irena puella*! The red eyes and the blue sheen on the head and wings were unmistakable. When I was on a forest trek with my family last year in Periyar Tiger Reserve, Kerala, we had heard this bird but it had remained hidden in the foliage and we could not see it and now here it was, right in front of me, sitting quietly, without uttering a sound! It found me, as they say. I have noticed Yellow-browed Bulbuls *Iole indica* also doing this—they sing from a hidden place and when they are in view, they remain silent. It seems to be a survival tactic.

“Next Sunday, I watched a pair of Pied Flycatcher-Shrikes *Hemipus picatus* for the first time. I had to search in my field guide to identify it, as I had never seen these birds before.

“So I have had a lot of fun seeing ‘new’ birds this season...”

**Pragati Nayak**

Aashirwad, Sampe, P.O. Aryapu, DK  
574210



Black-necked Stork

© Anwaruddin Choudhury