

— In the news¹ —

Compiled by Praveen J.

Barriers to migration

On 9th May 2009, thousands of people around the world attended World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) events, which highlighted the barriers birds face during their long journeys. BirdLife Partners around the world are taking part, and are involved in joined up conservation projects to reduce threats faced by migratory birds. The theme for this year's WMBD—Barriers to migration—aims to raise awareness of some of the obstructions birds face during their migration. Apart from the innumerable natural obstacles faced, they also have to maneuver around multitudes of man-made obstacles like power lines, wind farms, television and mobile phone transmission masts, glass windows, tall buildings, and other structures. These man-made structures cause bird collisions that could result in fatalities. Many birds, especially those that migrate at night, do not recognise these new obstacles and subsequently collide with power lines, or crash into glass windows. One of the most susceptible types of migrants are soaring birds like raptors. These birds are funneled, in thousands each year, along predictable routes, avoiding large bodies of water and high mountains. Effects of man-made barriers in these migration bottlenecks is very high. BirdLife's Migratory Soaring Birds project aims to address these threats, as well as habitat alteration, pollution, and illegal hunting, by working with key economic sectors to better understand the underlying causes of the threats to soaring birds, and develop best practice guidelines. This will be achieved through regional awareness raising and training, combined with six pilot projects in partnership with the key stakeholders across the Middle East and north-eastern Africa. *Courtesy: www.birdlife.org.*

Birdfair/RSPB Research Fund for Endangered Birds

The RSPB invites applications for funding from the 2009 Birdfair / RSPB Research Fund for Endangered Birds, which will remain open until 30th September 2009. This fund provides assistance of up to \$2,000 to researchers working on birds listed by IUCN as Endangered, Critically Endangered, or Data Deficient. Successful research projects will be intimated by 30th December 2009. Application forms may be downloaded from the RSPB website: www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/science/international/smallgrants/endangeredbirdgrants.asp.

From the field

Spring migration is in full swing and a whole lot of birds on passage are being reported from seemingly unlikely locations. Add to that the extra long weekends this year! Most birders are out in the field with their binoculars and cameras—a lot is happening around. Ravi Potluri and others reported a checklist of more than 200 species from a birding tour in Bhutan between 2nd and 10th April 2009 with sightings of Satyr Tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus*, Himalayan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus*, Blood Pheasant *Ophrysia superciliosa*, Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*, Fire-tailed Myzornis *Myzornis pyrrhura*, Cutia *Cutia nipalensis*, Yellow-rumped Honeyguide *Indicator xanthonotus*, Spotted Laughingthrush *Garrulax ocellatus* and Slender-billed

Scimitar-Babbler *Xiphirhynchus supercilialis* (*Courtesy: DelhiBird*). About 20 Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa* and one Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* were recorded on 9th May 2009 from Ambazari Lake in Nagpur by Rohit Chakravarty, presumably on passage (*Courtesy: birdsofnagpur*). Raju Kasambe recorded Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus* attacking and trying to kill a small warbler—which escaped!—at the same location on 1st May 2009 (*Courtesy: nagpurbirds*). K. B. Sadananda photographed a Pied Tit *Parus nuchalis* at Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary, Karnataka in January 2009, a confirmed sighting in southern India after close to a decade (*Courtesy: BngBirds*). Anand Arya and others reported a Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla* at Olka Bird Park, Delhi on 1st May 2009 (*Courtesy: DelhiBird*). Mandar Khadilkar reported more than 300 spp., on an 18-day tour of north-eastern India in the first quarter of March 2009 with sightings of Jerdon's Babbler *Chrysomma altirostre*, Lesser Grey-headed Fish-Eagle *Ichthyophaga humilis*, Blue-naped Pitta *Pitta nipalensis* from Kaziranga; Lesser Shortwing *Brachypteryx leucophrys*, Rufous-breasted Blue Flycatcher *Ficedula hyperythra* from Panbari; White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata* at Nameri; Bugun Liocichla *Liocichla bugunorum*, Rusty-fronted Barwing *Actinodura egertoni*, Bhutan Laughingthrush *Garrulax imbricatus*, Ward's Trogon *Harpactes wardi*, Gold-breasted Tit-Babbler *Alcippe chrysotis*, Grey Peacock-Pheasant *Polyplectron bicalcaratum*, Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*, Beautiful Nuthatch *Sitta formosa*, Tibetan Siskin *Carduelis thibetana* from Eaglenest, Himalayan Buteo *Buteo burmanicus* and Upland Buzzard *B. hemilasius* from Sangti valley; Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* from Sella Pass; Yellow-rumped Honeyguide at Dirang and many other goodies (*Courtesy: BirdsofBombay*). On 1st May 2009, E. S. Praveen recorded a massive, 1,000-strong Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* flock at Enamavu, Kerala—perhaps congregating before migration (*Courtesy: KeralaBirder*). Vijay Mohan Raj reported a Speckled Piculet *Picumnus innominatus* from Dandeli, Karnataka on 8th April 2009 (*Courtesy: Bngbirds*). Bindu Kapadia reported Satyr Tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus*, Broad-billed Flycatcher-Warbler *Tickellia hodgsoni* and White-browed Tit-Babbler *Alcippe vinipectus* at Neora Valley in Darjeeling Hills during 14th–22nd March 2009 (*Courtesy: DelhiBird*). Shashank Dalvi and Atul Jain reported Hodgson's Frogmouth *Batrachostomus hodgsoni* in Eaglenest, Arunachal Pradesh in late March 2009 (*Courtesy: DelhiBird*). Sumit K. Sen reported Eyebrowed Thrush *Turdus obscurus*, Black-browed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps* and Western Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus occipitalis* from Kolkota in April 2009, all first records for the city (*Courtesy: www.kolkotabirds.com*). L. Namassivayan reported more than 100 nests of Small Pranticole *Glareola lactea* from Malampuzha dam in Kerala on 24th April 2009. This is the largest nesting colony of this species in Kerala (*Courtesy: www.hindu.com*). Garima Bhatia and friends reported a Rusy-tailed Flycatcher *Muscicapa ruficauda*, on passage, from Nandi Hills, Bangalore on 10th April 2009 (*Courtesy: Bngbirds*). On 6th April 2009, Charlie Moores and Mike Prince recorded Pied Thrush *Zoothera wardii*, Sulphur-bellied *P. griseolus* and Hume's Warbler *P. humei* at the same location (*Courtesy: OrientalBirding*). Bill Harvey reported Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis*, a nesting female Great Pied Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*, Yellow-breasted Emberiza *aureola* and Black-faced Buntings *E. spodocephala*, Himalayan Rubythroat *Luscinia pectoralis* and Red-capped Babbler *Timalia*

¹ For the period 15th March–15th May 2009.

pileata from Kaziranga, Assam, 2nd–3rd March 2009 (Courtesy: *OrientalBirding*). Jagmohan Garg photographed an immature Watercock *Gallicrex cinerea* in Uppalapadu, Andhra Pradesh on 31st March 2009 (Courtesy: *bsap_online*). Prashanth Badarinath reported four Blue-winged Parakeets *Psittacula columboides* in Bilikal State Forest in Karnataka, which is about 60 km away from the nearest habitat for the species (Courtesy: *Bngbirds*). Sandeep Das recorded a Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* stealing the prey of a Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus calidus* at Adat Kole, Kerala on 15th March 2009 (Courtesy: *KeralaBirder*). Santosh Martin reported the presence of 200 Demoiselle Cranes *Grus virgo* at Sirguppa beside the Tungabhadra River while Vijay Mohan Raj reported about 40 at Hidkal dam—both locations in northern Karnataka (Courtesy: *BngBirds*). David Raju reported close to 300 spp. during a 15-day trip in mid-March 2009 to Nainital-Corbett and surroundings. The list includes Cheer Pheasant *Catreus wallichii*, Spotted-winged Grosbeak *Mycerobas melanozanthos* and Black-throated Accentor *Prunella atrogularis* (Courtesy: *KeralaBirder*).

A wader atlas for Africa-Western Eurasian region

The *Atlas of wader populations in Africa and Western Eurasia* is a milestone publication presenting the current knowledge of the numbers, distribution and movements of waders in the Africa–Western Eurasia region. Compiled over a decade, the *Atlas* is beautifully illustrated and provides maps, trends, and a wealth of detailed information on this remarkable group of birds. This *Atlas* is the latest in a line of flyway atlases that clearly demonstrate the need for international collaboration in the conservation of migratory birds. It brings together, for the first time, all the information that might be needed to act for the conservation of wader species in the African–West Eurasian region. Waders are one of the most migratory groups of birds and successful conservation demands a strongly international approach. Data provided by thousands of experts, most of them volunteers, from over 80 countries, have been combined with published results of bird ringing and national bird atlases. These data are presented on precise maps showing the population boundaries as well as areas used during breeding and non-breeding seasons, and key sites at every stage of a species' life cycle (Courtesy: www.wetlands.org).

Fighting extinction of vultures—action in Gujarat

Taking a serious view of the disappearing vultures in the state, the Gujarat Environment and Ecology Research Foundation (GEER Foundation) has sought greater involvement of naturalists and wildlife enthusiasts in the conservation of endangered vultures. At a meeting held in Gandhinagar, it was proposed to defer the vulture census till early next year when the weather would be more conducive for the exercise. The conservationists invited for the meeting suggested a change in the method of conducting the census, which is also being considered by the forest department. According to information obtained under the Right to Information Act, the forest department has spent eighty-four lakhs Rupees on vulture conservation through GEER Foundation in the last five years! Even though the vulture census figures are alarming, resulting in an outcry from the state's conservationists, it is worth mentioning that Gujarat is perhaps the only state that has such a method in place to locate vulture colonies, study nesting habits and an elaborate conservation plan. In Gujarat, Birds Conservation Society for Gujarat (BCSG) has a special vulture cell with volunteers dedicated to their protection. BCSG now has volunteers all over the state creating fenced feeding sites for vultures, where carcasses are dumped for vultures to feed on (Courtesy: <http://epaper.dnaindia.com>).

Migratory birds test negative for avian influenza

Over 500 swab samples collected so far from migratory birds under an international surveillance project on avian influenza, initiated in the Koonthankulam Bird Sanctuary in Tamil Nadu and Chilika Lake in Orissa, in December 2008, have tested negative for the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 strain, according to the BNHS. The project was part of a global programme to study the ecological habits of water birds, the interaction among wild and domestic birds, movement of avian influenza viruses and other pathogens in the Central Asian Flyway. The H5N1 strain that caused deaths in domestic poultry and birds in India and in many other countries in Asia, Africa and Europe since 2003 was the focus of the study. Under the project, ten Bar-headed Geese *Anser indicus*, six Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* and four Garganey *A. querquedula* were fitted with specially designed satellite transmitters in Tamil Nadu to study their migratory movements. Some other bird species were fitted with the transmitters in Orissa. Using global positioning system, the bird movements were tracked to enable scientists to determine whether there was any relation between bird locations and (HPAI) H5N1 outbreaks along migratory pathways. The study was jointly undertaken by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests, Ministry of Agriculture with technical inputs from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)-India, EMPRES-Wildlife Unit - Rome, BNHS, Wetlands International, and experts in bird capture and satellite telemetry from the United States Geological Survey. Scott Newman, Animal Health Officer, FAO, is the international coordinator for the project and Dr S. Balachandran, BNHS is the national coordinator in India (Courtesy: www.hindu.com).

Rhys Green awarded the Godman-Salvin Medal

An RSPB research scientist has received a rare honour for his work protecting threatened bird species. The British Ornithologists' Union (BOU) has awarded Rhys Green the Godman-Salvin Medal—making him only the 24th recipient in nearly 90 years. The honour came at the recent BOU conference and celebrates his work studying the effects of development, farming, and climate change on bird populations. Previous recipients of the medal have included pioneering ornithologist and founder of the World Wildlife Fund, Max Nicholson; current BOU president and Royal Warden of the Swans, Professor Christopher Perrins and Henry Witherby, author of *The handbook of British birds*. BOU have awarded it to Rhys because of his longstanding work with the RSPB and in particular his studies with Stone Curlews. Rhys has contributed both in publishing the science and implementing the conservation action with the RSPB.

Rhys Green has been a special friend of India, since his participation in the conservation work of critically endangered species like the Jerdon's Courser *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus* and the *Gyps* spp. vultures. *Indian Birds* and the New Ornithology Foundation congratulate Rhys on this happy occasion! (Courtesy: www.rspb.org.uk).

Errata

Indian Birds Volume 4 Number 5 (September–October) 2008
Pages 163–164: the photographs (Figs. 1–4) are all by Raghavji Balar and not by Pravin Indrekar, as mentioned. The error is regretted.
Page 174: the photograph was taken in Nagaland and not the Andamans, as mentioned.