

therefore all was, more or less, well with the world..."

"Apart from the beach, Kihim etiquette requires that one follow a proper birding route which has been hallowed by time. This begins along the kaccha road behind our house and leads first to a tried and tested banyan tree, then to mixed deciduous jungle (teak, madhuca, odina) beyond. As we walked along the road one morning we heard the call of our spotted babbler, but we also heard a whitethroated ground thrush, tantalisingly near but impossible to locate. On the same road redwhiskered bulbuls are heard and seen all over; a grave coucal is a frequent sight. We found that the banyan tree was thickly inhabited by Coppermiths, and we had a lovely view of a golden oriole for some minutes. Some flitting in the bushes was doggedly followed up, to be rewarded by the sight of an iora. We went past the banyan to a coconut grove where a pair of grey hornbills were known to be nesting. We located the nest-hole, halfway up the trunk of a coconut tree, but had to give up on the hornbills after waiting for some time. As we came back on to the road we were luckier with the nest of a pair of ashy swallow-shrikes, which was built high up in a palmyra, with the birds themselves circling fiercely around it." [*Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 23 (7-8): 11-14.].

A list of articles on birds by Shama Futehally, published in *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*.

- 1967. A visit to Periyar. 7 (7): 4-5.
- 1967. A week in Bharatpur. 7 (11): 7-11.
- 1968. Birdwatchers' Field Club outing. 8 (3): 2-3.
- 1968. Birds of Mahabaleshwar. 8 (7): 4-5.
- 1970. Birds on a Kashmir holiday. 10 (6): 1-3.
- 1975. Birding in Pudukottai. 15 (4): 1-4.
- 1976. A day at Sultanpur. 16 (7): 1-3.
- 1977. Birding in Sikkim. 17 (7): 5-6.
- 1983. Revisiting Kihim. 23 (7-8): 11-14.
- 2000. Birding in Kumaon. 39 (6): 97-99. (1999).

Announcement

Mr Zafar Futehally wishes to announce an award of Rs 5,000 in memory of his daughter, Shama. This award shall be given for a general article on Indian birds, published in 2005 in the *Newsletter for Ornithologists*. Articles should be submitted to The Editor, *Newsletter for Ornithologists*, P. O. Box # 2, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India. The winner shall be announced in January 2006. The decision of the editorial board of the *Newsletter for Ornithologists* will be final.

Reviews

Important Bird Areas in India. Priority sites for conservation.

By Zafar-ul, and Asad R. Rahmani. (Eds.) 2004. 1st ed. Mumbai: Indian Bird Conservation Network, Bombay Natural History Society and BirdLife International (UK). Hardbound. (20.5 x 30.0cm with illus. cover), pp. i-xviii, 1-1133, innumerable colour photographs (by; 88 photographers), maps (by; Irfan Ullah Khan & Sham Davande), tables and text-figs. (ISBN 019-567333-6.). Price: Rs 3,000/- (Rs 2,000/- for members of Bombay Natural History Society).

Contents: Title (p. i); imprint (p. ii); Contents (pp. iii-vi); Foreword (p. vii, by HIH Princess Takamado, with portr.); Foreword (p. viii, by Michael Rands, with portr.); Foreword (p. ix, by Graham Wynne, with portr.); Foreword (p. x, by Prodipto Ghosh, with portr., dated 7.x.2004); Foreword (p. xi, by B.G. Deshmukh, with portr.); Acknowledgements (pp. xii-xviii); Background [pp. 1-29: India: General information (pp. 1-7); Avifauna of India (pp. 8-24); Wildlife legislation and policies: A brief account (pp. 25-29)]; Objectives and methods of Indian IBA programme [pp. 30-40: Process of IBA identification and selection (pp. 33-38); GIS based mapping of the IBAs of India (p. 39); Data presentation (p. 40)]; National overview [pp. 41-65: Analysis and results (pp. 41-65); Some burning issues (pp. 66-88)]; IBAs in different states of India (pp. 89-1111); Appendices (pp. 1112-1126); Postscript: Vultures decline (p. 1127); Index to sites (pp. 1128-1133).

The section entitled "Some burning issues" (pp. 66-88), contains the following chapters: 'Illegal bird trade' by Abrar Ahmed (pp. 66-70); 'Undermining India's ecological sensitive areas' by Neeraj Vaghholikar (pp. 71-75); 'IBAs in northeast India: Threats to habitats and opportunities for conservation' by Manju Menon and Neeraj Vaghholikar (pp. 76-79); 'Can communities protect important bird areas?' by Ashish Kothari and Neema Pathak (pp. 80-88).

The main section of the book is divided into a chapter each for India's 28 States and six Union Territories. "All state accounts

contain an overview of the status of the Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and their conservation, followed by a series of site accounts describing the IBAs in that particular state," (p. 40).

The appendices are as follows: Appendix I: Important Bird Areas: Summary of global categories and criteria; Appendix II: A1: Globally Threatened Species; Appendix III: A2: Restricted Range Species; Appendix IV: A3: Biome Restricted Assemblage; Appendix V: A4i: ³ 1% biogeographic population of waterbirds.

This monumental publication is an inventory of 465 IBAs in India. This is "the first comprehensive study in which sites have been identified for bird conservation in India on the basis of globally accepted criteria" (p. 41). The application of these criteria to India reveals that we have 130 Globally Threatened species of which 8 are Critically Threatened, 10 Endangered, 57 Vulnerable, 1 Conservation Dependent, 2 Data Deficient and 52 Near Threatened. Further refinements in the process list species that qualify as Restricted Range Species (79) and those that comprise Biome Restricted Assemblages (8 biomes are identified containing 372 species). Sobering lists indeed. Especially in the light of 199 (42%) of the 465 IBAs being 'not officially protected' by the Indian government. It is inevitable that this percentage will grow in the future. Who will 'protect' these areas and how, in a nation where land is at a premium? Kothari and Pathak give concrete suggestions and positive answers in the chapter, "Can communities protect Important Bird Areas?" (pp. 80-88).

Having been marginally associated with this project since its inception, I know the amount of work, cooperation (seven pages of acknowledgements!), coordination, compilation, assimilation and synthesis, which has gone on behind the scenes to bring this path-breaking book to fruition. For this the authors and the entire IBA team are to be wholeheartedly congratulated.

Aasheesh Pittie

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Birds of Kangra. By Jan Willem den Besten. 2004. Mosaic Books & Moonpeak Publishers, New Delhi & Dharamsala. Rs. 395/-.

Till about the 1970s, for an average Indian the more commonly accessible books on India's birds could be counted on the fingertips of one hand. Beginning with the decade of 1980 there was a phenomenal growth of bird books; textual, photo-guides and illustrated field guides. Each new publication was hailed as a benchmark in excellence only to be outpaced just a couple of years later by yet another! A good time to have been living in. The first of these trendsetter publications was the slim Collins Handguide (176 pages) in 1980 and the latest arrival in 2004 *Birds of Kangra* is equally slim, also exactly 176 pages. In between was that fabulous magnum opus by Grimmett and the Inskipp. This period also introduced us to the auditory pleasure of birdcalls and song. The BNHS and Nature Club Surat became pioneers of this new dimension to the bird life of India. [P.S. Sivaprasad's was perhaps the first commercial audio-cassette on Indian birds, released in 1994.]

All books serve the one common purpose of sharing knowledge but what sets one book apart from the other is the personality of its author. Now Besten combines a questing mind and dogged perseverance with a winning smile and an outgoing friendly disposition; all of it summed up by the photograph on page 176. Unlike the scientist, he delights in his surroundings with empathy and compassion at the personal level. Little wonder that his book portrays birds in an intimate matrix of peoples (their history, culture, livelihoods, monuments, their demons and gods) and landscapes (geology, forests, crops, wetlands and water-bodies) of the Kangra Valley. Beginning in 1996, he has painstakingly observed, researched and documented 555 species: breeding residents, winter and summer visitors, passage migrants and vagrants. And listed them all at the end of the book showing altitude range, grand total separately for Dharamsala and Pong Dam for each species. The list also shows who first recorded each species beginning with Hugh Whistler in 1920-24 leading to his own effort up to 2003. But why the grand total for Dharamsala when the book is about Kangra as a whole? Well, once you see the map of Kangra (p. 173) you will notice that six of the eight birding areas listed are within a day's excursion from Dharamsala; especially if you are Besten whom I found inseparable from his Royal Enfield when we met briefly over tea at a friend's in Upper Dharamsala in May 1998.

Besten's book has two unique attributes. Firstly, he has illustrated the text with over 500 photographs and all of them taken by him. To the best of my knowledge, Otto Pfister is the only other author to have achieved this distinction. Besten's photo portrait of the Great Barbet (p. 106), the Dhauladhar mountain-scape with Bar-headed Geese in the foreground (pp. 10-11), Brahminy Ducks in flight (pp. 174-175) and an interloper among birds the Yellow-throated Marten (p. 29) are among the many photographs that I have gone back to, time and again. And secondly, Besten recounts local legend or folklore pertaining to each connected group of birds, following the scientific text. Unlike Jerdon, Hume and Whistler who were tutored in elementary Sanskrit, Urdu and Persian as part of pre-service education, Besten has had no such facility. He is obviously a good listener and quick learner. For his gleanings stand out incisive and authentic as for instance, the recounting of the "epic tale" of the Great Barbet (p. 107).

It is up to each reader to judge for himself the merits of the book. But for me Besten has above all crowned his love of birds by

having His Holiness the Dalai Lama to write the first page of *Birds of Kangra*. For, we know from history that Emperor Asoka, the most devoted adherent of Buddhism had made preservation of animals an instrument of State policy. "In Rock Edict I, Asoka forbids animal sacrifices" (the late Dr S. Radhakrishnan). That tenet of Buddhism, nurtured and refined over centuries, now finds a poetic and most sensitive expression on page one of *Birds of Kangra* in HH the Dalai Lama's text:

"Ever since I was a boy in Tibet, I have particularly enjoyed watching birds, the dignified Bearded Vulture soaring high above...the flocks of geese, and occasionally...the call of the Eagle Owl...It is very relaxing just to enjoy the dawn and listen to the birds." That is also the voice of the innermost anguish of an émigré.

Thank you Besten for unwittingly leading us Indians back to our heritage of caring for our birds first etched indelibly on a rock in 247 BC.

Lt. General Baljit Singh

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The bird man. The extraordinary story of John Gould. By Isabella Tree. 2004. Ebury Press, U.K. Paperback, pp., i-x, 1-324. Distributed in India by Rupa & Co. Price ₹4.55.

If genius is sharpened and accelerated by adversity and if good fortune flows from dogged focus on a single, noble obsession, then providence had marked such a man in John Gould. Coming from a poor, working class family, he had no formal school education and none at all at the college level. At 76 when John Gould passed away on 3 February 1881, he was the undisputed illustrator and publisher of the most magnificent and extant work on birds ever to have been created; 15 definitive books comprising 46 folio volumes containing 2,638 plates in colour and 16 significant monographs with 332 coloured plates. On the periphery, when he momentarily broke free from birds his two publications on mammals, "A monograph on kangaroos" and the more definitive, "The mammals of Australia", were received with equal acclaim. John Gould was also among the greatest pioneers of taxidermy.

Writing John Gould's biography with 200 years of detachment, Isabella Tree's narrative holds interest right up to the last word. She refrains from passing judgments but with access to monumental research material, she uses John Gould's contemporaries, employees, peers and family to do the "speaking". The result is a rounded self-made man, warts and all; part intuitive genius but mostly a primed work-engine, a devoted husband who could detach from home for months without regrets, a conscientious and doting father where providing comforts of home were concerned but could never bridge the gap between conventionality and intimacy with his children, had an uncanny eye to spot talent, paid his assistants more than the times, worked them down to bones but did not acknowledge their talent in any narrative, affable but had no friends among peers, instead successfully cultivated plenty of steadfast patrons from aristocracy and royalty in Europe and America. And from the bigger picture that emerges, none could match him then or now in our times, in running the publishing business both for superlative quality and mind boggling output.

Much as he was proud and happy with his professional attainments, his personal life was terribly sad. Behind the scenes, Elizabeth his wife was the bedrock both of his business and his home. She was among his very best bird artists and painters. For when she passed away at the age of 37, an unfortunate victim of

“bad medical practice,” and just 12 years in marriage, she had borne eight children and contributed 500 outstanding coloured plates and over 600 drawings to Gould’s works already published. John Gould was devastated. A lesser man may have slowed down but not John Gould; he held his chin up, assumed Elizabeth’s place as best he could with the children and kept publishing with ever-greater vigour. When his eldest son passed away in the prime in India with cholera, Gould stumbled, but steadied himself yet again. When cruel fate felled his third son, also in his prime, that was a blow too strong even for this indomitable spirit. Even so, he conceived the book, “A monograph of Pittidae” of which Part I, containing 13 plates, was published just months before his death.

Till today, I did not know that John Gould could neither sketch nor paint! But his knowledge of the living bird was so acute that of the over 3,000 plates he published in his lifetime, the proof copy of each carries corrections, criticism, suggestions and directions to artists for improvements, in Gould’s hand. He wrote the letterpress on each plate. Much as he loved all species of birds, the one that possessed him the most were the humming birds, even though he never saw one alive till much after he had published comprehensively on them. At long last, he visited the Americas to see and bring live specimens home. He obtained three but I am amazed that a man of his stature did not realise that the birds could not survive indefinitely on a diet of honey and saccharine water alone. For want of insect-protein in their diet, two died on board ship and the third after two days in England.

There is just no doubt that above all else in Nature John Gould loved birds the most. But he loved science (Ornithology) and his business of publishing even more. In the Australian bush, he had shot the male of a new species of raptor. Not satisfied, a few days later he added a female of the species to the collection along with nest and eggs knowing full well that its numbers were already critically low. For the fear of set-back to his business and losing his influential patrons from feudal aristocracy, Gould’s voice was conspicuous by its total silence from the decade-old movement in U.K. which culminated in the legislation of the Bird Protection Act in 1880. The British Ornithologists’ Union, which came into being in 1850, admitted his papers and even published them in the *Ibis*, but they did not admit him in to the Union. For the new breed of ornithological scientists, Gould remained essentially an outstanding illustrator of birds and publisher of fine bird books, and no more; not withstanding his established claim to discovery of about two score new species of birds and animals and the fact that some of his observations and inferences were acknowledged to have helped Darwin with the theory of natural selection. Perhaps Gould accepted the verdict with equanimity and so wished his epitaph to read, “Here lies John Gould, the ‘Bird Man’”.

Lt. General Baljit Singh

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Saving Asia’s threatened birds: A guide for government and civil society. By BirdLife International. 2003. 1st ed. BirdLife International, Cambridge, U. K. Paperback [21 x 29.5cm, (illus. cover, col. photographs)], pp. i-x, 1-246, 191 photographs (colour), 3 portraits, 37 maps, numerous tables, text-figs., graphs. (ISBN 0-946888-47-7.)

Contents: Half-title (p. i); title (p. iii); imprint (p. iv); Contents (p. v); Foreword by HIH Princess Takamado (p. vi); Foreword by Michael Rands (p. vii); Foreword by Jorgen Thomsen (p. viii); Acknowledgements (pp. ix-x); Summary (pp. 1-2); Asia: Birds,

habitats and people (pp. 3-17); Asia’s threatened birds and their habitats (pp. 18-24); Conservation issues and strategic solutions (pp. 25-40); Data presentation [pp. 41-240: Forests (pp. 43-112), Grasslands (pp. 113-136), Wetlands (pp. 137-234), Seabirds (pp. 235-240)]; Appendix: Threatened bird species covered in this analysis (pp. 241-245); References (p. 246).

Chapters of special interest to the region are: Sino-Himalayan mountain forests [covering: China; Pakistan; India; Nepal; Bhutan; Myanmar; (pp. 61-68)]; Indian peninsula and Sri Lankan forests [India; Sri Lanka (pp. 69-74)]; Indo-Burmese forests [India; Bhutan; Bangladesh; Myanmar; (pp. 75-82)]; Indo-Gangetic grasslands [Pakistan; India; Nepal; Bhutan; Bangladesh; (pp. 119-124)]; South Asian arid habitats [Pakistan; India; Nepal; Bhutan; Bangladesh; (pp. 125-136)]; Tibetan plateau [China; India; Bhutan; (pp. 177-180)]; Indus basin [Pakistan; (pp. 187-190)]; North Indian wetlands [India; Nepal; (pp. 191-196)]; South Indian and Sri Lankan wetlands [India; Sri Lanka; (pp. 197-202)]; Assam and Sylhet plains [India; Bangladesh; (pp. 203-208)]; Bay of Bengal coast [India; Bangladesh; Myanmar; (pp. 209-212)]; Myanmar plains [Myanmar; (pp. 209-212)]. 82 avian species are threatened in these regions (see below).

“This book is a synthesis of the conservation recommendations in BirdLife International (2001)”, (p. 246). “I am certain it will serve as a ‘field guide’ for decision-makers as they seek to target their energies and resources towards safeguarding the most threatened bird species and protecting Important Bird Areas throughout Asia” (p. vi). The Appendix “includes the 303 globally threatened bird species covered in the analysis of this book. It gives their IUCN Red List Categories...” (p. 241).

To write an executive summary of the mammoth 3,000 page, two-volume *Threatened birds of Asia* (BirdLife International 2001) is a daunting task indeed; to do it with such felicity, impressive. It is especially commendable, as it becomes a document for decision-makers in governments and society. How quickly it reaches those hands and the way they use it, will of course measure its success. But its ultimate contribution will be when its recommendations are applied in the field and yield positive results.

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Forest trees of south India. By S. G. Neginhal. 2004. Published by the author, Bangalore. Price: Rs 895/-. For subscribers of this *Newsletter* Rs 700 + Rs 75 (postage).

For birdwatchers this book is a boon as it helps them identify 988 forest trees belonging to 89 families, found in tropical moist and dry deciduous forests of peninsular India. It contains 170 colour pictures and 193 line-drawings of trees, indicating key identification features. Local names of trees are given in respective regional languages. Economic importance of trees and usage of their various parts are also given.

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