

Similarly, the Little Ringed Plover, and the Temminck's Stint seemed to prefer rocks, sand or open mud. The other sandpipers and waders show a greater propensity to wade out into the shallows or even alight on the thickly matted floats of plants growing in deeper water. This latter seems a favourite feeding mode of the Spotted Sandpipers. The Marsh Sandpiper is chiefly a wader foraging in the water rather than along its edges.

"It was also interesting to note the total absence of the fish-eating River Tern which is a common bird on all the rivers of Saurashtra, while the few migratory Caspian and Gull-billed Terns which did pass over, flew without a downward glance at the sullied water. Pied and Common Kingfishers both fish-eating birds, were absent. A similar polarisation in species of egrets was obvious. Cattle Egrets present in large flocks but the other egrets were few and far between, and both the Grey and Purple Herons though present, were uncommon..."

The next was a valuable article by Salim Ali requesting readers to report on roosts of Rosy Pastors *Pastor roseus*. He describes roosts, which he came across in Kutch, Gujarat and Delhi. This is what he said about roosts in Delhi, "Roost observed 14th and 15th April. Occupation continuing. Swarms concentrating at sunset to roost in a grove of rather scattered but large and dense thickets of *Salvadora persica* at Raisina, near the transmitting station of All India Radio. The birds were reported to have come here only within the last ten days. All now in perfect summer plumage and evidently on passage to their northern breeding grounds. Party after party of 10 to 50 birds, and dense well-drilled formations of 500 arriving from all directions, flying at great speed close above the ground, sweeping up suddenly from time to time as if to clear some imaginary obstacle ('hedge-hopping'), wheeling, banking, and circling in the air before alighting on bare trees and *Salvadora* bushes in packed,

typically starling-like clusters, and overflowing on to the ground. Numbers difficult to estimate: may be 25,000 or 50,000 birds, or more! Were reported on the evening of 15 April to have decreased noticeably..."

The other items in this issue related to the problem of choosing a national bird for India. It will be recalled that Salim Ali opted for the Great Indian Bustard, while members of the Lok Sabha decided on the Peacock. There was also a reference to the 13th International Ornithological Congress to be held at Cornell University in June 1962. The Secretary General then was Charles C. Sibley. In the correspondence section there was a letter from Dr W. Rydzewski, editor of *The Ring*, Wroclaw, Poland. He arranged for an exchange between *The Ring* and our newsletter, and from *The Ring* we were able to discover some fascinating facts about the long distance migration of birds as a result of the information found from the rings on their legs.

Cdr. N. S. Tyabji I.N. reported on the presence of 42 species of birds near Cochin harbour from December 1957 to April 1960.

Two contradictory letters about the newsletter from Dehra Dun are worth mentioning. P. D. Stracey, Honorary Secretary of Wildlife Preservation Society of India, Dehra Dun, suggested that instead of starting a new newsletter we should block a few pages in their magazine *Cheetal*, which was brought out every six months. This way, he said, our material would reach a wider public. [Stracey was the C. C. F. of Assam, author of a book on elephants and after retirement, was sent to Abyssinia, to set up their wildlife service.].

M. A. Rashid, Honorary Secretary, Wildlife Club, Dehra Dun, said, "We sincerely hope that your efforts to form an Ornithological Society will soon bear fruit. Please note that we shall be only too glad to join the same." [M. A. Rashid was later Chief Wildlife Warden of Gujarat and helped to promote the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*.].

In Memoriam: Shama Futehally (1952-2004)

Professor at the National School of Drama, Delhi, writer, critic, and translator, Shama was a passionate bird watcher, and contributed occasionally to the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. Extracts from some of these are reprinted below in honour of a true bird lover.

Birding in Kumaon

"The next day was to be dedicated to adventure. We had heard that the trek to Peenath, i.e., to the Pinakeshwar temple some distance away, was uniquely beautiful, and had collected a guide and sandwiches for the event. The trek is also a good twelve kilometres of nearly vertical climb, but our guide appears to have taken a good look at the two memsaabs who had hired him, to have sized them up unerringly, and to have left this fact for them to find out. We left early in the morning and reached the base of the mountain around eight. It was here that we had our first view of the red-billed blue magpie, that strikingly colourful denizen of the mountains. Three of these birds flew across the fields in front of us to confabulate together on the pines. Then there was the pleasant sight of a cinnamon tree sparrow, which I remember seeing on every branch during a visit to Kashmir in the seventies..."

"The day after that we drove to Binsar, which adjoins the Corbett National Park on one side and the Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary on the other. It is also one of the most beautiful places I have seen. Weighty with forest, it swirls in and out of mist, swoops into deep

ravines, disappears into cloudy mountains, and opens up to flaming sunsets. Early in the afternoon Zai and I were walking to the 'Snow Viewing Point' immediately after another of those mountain storms which threaten to end the world without further ado. We reached a small clearing where the sun was shining glassily on emerald leaves, and as we arrived it burst into life. Hundreds of small birds began to fly crazily about, apparently in demented search of the berry-like fruit of a particular tree. These turned out to be chestnut-bellied nuthatches, which I had assumed were never seen in large numbers. Interestingly enough we saw another flock of these nuthatches, behaving in much the same way, early the next morning in another spot. This, too, was after a shower. It seems to me that this would make a perfect subject of study for some eager young ornithologist." [1999. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 39 (6): 97-99.]

Revisiting Kihim

"My knowledge of, birds such as it is, is all mapped on to Kihim – ring plovers are the dots you see by a certain large patch of rocks, black bellied finch-larks are the flash of brown and black by the Kihim pond, the call of the spotted babbler is the call you hear as you walk past the third house from ours. This time I was returning after some years, and in the interim a fertiliser complex had raised an ugly head in the next village. But I discovered, with primitive relief, that my bird map was more or less unchanged and that

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 Mahabaleswar. 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.

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