

—In the news—

Compiled by Praveen J.

More Indian birds Red-listed ...

BirdLife International (BLI) has shown interest this year in some of the “splits” proposed in *The Ripley Guide* (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005), and a re-evaluation of conservation status was requested through the Globally Threatened Forums. As a result of the information pooled in, few of the Western Ghats endemic birds got re-listed, and these been provisionally published. The two subspecies of White-bellied Shortwing *Brachypteryx major* have been re-evaluated and the northern form, now renamed Nilgiri Blue-Robin *Myiomela major*, classified as “endangered” while the southern form remains in the old super-species as “vulnerable”. Newly lumped Black-chinned Laughingthrush *Strophocincla cachinnans* retains the “endangered” conservation status of its nominate form (formerly Nilgiri Laughingthrush) while Kerala Laughingthrush *S. fairbanki*, now strictly delimited south of the Palghat Gap, is elevated to “vulnerable”. Other major updates include the elevation of the Western Ghat endemic Grey-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus priocephalus*, and the migrant wader Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* to “near-threatened”. (www.birdlife.org)

Save migratory birds in crisis – every species counts!

This is the theme of the World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) celebrated on 8–9 May 2010, an initiative started in 2006 as an annual awareness campaign highlighting the need for protection of migratory birds and their habitats. United Nations has declared 2010 the *International Year of Biodiversity*, and consequentially WMBD focuses on Globally Threatened Migratory Birds, especially those 31 migratory bird species, which are classified as Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List. Migratory birds rely on several different habitats; they need different locations for breeding and raising their young, and for feeding. Some of them migrate up to thousands of kilometers to find suitable areas and cross many different habitats, regardless of political borders. Thus, saving migratory birds saves the habitats they require, which benefits other species as well. WMBD activities take place in many different countries and places, but are all linked through a single global campaign and theme. At the moment 192 birds are classified as Critically Endangered as a result of habitat loss, hunting, pollution, climate change, human disturbance and other reasons. Without immediate action, many of these endangered species will not be here in a few years time. Some of the key bird species that have received attention during the celebration are Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus*, Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris*, New Zealand Storm-petrel *Oceanites maorianus*, and Rueck's Blue-flycatcher *Cyornis ruckii*. (www.worldmigratorybirdday.org)

Tracking Amur Falcon migration

Black Storks *Ciconia nigra*, Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa*, and now Amur Falcons *Falco amurensis* are being tracked by scientists using satellite telemetry. A number of these falcons have been fitted with tiny 5 g transmitters in South Africa early this year.

Now, the first bird has been located, in early May, in China east of Mongolia and scientists wonder if they will continue further north. The diminutive raptor has already flown more than 13,750 km in seven weeks, sometimes covering over 1,000 km in a single day. Scientists found that the route differed from what has been speculated in all the handbooks. More details on the migration shall be revealed during the upcoming conference on Asian Raptors. (www.raptor-research.de)

The day of the sparrow

The first World House Sparrow Day (WHSD) was celebrated on 20 March 2010, and focused on raising awareness about the decline of the House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* throughout the world, and discussed the problems faced by the bird in its daily fight for survival. This is an international initiative by Nature Forever Society in collaboration with Bombay Natural History Society, Eco-Sys Action Foundation (France), Avon Wildlife Trust (UK), and other national and international organisations across the world. Acting as a flagship species, House Sparrow symbolises biodiversity found in and around urban spaces and draws attention towards the conservation and monitoring of common species. More than 180 individuals and organisations from different parts of the world joined the celebrations this year by conducting common bird-watching trips, public discussions, exhibitions, presentations, bird rallies, art competitions, and educational and public events, all aimed at paying more attention to the birds in their neighborhood, and their conservation. (www.worldhousesparrowday.org)

Bird races & statistics

Bird races are fun events and are generally not meant for statistical records. However, an attempt was made by Mike Prince at Bangalore to derive patterns from the team logbooks of HSBC Bangalore Bird Race 2010. Though quite an involved exercise with lots of private correspondence, some sensible patterns emerged, which might be of local importance. Compared to other bird races, it was found that the percentage of bird species seen by the winning team (63%) as against the total number of species seen by all teams is comparatively low. It probably means that all the ‘good’ habitats in Bangalore are farflung, and that it is impossible to visit all of them on a single day, cutting across the busy city traffic. The following species were recorded by all 33 teams indicating them to be the commonest during the race; Little Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*, Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*, Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*, Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*, Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus*, Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocerus*, House Crow *Corvus splendens*, and Jungle Myna *Acridotheres fuscus*. Similarly a percentage abundance figure was also arrived for all the 238 species recorded during the race. A similar analysis has been attempted during the first Kerala Bird Race to obtain the commonest species in each of the three cities. Bird race takes a whole lot of birdwatchers out on a single day – the data generated at least could be used for monitoring common bird species (Bngbirds).

From the field

John Gregory reported a male Western Tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus*, Cheer Pheasant *Catreus wallichii*, eight Koklass Pheasants *Pucrasia macrolopha*, and up to 50 Himalayan Monals *Lophophorus impejanus* during a weeklong trip to Great Himalayan National Park in early May (OrientalBirding).

Ginu George and others reported an unusual “laughing call” of Malabar Parakeet *Psittacula columboides* from Idamalayar, Kerala on 1 May 2010. They also reported Ceylon Frogmouth *Batrachostomus moniliger*, Grey-headed Bulbul, and White-bellied Treepie *Dendrocitta leucogastra* among other birds from Idamalayar & Thattekkad (KeralaBirder).

S Chandrasekaran discovered a nesting colony of White-rumped Vultures *Gyps bengalensis* at Mangalapatti in Moyar River valley, Satyamangalam, Tamil Nadu during April 2010. The nesting site had about 20 nests and augments the known vulture nest sites in this belt spread across the three southern states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala (www.hinduonline.net).

David Raju reports many specialities from north-eastern India during his 10-day trip in early April—a Jerdon’s Baza *Aviceda jerdoni* was spotted in Gibbon Sanctuary; Red-billed Leiothrix *Leiothrix Jutea*, Chestnut-crowned Warbler *Seicercus castaniceps*, White-browed Shrike-Babbler *Pteruthius flaviscaps*, Small Niltava *Niltava macgrigoriae*, Rufous Sibia *Heterophasia capistrata*, Grey-sided Laughing-thrush *Dryonastes caerulatus*, Spot-winged Grosbeak *Mycerobas melanozanthos*, Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*, Small-billed Scaly Thrush *Zoothera dauma*, Cutia *Cutia nipalensis*, and Dark-sided Flycatcher *Muscicapa sibirica* from Sikkim; a nesting pair of Silver-breasted Broadbill *Serilophus lunatus*, Thick-billed Green Pigeon *Treron curvirostra*, Rosy Minivet *Pericrocotus roseus*, Pale-capped Pigeon *Columba punicea*, and Wreathed Hornbill *Aceros undulatus* from Manas; Pied Falconet *Microhierax melanoleucos*, White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata*, and Abbott’s Babbler *Malacocincla abbotti* from Nameri; Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola*, Swamp Francolin *Francolinus gularis*, Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos*, and a pair of Bengal Francolin *Houbaropsis bengalensis* at Kasiranga (birdsofNEIndia).

Sayam Chowdhury and others reported 25 Spoon-billed Sandpipers *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*, 24 Nordmann’s Greenshanks *Tringa guttifer*, and 450 Great Knots from Sonadia Island, Bangladesh early March 2010 (OrientalBirding).

Rahul Anand reported an incidence of nest parasitism when he saw a Common Hawk-Cuckoo *Hierococcyx varius* chick being fed by a group of Yellow-billed Babblers *Turdoides affinis* at Kannur, Kerala during last week of March 2010 (KeralaBirder).

A Black Baza *Aviceda leuphotes*, on passage, was photographed by James Williams from Galibore fishing camps on 11 April 2010; this is the second time that this species was reported from Bangalore area during spring passage.

Five to seven Orange-breasted Green-Pigeons *Treron bicincta* were photographed from Tambaram, Chennai on 10 March 2010 by P. Hopeland, while Vivek Chandran and Seshadri K S reported photographed three of this species from Pondicherry university campus on 20 February 2010. They also photographed Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola* and White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* from Kalliveli marshes, TamilNadu (TamilBirds).

H Rudresh reported a Jungle Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos* burying an egg in mud and covering it with dry leaves and stones. Crows are known to cache their finds, mainly food, and return to the same spots later to claim their loot! (Bngbirds).

During a field visit to Nagaland in late April 2010, Sumit K. Sen and Bikram Grewal reported goodies like Grey Sibia *Heterophasia gracilis*, Red-headed Laughing-thrush *Trochaloxyeron erythrocephalum*, and Flavescent Bulbul *Pycnonotus flavescens*

among other birds (www.kolkatabirds.com).

Ramki provided a glimpse of Bengal Floricans in breeding courtship with excellent photographs from Manas where he spotted not less than ten birds, all of them within half a kilometer of each other (IndiaNatureWatch).

Geetha Radhakrishnan and others reported a flock of seven Ashy Minivets *Pericrocotus divaricatus* from Theosophical society area, Chennai during first week of April (TamilBirds).

Rarest bird through lens

A new international photo competition covering the world’s 623 most threatened birds has been launched. This is a follow-up to the photo competitions that led to the production of the highly acclaimed *Rare Birds Yearbook 2008*, and *2009*. The photos submitted for the new competition will feature in a landmark publication – *The World’s Rarest Birds* – that will be produced by the not-for-profit publisher WILDGuides next year. The proceeds will be donated to BirdLife International’s Preventing Extinctions Programme, as was the case with the *Rare Birds Yearbooks*. *The World’s Rarest Birds* will be a lavishly illustrated hardback book, covering the 362 species categorised as Endangered, 65 that are Data Deficient, 192 Critically Endangered species, and the four species that are Extinct in the wild, and only now exist in captivity. It will be a comprehensive directory of the world’s most threatened bird species and include specially written feature articles on the key bird conservation issues in each of the world’s regions. At a local level, it would interest many of our photographers that five of ‘our’ vultures, Great Indian Bustard, two of ‘our’ flicans, Black-chinned Laughing-thrush, White-winged Duck, Greater Adjutant, and Jerdon’s Courser are listed amongst the sought-after birds. (www.birdlife.org)



Common Hawk-Cuckoo *Hierococcyx varius*.