species the field is wide open for discoveries." What Stewart says has been confirmed by present birdwatchers who so often succeed in extending the range of species mentioned in the books. Salim Ali himself used to advise not to treat anything written as gospel truth. What Stewart says about the possibility of the Glossy Ibis occasionally reaching the south-eastern seaboard of India has probably already been confirmed by later day birders.

A flight down memory lane—1: Half a century of birds!

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I had anticipated spending the remaining years reading about experiences of other, younger people, but your editor persistently called for articles. Had he not been someone I have admired for his dedication and maturity, I would not have responded and in time, his exhortations would have faded away. Apart from having a high respect for him, there is a small degree of personal vanity involved, because in a small measure, he is a product of my endeavors; as he confided in me, he was an active member of the Nature Club of his school, which Captain N.S. Tyabji (Retd.), a very respected member of WWF-India, had started in Hyderabad. The Nature Clubs were part of the Youth Education Movement that I had the privilege to initiate in 1976 for WWF-India. Besides, he was very persuasive, explaining how my years of experience would "enrich" the contents of *Indian Birds*. Flattery is terrible and I succumbed to it! Besides what did I have to lose since, at my age, memories are the only things that are there apart from the aches and pains of a faltering body; old people also love to talk about the wonderful world of their younger years, amusingly oblivious of the fact that if today's world is a trifle wanting, it is because of the acts of omissions and commissions of our generation. Of course the world was a far better place for birdwatchers when I was a youth, than what it is today, and perhaps, I may be doing a service to the cause of bird conservation if I not only wrote about those halcyon days, but also attempted to show where we had failed in conserving it. If nothing else, there will be something to keep me occupied, enjoying what I am doing.

Actually, in measuring back from 2006 gets my math wrong; I had done some of my most exciting and active birdwatching in the 1940s through to 1960. Taking into account the bird rich years of my early childhood—when birds were every where, even right inside homes, it would be correct to say that it has been a full life time of birds. In those early years of the last century, almost every one was aware of birds: sparrows, mynahs, doves, pigeons, parakeets, koels, wagtails, pariah kites, vultures, owlets and barn owls, and not to forget the ubiquitous and rascally house crows. Peafowl freely entered compounds and Sarus Crane *Grus antigone* were affectionately referred to as "the couple" (*beladi*). Every cool season saw the arrival of skeins of Demoiselle Crane *Grus virgo*, flighting from a daytime waterside resting place, to fan out across the countryside to glean grain fallen in stubble of harvested millets and sorghum. When I think of it, every one was familiar with a surprising number of species. For those from families of country gentlemen, who enjoyed *shikar*, the repertoire of familiar species went up exponentially: ducks, snipe, partridges (now known as 'francolin'), bustards and the several birds of prey were casually referred to! I am sure many of today's well informed birdwatchers would be happy to be able to list as many species as we did as children. It was not surprising then that there were such knowledgeable birdwatchers of the likes of Dharmakumarsinhji, Sálim Ali, Humayun Abdulali and a galaxy of British ornithologists, all within the span of one generation. Growing up among such luminaries could not but have had some influence on my young and highly receptive mind. That I have not been able to achieve far more as a naturalist is what I greatly regret.

The opportunities and the encouragement were there. Sheer lethargy is what I would accept. As a student at the Delhi University in the late 1940s, I had been commissioned to write a serial on ducks of the Delhi region! I am proud of my full length articles on birdwatching in the Garhwal region of the Himalaya and on the trek into Tibet in 1954 being accepted for publication in the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*. I keep on asking myself why there were not more papers by me since then? The reason why I am mentioning this is to emphasize, for the legions of bright young bird watchers of today, not to be casual. Salim Ali invariably insisted that I, "maintain a regular diary with meticulous notes," recording everything, howsoever insignificant. How I wish I had followed his advice! Where are the once familiar birds? Even crows are missing around my Rajkot home! I have explanations for the declines in populations of most birds, but without records over the years, they can be accepted, at best, as well informed conjectures. Given the wonderful binoculars and telescopes backed up by high quality cameras, the young birdwatcher of today must not be casual as so many of the earlier generation were. Another piece of advice which Sálim Ali gave was to take a harder look at the surroundings of every bird and not limit observations to the bird itself. We will not be able to help the birds if the habitats they have evolved in are destroyed. A couple of days ago my friend, Himmatsinhji, phoned up from Kachchh and lamented that we had been rather myopic in focusing on the species and not paying much attention to the habitat. He was referring to the degradation of the grasslands of his native area, pointing out that in the end, the cattle herders were under great stress,

because of which the very fabric of Kachchh's pastoral society was being torn asunder. The Great Indian Bustard and the Lesser Florican would need to be highlighted along with the magnificent, large-horned cattle of the area. Indian birds need native Indian flora and if there can be one essence of so many years of concern for conservation of wildlife, there has to be an informed stand against widespread introduction of exotic plants and monoculture practices.

Redeeming indigenous nomenclature of birds[1]

S. Theodore Baskaran

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A few months ago I was in Kodaikanal and I visited a single room library that opens three days in a week. Rummaging through the stacks, I hit upon a treasure. In the early 1930s, a certain Edward G. Nichols who lived in Madurai kept careful notes of the birds he sighted in Madurai and Kodaikanal and published the list in two installments in the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* (Nichols 1937, 1944a,b, 1945). These reprints are bound and kept in the library.

What's new? You may ask. Nichols did not merely prepare the checklist; he went a step further and documented the Tamil names of these birds. The person who helped him in recording the local names was P. Bonnel, a Tamilian from Tirunelveli; later he was in the faculty of the Madras Christian College and was professor emeritus when I was a student. Because of his passion for birds, he was known as 'Paradise Bird Bonnel'.

What Nichols did is significant because the Tamil names of birds are disappearing due to a lack of usage. I believe that for the conservation movement to be successful, particularly bird conservation, we have to retrieve indigenous nomenclature. Not just the names of birds, but of the other creatures as well...of mammals, reptiles and so on. For instance, the Tamil name for King Cobra '*karunagam*' has already gone out of vogue and a translation of the two words in the English name has taken over. If you go the old museums, you will see the original Tamil name on the label.

Before proceeding further I must make it clear that I am not into language politics here but only into conservation and how that cause can be furthered, by redeeming traditional names.

The concepts and ideas concerning Tamil nomenclature would apply to other languages also—such as Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam—since all have been subjected to the distortions brought in by colonialism. The British derisively referred to these languages as 'vernacular', a word from a root which means 'slave'. Of these languages I am familiar only with Tamil: so I will restrict my observations to this language.

What is happening now in this front? As a short cut, translators, who have a condescending attitude to local language, even if it is their mother tongue, translate the English name and use it in Tamil? However in the rural areas, the original Tamil names are used. So you already have a Diglossia problem, in having two sets of names, creating confusion for people and researchers. When we use the translated name, it does not make any sense to the people.

The English names themselves are a recent creation, often concocted from the point of view of the British, Like 'Indian Robin' or 'The Grey-headed Flycatcher'. Do you see why in India, bird watching as a hobby is restricted largely to the English-speaking crowd? Most of the Tamil names are a single word like *kuyil* (koel) or *kili* (parakeet). Ponderous, compound names such as 'Malabar whistling thrush' will not be part of popular culture. It will not find a place in popular imagination.

For all the creatures, both birds and mammals that we have been with for hundreds of years, there are local names. These names are not just sounds. They are little capsules of knowledge. Some of them describe the behaviour of the bird, some its appearance while others the habitat. Large Pied Wagtail which frequents the *dhobi ghats* is called *Vannathi kuruvi* (Washer-woman bird); Hill Myna is *Naiyandi kuruvi* for its propensity to mimic. While walking in Periyar sanctuary, our guide pointed to a Ruby-throated Bulbul and called it *Manikandan* (Jewell-throated). But the best I have come across is the Tamil name for Shama—it is called *Solaipadi* (the one that sings in the shola. The Tamil word *solai* is the root of the term Shola). Early taxonomists have coined scientific names of some species around the Tamil names.

But there are also 'problems' with Tamil names arising from regional dialects. One species is known by different names in different regions of Tamil Nadu; Pitta, which is known by four names, is a good example. Similarly, different species of birds of one or more genera are known by just one name—quails and partridges are examples.

Some of the bird names have been in parlance for hundreds of years. In Tamil literature, there are lexicons, called *nigandu* that have come down from 8th to 10th century AD.

There are at least three *nigandus*, in which there are lists of birds, animals and trees, among other things. Many names of birds also occur in inscriptions.

My observation is that many of these traditional names are still in vogue in rural areas. It is in the urban area that they have gone out of parlance. Many Tamil names of birds that have gone out of use in India, survive in Sri Lanka. In fact G.

[1] Based on a paper read at the Bird Fair Conference at Gandhigram, Tamil Nadu on 4.ii.2006.