

## Crested Serpent-Eagle *Spilornis cheela* preying on termites (Termitidae) in Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary, Gujarat, India

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Vasava, A., 2011. Crested Serpent-Eagle *Spilornis cheela* preying on termites (Termitidae) in Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary, Gujarat, India. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (X): 56.

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Manuscript received on 20 January 2011.

The Crested Serpent-Eagle *Spilornis cheela* has a wide-ranging diet comprising snakes, lizards, frogs, toads, small mammals, and birds (Naoroji & Monga 1984; Ali & Ripley 1987; Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001; Waghray et al. 2003; Naoroji 2006). It occasionally supplements this diet with tree frogs, grubs, fish, and crabs (Ferguson & Christie 2001; Naoroji 2006). However, reports of it feeding on small insects are scarce (Naoroji 2006).

On 10 July 2009, at 1700 hrs I was in Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary (21°41'4.69"N 73°47'54.00"E) in Narmada district, Gujarat, India. While driving back from the Malsamot area I spotted a Crested Serpent-Eagle on the ground. It was about 130 m away from me, and was hopping around trying to catch, and feed upon some swarming termites (Termitidae). It also perched on low branches and swooped down to catch them as they flew about. The monsoon had just begun in western India and alates of these termites were emerging from the ground for

their annual mating session. I observed the bird feeding for nearly 15 min., after which it flew away. Though Naoroji (2006) does list termites in the diet of the Crested Serpent Eagle, I present this observation, as it is an uncommon occurrence.

### References

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## Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir,

I read the lead article on Gwendolen (Wendy) Mary Beryl Sparks in the *Indian BIRDS* volume 6 no. 6 with great interest, but also with a tinge of nostalgia, for I knew Wendy, in a way, and we corresponded for a few months by snail mail during 1998–1999. The article prompted me to pull out our old letters. She had graciously responded, to my appeal in the *Oriental Bird Club Bulletin* for records of Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* from the Indian Subcontinent, by writing a detailed and formal letter on 26 August 1998. Interestingly she had recorded a large

flock c. 200 Sociable Lapwings as early as 3 August on the golf course near Vijay Vilas Palace, Mandvi. In the concluding paragraph of the letter she advised me to contact M. K. S. Himmatsinhji if I was not, "already in correspondence with Himmatsinji Jadeja regarding his own records, and older records from Kutch."

In one of her letters to me she expressed her

feelings and views quite freely. She wanted to send me the list of waders seen by her in India by going through her, "bird notes of 1947–8". However, "in the event this proved to be much more laborious," than she had anticipated and, therefore, promised to send me copy of her, "Indian Sub-continent bird lists," very soon. She added that she'd better get on with it, as at her advanced age, "one does not know how much time one has got. I am already eighty-two years old!"

Before sending her, "Indian Sub-continent bird lists," to me she informed me that her main list was in diary form, in chronological order, but lamented, "there were not many books available at the time," and, "Stuart Baker left much to be desired as a Field Guide!"

In her last letter to me, 27 October 1999, which was hand written in blue ink, matching the colour of the letterhead, she enclosed, "the promised copy," of her "1947–8 BIRD LIST."

Incidentally, while I was corresponding with Wendy Sparks I was also corresponding with Himmatsinhji of Bhuj. When I had asked for his views regarding the rather early arrival dates of Sociable Lapwing mentioned by Wendy Sparks, Himmatsinhji very promptly sent a handwritten letter (most letters were typewritten), and informed me that, "she had taken meticulous notes of the birds she had seen. In fact she was good at identification." He also shared some personal information about himself, adding, "she encouraged me a great deal in my hobby of birdwatching."

– Harkirat Singh Sangha

B-27, Gautam Marg, Hanuman Nagar, Jaipur 302021, Rajasthan, India.

FROM: Mrs. G. M. B. SPARKS, M.B.O.U.  
The Old Vicarage  
Chapel Lane  
Chalfont St Giles  
Herts. ENGLAND.

October 27th. 1999.

Dear Mr. Sangha  
Herewith the promised  
copy of my 1947-8 BIRD LIST. I  
hope that it will be of some use to  
you.

Yours sincerely  
G. M. B. Sparks.

Mr. Harkirat S. Sangha  
B-27 Gautam Marg  
Hanuman Nagar  
JAIPUR 302021  
INDIA.