

## Editorial

Bird populations are experiencing unprecedented changes across the globe as our planet warms. Many of these documented cases are from the temperate zones. The tropics are as vulnerable but have received relatively less attention. Some of the articles in this Sri Lanka special issue focus on documenting the status of birds, especially the common ones, quantitatively, with the hope that these numbers can be compared at some future date when habitats and overall environments are expected to be different. One of the articles even takes 'baby steps' towards setting an example of a follow-up study, comparing past numbers with present, to flag potentially declining species. Our lead article on patch-monitoring will, hopefully, be a model for describing the bird community of a very specific area, like a backyard. The authors have attempted to use easily replicable methods of collecting and analyzing data to aid future researchers on a similar quest.

The heavy use of eBird in this issue indicates the indispensable role that publicly available citizen science databases can play in the future. Gone are the days when field notes were destined to some dusty shelf or attic, relegated to obscurity and the ravages of time. The fact that eBird use is exponentially increasing in South Asia is a welcome indication that the trend will continue. There is an impressive and committed number of e-Birders in Sri Lanka, but the island nation might consider setting up formal groups of expert birders from the various provinces, who are willing to volunteer their time to monitor eBird postings and exert some quality control of this invaluable database. As ecotourism flourishes, there is always the risk of overzealous tour operators, or resort owners, faking digital images to purportedly report rare or new species. And tourists keen on nothing more than list-building often lump several disparate areas together to make consolidated lists that end up reporting incongruously unlikely species in unlikely areas, like coastal birds in the central hill zone, or, vice versa.

The increasing popularity of whale-watching tours from the Mirissa coast has been a bonanza for sea birders. The pelagic birds article by Anderson & Alagiyawadu could serve as a guide for the research and conservation possible when birders establish good rapport and long-term relationships with whale watching operators. Also, with a climate change-induced sea level rise of about a metre seemingly inevitable by the end of this century, an urgent need is to accurately quantify the extent of shorebird habitat in the island, and to make predictions on to what extent this will be compromised by rising waters and shrinking beaches. High altitude birds could also be in trouble. Studies focusing on the status of high-altitude endemics in Sri Lanka, with predictions on their range shrinkages, can be invaluable.

When papers are written by multiple observers, there is an inevitable bias of variability in their skills. That's why studies involving repeated observations by a single observer are invaluable. Three papers in this issue involve single observers. Apart from the pandemic paper (all field work for which were done by me), the Kirale Kele and Comb Duck papers stemmed from my friend Pavan Bopitiya's work. Pavan is an ace birder. He lives a mere stone's throw from the reserve. His repeated visits to the area spanning multiple years have been a boon to the ornithology of this superb wetland. Arjun Guneratne's essay on the history of Sri Lankan ornithology gives an overview of the birth and development of bird studies as a science.

I want to end this with a literal pet peeve. I thought some of my fellow Americans are too cat-friendly, but some Sri Lankans foster even more fervid feline fetishes! A colleague in Galle has 16 cats and my house-keeper's prolific cats in Matara are apparently the perennial source of kittens that roam the neighbourhood. The Galle lady keeps all of them indoors, but unfortunately, that is not the case in the many examples I saw on the island. My little postcard note will hopefully increase awareness of the destruction that free-ranging domestic cats can wreak on birds, and what can be done to mitigate it.

—Ragupathy Kannan  
Guest Editor



Kasun Chathuranga

Layard's Parakeet *Psittacula calthropae*