

Of birds and places

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2–10.x.2003: Rathwadhab, Corbett Tiger Reserve (29°39'49"N 78°51'26"E, 685 m a.s.l.)

Rathwadhab, though a part of Corbett Tiger Reserve is not as well known as Dhikala, Bijrani or Jhirna—few people come here. The place is on the Kotdwar–Maidaban bus route and remains open all round the year. The facilities at the century-old forest rest house (FRH) are pretty basic. The FRH has extensive grounds and overlooks agricultural fields, and the Mandal River beyond them. A couple of *Prunus cerasoides* trees in front of the verandah and a *Ficus religiosa* at the back of the building attract the birds. Human habitation, largely, is on the northern side of the river, which receives the sun and is outside the reserve forest. The slope facing north, which is within the reserve, is covered predominantly with sal *Shorea robusta* and among its associates, *Mallotus philippensis* is very common. We walked up to Mognukhal, which was about half-way to Kanda FRH (1,019 m); sal was present all along the route and as far as we could see. The other tree that you often notice in the area is mohul *Pyrus pashia*. In some places there are oak *Quercus leucotrichophora* (we presume).

This was our third visit to the place. Earlier we were there on 28–30.ix.1998 and 18–26.x.1999. We mention this because in 1998 we saw Rosy Minivet *Pericrocotus roseus* quite often but none in 1999 and a large number of them in 2003. In fact, in 2003 they outnumbered the other minivets, such as, Scarlet *P. flammeus* and Long-tailed Minivet *P. ethologus*, which were rare. In 1999, we saw a large number of Long-tailed Minivets besides the Scarlet Minivet.

In their *Compact handbook*, Ali & Ripley say of the Rosy Minivet, “gregarious after the breeding season”, which is principally in May and June. We wonder why we saw the bird in 1998 and 2003 and not between 18–26.x.1999. The bird is a partial migrant. However, what are the factors that start them to their winter quarters.

Lantana has colonized much of the open spaces that perhaps once upon a time were under forest cover. The plant may have a detrimental effect on the land but it attracts a host of butterflies to its nectar and such birds as Ashy Bulbul *Hemixos flavala*, among others, that feed on its fruit. Lantana grows in the sunny areas. But in the shade *Eupatorium adenophorum* (*E. glandulosum*), a native of Mexico, has established itself well. The borders of the metalled road are full of *Ageratum conyzoides*. Our own *Clerodendrum viscosum* grows in large patches where it has found a foothold—but has not dislodged the exotic weeds. The Mandal River once had plenty of fish. However, indiscriminate fishing and use of explosives have diminished their populations.

We like the place because you can walk around as you please along the motor road with the jungle on both sides of you. Vehicular traffic is minimal. Therefore, you can walk and

watch birds in peace. Sometimes you may come across mammals, such as, yellow-throated marten, wild boar and spotted deer. People say they often see leopard *Panthera pardus*, which we did not. The people we met there made our stay pleasant because they were kind to us and did not hesitate to extend a helping hand when we needed it. Besides, the place is free of the boisterous lot that descends in hordes to Dhikala. It is relatively easier to obtain a reply, and a permit, from the Kotdwar office of Corbett Tiger Reserve, than from Ramnagar. The latter treats you with cavalier disdain and never replies your letter (even when a self-addressed stamped envelope is provided) or your fax and the woman who picks up the telephone has an exasperating habit of disconnecting the line the moment you ask “Corbett National Park?” (It is possible that my Corbett is different from her “Carbet”!)

11–15.x.2003: Kanwashram, via Kalol Ghati from Kotdwar (29°47'18"N 78°27'36"E, 516 m a.s.l.)

The tourist lodge, established in 1957, is in a derelict state. However, much of the accommodation is inhabitable except a cottage, a double-room and two dormitories comprising ten beds. The manager gave us the double-room and very kindly provided us with meals. The lodge (without any neighbours) is about one and a half kilometres away from human habitations (Kanwashram proper), which makes all the difference. As the sun sets, you hear the sawing of leopard, which seems so close to you even when the animal is some distance away. One night around 02:00 hrs a lone tusker *Elephas maximus* climbed up the bridleway and gained the campus of the forest department adjacent to the lodge. Fortunately, he only damaged a cowshed and did not harm anybody, possibly because of the noise that people made to drive him away. There were so many langur *Semnopithecus entellus* that have taken over much of the abandoned lodges, and the canteen, in the campus. We thought anyone wanting to study them would find the place ideally suitable. People told us that during summer you might see ghoral *Nemorhaedus goral* on the hill slope opposite the lodge. The bird that interested us most was the Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*, foraging along the banks of Malini River. We saw it everyday and watched it as long as we could—truly a pretty bird.

16–19.x.2003: Saneh Forest Rest House, Lansdowne Forest Division (29°41'24"N 78°31'46"E, 307 m a.s.l.)

We did not plan, but had thought of visiting Saneh in Katri range. So from Kanwashram we telephoned the office of the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), Lansdowne Forest Division, at Kotdwar, who very kindly permitted us to occupy one room of the Saneh FRH. We are ever so grateful to him because

when we mentioned that collecting the permit from his office at Kotdwar would entail us a long detour he asked us to move to Saneh and that he would dispatch the permit to the FRH office of Saneh, which he did. We wonder how many DFOs would accommodate birdwatchers as he did.

This also is a very old FRH close to rivers Kho and Katri. Perhaps when it was built, nearly one hundred years ago, the place did not have many human habitations. At present, there are people living around the FRH—engaged primarily in agriculture—which has taken away its character of a jungle. Even with so many people around, wild elephants come to feed on the crop. Many came while we were there and people had a trying time driving them away. However, when you move away from the village area, there are places where you may see some birds, but ensure you do not bump into a wild pachyderm. The FRH has a number of lofty barna trees the likes of which we had not seen. *Sida acuta* covered the road verge; we have nowhere seen this plant covering so much of an area in such profusion.

Kaluchaur is a 9 km trek that entails fording a river at two or three places. There is a fair-weather road to Kaluchaur, but is not done up for traffic as a matter of routine (between November and June). However, if you are game for the trek, it

may be worthwhile a visit to the place which also has an FRH. When we were there Dr A. J. T. Jonhsingh of WII, Dehradun, had come with his pupils and they went there one morning and came back the same evening.

20–25.x.2003: Kishenpur Sanctuary, Dudwa National Park, Mailani-Kheri (28°17'13"N 80°21'12"E 165 m a.s.l.)

The Range Forest Officer, who is a friend, and a host par excellence, took us around to such places as Jhadital and Marha (we may have got the spelling wrong). Jadhital is a large water body set in a well-wooded area that attracts a variety of water birds. Here we saw *c.20* Ferruginous Pochard *Aythya nyroca*, and a few breeding pairs of Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*, among other birds. The *tal* is worth a visit, if you are somewhere in the area. Marha has what we would call very wild habitat though there is a temple within the FRH grounds. You, however, require a thick skin to go round the place because it is infested with mosquitoes. The people attached to the temple continually burn something or the other to keep the tormentors at bay. The place has dense bamboo brakes and a variety of broad-leaved trees. We found the habitat very interesting. The warden also extended his help, which added to pleasure of seeing Marha.

Table 1. Checklist of birds seen

Key: 1=Rathuadhab; 2=Kanwashram; 3=Saneh; 4=Kishenpur Sanctuary.

Species*	1	2	3	4	Species*	1	2	3	4
Little Grebe <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>				+	White-breasted Waterhen <i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>				+
Little Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>				+	Common Moorhen <i>Gallinula chloropus</i>				+
Indian Shag <i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>				+	Common Coot <i>Fulica atra</i>				+
Darter <i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>				+	Pheasant-tailed Jacana <i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>				+
Little Egret <i>Egretta garzetta</i>			+	+	Bronzed-winged Jacana <i>Metopidius indicus</i>				+
Grey Heron <i>Ardea cinerea</i>				+	Little Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius dubius</i>			+	
Purple Heron <i>Ardea purpurea</i>				+	River Lapwing <i>Vanellus duvaucelii</i>			+	
Large Egret <i>Casmerodius albus</i>				+	Red-wattled Lapwing <i>Vanellus indicus</i>	+	+	+	+
Cattle Egret <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>				+	Common Greenshank <i>Tringa nebularia</i>		+	+	+
Indian Pond Heron <i>Ardeola grayii</i>		+	+	+	Green Sandpiper <i>Tringa ochropus</i>		+		
Black Bittern <i>Dupetor flavicollis</i>				+	Wood Sandpiper <i>Tringa glareola</i>			+	
Asian Openbill-Stork <i>Anastomus oscitans</i>				+	Common Sandpiper <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			+	
Lesser Adjutant-Stork <i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>				+	Blue Rock Pigeon <i>Columba livia</i>	+			
Black Ibis <i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>				+	Spotted Dove <i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	+	+	+	+
Lesser Whistling-Duck <i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>				+	Eurasian Collared Dove <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	+	+	+	+
Cotton Teal <i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>				+	Yellow-legged Green-Pigeon <i>Treron phoenicoptera</i>				+
Gadwall <i>Anas strepera</i>				+	Green Imperial-Pigeon <i>Ducula aenea</i>				+
Northern Shoveller <i>Anas clypeata</i>				+	Rose-ringed Parakeet <i>Psittacula krameri</i>		+	+	+
Common Pochard <i>Aythya ferina</i>				+	Slaty-headed Parakeet <i>Psittacula himalayana</i>	+	+		
Ferruginous Pochard <i>Aythya nyroca</i>				+	Plum-headed Parakeet <i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>			+	+
Oriental Honey-Buzzard <i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>	+		+		Brainfever Bird <i>Hierococcyx varius</i>	+			+
Black-shouldered Kite <i>Elanus caeruleus</i>				+	Asian Koel <i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>		+		
Black Kite <i>Milvus migrans</i>	+		+		Greater Coucal <i>Centropus sinensis</i>			+	+
Egyptian Vulture <i>Neophron percnopterus</i>			+		Asian Barred Owllet <i>Glaucidium cuculoides</i>	+		+	+
Red-headed Vulture <i>Sarcogyps calvus</i>		+			Jungle Owllet <i>Glaucidium radiatum</i>		+		+
Crested Serpent-Eagle <i>Spilornis cheela</i>	+			+	Spotted Owllet <i>Athene brama</i>			+	+
Shikra <i>Accipiter badius</i>	+	+	+	+	House Swift <i>Apus affinis</i>	+			
Rufous-bellied eagle <i>Hieraaetus kienerii</i>		+			Small Blue Kingfisher <i>Alcedo atthis</i>	+	+	+	+
Changeable Hawk-Eagle <i>Spizaetus cirrhatu</i>	+				Stork-billed Kingfisher <i>Halcyon capensis</i>			+	+
Grey Francolin <i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>		+		+	White-breasted Kingfisher <i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	+	+	+	+
Red Jungle Fowl <i>Gallus gallus</i>	+	+	+	+	Greater Pied Kingfisher <i>Megaceryle lugubris</i>	+	+		
Kaleej Pheasant <i>Lophura leucomelanos</i>	+				Lesser Pied Kingfisher <i>Ceryle rudis</i>			+	
Indian Peafowl <i>Pavo cristatus</i>	+	+	+	+	Blue-bearded Bee-eater <i>Nyctornis athertoni</i>			+	

Species*	1	2	3	4	Species*	1	2	3	4
Small Bee-eater <i>Merops orientalis</i>	+	+		+	Rufous-bellied Babbler <i>Dumetia hyperythra</i>				+
Chestnut-headed Bee-eater <i>Merops leschenaulti</i>	+	+			Jungle Babbler <i>Turdoides striatus</i>	+	+	+	+
Indian Roller <i>Coracias benghalensis</i>			+	+	Red-billed Leiothrix <i>Leiothrix lutea</i>	+			
Oriental Broad-bill Roller <i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>	+				Blue-winged Minla <i>Minla cyanouroptera</i>	+			
Common Hoopoe <i>Upupa epops</i>	+			+	Quaker Tit-Babbler <i>Alcippe poioicephala</i>	+			
Indian Grey Hornbill <i>Ocyeros birostris</i>			+	+	White-bellied Yuhina <i>Yuhina xantholeuca</i>	+			
Oriental Pied Hornbill <i>Anthraceroceros albirostris</i>			+		Brown Prinia <i>Prinia crinigera</i>		+		
Lineated Barbet <i>Megalaima lineata</i>	+	+		+	Franklin's Prinia <i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>	+	+	+	+
Blue-throated Barbet <i>Megalaima asiatica</i>	+	+			Yellow-bellied Prinia <i>Prinia flaviventris</i>		+		
Coppersmith Barbet <i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>	+	+		+	Plain Prinia <i>Prinia inornata</i>	+	+		
Speckled Piculet <i>Picumnus innominatus</i>	+				Blyth's Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	+	+		
Grey-capped Pigmy Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos canicapillus</i>	+				Common Tailor Bird <i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	+	+		+
Rufous-bellied Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos hyperythrus</i>	+				Common Chiffchaff <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	+	+		+
Black-naped Green Woodpecker <i>Picus canus</i>	+			+	Yellow-browed Warbler <i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>	+	+	+	+
Small Yellow-naped Woodpecker <i>Picus chlorolophus</i>	+				Hume's Warbler <i>Phylloscopus humei</i>			+	
Large Yellow-naped Woodpecker <i>Picus flavinucha</i>	+				Western Crowned Warbler <i>Phylloscopus occipitalis</i>	+			
Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker <i>Dinopium benghalense</i>		+		+	Grey-headed Flycatcher Warbler <i>Seicercus xanthoschistos</i>	+	+	+	
Greater Golden-backed Woodpecker <i>Chrysocolaptes lucidus</i>	+	+	+		Common Lesser Whitethroat <i>Sylvia curruca</i>	+			
Sand Martin <i>Riparia riparia</i>	+				Sooty Flycatcher <i>Muscicapa sibirica</i>	+	+		
Red-rumped Swallow <i>Hirundo daurica</i>		+	+	+	Red-throated Flycatcher <i>Ficedula parva</i>	+	+	+	+
White Wagtail <i>Motacilla alba dukhunensis</i>	+	+	+	+	Little Pied Flycatcher <i>Ficedula westermanni</i>	+			
White Wagtail <i>M. a. leucopsis</i>		+	+		Ultramarine Flycatcher <i>Ficedula superciliaris</i>				+
White Wagtail <i>M. a. alboides</i>			+		Verditer Flycatcher <i>Eumyias thalassina</i>	+	+	+	+
White Wagtail <i>M. a. personata</i>			+		Rufous-bellied Niltava <i>Niltava sundara</i>	+			
Large Pied Wagtail <i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>		+	+		Pale Blue-Flycatcher <i>Cyornis unicolor</i>	-	+	-	-
Citrine Wagtail <i>Motacilla citreola</i>			+		Grey-headed Flycatcher <i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>	+	+		+
Yellow Wagtail <i>Motacilla flava</i>			+		Asian Paradise-Flycatcher <i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>	+		+	
Grey Wagtail <i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	+	+			Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher <i>Hypothymis azurea</i>	+			+
Rosy Minivet <i>Pericrocotus roseus</i>	+				White-throated Fantail Flycatcher <i>Rhipidura albicollis</i>	+	+		
Long-tailed Minivet <i>Pericrocotus ethologus</i>	+				Red-headed Tit <i>Aegithalos concinnus</i>	+			
Scarlet Minivet <i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>	+				Great Tit <i>Parus major</i>	+			+
Pied Flycatcher-Shrike <i>Hemipus picatus</i>	+				Black-lored Yellow Tit <i>Parus xanthogenys</i>	+			
Black-crested Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus melanicterus</i>	+	+			Black-spotted Yellow Tit <i>Parus splanotus</i>	+			
Red-whiskered Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>	+	+	+	+	Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch <i>Sitta castanea</i>	+			
Himalayan Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus leucogenys</i>	+		+		Velvet-fronted Nuthatch <i>Sitta frontalis</i>	+			
Red-vented Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	+	+	+	+	Wall Creeper <i>Tichodroma muraria</i>	-	+	-	-
Brown-eared Bulbul <i>Hemixos flavala</i>	+				Tickell's Flowerpecker <i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchus</i>	+		+	
Black Bulbul <i>Hypsipetes leucocephalus</i>	+				Purple Sunbird <i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>			+	+
Common Iora <i>Aegithina tiphia</i>	+	+	+		Crimson Sunbird <i>Aethopyga siparaja</i>	+	+	+	
Gold-fronted Chloropsis <i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>		+			Oriental White-eye <i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>	+	+	+	+
Brown Shrike <i>Lanius cristatus</i>		+			White-rumped Munia <i>Lonchura striata</i>	+			
Rufous-backed Shrike <i>Lanius schach</i>	+				Spotted Munia <i>Lonchura punctulata</i>	+	+		
Grey-backed Shrike <i>Lanius tephronotus</i>		+			House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>	+	+	+	+
Blue Rock-Thrush <i>Monticola solitarius</i>		+			Baya Weaver <i>Ploceus philippinus</i>		+		
Blue Whistling-Thrush <i>Myophonus caeruleus</i>	+	+	+		Asian Pied Sterling <i>Sturnus contra</i>				+
Orange-headed Thrush <i>Zoothera citrina</i>	+				Common Myna <i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	+	+		+
Oriental Magpie Robin <i>Copsychus saularis</i>	+	+	+	+	Eurasian Golden Oriole <i>Oriolus oriolus</i>				+
White-rumped Shama <i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>	+			+	Black-headed Oriole <i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>		+	+	+
Indian Robin <i>Saxicoloides fulicata</i>	+	+	+		Maroon Oriole <i>Oriolus traillii</i>	+			
Plumbeous Redstart <i>Rhyacornis fuliginosus</i>	+				Black Drongo <i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>				+
Black Redstart <i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		+			Ashy Drongo <i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>				+
Spotted Forktail <i>Enicurus maculatus</i>	+				White-bellied Drongo <i>Dicrurus caeruleus</i>				+
Common Stonechat <i>Saxicola torquata</i>	+				Bronzed Drongo <i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>	+	+		+
Pied Bushchat <i>Saxicola caprata</i>				+	Spangled Drongo <i>Dicrurus hottentottus</i>	+	+		
Grey Bushchat <i>Saxicola ferrea</i>	+		+	+	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo <i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>				+
Indian Chat <i>Cercomela fusca</i>		+			Red-billed Blue Magpie <i>Urocissa erythrorhyncha</i>	+			
White-throated Laughing Thrush <i>Garrulax monileger</i>	+				Red-billed Chough <i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>			+	
White-crested Laughing Thrush <i>Garrulax leucolophus</i>	+				Indian Tree-pie <i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>		+	+	+
Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler <i>Pomatorhinus erythrogenys</i>	+				Grey Treepie <i>Dendrocitta formosae</i>	+		+	
Black-chinned Babbler <i>Stachyris pyrrhops</i>	+				House Crow <i>Corvus splendens</i>				+
					Jungle Crow <i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>		+	+	+