

work was featured in that month's (May 2009) *National Geographic*. The article was an invaluable teaching tool in one of our readings and discussions on the verandah.

Students returned to the USA after getting to know the major bird families of the Neotropics and an overall feel for tropical nature, without the sense of being flooded with too much

information. Above all, their curiosities have been piqued. Some of them are planning to return to Trinidad for post-graduate research. At least one of them appears to be hooked to bird photography and another is taking daring tentative steps towards taxonomic botany. The Tropical Field Biology course is off to a good start.

Recoveries from the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers (1970)—23*

Zafar Futehally

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In my previous column I had said that 1970 was a year in which conservation and natural history activities gathered a new momentum mainly because of the meeting of the IUCN General Assembly, which took place in November 1969. The *Newsletter* too received a spate of good articles in that period. I have reproduced some from the January 1970 issue, and here is another by our diplomat/ornithologist, Sudhir Vyas, who has featured in this column before.

Incidentally I was asked to give a talk on conservation to the IAS probationers at the National Administrative Institute in Mussoorie at the time when Sudhir was in the institute. Later he offered to take me for a bird walk, which I declined because of an alternative offer from the equerry of the riding club to take me out for a canter. Horses and birds remain my passion in equal measure.

The birds of Mussoorie

Sudhir Vyas

"The first bird, which intrudes upon your peace in Mussoorie, is not the chirpy sparrow, not the garrulous crow, but that rough and ready champion of song, the Himalayan Whistling Thrush. It was everywhere in the woods, on the open hillsides, even in the bazaar. Its pleasant song was a regular feature of both day and night. But apart from this I saw very few thrushes. I saw the Blueheaded and Chestnutbellied Rock Thrushes occasionally. The Greywinged Blackbird was often heard singing, but being shy, was rarely seen. During the last week of our stay, however, a male took up quarters in our garden and delighted us with his song.

"An amusing incident took place one day, when I descended into the thorny undergrowth on hearing what sounded like a puppy. But no puppy was to be found. Instead, three Blue Magpies fluttered off from a bush. I gained a wise experience—always test for Blue Magpies before diving after unfamiliar noises—and paid for it by quite a few scratches. Redbilled Blue Magpies were, incidentally, very common. A party of nearly 20 frequented the municipal Gardens. On the contrary I never saw the Yellowbilled species.

"My exhilaration knew no bounds when I saw a Sirkeer Cuckoo at 6500 feet. It declined considerably however on reading in Whistler that they are often found up to '6000 ft and even

occasionally higher.' It was much less rufous in colour than the ones I saw at Poona. Indian, Common, and Himalayan cuckoos were often heard. I once heard the 'Brainfever' of a Hawk-cuckoo but I could not find it.

"A lovely place for birds is the Kamptee Road. Here I once saw a Himalayan Barred Owlet feeding its brood of three. I once heard the Himalayan Scops Owl's double whistle at night but I could not find it. On another occasion, I saw a nightjar fluttering along at dusk but it was silent and could not be identified. Kokla Green pigeons were common along the Kamptee Road and they often fed on berry bushes close to the ground, thus providing an unobstructed view of themselves. They looked beautiful with their orange breasts and maroon backs. Kaleej pheasants too were fairly common here.

"A great disappointment was the paucity of hawks in Mussoorie. The Kestrel was the commonest falcon and a pair had a nest on a high ledge on Gun Hill. A small falcon was seen twice in forest, and I think it was a Hobby. On another occasion I saw a large peregrine-like falcon, but it had pale underparts. What could an Eastern Peregrine be doing here in June? I saw a Shikra once but no eagles at all. There was a refuse dump in Mussoorie where large number of Scavenger Vultures, Large Indian Kites and a Lammergeier or two fed on rubbish. A number of Grey Drongos also frequented this place. Could it be due to the flies attracted to the rotting refuse?

"The Redwinged Shrike-babbler was much commoner than what I had expected. I once saw a family party on the 16th of June with two young. They often associated with Treepies, Drongos and Dark Grey Cuckoo-shrikes. I also saw once what I think was a female Maroon Oriole.

"A Hoopoe and a huge colony of House Swifts had nests in the remains of the 'Standard Skating Rink' on the Mall which burnt down in 1968 and by courtesy of the municipality is still standing. I hope it survives long enough for the swifts to raise their young. Blyth's Whiterumped Swifts arrived in some numbers about the middle of June. A little later Whitethroated Spinetails and Alpine Swifts also made their appearance. Shortbilled Minivets had finished breeding by June and could be seen in family parties.

"The Great Himalayan Barbet was common in the jungles as were the Scalybellied and Blacknaped Green woodpeckers

and the Brownfronted Pied Woodpecker. The Himalayan Pied Woodpecker was rare and an interesting discovery was the Lesser Yellownaped Woodpecker.

"I must admit however that there were quite a few disappointments too. From books I had formed the impression that hills would be teeming with Laughing thrushes. What a shock I received to see only two species—the Streaked and the Whitethroated. Even the latter was by no means common. A few rather pale Redrumped Swallows, which nested under bridges, and some seedy looking House-martins were the only swallows I saw. There was hardly a Tree-warbler in the area. I saw one—a plain brown and buff one with no wing bar and a pinkish beak, which refused to utter a sound and could not be identified. I left it in disgust. The Greyheaded Flycatcher-Warbler was, however overwhelmingly abundant. I saw only two Yellowbacked sunbirds and a few Firebreasted flowerpeckers and Black bulbuls. Neither did I see any Hill Partridges. The Black Partridge however was common and the hills resounded with their calls in the morning. Another relief was the predominance of the Cinnamon Sparrow over the House Sparrow. Crows (with very harsh voices) were also not common.

"In spite of this it was a very enjoyable outing and I saw over a hundred species of birds in one and half months. I was quite disappointed to return to the sweltering heat and humidity of

Lucknow." [Vyas, Sudhir. 1970. Birds of Mussoorie. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 10 (1): 4–6.]

The Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*

V G Kartha, an engineer in the Bhillai Steel Plant (Central India) kept a close watch on the arrival and departure of this migrant from Eastern Europe, allegedly one of the earliest of our winter visitors and the latest to depart. A very widespread species, reaching as far south as the Laccadives. I have watched this shrike for long periods both around Bombay and in Kihim, and what Kartha writes rings a bell. "It is usually so motionless that it is difficult to detect. The occasional movement it permits itself is of the head, which swivels this way and that, keeping a sharp look-out for "jay- walking" insects and worms ... It takes off so suddenly that you blink in your eye-pieces. It flies to the ground, makes a pin-point landing ... picks up the insect ... and flies back to the same or an adjacent outpost. When on the ground it holds its tail slightly elevated ... I have never heard it calling from anywhere close to the ground. It is usually from high up among the leaves or from overhead electric wires. It opens its mouth wide and its whole body and tail vibrates with the effort." [Kartha, V. G. 1970. The Brown Shrike in Bhillai. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 10 (1): 2–4.]

Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus* sightings in Kachchh, Gujarat, India

Veer Vaibhav Mishra & Ratan Singh

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On 25 December 2008, at 1130 hrs, we were watching birds with M. Coverdale in Phot Mahadev thorn forest of Kachchh (Gujarat, India). We were close to a ravine with *Euphorbia* sp., vegetation growing on the slopes, and a scanty growth of acacia trees. We flushed two nightjars (Family: Caprimulgidae), and upon searching found eight more, all roosting in the ravine.

The nightjars had large, long tails, black and gold scapular stripes, white throat patches, barred breasts, and pale bars on wing coverts (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005).

We identified them as Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus*. Nigel Cleere (see reference) confirmed the identification of the nightjar.

Large-tailed Nightjar is found in north-eastern Pakistan (Murree Hills), Himalaya, Uttaranchal, Nepal, eastward through the Assam Valley, Orissa, and north-eastern India. This species is known to winter in Madhya Pradesh. There is one record of this species from Gujarat (heard calling by Pranav Trivedi). The present record, where eight individuals of Large-tailed Nightjars were sighted, and photographed in Kachchh, is an important addition to the avifauna of Kachchh, and Gujarat.

References

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- Trivedi, P., & Soni, V. C., 2006. Significant bird records and local extinctions in Purna and Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuaries, Gujarat, India. *Forktail* 22: 39–48.



Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus*