

the spread of the disease, it is a high priority to improve our understanding of the precise migratory patterns and phenology of different species, enhance viral surveillance of wild birds in all countries and increase our knowledge on the behaviour of this virus in different wild birds. Such work will require considerable long term resource allocations to support strategic planning and coordination at the flyway and national level, building of capacity at the national level to undertake and report on progress in a timely manner. This

information will provide the basis for a much needed early warning system.

Further details can be obtained at: www.cms.int/avianflu and www.iisd.ca/ymb/ais/ymbvol123num1e.html.

[This note is a summary of a presentation made by the author at the "Scientific Seminar on Avian Influenza, the Environment and Migratory Birds" UNEP HQ, Gigiri, Nairobi, Kenya, 10–11 April 2006, organised by UNEP, CMS and AEWA.]

Recoveries from the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* (1966)—13

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In the previous issue of *Indian Birds* I confined myself to giving examples of the writing of K.K. Neelakantan. In this I remind readers of R.A. Stewart Melliush.

The Indian branch of Oxford University Press (OUP) has had some remarkable personalities as editors who were fine naturalists as well. R.E. Hawkins, of course, became a legend. Apart from being a pillar of the publishing world he was also a pillar of the Bombay Natural History Society. After retiring from OUP he edited the splendid *Encyclopedia of Indian Natural History*, which became a standard reference work for Indian naturalists. The meticulous Ravi Dayal, who died recently, without being an "active" naturalist, had a taste for natural history.

Another remarkable person who joined OUP in 1966 was Stewart Melliush. By any yardstick he was extraordinary—a competent pianist, a good artist, a calligrapher and an ornithologist who sketched birds on the wing in order to identify them later. He was unapologetic about being eccentric. He did not use clocks or watches; he preferred the hour-glass. He never filled-up at a Burmah Shell petrol pump because he didn't like the colours on the signboards. He was a hopeless correspondent, not because he was an uncaring friend, but because he couldn't send a letter that was not perfect by his standards of calligraphy. In the middle of Gir Sanctuary he seemed to be more interested in studying the ancient little train than looking at lions. Almost from the day he landed in India, Stewart became a close friend, and a very strong supporter of the *News. Birdwatchers*. He designed its front cover, and the masthead, which was never changed. As you will see from the following, he wrote in a knowledgeable, easy, light hearted style which was thoroughly enjoyable.

Bird books [Melliush, R.A.S. *News. Birdwatchers* 6 (12): 1–5] Nothing adds so greatly to the pleasures of field ornithology, and makes them meaningful, as the handling, study and regular use of satisfactory literature. Many bird books are intrinsically pleasant and beautifully illustrated; it is little wonder that far more people buy bird books for armchair contemplation than ever dream of doing anything more about birds or watching them than chucking a few crumbs at

sparrows every day. Many will gloat over reproductions of the paintings of Audubon or Gould, G.E. Lodge or David Reid-Henry, who will never be found counting starlings going to roost, or optimistically climbing trees to delve into old abandoned nests full of droppings and slush. The joys of ornithological literature can be savoured independently of the more rigorous study of the living bird.

For the serious birdwatcher, however, his bird books are more coffee table or fireside diversions. They are valuable tools or accessories, often hard to be without. Indeed, they play so big a part in fixing the direction his studies take and the intensity with which he pursues them that their selection should be as deliberate and systematic as that of other far more costly pieces of equipment, like field-glasses and cameras. What books are useful for the birdwatcher in India, and in what degree? This article is supposed to offer a partial answer. It is a review of some of the reference literature available and forthcoming which is relevant to birds in this country. It is not intended to be comprehensive because I have confined myself strictly to books systematically describing birds found in the sub-region, and have said nothing about more discursive literary works such as Lowther's *A "bird photographer in India"* and Macdonald's *Birds in my Indian garden*, however excellent they may be. I have also not discussed books on birdwatching in general and of inter-regional application, or those which deal with birds of other regions and yet are useful to Indian observers because species migrate or overlap from one region to another (e.g. Witherby's *Handbook of British birds*). There are other omissions due to my own unfamiliarity with the books in question. To the veteran birdwatcher this may well be of no interest whatsoever; but there are many readers of the *Newsletter* whose acquaintance with ornithology is not of long standing and who would be stimulated to far greater activity and interest if they possessed good books to guide them, and knew their way around those which are only to be seen now in libraries or other people's homes.

The book to buy first, unless one lives in an area covered by a provincial survey, is unquestionably Salim Ali's *"The book of Indian birds"*. Wisely, this does not include everything.

There are nearly 2,100 species and sub-species of birds on the subcontinental list, and to illustrate all these in a handy inexpensive volume of portable size and to include adequate text under each entry is impracticable. Salim Ali restricts himself to describing 256 of the commoner birds to be found in every variety of habitat, and all the birds described are illustrated—not all, it must be said, with unqualified success—in colour. There are also numerous photographs. The author has chosen his representative selection of species shrewdly, and his descriptions are models of intelligent compression. It is remarkable how much he can say about a bird in a few short sentences. Salim Ali's writing on birds is always a pleasure to read; he gets the very most out of the English language, his style being lively and colourful and yet at the same time precise. He never forgets how varied his readers will be in their knowledge of his subject, and avoids pretentious displays of erudition and the horrors of writing down to the novice. His scholarship is impeccable. In the introduction and the 30-odd pages at the back devoted to nesting, flight, migration, the usefulness of birds, and birdwatching, he is at his very best...

Mention of the *Journal* [of the Bombay Natural History Society] reminds me that the back numbers of this publication, which has appeared without a break since 1886 and is now in the 63rd volume, are the godown in which is embedded by far the greatest store of information about Indian birds, as well as about other forms of animals and plants. In their pages will be found accounts of numerous provincial surveys of bird life, such as 'The birds of Bombay and Salsette' by Salim Ali, Humayun Abdulali, and Hugh Whistler (1939–40), and Whistler and Kinnear's report on their survey of the Eastern Ghats (1930, 1933–7), which is still the only satisfactory published study of the birds of the eastern half of peninsular India and should be examined by all birdwatchers in Andhra and Madras, and perhaps the states which adjoin them too. Then there are numberless letters and notes from correspondents which go to make the *Journal* a kind of Aladdin's cave of treasure. Its entrance is usually to be found buried deep beneath the matted thickets and scrub-and-bush jungle of public libraries. It is well worth hacking a way through the undergrowth now and then and spending an hour or two in sweating communion with its riches. It is also advisable to spare one's posterity such effort and by joining the Society obtain new issues of the *Journal* for oneself every four months. A subscription costs Rs.30/-. It is true that some issues barely recognize the existence of birds at all, being morbidly devoted to such irrelevancies as the pre-coital posturings of snails, or the number of bristles on the big toe of a new kind of louse; but one must learn to take the rough with the smooth, and frequently very useful ornithological notes appear.

Lastly, a brief word about buying books. Theoretically, any bookseller worthy of his calling ought to be able and willing to supply any book which is still in print (i.e. of which the publisher holds unsold stock or which he is reprinting or proposes to reprint). If the bookseller does not have a copy in his own stock, he ought to be prepared to order it, from abroad if necessary & if the import trade control procedure permits, for any *bona fide* customer. Unhappily not every bookseller will take the trouble to order unstocked books—it is often far

easier for him to shake his head and say 'not available', whether he had heard of the title or not—and there are sometimes perfectly respectable reasons why the best of book-sellers cannot satisfy their customers. If frustrated the customer should not give up hope but should write to the publishers and explain his difficulty. Whatever authors may say to the contrary, somewhere in the lower regions of their systems, often modestly hidden from view, publishers usually have a residual urge to barter their wares for gold.

Books which are out of print are much more difficult to come by, but a secondhand bookseller, of which there are a number of good ones in India, can often work miracles.

The Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* Linnaeus, breeding in southern Madras [Melluish, S. *Newsl. Birdwatchers* 6 (2): 1–2]

So little appears to be known of the breeding habits of some of the commoner but less conspicuous birds resident in India that the following record may be of interest.

Two races of the Kentish Plover, *Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus* and *C. a. seebohmi*, are known to be resident in the Indian area. The former's range is defined by Ripley thus, 'Breeds in West Pakistan in Sind, and India in Kutch and Saurashtra (subspecies?), south in winter throughout the Peninsula, Nepal in the terai, and Ceylon' while *seebohmi* is regarded as a Ceylonese race, though Salim Ali (*The birds Of Travancore & Cochin*, 1953) says 'it may possibly be found to breed in Travancore also'. Except for this last conjectural statement, I can find no published mention of the breeding of either race in southern India.

Kentish Plovers are common on the coast of Madras at most times of year, but the first hint I received that they might breed was after Zafar Futehally and I had watched a small plover, which I had carelessly dismissed as a Lesser Sand Plover, performing wing—and tail—drooping and other decoying antics in some plough at Velacheri, a few miles south of Madras city, on 8 February 1964. Mr. Futehally later referred to Henry's *Guide to the birds of Ceylon*, where, at page 291, there is an admirable description of the behaviour we had witnessed. We concluded that the bird seen was a Kentish Plover, but as birds in breeding condition will perform ritual acts of this kind whether they are actually breeding or not, we could not assume it was nesting.

In early May 1964, at Madras in Chingleput district, I found a plover fledgling, which could not fly and which I was thus able to pursue and photograph at short range. A very worried adult Kentish Plover was present to witness this performance, and to confirm the fledgling's identity. Later the same day close by I saw two more adult Kentish Plovers frantically trying to decoy me away from what I could only suppose were young similar to the one I had just seen, or nests. Their tactics were successful.

I have now found a Kentish Plover's nest. I was at Kodikkarai (better known as Point Calimere) in Tanjore district on 14 January 1966, walking along the shore about a mile west of the railway station, when an adult Kentish Plover in very smart livery attracted my attention by running along the sand in front of me in a crouching posture with its wings drooping and its tail fanned out and pressed downwards. Every now and then it stopped and changed its directions,

and occasionally assumed a more upright stance, folding its wings in the normal manner. After a long and tiring day plodding through the mud, and with sundown approaching, I did not feel in the least like hunting for eggs or a fledgling which might after all be purely imaginary. I had just resolved to walk on when I looked down and saw three eggs in the sand at my feet.

These were a matt khaki, blotched all over with sepia, the blotches a trifle denser at the broader ends. In shape they resembled chicken's eggs, the one I measured was approximately 32 by 22 cm in size. They lay with their narrow ends inwards and downwards in a hollow in the sand about four inches in diameter, lined and surrounded by an untidy array of bits of broken shell. I saw no sign of an attempt to cover the eggs with fragments of shell and mud, such as Henry

describes. A few tufts of grass grew round about the depression, but offered no protection to the nest in any way. The nest was 33 feet from the high-water line.

Throughout my examination of this nest the adult bird was silent, and I did not see it again; nor, it will be realized, did I see it approach or sit on the nest, but the chances of the eggs belonging to a different bird or species are, I believe, very remote. The eggs were warmer to the touch than pieces of mollusc shell lying near them and a sitting bird had clearly left them only a moment before I found them.

Calimere is a mere thirty miles from the end of the Jaffna peninsula, and it is possible that the birds there are *seebohmi*. What seems odd is the early date. Henry wrote, 'The breeding season lasts from about March till August, but June and July appear to be the favourite months'.

Correspondence

A correction

In 'Correspondence' [*Indian Birds* 2 (3): 78] there is a location error; in the fourth paragraph 'Ladakh' should be replaced by 'Lahoul' so that the sentence reads, "I have seen a flock years ago in Lahoul, besides the track beyond Sissoo."

"Do be more selective of drawings you use—the find drawing of the Black-necked Stork is quite out of place since the text around it is of flycatchers, woodpeckers and other woodland birds. *Fillings* for the sake of obliterating blanks are welcome but need to fit in to a reader's understanding of what he is looking at."

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10.vii.2006

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* in Konkan, Maharashtra

On the morning of 10.x.2005 we spotted and photographed (enclosed) one immature Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* in a small wetland in Chiplun city (17°31'N 73°31'E), Ratnagiri district

(Maharashtra, India). This might be a first record of the species from the Konkan region. Other birds at the wetland were Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala*, Asian Openbill-Stork *Anastomus oscitans*, White-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus*, Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* and Gadwall *Anas strepera*.

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European Roller *Coracias garrulus* in Nagpur, Maharashtra

My friends (Pranav Chahande and Ketan Khamgaonkar) and I would like to report the sighting of a European Roller *Coracias garrulus* on 5.vi.2005 at Ambazari lake in the city of Nagpur (Maharashtra, India). The bird is still present on 10.vi.2005 and has been photographed by Pranav (photo enclosed).

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Editorial

The evolution of a periodical publication results from the interaction between its editors and readers. Both adjust to each other's needs and styles. From its inception, all material published in *Indian Birds* has been peer-reviewed to ensure its relevance and accuracy. We strongly believe that as a forum that caters to the publishing needs of amateur and professional South Asian ornithologists, *Indian Birds* should provide well researched, dependable data and information.

We receive various types of contributions from our readers. Some are scientific in their style, others popular. Some are checklists of birds seen in an area, some observations of a single species while a few are casual observations at a point in time. Correspondence from members are always welcome and a delight to publish for they are the consequence of thoughtful perusal and the need of the reader to correspond with an author or other readers. We believe that more than

being a scientific ornithological publication we would like to be rigorous about our ornithology.

In this issue, we bring you the first scientific description of a new species for the Indian avifauna and for science. The discovery of the spectacular Bugun Liocichla, in Arunachal Pradesh (India) is cause for joyous celebration for at least two reasons. One, in an age of accelerated extinctions primarily due to habitat destruction, there still exist regions of the earth where 'be dragons'. Two, the strong and immense presence and contribution of amateurs to ornithology—for Ramana Athreya is an astronomer by profession!

Anwaruddin Choudhury, another untiring cataloguer of north-east India's fauna, writes about the birds of Dibru-Saikhowa National Park and Biosphere Reserve and Taej Mundkur updates readers on the present situation of the avian virus in wild birds.