Editorial

The seasons have changed and the inexhorable urge to procreate has once again sucked the avian migrants away from our drying landscape. Life renews itself in Nature's unceasing drama; buffetted constantly in eddies created by a tilted, spinning Earth, rotating forever around the source of life.

In a sense, this Newsletter too is a renewal of our belief in the importance of the amateur Indian birdwatcher, of his / her contribution to our rich ornithological literature.

Coining a title

Several well-wishers have written in to say that the title, *Newsletter for Ornithologists*, is quite a mouthful. We feel that ultimately it is the content of the newsletter that will make it popular among birdwatchers, not the title. After all, an ornithologist is also a birdwatcher and vice-versa. Neither derives less pleasure in his pursuit by being labelled one or the other.

Printed versus digital

Today mailing lists are a rage with the computer savvy. Their popularity increases day by day. Their usefulness cannot be denied. They are an open forum, always accessible to the interested, just like a room full of like-minded people exchanging ideas and information. They are strengthened by the amazing wizardry of electronic archives, keywords and, threads—all efficient tools of data retrieval. Above all else, they are free of charge and catholic and impartial in their acceptance of inputs. Users have the satisfaction of immediate gratification in print, hence their immense usefulness and popularity.

Where then, is the place of our *Newsletter*, in this wired, electronic world? I have frequently asked myself this question. You must excuse my bias for the printed word, being a bibliographer. But there is truth and substance in the relative permanence and accessibility of published material. Especially for those, whose world is yet to be changed by the Internet. The other advantages of a forum like our Newsletter, vis-à-vis Internet-based mailing lists, are the processes of distillation and editing. The best material is made available to the reader—the most accurate, the most readable, the most informative and the most enjoyable. Can one deny the pleasure of sinking into a sofa with a cup of coffee and settling to read the latest issue of the *Newsletter* or a book? Mailing lists require computer hardware, Internet connectivity and the straight-backed discipline of table and chair. And the volatility of the medium is the playing field of viruses and hackers. How many people are there who would prefer reading backlit text to that which is printed on paper? In our time at least, a published *Newsletter* will prevail. Future generations may tread a different path.

Our aim

We wish to publish approximately 100 pages of printed material annually, in six issues, published in February, April, June, August, October and, December, respectively. This cannot be done, dear reader, without your help. From you, we welcome articles, papers, annotated checklists, trip reports, notes on the behaviour and biology of one or more species, book reviews, audio-recording reviews, letters, announcements and notices of events, news from the birding world, etc. We also encourage artists and photographers to showcase their work on our covers.

We will gradually build a network of volunteer referees, specializing in the birdlife of a geographical / political area, a habitat, or fascinated with a particular family of birds. They will assist us in our work and lend credibility to it.

In this issue

M.K.S. Pasha and his friends present a checklist of birds of Pench Tiger Reserve, with abbreviated annotations. Checklists are the baseline data for further studies of avifauna of a region, and are increasingly used in management decisions regarding land-use. Their usefulness, backed up with detailed, old-fashioned field notes, can never be commended enough.

Daniel Wesley takes you into the miniature world of nesting sunbirds and Satish Pande and his friends, on the trail of the rare Forest Owlet.

Baljit Singh's piece illustrates the importance of an open and alert mind and the confidence that birding notes instill in putting two and two together. Its triumph is the unmentioned fact that meaningful birdwatching is not just the preserve of those who tramp through jungles.

Ranjit Manakadan and Sivakumar tentatively record a vagrant. Prakash Gole informs about a meeting of the Goose Specialist Group. There is much more.

The 'Reviews' section discusses four recently published books. We will bring to readers detailed reviews of publications in the future. Books are the building blocks of our libraries but unfortunately, no longer easily affordable. A well-rounded review helps in clinching an investment decision!

In the column, 'Recently published', we present to readers all that is being published worldwide, on birds of the Indian region.

A request

Now that the first issue of this new ornithologial publication is in your hands, we request you to make it a success. Please talk about it to friends, show it to people, and encourage them to subscribe and to write for it.

Aasheesh Pittie.

Birds of Pench Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh, central India

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Introduction

Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR) (78°55'E--79°35'E and 21°8'N--22°N) lies in the southern lower reaches of Satpura Hills. According to the biogeographic classification of Rodgers and Panwar (1988), PTR falls under 6E Biogeographic Province of the Deccan Peninsula. PTR was the 19th Tiger Reserve of India, notified as such in 1992-93. The Reserve, spreading over the two districts of Seoni and Chhindwara, comprises of the Pench (or Priyadarshini) National Park, Pench Sanctuary and the reserve forest, totally encompassing an area of 757.85 km^2.

Little previous work has been carried out on the avifauna of the Reserve. Kumar (1999) had listed 171 species of birds in the management plan of PTR. Some information however, on distribution of bird species, is available (Pasha and Sankar 1996, Pasha 1998). One of us (R.J.) studied bird community structure of PTR between October 1997 and May 1998. M.K.S.P. and G.A. stayed in PTR from February 1997 to August 2000 studying the ecology of Gaur *Bos gaurus* Smith, 1827, and collected information on avifauna. Since there is no published checklist prior to this, the present work can form the baseline for further research.

Study area

The Pench River, from which the Reserve derives its name, flows through the center of the park dividing it into the western Chhindwara Block (141.61km^2) and the eastern Seoni Block (145.24km^2). The river dries out in summer resulting in the formation of several puddles, which are an important water source for the fauna of the Reserve. On the southern end of the river stands Totladoh hydroelectric dam. The construction of the dam submerged 54km^2 area of the Reserve. In addition to this, a water tank (*c.*0.5km^2) at Bodha Nala was constructed in 1994 in the Seoni Block. These water bodies attract and provide refuge to many migratory waterfowl and other water-bird species.

The vegetation of the area falls into two major categories: Tropical Dry Deciduous and the Tropical Moist Deciduous type (Champion and Seth 1968). These forest types, for the present study, were further sub-divided as follows:

1. Teak dominant forest: Teak (*Tectona grandis*) with associated species like *Madhuca indica, Diospyros melanoxylon, Terminalia tomentosa, Buchanania lanzan, Lagerstroemia parviflora, Miliusa velutina* and *Lannea coromandelica*.
2. Miscellaneous forest: Teak mixed, *Anogeissus latifolia-Bosewellia serrata* mixed stand, hill forest and *Zizyphus-Butea* mixed woodland.
3. Bamboo-dominant (*Dendrocalamus strictus*) forest.
4. *Cleistanthus collinus* woodland.
5. Grassland–Savanna.
6. Open scrub jungle: Dominated by *Lantana camara.*
7. Wetlands: River, streams, ponds and reservoir.

The terrain is gently undulating and is dissected by a number of seasonal streams and *nullahs*. The altitude of the Reserve ranges from 350m to 650m. Climatically the area has four seasons: summer (March--June), monsoon (July–August), post monsoon (September–October) and winter (November--February). The temperature in winter dips as low as –2°C and rises to a maximum of 49°C in summer. The average rainfall is around 1400mm, 80% of which is received during the southwest monsoon between July and September.

Methods

The present list is the outcome of bird observations carried out in PTR between February 1996 and July 2000, spread over all four seasons. The area was regularly surveyed for birds in all the major habitats. Birds seen were identified and recorded along with habitat type and status (resident, winter visitor, local migrant and straggler). On the basis of the frequency of sighting, the bird species were assigned categories of abundance (absent, rare, uncommon, occasional and common). The birds recorded were categorized into seven trophic guilds, namely insectivores, omnivores, carnivores, frugivores, granivores, piscivores and nectarivores based on Ali and Ripley (1987).

Results and discussion

262 species of birds were recorded in PTR (Appendix 1). This study has added 84 species to the previous list of PTR (Kumar 1999). Among the birds sighted, 162 are resident, 70 winter visitors, 3 summer visitors, 25 local migrants and 2 vagrant / straggler species. The composition of birds in different guilds in PTR showed that the insectivorous guild was the most abundant (35% of the total species) and nectarivorous guild was the least abundant guild with only (1%). The composition of other five guilds is 25% omnivores, 16% carnivores, 10% frugivores, 6% granivores and 7% piscivores.

The Pench Reservoir spread over 50km^2 is a major attraction to the migratory waterfowls and the dead trees scattered amidst the reservoir is good nesting site for many

water birds. Important species nesting in the reservoir are Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala* (Pennant, 1769), Asian Openbill-Stork *Anastomus oscitans* (Boddaert, 1783), White-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* (Boddaert, 1783), and Oriental White Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* (Latham, 1790). The Painted Stork and Oriental White Ibis are "Near Threatened" (BirdLife International 2001: *Threatened birds of Asia: The BirdLife International Red Data Book*), while the Asian Openbill-Stork and White-necked Stork have been recorded breeding here for the first time. The waders in PTR occur in low numbers. The plausible reason for the low abundance of waders in PTR could be that, the edges of the forest end abruptly into these water bodies leaving practically little or no space for the creation of the banks and shallow areas, which are essential for wading birds. Another point worth noting is the over-wintering of Brahminy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* (Pallas, 1764) in PTR in 1997 and 1998. During these two years *c.*50 birds stayed over in PTR till as late as April.

Sightings of special interest

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* (Linnaeus, 1758). Not a common winter visitor to PTR. Has been sighted only once in the Pench reservoir in January 1999.

Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos* (Pennant, 1769). A winter visitor to the area. Has been sighted continuously, every winter, since 1996. This harrier was first sighted in November 1995 (Pasha & Sankar 1996), which is the range extension record for this raptor.

Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* J. E. Gray, 1834. Was sighted once in March 1997.

Painted Spurfowl *Gallopardix lunulata* (Valenciennes, 1825). Very rare in PTR. Seen only twice, at the same site, in March and April l996 (Pasha 1998). In dry deciduous forest dominated by teak (*Tectona grandis*).

Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus* (Boddaert, 1783). About seven to ten breeding pairs are present in PTR. Commonly seen along the banks of Pench River in the northern part of the national park.

Rosy Minivet *Pericrocotus roseus* (Vieillot, 1818). A male was sighted once in scrubland, in the national park, near Karmajhiri village.

White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus* (Scopoli, 1786). A male was seen near Bodha Nala tank. The area has moist deciduous vegetation, dominated by bamboo.

Threats to the area

Sporadic fires and illegal fishing are two major problems that the management of PTR faces. Fires occur annually, predominantly during summer. These can be detrimental to breeding ground birds. Also, these fires affect old, dead trees, which are essential for hole-nesting birds. Effective preventive measures which the Reserve staff has embarked upon, is an effective step to combat such situations. Illegal fishing in Pench Reservoir used to be a major threat to the Reserve's flora and fauna and also to migratory waterfowl visiting this area every year. Since the Supreme Court's Order in 2000, a complete ban on fishing has come into force. As a result the mortality of several water birds, which used to get caught and entangled in the fishing nets, has declined. Effective patrolling in PTR has minimized the pressures on the reservoir. The park is becoming a major tourist attraction and the increase in tourist influx and the proposition of opening some areas of the reservoir for boating for the visitors needs to be looked with great caution. The staff still needs to be better equipped to provide strong resistance and overcome the existing problem.

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Species	Habitat	Frequency	Status
Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* (Pallas, 1764)	Wl	C	R
Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Wl	X	W
Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger* (Vieillot, 1817)	Wl	C	R
Indian Shag *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis* Stephens, 1826	Wl	O	LM
Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Wl	O	LM
Darter *Anhinga melanogaster* Pennant, 1769	Wl	U	LM
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* (Linnaeus, 1766)	Wl	C	R
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Linnaeus, 1758	Wl	C	LM
Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* Linnaeus, 1766	Wl	O	LM
Large Egret *Casmerodius albus* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Wl	C	R
Median Egret *Mesophoyx intermedia* (Wagler, 1829)	Wl	C	R
Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Gr, Os, Cs, Wl	C	R
Indian Pond-Heron *Ardeola grayii* (Sykes, 1832)	Wl	C	R
Little Green Heron *Butorides striatus* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Wl	O	R
Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Wl	C	R
Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala* (Pennant, 1769)	Wl	O	R
Asian Openbill-Stork *Anastomus oscitans* (Boddaert, 1783)	Wl	O	R
Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Wl	O	W
White-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* (Boddaert, 1783)	Wl	O	R
Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* (Latham, 1790)	Wl	U	R
Oriental White Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* (Latham, 1790)	Wl	C	R
Black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa* (Temminck, 1824)	Wl	U	R
Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* Linnaeus, 1758	Wl	O	LM
Lesser Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna javanica* (Horsfield, 1821)	Wl	C	LM
Brahminy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* (Pallas, 1764)	Wl	C	W
Cotton Teal *Nettapus coromandelianus* (Gmelin, 1789)	Wl	U	W
Gadwall *Anas strepera* Linnaeus, 1758	Wl	O	W
Eurasian Wigeon *A. penelope* Linnaeus, 1758	Wl	O	W
Mallard *A. platyrhynchos* Linnaeus, 1758	Wl	U	W
Spot-billed Duck *A. poecilorhyncha* J.R. Forester, 1781	Wl	U	LM
Northern Pintail *A. acuta* Linnaeus, 1758	Wl	C	W
Garganey *A. querquedula* Linnaeus, 1758	Wl	O	W
Common Teal *A. crecca* Linnaeus, 1758	Wl	O	W
Red-crested Pochard *Rhodonessa rufina* (Pallas, 1773)	Wl	O	W
Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Wl	O	W
Ferruginous Pochard *A. nyroca* (Guldenstadt, 1770)	Wl	O	W
Tufted Pochard *A. fuligula* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Wl	U	W
Oriental Honey-Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhyncus* (Temminck, 1821)	Tk, Ms, Gr, Os, Cs	C	R
Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus* (Desfontaines, 1789)	Gr, Os, Cs	C	R
Black Kite *Milvus migrans* (Boddaert, 1783)	Cs	X	R
Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* (Boddaert, 1783)	Wl	U	R
Greater Grey-headed Fish-Eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus* (Horsfield, 1821)	Wl	O	R
Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Cs	C	R
Indian White-backed Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* (Gmelin, 1788)	Ms, Cs	C	R
Long-billed Vulture *G. indicus* (Scopoli, 1786)	Cs	C	R
Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus* (Linnaeus, 1766)	Cs	X	V
Red-headed Vulture *Sarcogyps calvus* (Scopoli, 1786)	Tk, Ms, Cs	O	R
Short-toed Snake-Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* (Gmelin, 1788)	Gr, Os, Cs	U	R
Crested Serpent-Eagle *Spilornis cheela* (Latham, 1790)	Tk, Ms	C	R
Western Marsh-Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Wl	O	W
Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos* (Pennant, 1769)	Gr	X	W
Shikra *Accipiter badius* (Gmelin, 1788)	Tk, Ms, Cc, Cs	C	R

Species	Habitat	Frequency	Status
White-eyed Buzzard *Butastur teesa* (Franklin, 1832)	Tk, Ms, Cc, Gr, Os, Cs	C	R
Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* Linnaeus, 1758	Ms	U	W
Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax* (Temminck, 1828)	Tk, Ms	U	R
Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus* (Vieillot, 1822)	Tk	O	R
Booted Eagle *H. pennatus* (Gmelin, 1788)	Tk	O	W
Changeable Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus* (Gmelin, 1788)	Tk, Ms, Bm	C	R
Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Wl	O	W
Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* Linnaeus, 1758	Gr, Cs	C	W
SakerFalcon *Falco cherrug* J.E. Gray, 1834	Ms, Os, Cs	O	R
Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* Tunstall, 1771	Tk, Wl	U	W
Painted Francolin *Francolinus pictus* (Jardine & Selby, 1828)	Ms, Os	C	R
Grey Francolin *F. pondicerianus* (Gmelin, 1789)	Os, Cs	C	R
Jungle Bush-Quail *Perdicula asiatica* (Latham, 1790)	Ms, Bm, Gr	C	R
Red Spurfowl *Galloperdix spadicea* (Gmelin, 1789)	Tk, Ms, Bm	C	R
Painted Spurfowl *G. lunulata* (Valenciennes, 1825)	Bm, Ms	X	R
Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Os, Cs	C	R
Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* Linnaeus, 1758	Ms, Cc, Gr, Os, Cs	C	R
Yellow-legged Buttonquail *Turnix tanki* Blyth, 1843	Gr, Os, Cs	U	R
Common Buttonquail *T. suscitator* (Gmelin, 1789)	Ms, Gr, Os	U	R
White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus* (Pennant, 1769)	Wl	C	R
Purple Moorhen *Porphyrio porphyrio* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Wl	O	R
Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Wl	C	R
Common Coot *Fulica atra* Linnaeus, 1758	Wl	C	LM
Bronze-winged Jacana *Metopidius indicus* (Latham, 1790)	Wl	O	R
Greater Painted-Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Wl	O	R
Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* Scopoli, 1786	Wl	O	LM
Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus* (Boddaert, 1783)	Cs	O	R
River Lapwing *V. duvaucelii* (Lesson, 1826)	Wl	C	R
Red-wattled Lapwing *V. indicus* (Boddaert, 1783)	Cs, Wl	C	R
Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Wl	O	W
Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* Linnaeus, 1758	Wl	C	W
Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* Linnaeus, 1758	Wl	U	W
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* Linnaeus, 1758	Wl	O	W
Little Stint *Calidris minuta* (Leisler, 1812)	Wl	O	W
Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Wl	C	R
Stone-Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Tk, Os, Cs	C	R
Indian Courser *Cursorius coromandelicus* (Gmelin, 1789)	Cs	U	R
River Tern *Sterna aurantia* J.E. Gray, 1831	Wl	O	R
Painted Sandgrouse *Pterocles indicus* (Gmelin, 1789)	Os	O	R
Blue Rock Pigeon *Columba livia* Gmelin, 1789	Cs	X	R
Oriental Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* (Latham, 1790)	Tk, Ms, Bm	O	R
Little Brown Dove *S. senegalensis* (Linnaeus, 1766)	Os, Cs	C	R
Spotted Dove *S. chinensis* (Scopoli, 1786)	Tk, Ms, Cc, Cs	C	R
Red Collared-Dove *S. tranquebarica* (Hermann, 1804)	Ms, Bm	O	R
Eurasian Collared Dove *S. decaocto* (Frivaldszky, 1838)	Tk, Os, Cs	C	R
Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Tk, Ms, Bm	X	R
Yellow-leged Green-Pigeon *Treron phoenicoptera* (Latham, 1790)	Tk, Ms, Bm	C	R
Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria* (Linnaeus, 1766)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc	C	R
Rose-ringed Parakeet *P. krameri* (Scopoli, 1769)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc, Gr, Cs	C	R
Plum-headed Parakeet *P. cyanocephala* (Linnaeus, 1766)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc	C	R
Pied Crested Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus* (Boddaert, 1783)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Os, Cs	C	S
Brainfever Bird *Hierococcyx varius* (Vahl, 1797)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc	C	R
Indian Cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus* Gould, 1838	Tk, Ms, Bm	U	LM

Species	Habitat	Frequency	Status
Indian Plaintive Cuckoo *Cacomantis passerinus* (Vahl, 1797)	Tk, Bm, Os	O	R
Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc	C	R
Sirkeer Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus leschenaultii* (Lesson, 1830)	Ms, Bm, Os	O	R
Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis* (Stephens, 1815)	Ms, Bm, Gr, Os, Cs	C	R
Barn Owl *Tyto alba* (Scopoli, 1769)	Cs	U	R
Oriental Scops-Owl *Otus sunia* (Hodgson, 1836)	Tk, Ms	U	R
Collared Scops-Owl *O. bakkamoena* Pennant, 1769	Tk, Ms, Bm	O	R
Eurasian Eagle-Owl *Bubo bubo* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Tk, Ms	O	R
Brown Fish-Owl *Ketupa zeylonensis* (Gmelin, 1788)	Tk	U	R
Mottled Wood-Owl *Strix ocellata* (Lesson, 1839)	Tk, Ms	U	R
Jungle Owlet *Glaucidium radiatum* (Tickell, 1833)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc, Os	C	R
Spotted Owlet *Athene brama* (Temminck, 1821)	Os, Cs	U	R
Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* (Pontoppidan, 1763)	Ms	X	W
Indian Jungle Nightjar *Caprimulgus indicus* Latham, 1790	Tk, Ms, Gr, Os, Cs	C	R
Common Indian Nightjar *C. asiaticus* Latham, 1790	Tk, Ms, Os, Cs	C	R
Franklin's Nightjar *C. affinis* Horsfield, 1821	Gr, Os	C	R
White-rumped Needletail-Swift *Zoonavena sylvatica* (Tickell, 1846)	Ms, Bm	O	R
Asian Palm-Swift *Cypsiurus balasiensis* (J.E. Gray, 1829)	Cs	O	R
House Swift *Apus affinis* (J.E. Gray, 1830)	Cs, Wl	C	R
Crested Tree-Swift *Hemiprocne coronata* (Tickell, 1833)	Tk, Ms, Bm	C	R
Small Blue Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Wl	O	R
Stork-billed Kingfisher *Halcyon capensis* (Linnaeus, 1766)	Wl	O	R
White-breasted Kingfisher *H. smyrnensis* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Ms, Cc, Cs, Wl	C	R
Lesser Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Wl	C	R
Small Bee-eater *Merops orientalis* Latham, 1801	Ms, Cc, Os, Cs	C	R
Blue-tailed Bee-eater *M. philippinus* Linnaeus, 1766	Ms	U	W
Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Tk, Ms, Cs	C	R
Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops* Linnaeus, 1758	Cs	C	R
Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyceros birostris* (Scopoli, 1786)	Tk, Ms, Bm	C	R
Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus* (Boddaert, 1783)	Tk, Ms	O	R
Brown-headed Barbet *Megalaima zeylanica* (Gmelin, 1788)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc	C	R
Coppersmith Barbet *M. haemacephala* (P.L.S. Müller, 1776)	Tk, Ms	C	R
Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* Linnaeus, 1758	Os	X	W
Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos nanus* (Vigors, 1832)	Tk, Ms, Bm	C	R
Yellow-fronted Pied Woodpecker *D. mahrattensis* (Latham, 1801)	Tk, Ms, Bm	C	R
Rufous Woodpecker *Celeus brachyurus* (Vieillot, 1818)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc	U	R
Small Yellow-naped Woodpecker *Picus chlorolophus* Vieillot, 1818	Tk, Bm	U	R
Little Scaly-bellied Green Woodpecker *P. xanthopygaeus* J.E. Gray & G.R. Gray, 1846	Tk, Ms, Bm	O	R
Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker *Dinopium benghalense* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Tk, Ms, Cc	C	R
Black-shouldered Woodpecker *Chrysocolaptes festivus* (Boddaert, 1783)	Tk, Ms, Bm	C	R
Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura* (Linnaeus, 1766)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Os	C	S
Singing Bush-Lark *Mirafra cantillans* Blyth, 1845	Gr, Cs	O	R
Red-winged Bush-Lark *Mirafra erythroptera* Blyth, 1845	Os, Cs	C	R
Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark *Eremopterix grisea* (Scopoli, 1786)	Os, Cs	C	R
Rufous-tailed Finch-Lark *Ammomanes phoenicurus* (Franklin, 1831)	Cs	O	R
Eastern Skylark *Alauda gulgula* Franklin, 1831	Gr, Cs	O	R
Plain Martin *Riparia paludicola* (Vieillot, 1817)	Wl	O	R
Common Swallow *Hirundo rustica* Linnaeus, 1758	Gr, Cs, Wl	C	W
Wire-tailed Swallow *H. smithii* Leach, 1818	Wl	C	R
Red-rumped Swallow *H. daurica* Linnaeus, 1771	Gr, Os, Cs	C	W
Streak-throated Swallow *H. fluvicola* Blyth, 1855	Wl	U	LM
Forest Wagtail *Dendronanthus indicus* (Gmelin, 1789)	Ms	X	W
White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* Linnaeus, 1758	Wl	O	W

Species	Habitat	Frequency	Status
Large Pied Wagtail *M. maderaspatensis* Gmelin, 1789	Wl	C	R
Citrine Wagtail *M. citreola* Pallas, 1776	Wl	O	W
Yellow Wagtail *M. flava* Linnaeus, 1758	Gr, Wl	O	W
Grey Wagtail *M. cinerea* Tunstall, 1771	Ms, Wl	C	W
Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus* Vieillot, 1818	Cs	C	R
Tawny Pipit *A. campestris* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Os, Cs	O	W
Brown Rock Pipit *A. similis* Jerdon, 1840	Os, Wl	O	W
Eurasian Tree Pipit *A. trivialis* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Ms, Bm	O	W
Oriental Tree Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni* Richmond, 1907	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc	C	W
Large Cuckoo-Shrike *Coracina macei* (Lesson, 1830)	Tk, Ms, Bm	C	R
Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrike *C. melanoptera* (Rüppell, 1839)	Ms, Cc	U	LM
Small Minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus* (Linnaeus, 1766)	Tk, Ms	C	R
White-bellied Minivet *P. erythropygius* (Jerdon, 1840)	Os	U	LM
Long-tailed Minivet *P. ethologus* Bangs & Phillips, 1914	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc	C	W
Scarlet Minivet *P. flammeus* (Forster, 1781)	Tk, Ms	O	LM
Common Woodshrike *Tephrodornis pondicerianus* (Gmelin, 1789)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc	C	R
White-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucotis* (Gould, 1836)	Os	X	V
Red-vented Bulbul *P. cafer* (Linnaeus, 1766)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc, Os	C	R
White-browed Bulbul *P. luteolus* (Lesson, 1841)	Os	O	R
Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc	C	R
Jerdon's Chloropsis *Chloropsis jerdoni* (Blyth, 1844)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc	C	R
Gold-fronted Chloropsis *Chloropsis aurifrons* (Temminck, 1829)	Tk, Ms	O	R
Brown Shrike *L. cristatus* Linnaeus, 1758	Os, Cs	O	W
Bay-backed Shrike *L. vittatus* Valenciennes, 1826	Gr, Os	O	R
Rufous-backed Shrike *L. schach* Linnaeus, 1758	Ms, Bm, Gr, Os, Cs	C	R
Southern Grey Shrike *L. meridionalis* Temminck, 1820	Os, Cs	U	LM
Blue Rock-Thrush *Monticola solitarius* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Cs	C	W
Orange-headed Thrush *Zoothera citrina* (Latham, 1790)	Ms, Bm	O	R
Scaly Thrush *Z. dauma* (Latham, 1790)	Bm	U	W
Tickell's Thrush *Turdus unicolor* Tickell, 1833	Tk, Bm	U	W
Eurasian Blackbird *T. merula* Linnaeus, 1758	Ms, Bm	O	LM?
Dark-throated Thrush *T. ruficollis* Pallas, 1776	Tk, Bm	U	W
Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Tk, Cc, Os	C	R
White-rumped Shama *C. malabaricus* (Scopoli, 1786)	Ms, Bm	U	LM
Indian Robin *Saxicoloides fulicata* (Linnaeus, 1766)	Os, Cs	C	R
Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* (Gmelin, 1774)	Tk, Os, Cs	C	W
Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* (Linnaeus, 1766)	Gr, Os, Cs	O	W
Pied Bushchat *S. caprata* (Linnaeus, 1766)	Gr, Os	O	LM
Grey Bushchat *S. ferrea* Gray, 1846	Os	U	W
Indian Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus horsfieldii* Sykes, 1832	Ms, Bm	U	R
Rufous-bellied Babbler *Dumetia hyperythra* (Franklin, 1831)	Bm, Os	C	R
Yellow-eyed Babbler *Chrysomma sinense* (Gmelin, 1789)	Ms, Bm, Os	C	R
Common Babbler *Turdoides caudatus* (Dumont, 1823)	Os	X	R
Large Grey Babbler *Turdoides malcolmi* (Sykes, 1832)	Os, Cs	U	R
Jungle Babbler *Turdoides striatus* (Dumont, 1823)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc, Os	C	R
Quaker Tit-Babbler *Alcippe poioicephala* (Jerdon, 1844)	Ms, Bm	U	R
Rufous-fronted Prinia *Prinia buchanani* Blyth, 1844	Os	O	R
Grey-breasted Prinia *P. hodgsonii* Blyth, 1844	Tk, Ms, Gr, Os	C	R
Jungle Prinia *P. sylvatica* Jerdon, 1840	Os	O	R
Ashy Prinia *P. socialis* Sykes, 1832	Gr, Os	U	R
Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* Blyth, 1849	Ms, Os	C	W
Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata* (Lichtenstein, 1823)	Os	O	W
Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius* (Pennant, 1769)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc, Os	C	R

Species	Habitat	Frequency	Status
Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* (Vieillot, 1817)	Ms, Gr, Os, Wl	O	W
Olivaceous Leaf-Warbler *P. griseolus* Blyth, 1847	Tk, Ms	O	W
Hume's Warbler *P. humei* (Brooks, 1878)	Tk, Ms	O	W
Greenish Leaf-Warbler *P. trochiloides* (Sundevall, 1837)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc	C	W
Large-billed Leaf-Warbler *P. magnirostris* Blyth, 1843	Tk	U	W
Western Crowned Warbler *P. occipitalis* (Blyth, 1845)	Tk, Ms	U	W
Common Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Os	C	W
Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica* Pallas, 1811	Ms, Cc	U	W
Brown-breasted Flycatcher *M. muttui* (Layard, 1854)	Ms	X	W
Red-throated Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* (Bechstein, 1792)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Os	C	W
Ultramarine Flycatcher *F. superciliaris* (Jerdon, 1840)	Ms, Bm	O	W
Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassina* (Swainson, 1838)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc	O	W
Tickell's Blue-Flycatcher *Cyornis tickelliae* Blyth, 1843	Tk, Ms, Bm, Os	C	R
Grey-headed Flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis* (Swainson, 1820)	Tk, Ms, Bm	O	W
Asian Paradise-Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc, Os	O	S
Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher *Hypothymis azurea* (Boddaert, 1783)	Tk, Ms, Bm	C	R
White-browed Fantail-Flycatcher *R. aureola* Lesson, 1830	Tk, Cc, Os	C	R
Great Tit *Parus major* Linnaeus, 1758	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc, Os	C	R
Black-lored Yellow Tit *Parus xanthogenys* Vigors, 1831	Tk, Ms, Bm	O	R
Thick-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum agile* (Tickell, 1833)	Tk, Ms, Bm	C	R
Tickell's Flowerpecker *D. erythrorhynchos* (Latham, 1790)	Ms	O	R
Purple Sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica* (Latham, 1790)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc	C	R
Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus* (Temminck, 1824)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc	C	R
Crested Bunting *Melophus lathami* (Gray, 1831)	Os	X	W
Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala* Scopoli, 1769	Cs	U	W
Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus* (Pallas, 1770)	Tk, Ms	O	W
Red Munia *Amandava amandava* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Gr, Os	C	R
White-throated Munia *Lonchura malabarica* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Os, Cs	C	R
White-rumped Munia *L. striata* (Linnaeus, 1766)	Cs	O	LM
Spotted Munia *L. punctulata* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Os, Cs	O	R
Black-headed Munia *L. malacca* (Linnaeus, 1766)	Cs	O	LM
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Tk, Gr, Os, Cs	C	R
Yellow-throated Sparrow *Petronia xanthocollis* (Burton, 1838)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc, Gr	C	LM
Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus* (Linnaeus, 1766)	Gr, Os, Cs	O	LM
Grey-headed Starling *Sturnus malabaricus* (Gmelin, 1789)	Tk, Ms, Bm	O	R
Brahminy Starling *S. pagodarum* (Gmelin, 1789)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc	C	R
Rosy Starling *S. roseus* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Tk	O	W
Common Starling *S. vulgaris* Linnaeus, 1758	Os, Cs	U	W
Asian Pied Starling *S. contra* Linnaeus, 1758	Tk	U	R
Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* (Linnaeus, 1766)	Tk, Ms, Cc, Os, Cs	C	R
Jungle Myna *A. fuscus* (Wagler, 1827)	Ms	X	LM
Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Tk, Ms, Cc	O	R
Black-headed Oriole *O. xanthornus* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc	C	R
Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus* Vieillot, 1817	Tk, Gr, Os, Cs	C	R
Ashy Drongo *D. leucophaeus* Vieillot, 1817	Tk, Ms	O	W
White-bellied Drongo *D. caerulescens* (Linnaeus, 1758)	Tk, Ms	C	R
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *D. paradiseus* (Linnaeus, 1766)	Tk, Ms, Bm	C	R
Ashy Woodswallow *Artamus fuscus* Vieillot, 1817	Cs	X	LM
Indian Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda* (Latham, 1790)	Tk, Ms, Bm, Cc	C	R
House Crow *Corvus splendens* Vieillot, 1817	Cs	X	R
Jungle Crow *C. macrorhynchos* Wagler, 1827	Tk, Ms, Bm, Gr, Os, Cs	C	R

Habitat codes:

Tk	Teak forest
Ms	Miscellaneous forest (teak mixed, *Anogeissus-Boswellia* stand, hill forest, and *zizyphus* stand)
Bm	Bamboo dominant forest
Cc	*Cleistanthus collinus* woodland
Gr	Grassland – Savanna
Os	Open scrub jungle (dominated by *Lantana*)
Cs	Countryside / Cultivation
Wl	Wetlands (river, streams, ponds, and reservoir)

Frequency codes:

C	Common
O	Occassional
U	Uncommon
X	Rare

Status codes:

R	Resident
W	Winter visitor
S	Summer visitor
LM	Local migrant
V	Vagrant / Straggler

A glimpse of the breeding biology of the Purple-rumped Sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica* (Linnaeus, 1766)

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Presented here are the data (Table 1) on 14 pairs of eggs: their dates / times of deposition (Egg-laying), incubation period and, the brooding and the fledging of the nestlings of the Purple-rumped Sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica* (Linnaeus, 1766). The upright arrows in the table stand for the time at which eggs were noticed in the nests, their time of exact laying was not known. The timings without the arrows were almost exact in that they were arrived at from the behaviour of the female and her position in the nest. When she was about to eject the eggs she stood with her breast thrust up and forward, blocking the entrance hole, the head lifted and rocking forward and backward. The egg ejected, she sat immediately on it, adjusting it, indicative of the egg being in the nest.

Egg pairs nine and ten were of a single pair of birds. This pair had the misfortune of having to make three nests for two clutches of eggs, all in a line in the *Prosopis* sp., fence by my window. Their first nest, initiated on 9th November 1990 and completed on the 15th was abandoned, the reason being I presume my agitating the nest-twig to know if the female was occupying it for the night. The same pair, continuing in the fence, built another nest 3m away and, completing it on 24th November 1990, laid two eggs, one each on 27th and 28th, brooding the young successfully to fledging stage. The nestlings fledging on 28th December 1990, the parents started another nest on 21st January 1991 about 30cm away from the second nest, initiated a clutch on 4th February 1991 to carry it through to fledging on 6th March 1991.

The following conclusions are made from the above data: The species breeds throughout the year with a break of two months, May-June. The gap between the second egg of a clutch and the initiation of the following clutch, if any, is 68 days. The period between the second egg of a clutch and the starting of the next nest is 54 days; the gap between the fledging of one brood of young and nest-site selection for the next nest is 24 days; that between one fledging and the laying of the first egg of the succeeding clutch is 38 days. How many clutches a pair of birds brings forth per season is not known. A striking behaviour is the making of a separate nest for every fresh clutch a pair lays. This may imply that the species, spending much energy on nest construction, is a poor breeder. But then, this is compensated for by the fact of the species being a year-round breeder.

The recent information on the bird's behaviour (Kumar 2003) throws up a few points of interest. The eggs of the birds of Palayamkottai and Thiruchirappalli are a deviant in being plain grey without markings and the greenish tinge. That the bird laid another clutch immediately on the loss of a clutch in the same nest is not corroborated by my data. On the contrary, as per the data on pairs nine and ten, the bird has the potency to delay the deposition of the egg in case of nest / clutch catastrophe. In this light, the Hyderabad bird had it seems, only delayed the laying, by a day or so, and the egg she did lay was the 'exceptional' third egg (Ali and Ripley 1987) of the clutch that was to have been. The plausibility of the bird delaying by a couple of days, the initiation of the clutch under normal situation, it appears, is that the eggs do not enter the oviduct till the nest is completed. The completed nest is the stimulant for ovulation to take place. Hence she waits, of necessity, for that number of days either in the nest or outside it during the nights. And the waiting may or may not be to assess the security situation only, as I have argued elsewhere (Wesley 1996). It may serve the twin purpose[1].

[1] **Editors' Note:** The reason why the egg was laid quickly in Hyderabad and not so at Tiruchirapalli cannot be fully explained just by the reasons given by Mr. Wesley. There are several other things that need to be considered. For instance, the nest, which Mr. Wesley had observed and found a larger 'gap', than reported by Mr. Ashok Kumar, was disturbed by the former, which had scared the bird. Whereas at the Hyderabad nest, the bird had the eggs, damaged

References

Ali, Salim and S. Dillon Ripley, 1987. *Compact handbook of birds of India and Pakistan.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

perhaps but the bird had not been scared off and so it did not consider rebuilding the nest. Resource availability, conditions ideal for nesting, etc., too may decide whether the bird could afford building a new nest. Also comparing the gaps between one successful brood and the next, with a replacement clutch, may not be correct as the bird that has raised a successful brood may need time to recuperate and also may still have to spend energy and time on the fledglings till they are independent and capable of fending for themselves.

Kumar, Ashok, 2003. Breeding behaviour of *Nectarinia zeylonica*. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 43 (6): 80-82.

Wesley, H. D., 1991. Parental care in the Purple-rumped Sunbird. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 31 (3-4): 2-3.

Wesley, H. D., 1996. Breeding behaviour of *Nectarinia zeylonica* at two latitudes in the Indian peninsula. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 36 (2): 28-29.

Table 1.

Nectarinia zeylonica: Data on egg laying, incubation and fledging from south* Tamil Nadu

Clutch No.	Egg No.	Laying: Date/Time	Hatching: Date/Time	Incubation period (days)	Fledging date: Nestling period (days)
1	1 2	27-12-1964: 07:00 hours 28-12-1964: 08:05 hours	13-1-1965: 16:15 hours ↑	16	28-1-1965 (15)
2	1 2	10-2-1965: 08:40 hours ↑ 11-2-1965: 11:40 hours ↑	26-2-1965: 06:50 hours	15	13-3-1965 (15)
3	1 2	25-8-1967: 06:55 hours 26-8-1967: 07:15 hours	9-9-1967: 10:00 hours 10:50 hours	15	24-9-1967 (15)
4	1 2	11-3-1969: 07:20 hours 12-3-1969: 07:35 hours	27-3-1969: 07:15 hours 08:05 hours	15	11-4-1969 (15)
5	1 2	6-4-1986: 17:30 hours ↑ (Both eggs)	14-4-1986: 06:25 hours 15-4-1986: 06:20 hours	?	30-4-1986 (15)
6	1 2	23-11-1986: 06:35 hours 24-11-1986: 06:55 hours	9-12-1986: 06:48 hours 13:35 hours ↑	15	23-12-1986 (14)
7	1 2	21-7-1988: 06:25 hours 22-7-1988: 06:35 hours	6-8-1988: 06:34 hours 07:10 hours	15	21-8-1988 (15)
8	1 2	2-4-1990: 06:30 hours 3-4-1990: 06:50 hours	18-4-1990: 06:15 hours	15	?
9	1 2	27-11-1990: 10:30 hours ↑ 28-11-1990: 07:30 hours	12-12-1990: 09:55 hours 13-12-1990: 08:00 hours	15	28-12-1990 (15)
10	1 2	4-2-1991: 12:45 hours ↑ 5-2-1991: 13:50 hours ↑	19-2-1991: 17:30 hours ↑ 20-2-1991: 06:30 hours	15	6-3-1991 (14)
11	1 2	14-8-1991: 09:00 hours 15-8-1991: 07:30 hours	29-8-1991: 13:05 hours 30-8-1991: 06:30 hours	15	15-9-1991 (16)
12	1 2	22-9-1992: 13:20 hours 23-9-1992: 08:10 hours	7-10-1992: 17:10 hours ↑ Two nestlings	14	23-10-1992 (16)
13	1 2	21-12-1992: 06:30 hours 22-12-1992: 06:20 hours	6-1-1993: 07:30 hours	15	22-1-1993 (16)
14	1 2	17-1-1994: 07:10 hours 18-1-1994: 07:30 hours	1-2-1994: 06:35 hours : 13:30 hours ↑	14	18-2-1994 (17)

↑ = Time of recording.

* = 1964-1969: Data from Palayamkottai. 1986-1994: Data from Tiruchirappalli.

Malkhandi - a magic place

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Though I was only able to stay in this spot in the Western Himalayas, about three or four times, it remains in my memory as a very special place. The location is called Malkhandi, and is situated in Hazara District of the NWFP, on the east bank just above the Kunhar River which flows in a southerly direction, parallel to, and to the east of the mighty Indus river. The whole valley is a popular tourist resort, usually called the Kaghan Valley, after the main village in that valley. Malkhandi is a small Forest Reserve with an Inspection bungalow bearing the same name. It is located up a narrow track; about 300 ft above the site of a Trout Hatchery and Forest Tree Nursery located along side the main jeep track, which follows the Kunhar River (34°42'N, 73°34'E). Here is a small dilapidated forest rest house, with nearby a much more recently constructed Forest bungalow, not open to tourist or non-forest officials, and is located amongst a beautiful rather isolated patch of mixed deciduous and coniferous forest, with areas both below and above the valley largely cleared for terraced cultivation.

Whilst giving a general description of the area, I can do no better that quote excerpts from my diary written during one of my last visits to Malkhandi on June 17th 1984.

After the second day of travel from our home and a journey of seven hours from the plains of the Punjab where my wife and I had stayed overnight, we were glad to find the little rest house still unoccupied by any other traveller, and that the bathroom with broken wash basin, still had running water.

Malkhandi is rich in sub-montane vegetation, being located at 1,356m (4,450ft) elevation. Surprisingly there are no Horse Chestnut trees *Aesculus hippocastanum*, common along the road below, but a good mixture of Mountain Ash *Fraxinus xanthoxyloides*, Pistachio *Pistacia integerrima*, the Maple *Acer caesium* known locally as 'Tarkanna', and both The Holly Oak *Quercus baloot* and Himalayan Silver Oak *Quercus dilatata*, locally known as 'Ban', and surprisingly some Apricot *Prunus armeniaca* and Peach trees *P. persica*, as well as the Wild Pear *Pyrus pasha* and the Himalayan Bird Cherry *Prunus cornuta*, besides a scattering of Indian Deodar *Cedrus deodara* trees, at this time of the year bearing beautiful lime green rounded female cones on it's horizontal boughs. Under-story included the usual *Viburnums*, *Vitex negundo* with pale mauve flowers, and many creeping vines of the *Vitis* (wild grape) family. And another slender Maple tree which I had not encountered anywhere else before in Pakistan, which was identified for me, as *Acer cappadocium*, which as it's name implies, extends as far west as Turkey and has very attractive small silvery palmate leaves.

Behind our little rest house gurgled a small stream, which not only lulled us into sleep at night, but also was a big attraction for insects and nesting birds. It would make heavy reading to try and list all the typical birds of that place, but amongst the common and conspicuous ones were the Eurasian Golden Oriole, *Oriolus oriolus* (Linnaeus, 1758), whose fluting calls regularly punctuated the drone of flying insects. At dawn each morning we were also serenaded by the quite pretty little song of the Asian Paradise-Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi* (Linnaeus, 1758), so different from its usual harsh contact calls. There were two other rather noisy denizens of this small patch of forest, the Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus* Vieillot, 1817, and the Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes leucocephalus* (P.L.S. Muller, 1776). At this time of year most had families to feed, but the males still reserved a short morning period to proclaim their songs and the rather itinerant Black Bulbuls always announced their arrival in the vicinity with noisy squeaks and mewing sounds. There was also a good population of Grey-winged Blackbirds *Turdus boulbul* (Latham, 1790), as well as roving parties of restless insectivorous Oriental Whiteyes *Zosterops palbebrosa* (Temminck, 1824), and Grey-headed Flycatcher-Warblers *Seicercus xanthoschistos* (G.R. Gray & J.E. Gray, 1846). Less common but regularly encountered were two flycatchers which stick more closely to a particular piece of hunting territory, The Rufous-bellied Niltava *Niltava sundara* (Hodgson, 1837) and The Grey-headed Flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis* (Swainson, 1820). Many other birds were common and always present, including the skulking but noisy Brown-flanked Bush-Warbler *Cettia fortipes* (Horsfield, 1845), Great Tits *Parus major* Linnaeus, 1758, Verditer Flycatchers *Eumyias thalassina* (Swainson, 1838), Large Scaly-bellied Green Woodpeckers *Picus squamatus* Vigors, 1831, Long-tailed Minivets *Pericrocotus ethologus* Bangs & Phillips, 1914, and Oriental Turtle-Doves *Streptopelia orientalis* (Latham, 1790). Surprisingly we heard no songs of the Indian Blue Robin *Luscinia brunnea* (Hodgson, 1837), perhaps the elevation was too low for them, nor did we ever hear the Spotted Scops-Owl *Otus spilocephalus* (Blyth, 1846) with it double bell call at night, so common higher up in the forests.

On this visit we were easily able to locate the nearby Asian Paradise-Flycatcher's nest besides the steam. Shaped like a triangular wine glass, it was not decorated on the outside with spiders egg cacoons, as is so common with this species, but cleverly woven at the tip of a drooping slender branch and made mostly from fine grass and root fibres. The rather sparsely downed chicks were newly hatched and the female still spent short intervals brooding them, so that we avoided going too close to see them. Within a stones throw of this nest was a Eurasian Golden Oriole's nest in a Pistachio Tree, with three young almost fully fledged and

showing streaked breasts and lime yellow upper plumage. Two of them bulged half over the side of their rather inadequate hammock shaped nest, waiting to be fed. Their nest seemed to be woven exclusively from grass. We were impressed by the regular visits of the male to feed them, as he usually takes only the briefest perfunctory shifts on the nest during incubation. Less than a hundred yards from our Rest House were two more conspicuous nests. The most exciting for me, a Long-tailed Minivet's nest which was welded between three slender forking twigs, high up in the crown of a small *Acer* sp., tree. The nest iself was decorated outside with flakes of lichen and quite conspicuous. The female was incubating and sitting tightly whenever we passed the nest. The Ashy Drongo's nest was rather untidier in appearance and did not look substantial, being woven into the fork amongst the uppermost branches of a small tree, and built in a rough shallow cup shape with root and bark fibres. The female also seemed to be still incubating, as we did not see any sign of young being fed. During our leisurely walks around the forest track we had other memorable moments. Watching an Asian Paradise-Flycatcher, foraging around the horizontal branches of a moss-draped oak bough, which flushed and seized a large Sphengid Hawkmoth. Flying to a lower branch, the hapless moth was jiggled around in its bill, until one by one the wings were scissored off. During the last stages of this process, the heavy abdomen of this large moth twice slipped from its bill, only to be quickly recaptured in a downward swoop.

We also watched a Black Bulbul, which had already caught a large female Preying Mantis before we noticed it; of which we could clearly see it's struggling legs visible on either side of the bird's blood red bill. Perhaps this was not a usual meal for this largely frugivorous bulbul, because it hesitated several times, perched motionless, before finally, after more that several minutes, bashing the insect against a twig and swallowing it in several rather jerky gulps. So much was going on around us in the sun dappled glades and we were also entertained on the evening before our departure, by watching a party of Slaty-headed Parakeets *Psittacula himalayana* (Lesson, 1832) with fully fledged young, feeding on the tiny purplish brown flowers of the Smoke Bush *Cotinus coggyria*. The young, well able to fly and feed for themselves, seemed more keen to beg from their parents with much curious head bobbing rather than to enjoy the flowery feast. One final treat during that visit was the opportunity to watch for a prolonged period a pair of Speckled Piculets *Picumnus innominatus* Burton, 1836, foraging on low shrubs. This species is distinctly rare and local in Pakistan, occurring in only several widely scattered localities. My diary notes describe how we had just returned from our morning walk when by the Rest House we were attracted by their weak tinny single noted calls. They were able to hang upside down on pendant twigs and perch sideways on slender branches, their tiny grey green feet with two toes firmly gripped around each side of the twig. They did not use their tails as a support when ascending a vertical branch yet they seemed very proficient at so doing. I noted that their white breasts were dotted in vertical radiating lines with blackish grey small crescent marks turning lower down to solid grey black spots, and that their wing coverts were a lovely shade of golden olive, whilst their stubby tails were blackish grey with the outer tail feather clearly showing white outer webs when they flew. They are so small that they can search for insects along the lower shrubs or more slender twigs, which are inaccessible to the heavier woodpeckers. Like all small birds they seemed particularly restless and constantly on the move, fluttering into the air to reach an adjacent twig, rather than hopping along a branch as their larger cousins usually do when foraging.

The birds obviously loved this place as well, and as it is a reserved forest, I hope it will ever more remain a magical place.

Additional records of the Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti* Hume, 1873, in Melghat Tiger Reserve, Maharashtra

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F. R. Blewitt first collected a specimen of this owlet from the dense forests of eastern Madhya Pradesh on 14th December 1872 (Hume 1873). A. O. Hume dedicated the bird to his friend and placed it in a new genus that he erected for it, calling it *Heteroglaux blewitti* (Hume, 1873). In the foothills of the Satpura Mountains north of Shahada in Maharashtra, India, the endemic Forest Owlet that was thought to be extinct was rediscovered after 113 years on 25th November 1997, in a tropical dry deciduous forest, by American ornithologists (King and Rasmussen 1998).

Subsequently during the surveys conducted by Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) from June 1998 to June 1999, four nesting pairs of Forest Owlets were recorded in Toranmal forest range (Maharashtra) between 400-500 m. elevation, in October 1998. Three of these nests were found at Shahada, while one nest was found in Taloda, about 30 km from Shahada (Ishtiaq 2000). Further, in the second phase of this study, conducted from 28 January to 22 February 2000, 25 Forest Owlets were located from two new sites in Maharashtra and Madhya Paredesh. Forest

Owlets had never been reported from these sites (Ishtiaq 2000). Rithe (2003) reported nine Forest Owlets from the Satpuras in Melghat. Two birds at Raipur, two at Malur, four at Jamodapadao and one at Mahendri, about 100 km to the east of Melghat.

Records of two new sites: All these above-mentioned locations are quite different from the additional sightings recorded on 19-vi-2002 and 1-vi-2003 and described by us here.

On 19-vi-2002, Raju Kasambe and Jayant Wadatkar visited the Harisal range of Melghat Tiger Reserve, in Malur bit No. 597, north of Malur village. Amidst a forest of *Tectona grandis, Madhuca indica, Terminalia tomentosa, Schleichera oleosa, Lagerstroemea parvifolia, Boswellia serrata, Anogeissus latifolia, Lanne grandis*, close to Bhavar Nullah and ploughed fallow fields, at an altitude of less than 100m, one Forest Owlet was sighted early in the morning. No calls were heard. The owlet was perching in direct sunlight and gave excellent viewing and photographic opportunity for 30 minutes. It then flew to the nest, in a teak tree (*Tectona grandis*), situated at a height of 13-15 m above the ground. The narrow nest entrance suggested that a Plum-headed Parakeet *Psitaculla cyanocephala* (Linnaeus, 1766) had excavated the nest. Eight pellets were collected from under the nest and revealed a skull with a beak of an unidentified warbler in one pellet, and feathers with bird bones in the rest of them.

About 200m from this Forest Owlet, two Spotted Owlets *Athene brama* (Temminck, 1821) were seen. A nest of this pair was seen at a height of 10-12m in the same region. Interestingly we also recorded Jungle Owlet *Glaucidium radiatum* (Tickell, 1833) and Mottled Wood-Owl *Strix ocellata* (Lesson, 1839) from the same locality. This fact indicates the importance of conservation of this area. A study to explore possible associations between these species needs to be undertaken (Pande, *in press*.). Competition for food between the Forest Owlet and other owls may not be significant due to the partly diurnal habit of the former.

One year later, on 1-vi-2003, members of ELA Foundation and we visited a different location in the same area, south of Malur village. On the Chaurakund-Malur road, at 6.45 a.m., a Forest Owlet was seen perched in the shade of the trunk of a teak tree. It was at a height of about 10m. After some time it flew to an adjacent tree, perched in direct sunlight and uttered the typical 'cooing' call. The mate answered this call from a distance of about 100m. Satish Pande was ready with the audio recording equipment and Amit Pawashe and he recorded the call of the Forest Owlet. Other members of the team (Prashant Deshpande, Chandrahas Kolhatkar and Mohan Panse) made a video recording. The typical tail wagging and cooing were documented. The bird retreated to the shady portion of the tree and dozed when the temperature started climbing. It is possible that Rithe (2003) has already reported the same pair from this area of Malur. We therefore do not claim it as a new record but merely state the observation. During this visit we were accompanied by a local Korku youth.

We then decided to search in new areas for Forest Owlets, by playing the recently taped call every half a kilometre, as we proceeded further. After a journey of about 10km we were rewarded. Near the Jambukuwa water hole, on bit No. 591 of the Harisal range, one Forest Owlet answered our tape-recorded call. This was the second new addition to the existing reported numbers of the Forest Owlet. By this time it was late afternoon with the mercury reaching 46^0C. Our movements had become arduous due to the tormenting heat. We therefore stopped our search.

Conservation and threats: The Forest Owlet is endemic to this area of the Satpura range and is Critically Endangered (BirdLife International 2001, IUCN 2002). This species is also included under Schedule I (Part III: Birds) of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. Our two new records of this endemic species are significant because every addition to the existing documented numbers, and identification of each new site, play an important role in ascertaining its population size, density and distribution. It enables planning of future conservation measures for the survival of this owlet. Ishtiaq (2000) emphasized an immediate need to declare all the rediscovered sites as Important Bird Areas (IBA), as they meet the criterion of a Globally Threatened Species (BirdLife International 2001).

Further, Ishtiaq (2000) has indicated that the major threat for the Forest Owlet is habitat degradation. Around 5,000ha of forest had recently been clear-felled to serve as a rehabilitation site for people displaced by the Sardar Sarovar Dam. Besides this, we have noticed that shifting cultivation is practiced extensively in the area occupied by Forest Owlet. Hence not only their habitat but also nest trees are at a great risk. Tree felling in the area occupied by the Forest Owlet should be immediately checked. Another larger danger lurks in the form of the proposed Upper Tapi Irrigation Project, Stage II, which threatens to submerge the 244ha of prime habitat of this rare owlet. James Duncan (2003) has emphasized that more intensive research and management effort is needed to prevent this species from disappearing from our planet. The balance unfortunately appears to be unfavorably tilted against the Forest Owlet.

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Jungle Myna and Bank Myna. Too few, too many, then none at all!

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Over the past few decades whenever I happened to come by Jungle Mynas *Acridotheres fuscus* (Wagler, 1827), they were almost always in the company of the Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* (Linnaeus, 1766). I had never consciously noted the numbers of the one against the other but I have carried the imprint that the Common would outnumber the Jungle Myna by about ten to one. For confirmation, I recently went back to the oldest, and the first, bird book in which Jerdon (*The birds of India*, 1863; vol. II: 329) reproduces Hodgson's observation on the Jungle Myna, "perpetually associating with *A. tristis*, every large flock of which has many individuals of this bird among them."

At this stage, I decided to make a field sample survey of the numbers of the Jungle Myna obtaining at Chandigarh (30°45'N, 70°45E. 360m a.s.l.) vis-à-vis the Common Myna. I opted for the Zakir Rose Garden for my survey. For, on the way out and return from my daily morning walk, I traverse about 800m through it and am able to observe bird-life at random up to 30-50m all around. To give an idea of its space, it is paraded as the largest in Asia with 1,200 varieties of roses and more than 50 species of trees, most of them flowering. It is a favoured roosting and breeding site for the resident birds and it also attracts local migrants and 'passage' birds through the year-long cycle of bird movements. Here are the observations (2003).

S.No.	Date and time	Common Myna	Jungle Myna
1	21.ii: 07:55	17	4
2	22.ii: 07:30	12	2
3	23.ii: 08:15	20+	3
4	24.ii: 07:45	15+	3
5	26.ii: 07:55	20	4
6	28.ii: 08:00	30+	9
7	2.iii: 08:30	35+	2
8	5.iii: 07:30	42	2

Thus far, the above tabulation places one Jungle Myna for every seven of the Common. Now on 7th March, we boarded the train that would transport us to the bad lands of tribal Jharkhand. At 11:30 hours when the train reached Kanpur Railway Station (80°10'N, 26°20'E), I stepped out on the platform as I hoped to see a variety of birds including the mynas. I was at once astonished because to the total exclusion of all species of birds, all I saw were hundreds upon hundreds of Bank Mynas *Acridotheres ginginianus* (Latham, 1790). Later at 16:10 hours, I was to witness exactly the same scene at Allahabad Railway Station (81°51'N, 25°30'E) with just a few House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* (Linnaeus, 1758), and Blue Rock Pigeons *Columba livia* Gmelin, 1789, thrown in. this is probably the kind of setting which had inspired Ali and Ripley (*Handbook* 1972, vol. 5: 181) to state how it particularly favoured railway stations, sauntering along confidingly on the platform, in and out of passengers feet and baggage, picking up bits of food. We spent the next three weeks at Mcluskie Ganj (23°48'N, 84°56E. 360m a.s.l.) where Bank Mynas have never been sighted but Jungle Mynas are seen occasionally. However, from 8-26 March 2003 not a single Jungle Myna was spotted during my daily fairly extensive morning walks.

The return journey was performed on 27th March. Surprise of surprises, there was no trace of any Bank Myna even as I tramped up and down the platform of Allahabad Railway Station at 10:30 hours for the next 15 minutes. At 14:40 hours the Kanpur Railway Station replicated exactly the same scene! Ali and Ripley (op. cit.) state that this Myna is "…subject to…seasonal local…movements..." In the instant case this seemed inadequate to explain the two so completely divergent observations made twenty days apart at the same spots and the same clock hours. Perhaps what I had witnessed is the sharp divide between the preferred living habitat of this myna (towns, cities, bazaars and railway stations) and its preferred breeding habitat (steep earth banks, road cuttings and banks of rivers and canals). Now Kanpur has the Ganges and the Chambal in close vicinity and the Allahabad Railway Station is virtually on the confluence of the Ganges, Jamuna and Sarswat rivers. In all probability the Bank Mynas had left their living habitat for their breeding habitat between 7 and 27 March. Mr.

Gurmeet Singh, Deputy Chief Wildlife Warden, Punjab, who studied the Bank Myna for his M.Sc. degree (1992. *The ecology of the Bank Myna (Acridotheres fuscus) in an urban environment*. University of Bombay: Bombay.), backs my inference.

On returning to Chandigarh it was not the turn of the Jungle Myna to astonish me with such vast congregations on my chosen corner in the Rose Garden where the Common Myna stood driven to near anonymity; at least for about ten days any way. Perhaps it is best to reproduce the observations I noted:

1. 28th March, 07:00 hours: Jungle Mynas are just about everywhere. On one Jacaranda tree alone, there are 54 and elsewhere in the Rose Garden I saw 5 Common Mynas only.
2. 30th March, 07:30 hours: Jungle Mynas in flocks of 10 to 50. They are so crazy over the nectar of the Bottle Brush *Callistemon lanceolatus* flowers that you could throw a butterfly net over them, almost!
3. 1st April, 08:15 hours: Jungle Mynas, no change.
4. 2nd April, 08:00 hours: 33 Jungle Mynas on a *Semal* tree *Salmalia malabarica* and 20 on a nearby Silver Oak *Grevillea robusta*. In contrast only four Common Mynas encountered.
5. 4th April, 07:30 hours: The Jungle Mynas are also attracted to the nectar of the Silver Oak flowers.
6. 7th April, 07:30 hours: Jungle Mynas still around in large numbers but beginning to form smaller congregations of 5-15 birds. The rose garden full of myna chatter.
7. 10th April, 07:30 hours: Jungle Mynas now more or less in the same numbers as Common Mynas. The return 'passage' of the Jungle Mynas may well have begun.
8. 14th April, 08:00 hours: Jungle Mynas diminishing in numbers. Blossoms on Bottle Brush and Silver Oaks have faded out.
9. 16th April, 07:30 hours: One flock of 20 Jungle Mynas.
10. 21st April, 07:00 hours: One reason why so few of the Common Mynas were visible is perhaps because the peak 'passage' of the Jungle Myna here coincides with the peak nesting activity of the Common. There is no direct evidence of the Jungle Myna nesting here. Surely there must be a few Jungle Mynas resident here. Should they not be nesting? One pair was seen exploring a nest-cavity on a Semal tree and another contesting a cavity with a Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* (Scopoli, 1769). Finally one Common Myna arrived and cleared every one from the site!
11. 20th May, 08:00 hours: Since 23rd April, no Jungle Mynas have been seen at all, anywhere.

Of course no conclusions can be formed on the basis of a few observations. But what appears probable about the large but temporary influx and presence of the Jungle Myna here from about mid-March to end-April may well have a link with tree blossoms (the Bottle Brush and Silver Oak, for instance). The absence of Jungle Myna beginning about end-April, which coincides with the fading of certain tree blossoms, may also imply that there are no exceptions to Ali and Ripley's assertion about the Jungle Myna "breeding from foothills to *c.*2100m". As they begin breeding in March and once the biological urge sets in, off they got to the foothills and beyond. May be next year, someone will get up the Shivaliks and map out this movement. Will some reader please also check out whether the seasonal fluctuation of numbers of the Bank Myna at the Kanpur and Allahabad railway stations is related to their breeding period, March-April? I concede that it may not make ornithological waves but it will be an interesting insight.

Postscript

I had readied this article for dispatch when I hit a lucky patch with the Jungle Myna at 07:45 hours on 25th May 2003. One Jungle Myna in a blaze of a hurry landed almost at my feet, grabbed at some tid-bit and took off in a flash. Fortunately, I could follow his flight and saw him enter a cavity of a tree trunk about 20m away. It was an old, gnarled Gulmohar tree *Delonix regia*, with a large cavity about 10 inches across and five feet above the ground. But Jungle Myna parents were busy carrying food to their chicks in never-ceasing shuttles. Two very hungry gaping gullets kept bobbing up to the rim of the cavity. So there is a small permanent resident population of the Jungle Myna here and they do nest also. After all, Chandigarh is at the Shivalik foothills. On 28th May, three more active nests of the Jungle Myna were seen in the same general area.

A pair of Common Myna was nesting and happily co-existing in another cavity of the same tree about 2m up and away to a side. And three more, in cavities, in the decayed, thick whorl of a Semal, some 20m away.

Now at the end of this article, someone may well ask what was all this pother about? Mere myna chatter!

Sighting of Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* Linnaeus, 1758, in Sriharikota Island, Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh, India

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Two races of the Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* Linnaeus, 1758, are reported from the Indian region. *R. a. korejewi* Zarudny, 1905, which breeds in Kashmir and Ladakh (?) and straggles as far as Madhya Pradesh; and *R. a. indicus*

Blyth, 1849, an extralimital species that winters in eastern Nepal, terai and Kathmandu valley, Bengal, south to Kolkata (Calcutta), Bangladesh and N.E. India (Ali and Ripley 1987). The race *indicus* differs from *korejewi* in being darker olive-brown; less grey above and below; having a distinct brownish wash on upper breast (vs. clear grey); more white on throat (vs. white largely lacking); and the brown eye-stripe more prominent behind eye (Ali and Ripley 1987). Recently, Punjabi (1997) sighted the species (race?) from Mumbai citing it as the southernmost record in India. Kazmierczak (2000) points to stray records in southern India. However, on our enquiry to provide details of these sightings, he replied that these records are probably erroneous (*in litt.*).

Sriharikota (Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh) is a spindle shaped island (181 km^2), bordered by the waters of Pulicat Lake (*c*.461km^2) on its western, northern and southern borders and by the Bay of Bengal on the east. The Island is accessible by road from the mainland from Sullurpet, 18km to the west of its central portion. Sriharikota is a "restricted area" due to its status as a satellite-launching base of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). Due to its special status, Sriharikota has now the largest and best protected of the few remaining patches of Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest in India. The wetlands of the Island comprise of fresh and brackish water streams and lakes, and some abandoned and almost silted village ponds.

On 28th May 2003 at 07:00 hours, we sighted a Water Rail along one of the streams in Sriharikota. The Water Rail has not been recorded by earlier workers in Sriharikota (BNHS 1976, Samant & Rao 1996, Rao 1998) nor during the first year of our on-going 3-year project on the faunal diversity of the Island. The species is easily separated from most other rails and crakes by it long red bill, and, is further distinguished from the Blue-breasted Rail *Gallirallus striatus*, which also has a (less) relatively long reddish bill, by the latter's barred upperparts (*vs*. brown blotches running backwards). However, being unfamiliar with the species, we failed to look for the presence of a brownish wash on the upper breast (present in race *korejewi*), helpful in the separation of the races. However, we presume it to be *indicus* as the brownish wash was not noted in both our jottings.

The sighting of the Water Rail in Sriharikota is interesting, as besides adding to the scanty records in southern India, the sighting was towards the end of May, an out-of-season sighting. Due to its skulking nature the species is easily missed and birders should keep a lookout for it with extra efforts to identity the race, as Ali & Ripley (1987) comments, 'owing to paucity of specimens and dependable records, status for the two races in our area remains uncertain'.[2]

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[2] **Editors' Note:** This observation of the authors extends the range of the Water Rail so much that it warrants caution. It has been published not so much to imply acceptance as to alert birdwatchers to look out for the species in particular and to pay more attention to the family Rallidae.

A meeting of the Goose Specialist Group

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The Goose Specialist Group of Wetlands International meets annually in one of the countries of Europe to discuss conservation and management of various goose species. The 2004 meeting took place in Odessa, Ukraine, in early March. Scientists from the University of Odessa organized it. Specialists from Finland, Sweden, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, France and Spain were present in strength, together with some from Hungary, Estonia and Kazakhstan.

I attended the meeting on invitation as the coordinator for Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* (Latham, 1790).

The meeting mainly discussed the problems of geese wintering in various nations of Europe. A number of goose species from Pink-footed *Anser brachyrhynchus* Baillon, 1834, Greylag *Anser anser* (Linnaeus, 1758) and Greater White-fronted *Anser albifrons* (Scopoli, 1769) to Lesser White-fronted *Anser erythropus* (Linnaeus, 1758), Bean *Anser fabalis* (Latham, 1787), Barnacle *Branta leucopsis* (Bechstein, 1803), Brent *Branta bernicla* (Linnaeus, 1758),

and Red-breasted *Branta ruficollis* (Pallas, 1769) and breed from Iceland to east Siberia in the Tundra region and winter from U.K. to Japan and south to India and Africa. On migration and in winter quarters the main threats they face are hunting and habitat loss including fragmentation. In some countries hunting pressure was staggering. Over 50,000 Greater white-fronted geese used to be shot in the Netherlands every year. Now hunting restrictions are in force in many countries. This has resulted in a great increase in the numbers of this goose whose world population now exceeds seven million!

Incidentally delegates asked me if the numbers of Barheads are increasing since the ban on hunting in India, our country being the major wintering areas of this goose. Their number obviously does not show any increase. But it is also true that their number is not regularly monitored in our country. On the other hand *A. indicus* has become somewhat of a problem in Europe. It has escaped from private collections and has been breeding in Sweden and some other countries as a feral species. They want to get rid of it, as it is not a true European goose!

The Lesser white-fronted, with a total world population of less than 25,000 is now considered endangered. It breeds in tundra from Norway to Eastern Siberia and winters mainly in Azerbaijan and north China. It no longer breeds in Sweden and Finland. A programme of re-introduction was therefore carried out in Sweden using captive-bred chicks in association with Barnacle geese as foster parents. Interestingly chicks became imprinted on the release site and not on foster parents. After migrating with foster parents to Netherlands in winter, they returned to the release site without any guidance from the foster parents. This programme has now been stopped as gene contamination with Greater white-fronted was observed in the released birds!

Recently habitat loss, mainly conversion of wetlands and meadows to agriculture, became a major threat in Belgium and Hungary; illegal fishing and oil pollution in wetlands in Bulgaria; hunting, eco-tourism and a shipping canal proposed through the Danube Delta National Park in Ukraine and hunting pressure in almost all countries are the other threats encountered by geese today in Europe.

Ukraine, together with Rumania and Bulgaria, are major wintering areas for Greater white-fronted and Red-breasted geese. The latter is another endangered goose species. We saw huge flocks of both occurring close to each other though they rarely inter-mix. Greater white-fronted outnumber Red-breasted by a proportion of 10:1. In one large saucer-shaped basin, dominated by agricultural fallows, we saw a 20,000 strong flock of Greater white-fronted. Next to them was a flock of about 2,000 Red-breasted. Impressive gatherings of Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* (Gmelin, 1789), Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* (Linnaeus, 1758) and Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* Linnaeus, 1758, were also seen in wetlands of Ukraine. These wetlands support extensive reed beds of *Phragmites* sp., harvested and exported to the Netherlands.

In India we are familiar with Greylag which breeds from U.K. and Spain in the west to Ukraine in the east. It also winters in Africa and China besides India. In Donana National Park in Spain they are threatened by lead and cadmium leaching from a nearby mine. In Ukraine, in one of their breeding areas in Danube Delta National Park, their principal food item was found to be bulbs of *Trapa natans*, a common wetland plant in India. Another common Indian plant *Xanthium strumarium* was also found to be growing in the Danube delta.

I presented to the meeting whatever data I could collect about the world status of Bar-headed goose. Its major breeding areas lie in Tibet where in the nineties of the last century, over 10,000 pairs were said to be breeding (Jian jian Lu, *pers. comm.*). We have small breeding colonies of this goose in Ladakh, the largest one with over 50 breeding pairs was the one I discovered south of Tso Moriri in 1980. To my knowledge this colony has not been investigated since then. The goose no longer breeds in Russia and the breeding population in Mongolia has declined from over 1,000 pairs to just a few. In 1997 I visited Kyrgyz Stan where only 10 nests were found on an island in Song Kul, a lake at an altitude of 3,000m. Breeding numbers of this goose seem to have declined over most of its range, except in Tibet.

Data about its wintering numbers come from winter waterfowl counts carried out in India, Pakistan, Nepal, China, etc. In Pakistan wintering numbers seem to have declined drastically. In India they are more or less stable with increase in some areas and decline in others. In Nepal this goose appears mainly on passage. In 2000 I visited Myanmar to assess the numbers wintering in that country and found that over 4,000 geese winter on the banks of the Irawaddy. Counts in 2001-2003 by Joost van der Ven of Netherlands showed more or less identical numbers. I estimated the total world population of Bar-headed to be of the order of between 30,000 to 35,000 birds.

However, compared to the data amassed by European nations about the breeding, wintering and migration of geese over Europe, we in Asia, seem to know little about the goose situation in the Asian continent. In India goose research and monitoring seems to have not been taken in any seriousness. I have met goose researchers from Japan and China but such meetings are sporadic and exchange of information extremely scant. It is usually difficult to establish contacts in countries like Mongolia and Kazakhstan, though the specialists from the latter country told me that they regularly ring Bar-headed and that most of the recoveries come from Tibet. In our country a satellite transmitter was placed on a Bar-headed wintering in Bharatpur's Keoladeo Ghana National Park. The goose migrated to its breeding area in south Tibet after staging on the Ganga and then flying directly to south Tibet. Ringing as a planned activity has almost ceased in India seriously hampering acquisition of migration data.

It is necessary for people interested in observing geese to come together, pool their energies and resources to form

a database, establish regular contacts and improve our knowledge of this interesting group of birds. Is it too early to visualize a Goose Specialist Group of Asia?

Blue-bearded Bee-eater and other birds in Kaigal, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh

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We went camping to Kaigal, with students of Rishi Valley School. This riparian forest area is owned by Krishnamurti Foundation India and is located on the Palamner-Kuppam road. The trip was short and lasted just over 27 hours on 18th-19th January. 2004. The habitat is mainly riparian with dry deciduous forests (reduced to scrub or grassy stretches on the fringes) and cultivation. During our visit there was hardly any water flowing in the stream and the only water in the vicinity was in the few deep pools.

With a group of 27 highly energetic students one rarely gets a chance to watch birds and I did not anticipate much on this trip. Yet I was able to record over 40 bird species here. One of the interesting birds seen was the Blue-bearded Bee-eater *Nyctyornis athertoni* (Jardine & Selby, 1828). A single bird was seen in the riparian habitat on the morning of 19th January. This species was earlier recorded in the Rishi Valley campus in 2000-2001 (Santharam 2001) and it was exciting seeing it here.

Another interesting bird identified from the calls was the Red Spurfowl *Galloperdix spadicea* (Gmelin, 1789). At least 2-3 birds were heard calling from the forest sloping to the stream early that morning. There are reports of this bird from scrub / deciduous forests around Madanapalle (Chittoor district) as also reports of it being hunted / captured for the pot. The other interesting birds seen were Grey Junglefowl *Gallus sonneratii* Temminck, 1813, White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus* (Scopoli, 1786), Spotted Babbler *Pellorneum ruficeps* Swainson, 1832, Black-naped Monarch-flycatcher *Hypothymis azurea* (Boddaert, 1783), and White-spotted Fantail Flycatcher *Rhipidura albicollis albogularis* (Lesson, 1831).

This forest tract lies adjacent to the Kaundinya Wildlife Sanctuary, which has a small population of Asian Elephants *Elephas maximus* Linnaeus, 1758, which seasonally migrate from Tamil Nadu. There are old records of the White-bellied Treepie *Dendrocitta leucogastra* Gould, 1833, from these forests (Ali and Ripley 1983). Perhaps a detailed survey of these forests could tell us the present status of these birds and other interesting birds that are patchily distributed outside the Western Ghats.

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Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* (Gmelin, 1789) feeding on insect road kills

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On the evening of 8th September 2003 (around 16:00 hours), the weather was humid at Sriharikota Island (Andhra Pradesh). Passing patchy dark clouds gave shade intermittently. Thousands of dragonflies were flying low over the road that connects Sriharikota Island with the mainland (Sulurpet), by passing through the Pulicat Lake. Vehicular traffic is high at this hour. This caused a heavy casualty among the dragonflies. A pair of Gull-billed Terns *Gelochelidon nilotica* (Gmelin, 1789) utilized this opportunity for effective feeding with minimum effort. They flew slowly over the road and made swooping dives to pick up the dead dragonflies from the road.

The Gull-billed Tern is one among the five species of terns reported from Sriharikota Island and the adjoining Pulicat Lake (Rao 1998). In India, the bird breeds in northwestern parts and is distributed widely throughout the country during winter (Ali and Ripley 1987). The Gull-billed Tern is an opportunistic feeder, more insectivorous

than most other terns. Its prey includes grasshoppers, dragonflies, moths and grubs. It also takes spiders, earthworms, small reptiles and frogs, small fish, aquatic invertebrates and, rarely, voles and small birds (del Hoyo *et al*. 1996). It is known that terns pick up food floating on sewage and seawater near harbours. At the same time, this observation of Gull-billed Terns feeding on insect road kills is worth documenting.

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Two additions to the Rishi Valley bird list

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The Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis* Linnaeus, 1766, and the Rain Quail *Coturnix coromandelica* (Gmelin, 1789), were recently seen in the campus of Rishi Valley in Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh. Here are the details.

Black-naped Oriole: At least a pair was seen from 9th February to 10th April 2003 (I was away from the campus soon after). All the features that distinguish the species, namely the darker and broader eye-stripes that joined up at the nape, less of black and more of green plumage on the wings and back and the more nasal call (the birds were very vocal) were noticed. Again in the winter of 2003, the birds were seen in Rishi Valley. There was more than a pair--perhaps two–seen / heard regularly in the campus from 19th November 2003, and are still around as I write this (on 11th April 2004). Having seen this species on several earlier occasions in the Western Ghats and in the Andamans, there was no difficulty in identifying it.

The species is only "occasionally recorded…in winter…[in] Kerala and Bangladesh; resident in Andaman and Nicobar Islands; widely scattered records elsewhere…" (Grimmett et. al., 1998). In Andhra Pradesh, this bird has been recorded from the eastern coastal plains (Taher and Pittie 1989) and at Anantagiri Reserve Forest in Rangareddi district (Pittie 2001). In Karnataka it was recorded by Andheria (1999) in Whitefield and Bannerghatta National Park on the outskirts of Bangalore, though not reported by Joesph George (1994).

In view of the paucity of reports from this region, this record is significant. Perhaps the bird may be a scarce but regular winter visitor in the southern peninsula but is often overlooked due its superficial resemblance to the commoner Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* (Linnaeus, 1758).

Rain Quail: A single bird was collected in one of the hostels of the school on the night of 27th June 2003. The bird was alive with no external injuries but appeared exhausted when it was brought to me the next morning. It was docile and made no attempts to fly when examined. The bird was easily identified by the field marks - the dark breast patch and the bold streaks on the flanks were those of a male Rain Quail. It was later released in the scrub jungle and ran away into the thickets and disappeared.

This bird is widespread in peninsular India and is known to have imperfectly understood local movements (Ali and Ripley 1983). Perhaps it moves about during the monsoon.

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Reviews

A photographic guide to the birds of India and the Indian Subcontinent, including Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka & the Maldives. by Grewal, Bikram, Bill Harvey, and Otto Pfister, 2002. 1st ed. Singapore: Periplus Editions (HK) Ltd. 512 pages. $29.95

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What a stream of books is flowing in! Whistler 1928, Salim Ali '41, Martin Woodcock '80, Grimmet *et al.* '98, Bikram 1993 onwards, Krys Kazmierczak 2001, Satish Pande (Birds of the Western Ghats) 2003.

Readers of the Newsletter are familiar with these books, though some of you may not have seen Bikram's latest about which I am writing. It has an attractive cover (very important, as "clothes make the man") is easy to handle, its 512 pages accommodated with the size of 6" x 4" x 1.5". Outstanding photographs and top class printing leave nothing to be desired and needless to comment on.

The book is up to date, dealing with 800 of the 1305 species which experts say now exist within the Subcontinent (Maldives too, included). Each page has at least one photograph of the described with a colour coded map. If it is a resident bird its distribution is shown in red. If a migrant it is shown in blue. The map relating to the Malabar Whistling Thrush *Myophonus horsfieldii* (Vigors, 1831), shows a red band along the Western Ghats with an arm spreading into Central India. In the case of the Blue Whistling Thrush *M. caeruleus* (Scopoli, 1786), there is a blob of red in the Himalayas coming down to the Bay of Bengal. Readers may recall that in the Newsletter of May/June 2003, Lt. Gen. Baljit Singh reports seeing this bird in Chandigarh. This shows the importance of the amateur birder in updating the work of scientists in the museums.

The book is beautifully organized and one learns many general facts, which add to our interest in the subject. The extended Introduction deals with: Enjoying birdwatching, ornithology in the region, bird movements, breeding, nomenclature, taxonomy and sequence and many other scientific topics explained in clear language. In the last decade the Orders, Families, Genera and Species have been altered, eliminated or added to, on the basis of DNA findings. We see from the Contents page that now there are 20 Families of Passerines and 41 Non-passerines. What remains unchanged is the number of birds endemic to India: 142. But we might, in course of time, rope in the Red-faced Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus* (Pennant, 1769), reported by Lt. Gen. B. C. Nanda, from the Coorg forests a few years ago.

Apart from the usual indices of Common (English) and Scientific names there is also a Systematic List of Families and Species which is often very helpful. An extensive bibliography and glossary and a section on useful addresses is a plus point added to its other qualities.

Birds of the Indus. by Mubashir Hasan, 2001. Karachi: Oxford University Press.

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Hardback (13.5 x 21.5cm, with illustrated dust cover), pp. i-xx, 1-348, 238 plates [colour photographs (236 of birds), by; T.J. Roberts (11), Mubashir Hasan (150), Syed Asad Ali (46), Khan Mohammad (13), F.J. Koning (2), Rudi Hess (1), Tim Hurrell (2), Robert R. Randall (1), Brenda Wheeler (1), Mark Malallieu (1) and, Rolf Passburg (8)]. ISBN 0-19-577938-X. Cover price Rs. 795/-.

Contents: Half-title and notice (p. i); title (p. iii); imprint (p. iv); dedication (p. v); Contents (pp. vii-x); Acknowledge-ments (pp. xi-xii); Introduction (pp. xiii-xx); text (pp. 1-329); References (pp. 331-333); Index of English names (pp. 335-339); Index of scientific names (pp. 340-344); Index of Urdu/Hindi names (pp. 345-348).

The following photographers have not been credited on the title page. Rudi Hess, Tim Hurrell, Robert R. Randall, Brenda Wheeler and Mark Malallieu.

This work is an example of what an abiding interest in a hobby can lead to. The author is a politician in Pakistan and bird photography is his hobby. Now that there are 'all-encompassing' handbooks on the birds of the Indian subcontinent, in the market, as there are too those covering each of the individual countries, we should see more work on restricted areas and habitats as well as monographs on taxa at various levels, in the future. Hasan's work limits itself to the birds of the Indus River watershed, for which he has selected *c*.236 species from 660 (p. xx) reported from Pakistan. The author gives a general introduction for each of the families he has selected, and then short species accounts, which are also general in nature, with some distribution notes, for each taxon. It is sad that the very motive for this work, the author's photographs, show up rather poorly, throughout. The editing too is slack at times: a picture of a falcon on page 70 is wrongly captioned "Shikra"; the photograph of nesting Cliff Swallows on page 209 is upside-down; to name a couple. The cover price is steep and not everyone can afford a copy easily.

Petronia. Fifty years of post-Independence ornithology in India. J.C. Daniel & Gayatri W. Ugra (*Editors*) (2003). Bombay: Bombay Natural History Society & Oxford University Press.

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Hardback (18.0 x 24.0cm, with illustrated cover), pp. i-vii, 1-342+6, frontispiece (portrait of Dr Salim Ali), plates (colour & black & white), text-figures. ISBN 019-566653-4. Cover price Rs. 400/-.

Contents: Half-tit. (p. i); tit. (p. iii); imprint (p. iv); Preface (p. v, by; B.G. Deshmukh); Contents (pp. vi-vii); text (pp. 1-342); "Notes" (4 pp.); advt. (2 pp.).

This is a compilation of papers ("A centenary dedication to Dr. Salim Ali 1896-1996") published earlier in various volumes of the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* (JBNHS)—except for a couple (see below). Only two papers are new. These are by Rishad Naoroji (pp. 46-52; Observations on the biology of the Mountain Hawk-Eagle) and Edward C. Moulton (pp. 295-317; The contributions of Allan O. Hume to the scientific advancement of Indian Ornithology).

The other papers are by the following authors: J.C. Daniel (pp. 1-6, published in *Hornbill*; Salim Ali–an appreciation); Lady Y.P. McNeice (p. 7; Salim A. Ali); J.B.S. Haldane (pp. 8-15; The non-violent scientific study of birds); Wan Tho Loke (pp. 16-23; Photographing the Whitebellied Sea Eagle *Haliaetus leucogaster* (Gmelin); V.C. Ambedkar and J.C. Daniel (pp. 24-45; A study of the migration of the Common Teal *Anas crecca* Linn., based on ring recoveries in India and USSR); Humayun Abdulali (pp. 53-58; On the food and other habits of the Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* Pallas in India); S. Dillon Ripley (pp. 59-66; Zoogeographic considerations on the Indian avifauna); Bharat Bhushan (pp. 67-80; The rediscovery of the Jerdon's or Double-banded Courser *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus*; Salim Ali & J.H. Cook (pp. 81-100; Observations on Finn's Baya *Ploceus megarhynchus* Hume rediscovered in the Kumaon terai); M.K. Himmatsinhji (pp. 101-103; Dr. Salim Ali's contribution to Kutch ornithology); Lavkumar Khacher (pp. 104-154; The birds of Gujarat – a Salim Ali centenary year overview); T.J. Roberts (pp. 155-162; Twentieth century changes in the avifauna of Pakistan); Thilo W. Hoffmann (pp. 163-171; New bird records in Sri Lanka and some connected matters); Anthony J. Gaston and V.J. Zacharias (pp. 172-184; The recent distribution of endemic and disjunct birds in Kerala: preliminary results of an ongoing survey); R. Sankaran [pp. 185-197; Aerial display in the Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica* (J.F. Miller)]; Madhusudan Katti and Trevor Price (pp. 198-215; Effects of climate on Palaearctic warblers overwintering in India); P. Balasubramanian (pp. 216-230; Interactions between fruit-eating birds and bird-dispersed plants in the tropical dry evergreen forest of Point Calimere, South India); Asad R. Rahmani (pp. 231-252; Strategies for long-term conservation of the Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* in India); S. Subramanya (pp. 253-279; Distribution, status and conservation of Indian heronries); D.N. Mathew, George Mathew and Tara Gandhi (pp. 280-283; Breeding seasons and conservation of the terns *Sterna fuscata* and *Anous stolidus* in the Lakshadweep); Priya Davidar (pp. 284-287; Conservation priorities for the Andaman Islands); Ranjit Manakadan, S. Alagarrajan and J.C. Daniel (pp. 288-294, published in *Buceros*; The post-independence history of Indian ornithology); S.A. Hussain [pp. 318-342; Some aspects of the biology and ecology of the Narcondam Hornbill (*Rhyticeros narcondami*)].

Even though most of the papers in this commemorative volume have been published earlier, their quality is of a high standard and their intrinsic value timeless. The editors should be congratulated for re-publishing them in a separate single volume for future generations of serious amateur and professional ornithologists. Highly recommended, and affordable.

A concise history of ornithology. The lives and works of its founding figures. by Michael Walters, 2003. London: Christopher Helm.

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Hardback. (17 x 24cm, illustrated dust cover with a brief biographical note on the author on back flap), pp. 1-255+1, 68 portraits (black & white), 25 illustrations (black & white photos, 1 double-page). (ISBN 1-873403-97-6.). Cover Price: £30/-.

Contents: Half-title (p. 1); title page (p. 3); imprint (p. 4); Contents (p. 5); Preface (pp. 9-10); Early times (pp. 11-19); The renaissance of Ornithology (pp. 20-51); Eighteenth century systems: Linnaeus, Brisson & Buffon, and their legacy (pp. 52-68); Pallas and the new awakening (pp. 69-74); Explorations of the Eighteenth Century (pp. 75-85); The Germans and the Dutch (pp. 86-95); The beginnings of American Ornithology (pp. 96-113); The Quinary and other Nineteenth Century systems (pp. 114-131); New theories, and explanations in the Far East (pp. 132-148); The turn of the Nineteenth Century and the introduction of trinomials (pp. 149-163); Ornithology and ornithologists in the Twentieth Century (pp. 164-175, by; John Coulson); Appendices 1-30 [pp. 176-235 (systems of classification)]; Appendices A & B (pp. 236-238); Bibliography (pp. 239-250); Index (pp. 251-255).

The chapter by John Coulson has the following sub-sections: Marking birds to study individuals (Survival and mortality rates; Colour-ringing; Behaviour; Telemetry; Transponders); Molecular studies in avian taxonomy,

systematics and biology (Paternity and pair fidelity; Taxonomy and systematics).

The 30 Appendices on systems of classification list the work of Walter Charleton, Möhring, J.C. Schaeffer, Brisson, Linnaeus (10th ed.), Linnaeus (12th ed.), Brünnich, Latham, Pallas, Gloger, Merrem, Blainville, L'Herminier, Nitzsch, Wagler, Lacépède, Illiger, Vieillot, Temminck, Bonaparte, Avium Conspectus of Tschudi, Cuvier, J.J. Kaup, Boie, Hogg, Huxley, Sundevall's Tentamen, Lilljeborg 1866, Reichenow, Fürbringer and, Gadow. Appendix 'A' is a list of birds from Emperor Rudolph II's collection, and Appendix 'B' is a list of birds described by Quoy & Gaimard on Freycinet's Voyage 1817-1820.

"This book is a detailed historical account of the study of birds, from the earliest written records through to the twentieth century...The lives and works of key ornithologists through history are presented here—the exploreres, the naturalists and the conservationists who have painstakingly built up our knowledge and understanding of birds over the centuries. As this fascinating story approaches the modern era, it reveals how burgeoning knowledge and shifting ideologies have interacted to shape ornithology as the complex scientific discipline we recognise today..." (dust cover, front flap).

The history of mankind is the story of individuals, and so is the case with the history of Ornithology. The subject is so vast, and the episodes that make it up so engrossing, that a detailed account would warrant separate biographies of each player. But that is not the purpose of this work. It is not easy to paint a picture that reveals, on one canvas, such a history. A sweeping grasp of the subject is needed allowing one to look at it from a distance, ensuring that the horizons are wide enough to encompass enough detail to make the work both entertaining and revealing. The author, who was the curator of birds' eggs for 30 years at the Natural History Museum, Tring, UK, achieves this with brilliance.

I hope that the quote below, dealing with the Ornithology of the Indian region, will whet the appetite of readers to delve deeper in the history of a subject that is close to their heart.

"As late as the 1820s almost nothing was known of the ornithology of India except for some collections of native drawings made by Indian army officers. One of the earliest and best known of these was the collection of General Hardwicke, a selection of which were engraved and published in 1830, edited by J.E. Gray of the British Museum. It was about 1830 that the beginnings of scientific investigation were laid by the researches of Major Franklin and Colonel Sykes, both of whom wrote papers in the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society* for 1831-32. In 1832, the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* was commenced and published in Calcutta, which, along with a number of other journals, contained valuable papers by Hodgson, Hutton, Pearson, Tickell, McClelland and others. Hodgson, who resided in Nepal, was the pioneer in that country."

"However, the dominant figure in early 19th century Indian ornithology was Edward Blyth, who for many years was curator of the Asiatic Society's Museum at Calcutta. He was the first trained Zoologist of his time to go to India. Blyth was born in London on 23 December 1810, of a Norfolk family. His father died in 1820, and his mother originally intended him for a career in the Church, but, on advice from his headmaster, sent him to study chemistry. His passion for natural history disinclined him for any other pursuits, and, on coming of age, he opened a chemist's shop in Tooting, London, But he gave this business so little attention that it inevitably failed. He devoted all his time to ornithology and entomology, and contributed many papers on Zoology to the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society*. It was largely on the basis of his editing of Griffith's edition of Cuvier's *Le Renge Animal* that he was recruited by Horace Wilson in 1841 as curator of the Museum of the Asiatic Society of Bengal at Calcutta. For over 20 years he rendered devoted service to the Society, submitting detailed monthly reports (which often filled 15-20 pages), publishing many descriptions of new species. During all these years, he subsisted on a pittance of a salary, and his periodic applications for an increase in remuneration were cast aside. In spite of the disgraceful treatment he received at the hands of the Society, Blyth never made any complaint, and accepted the capricious and often unreasonable criticisms of his excellent work with equanimity. After his retirement, he wrote: "I had always a presentiment that my successor in the Museum would be more adequately remunerated, beginning with just double what I had after more than 20 years work…" Fuel for a court case today, but Blyth dismissed it philosophically, as the great-hearted and underrated man he was. Grote, in writing Blyth's obituary in 1875, remarked: "Few men who have written so much have left in their writings so little that is bitter." Blyth died after a long and exceptionally productive career, as on of the pioneer Zoologists in the continent of Asia. Sadly, he is little remembered today. He was the mentor of T.C. Jerdon, William Blandford [*sic* (=Blanford)], and particularly A.O. Hume. There is no rational explanation of why Blyth has been ignored by the history of Zoology. He aroused the malice of J.E. Gray of the British Museum, as a result of a complaint made against his brother G.R. Gray. This does not, however, explain his neglect in the 20th century."

"Allan Octavian Hume was born in 1829, the son of a Scottish MP. He served as a midshipman in the Royal Navy, studied medicine at University College Hospital and at the age of 20 was posted to the Bengal Civil Service. From 1849 to 1867, he served as district officer at Etawah in the NW Provinces, from 1867 to 1870 as commissioner to a centralized department, and from 1870 to 1879 as Secretary to the Government of India. He showed great gallantry during the Indian Mutiny in 1857, risking his life on several occasions. He worked tirelessly in promoting education, reforming the local police, and in 1859 founded a popular paper *The People's Friend*, published at a very low price so that it would be accessible to the poorest of village youths.

As Commissioner, he introduced agricultural reforms, suitable to the particular needs of the people. He was always sensitive to local and traditional practice and never sought to impose `foreign' measures. Besides matters directly pertaining to agriculture and horticulture, Hume had to deal with forestry, including the conservation of forests, the restoration of denuded areas, and the supply of firewood to the public. He was also required to attend to fisheries, emigration, meteorological observations, museums, and exhibitions of art and industry, shipping, harbours, lighthouses and customs. In 1879, after 30 years of devoted service, he was summarily dismissed from his post in the secretariat of the Government of India, because he expressed his views freely, without regard to the opinions or intentions of his superiors. Hume retired from public service in 1882 and became founder of the Indian National Congress. For this purpose, he travelled to England in 1883 to seek the support of influential friends there. The First Session of the Congress was held from 25 to 30 December 1885. He seems to have been one of the few Englishmen completely trusted by the people of India, and he had received many forewarnings of the Mutiny, in the hope that he could do something to avert the tragedy. He is a figure unjustly forgotten in Indian political history. On his return to Britain in 1894, he settled in Dulwich and threw himself into local politics, serving on many committees, often as Chairman or President. This was the man, who, in his `spare time', studied the ornithology of the Indian sub-continent, and spent about £20,000 of his own money (a huge sum in those days) in accumulating an ornithological museum and library, which was the largest in Asia at that time. (It consisted of 63,000 bird skins and 19,000 eggs). He had planned to write a vast book on the ornithology of India and had made voluminous notes, but in 1884, while absent from home, a servant sold the manuscript in the market for waste paper. As a result, in 1885 he presented his entire collection to the Natural History Museum in London. In 1872, he had started, at his own expense, the journal *Stray Feathers*, edited it, and wrote many of the articles him self. It was published until 1899 when it had to be discontinued, as by then Hume was living in England," (pp. 156-157).

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Correspondence

Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* foraging on Drumstick *Moringa oleifera* leaves

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On 14th January 1998, I was observing birds in my garden at English Bazaar, Malda district, West Bengal. It was late in the morning when I noticed two Red-vented Bulbuls *Pycnonotus cafer* (Linnaeus, 1766), flying into a Drumstick tree *Moringa oleifera*. I was surprised to see them plucking the leaves. Or were they eating caterpillars? But on closer observation I saw that they were actually eating the leaves of the Drumstick tree. I don't understand why they were eating them. I thought it was an unusual, perhaps stray incident.

After that observation, whenever I got the opportunity, I observed Red-vented Bulbuls' foraging behaviour in my garden. To my surprise, till April 2003, I actually saw Red-vented Bulbuls foraging on Drumstick leaves on 36 occassions. I now believe that at least in this part of the country, leaves of the Drumstick tree form a part of the diet of Red-vented Bulbuls.

Forest Wagtail in Chennai, Tamil Nadu

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We live outside Chennai (Madras city), adjacent to a scrub forest. Of late we have a lot of Forest Wagtails *Dendronanthus indicus* (Gmelin, 1789), wandering through the garden and around the house. Yesterday (11.iv.2004) after 13:00 hours, one of our dogs drew my attention to a Forest Wagtail standing next to the house. The dog put her whole snout on top of the bird (physically touching it) and sniffed it. The bird allowed me to approach, and I picked it up. It had no signs of any injury (no sign of dog saliva either); it looked perfectly normal. It was standing normally and yet it wasn't walking away. It held onto my finger tightly, maintaining its balance but wouldn't perch on a tree branch when I tried to place it on one. So I kept it in a small cage for an hour. Then not knowing what else I could do for it, I took it out again to see if it was any better and this time it did fly away.

House Sparrow killed by Brahminy Starling

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In the 2nd week of April 2003, between 09:00-09:30 hours, I observed a pair of House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* (Linnaeus, 1758), busy building their nest. They selected a small space in a 10" x 10" hole in a brick pillar, situated in an undisturbed place on the roof. All day the partners were busy collecting straw, thin dry twigs and grasses and placing them in the hole. The male was more active at this job.

Suddenly I saw a pair of Brahminy Starlings *Sturnus pagodarum* (Gmelin, 1789), wandering on the same roof. After a while they approached the sparrows' nest, to usurp it. The sparrows were smaller than the starlings, but they defended their home territory with loud chirps and frequent "attacks" at the starlings. This lasted for 10-15 minutes, after which time the starlings flew away. On the same day, at around 14:00 hours, I saw them struggling once again for control of the nest hole. This time the starlings also "attacked" the sparrows. The struggle lasted for 5-6 minutes after which the starlings flew away.

Next morning, at 08:30 hours, I again heard the unusual chirping of sparrow. I saw that struggle between the sparrows and starlings had reached the stage where they were aggressively pecking at each other. But this time the starlings seemed more aggressive. They were compelling the sparrows to vacate that nest with frequent attacks. The sparrows were desperate. The Brahminy Starlings' black crest was erect with their aggression.

All of a sudden, a starling grasped the cock sparrow under its foot, pinning it down with its pointed claws and started pecking it. The other starling joined in. The hen sparrow seemed helpless. The cock sparrow was severely injured and bleeding.

I was taken aback at this sudden change of events. I tried to save the bird, but failed.

Miscellaneous

Launch of the Asian Waterbird Census report 1997-2001

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We are pleased to announce that Wetlands International has formally launched a new Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) 1997-2001 report titled "Numbers and distribution of Waterbirds and Wetlands in the Asia-Pacific region. Results of the Asian Waterbird Census: 1997-2001" (Wetlands International, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. ISBN 90 5882-020-3), on 4 April 2004 in Edinburgh, U.K., in conjunction with the Global Flyway Conference jointly organised by the U.K. and Dutch governments and Wetlands International.

The report presents the latest information on waterbird numbers and distribution, as well as the status of important wetlands in Asia.

This report summarises the results of the counts from 1,392 sites in 22 countries including 61 wetlands of international importance listed under the Ramsar Convention, 32 Migratory Waterbird Network Sites in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway and 43 Important Bird Areas.

A total of 291 species of migratory and resident waterbirds and 15 species of wetland-dependent raptors (birds of prey) were recorded; and a maximum of over 4.5 million waterbirds were counted in 2001.

The publication provides distribution maps for 110 species, including 24 globally threatened species.

The data in the report aims to contribute to conservation efforts of wetland management bodies, government agencies, conventions and NGOs at the local and the international level. Forewords by the Secretary General of the Convention on Wetlands and the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Migratory Species (two major international data users) call on their contracting parties to

use this publication to promote wetland and waterbird conservation nationally. This demonstrates the importance of the AWC.

For your immediate information, the summary of the report is attached at the end of this email. Additionally, the Ramsar Website has provided a writeup on this launch.

The publication is available from the Natural History Book Service http://www.nhbs.co.uk, and will be available for downloading shortly at Wetlands International Website: http://www.wetlands.org.

SUMMARY

Background

The Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) was initiated in 1987 and runs simultaneously with other waterbird censuses carried out in Africa, Europe, Central and West Asia and Latin America under the umbrella of the International Waterbird Census (IWC), which is organised by Wetlands International. The IWC is the largest and longest running faunal monitoring programme in the world.

The AWC started on the Indian subcontinent in January 1987 and has grown rapidly to cover Asia, Australasia and eastern Russia. Since 1987, a total of more than 5,700 sites from 25 countries have been counted at least once.

The AWC census takes place annually, during the second and third weeks of January, and is carried out by volunteers interested in collecting information on waterbirds and wetlands as a basis for contributing to their conservation.

The data collected by the AWC have been used in various reports and contributes to a range of conservation activities from local to global levels, including: Species and site conservation and research programmes and campaigns to raise awareness of the importance of wetlands in many countries; The development of national wetland and waterbird conservation Action Plans and Strategies; The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, in identifying wetlands of international importance through regular monitoring of waterbirds and Ramsar List sites; The Convention on Migratory Species, by monitoring the status of migratory waterbirds and their habitats; The Convention on Biological Diversity's goal of conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity; The implementation of the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy: 2001-2005, through monitoring of waterbirds and their sites, including sites listed under the three East Asian-Australasian Migratory Waterbird Site Networks; BirdLife International's Important Bird Area (IBA) Programme; IUCN/BirdLife's Globally Threatened Bird Update (GTB) Programme; and Wetlands International's Waterbird Population Estimates (WPE).

The data given in this publication represent the results of the AWC from 1997 to 2001.

Highlights of the 1997-2001 censuses

A total of 22 countries participated in the censuses and 1,392 sites were covered at least once between 1997 and 2001. Of the sites covered, a total of 61 have been designated as internationally important sites under the Ramsar Convention (as at 31 December 2003), 32 as Migratory Waterbird Network Sites in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (as at 31 December 2003) and 43 Important Bird Areas (as stated in BirdLife International's IBA publications for Cambodia, Lao PDR, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam, as at 31 December 2003).

Eighty-two sites in 10 countries, about 6% of the total number of sites counted, were reported to support more than 20,000 birds. Of these 82 sites, 22 (*c.*27%) are Ramsar sites and 11 (*c.*13%) belong to the Migratory Waterbird Site Networks in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

Total numbers of waterbirds counted were 2,223,805 (314 sites), 1,794,280 (385 sites), 3,266,649 (625 sites), 3,233,096 (594 sites) and 4,571,522 (770 sites) in 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001 respectively.

Totals of 291 species of waterbirds and 15 species of wetland-dependent raptors (birds of prey) were recorded. Over 43% of these are restricted to the region covered by the census (126 waterbird species and seven species of wetland-dependent raptors). The ten most numerous species were Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* (489,652 in 2000), Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* (259,155 in 2001), Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* (237,105 in 2001), Baikal Teal *Anas formosa* (231,482 in 1999), Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* (207,936 in 2001), Common Teal *Anas crecca* (194,723 in 2001), Gadwall *Anas strepera* (188,631in 2001), Common Coot *Fulica atra* (178, 458 in 2001), Spot-billed Duck *Anas poecilorhyncha* (161,494 in 2000) and Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* (160,280 in 2001).

Thirty-seven of the species recorded are recognized as Globally Threatened, according to BirdLife International (2001). They include two Critically Endangered, 11 Endangered and 24 Vulnerable, species; 31 of these are restricted to the region covered by the census. In addition, 17 Lower Risk species (one Conservation Dependent, 16 Near Threatened) were recorded. Good coverage of at least 14 congregatory threatened species (Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*, Oriental Stork *Ciconia boyciana*, Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor*, Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus*, Swan Goose *Anser cygnoides*, Baikal Teal *Anas formosa*, White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*, Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis*, Hooded Crane *Grus monacha*, Red-crowned Crane *Grus japonensis*, White-naped Crane *Grus vipio*, Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus*, Saunders' Gull *Larus saundersi*, and Indian Skimmer *Rynchops albicollis*) reinforces the value of the census in monitoring the distribution and abundance of these threatened populations and the need for additional attention to be paid to enhancing this role. A total of 145 species covered by the census are listed in the Appendices of the Convention on Migratory Species; of which 35 are Globally Threatened and Lower Risk species and are listed in Appendix I while 10 species are listed in Appendix II. Additionally, 26 species are listed by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna

and Flora (CITES); 14 (including 12 globally threatened and Lower Risk species) and 12 (including three globally threatened and Lower Risk species) species are listed in Appendices I and II respectively.

Information on uses of and threats to sites reporting more than 20,000 waterbirds revealed strong anthropogenic influences through fishing, agriculture at and around the sites, and overgrowth of vegetation (on-site uses and threats), with eutrophication resulting from on-site activities and in the catchments, through, for example, pollution (domestic sewage, fertilisers, solid wastes, etc.) and excessive siltation. Of concern is the reported partial or complete reclamation of a small proportion of these internationally important sites. Improved reporting of information on uses and threats at all sites is being promoted to provide a more comprehensive mechanism to increase our knowledge base and to enable preventive actions to be undertaken in a timely manner through local and international action.

The collection of data was coordinated and carried out by a dedicated volunteer network of National/Sub-national Coordinators and over 1,000 volunteers in 22 countries.

The AWC covers the following three main regions: South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia. Australasia is also covered as part of the AWC.

South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka)

A total of 649 sites in South Asia were counted at least once; count information was provided by all countries except Afghanistan and the Maldives. Total numbers of waterbirds counted were 508,030 (126 sites), 504,480 (194 sites), 1,005,325 (285 sites), 576,278 (164 sites) and 2,372,849 (327 sites) in 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001 respectively. Totals of 173 species of waterbirds and 14 species of wetland-dependent raptors were counted, 32 of which are globally threatened and Lower Risk.

Species distribution

Distribution maps are presented for a selection of 110 species, including 24 globally threatened and nine Near Threatened species for which relatively significant data are available.

Future directions

The report outlines plans to be implemented during 2004-2006. These range from actions to enhance geographic and site coverage, strengthen coordination and communication activities, provide training to improve the quality of data collected, upgrade database systems used to collate information, support improved decision making for waterbird and wetland conservation at international and national levels through enhanced use of AWC data and develop a fund raising strategy to support activities of the census.

Falcons in focus

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Driving towards the "Red Lakes," a set of twin small ponds in ICRISAT Campus (near Hyderabad), I glimpsed through the corner of my eye, a grey arrow streaking across the landscape, and disappearing into the crown of a Toddy Palm. We stopped on the bund, unfolding the spindly legs of our tripods, to scope onto a pair of Avocets that had been reported from here around Diwali. A small flock of waders huddled close to the fast-evaporating small pool. Ruffs stood about, some on the ground, sleeping with beaks under a wing, a few knee-deep in water, probing listlessly. No sign of avocets! Swinging my binoculars towards the crown of the Toddy palm, I spied the profile of a Red-headed Falcon. The tiercel would have seen our car long ago, as he shot through ether, abandoning a pouring landscape in his wake, to perch abruptly with a stone-hewn stillness in the palm. I could only see his bust over a frond. The hunters' large all-seeing eye, brown, and yellow-rimmed, reflecting the very world it absorbs; the powerful curved beak; the chestnut hood and moustache. His white throat gleamed with bounced sunlight. He watched me then, in a casually alert way, boring with his eight times more powerful eyes through the binocs into mine. I could not hold his intense stare.

From his elevated, shadowed perch, he watched the flat landscape spread away all around, a quilt-work of undisturbed brown and ploughed red earth, of yellowing and green vegetation, of stagnant paddies and distant water. Small clusters of trees huddled here and there and bare branched thorny shrubs spoke an arid language. A bright sun shone from behind me in a wind scrubbed cloudless sky. The surrounding industrial hub was a noxious nuisance. If there were larks in the fields close by, they lay low, merging their browns with the furrowed earth. A roller rasped in the background, not threatened by the hunter, but nervous in his presence.

Suddenly he rose, pumping his pointed wings with a surge of purpose and power. In the blinking of an eye he exploded from the sun upon the Common Swallow that had been zipping and unzipping the sky in pursuit of midges. At the last moment the swallow tumbled out of the tiercel's scorched trajectory, glimpsing the brilliance of the sun in his blazing eye as it slipped past the tiercel's flung anchor shape, avoiding miraculously, the clutching talon. When I

took the binoculars from my eye, pointing out the drama to CTH, we saw the falcon blurring towards her mate on closed wings. Miraculously the terrified swallow avoided the red-masked meteor, as both raptors overshot the fluttering little feathered heartbeat. The element of surprise was blown but the hunters pressed on. Again and again the swallow escaped by a whisker, buffeted about in the frenzied violence of the attack, the rushing roar of wind caught in a whirl of horizons, a panic-struck heart thudding frantically within its frail plumage. Predator and prey pouncing and prancing, locked in the tragic ballet of survival, spiraled to pinpoints in the domed firmament.

Fear, they say, gives strength. Mercurial reflexes, honed in the pursuit of flying insects, and the sagacity of an earth traveller migrating between distant shores, thrummed in the genes of the lucky swallow. In a moment, plummeting on curved wings, the falcon lit on the palm frond from where the tiercel had launched his attack and he followed on her heels. The world swung back on its axis and surrounding birdcalls reached my ear again. CTH pointed towards a woodpecker. In that moment of distraction, the falcon slipped away. The tiercel continued to watch a warming world as swallows now hunted their winged prey between him and the sun.

What is 'sea-watching'?

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Sounds a bit weird? Maybe sitting on a beach somewhere, sipping some tropical cocktail gazing into azure blue ocean waiting for some seagull to land on someone's deck chair. Not quite.

The monsoon is tailing off, (although it doesn't always seem so), but in August it is raining several times a day.

Where do you need to sea-watch? As close to the sea as possible. So you choose a promontory. So you are miles from shelter.

When are you likely to see the best birds? When it is blowing like hell and raining.

When is a telescope useless? When it is covered in rain or even worse sea-spray.

When is a telescope's thousand pounds worth of technical precision also made redundant? When the wind is shaking your preciously magnified image in a similarly magnified amount.

Are you getting the dialectics involved here?

When is the best time to sea-watch? Before the crack of dawn of course (all birders have a religious belief that if you are not suffering its not really birding).

Just because I read somewhere that most of the skua one birder saw was before 7am I believe him. Even though I have seen skuas at any time, the religious dogma must be mow followed.

So at 5.45 the alarm goes off. On with the sun block (you never know), pull back the mossy-net to get some air into the mildewed bed, quick swill of aqua and off we go.

Who?

The gear and me of course.

Gear?

Well scope, tripod, bins, book, pen and chair.

Chair?

Yes, plastic Indian all-purpose chair, for poor buggers with bad backs.

Oh!

How do I get a chair to the promontory?

On a motorbike.

On a motorbike?

Ok so it took some trial and error. Driving down an ancient track (this time literally ancient, as it is the road around an old fort) and therefore minor mishaps involving turning around and discovering no chair, but luckily not too far back, in a muddy puddle (yes Indian puddle!). I have thoughts about discarding chair completely, but the body / back says otherwise, rub off the mud with my sweatband, and get to it?

Get to what?

OK tripod, all set up cripple style.

Cripple style?

Completely un-straight leaning in towards me so I don't have to bend the back.

Oh, isn't that a bit awkward?

Yes! Well remember if it's too easy its not birding is it.

Oh!

So its now 6.30 plenty of time for the skuas! All set up scope pointing out to the sea, and…

And?

And nothing, maybe something will be along in a minute.

Oh…so what happens when that big black cloud gets here?

On with the raincoat, cover the scope and wait it out.

Didn't you say that's the best time to watch the birds? Oh! never mind.

[It's now 7.30 no skuas and sweet FA of anything else either, this is time when normal birders get going.]

Ah, OK 7.31, our first birds.

Oh, where?

See those little dots, those.

Those, but they are how far away?

Oh, about 5km, sometimes they come closer, especially when the wind is blowing.

Oh! So how do you know what you are looking at?

It's all a question of jizz.

Jizz? *Jizz*?

General Impression, Shape and Size.

Doesn't that spell GISS?

Well the exact meaning has been lost in the ancient archives of birderism, its thought to come from the RAF.

Oh! So what jizz did those ones have?

Don't know, too far out. Oh! Wait a minute, here's some more terns; look really big.

Isn't it these flying over our heads?

Oh yes, Little Terns.

So what are we hoping to see here?

Well there are the six tern species that are here all winter. Rubbish. We don't want them. We are after the four plus species, which are regular on passage migration, plus skuas, storm-petrels and anything else that could turn up.

OK so how do tell the difference between these 11 species of Tern if they are just winged dots on the horizon?

Well, remember that word jizz. Well those had shallow wing beats so it was probably a Gull-billed or perhaps a Common Tern whereas if they had quick and deep wing action they were probably Sandwich or Lesser Crested or perhaps one the smaller Terns, Roseate or White-cheeked.

Sounds very iffy to me!

No, it's all very scientific really.

Sound like a load of bollocks!

Aye, you might have something there. Well we could always go to the estuary. You can get really close to the birds there.

Oh that sounds better, when can we go?

OK, so we have to have these top-secret tide tables that a mate of mine managed to get hold of from the shipping company.

Sounds like pretty dangerous stuff?

Oh, yes it is, you never know who might come creeping up these estuaries.

Oh you mean like the Goan liberation movement?

Yes something like that.

OK, so see you tomorrow; at what time? Wait! No need to tell me, before the crack of dawn?

Actually no, bit of shame really, the tide will not be out till 10am so we can't.

What a shame!

So see you at 9.30 then. OK, bye.

[Scene: The estuary. Time: reasonable.]

So where are these birds then?

Out on that sand bank.

What sand bank?

Oh, out there, you'll see when we get closer.

Closer?

Yes we're wading out there.

What! Through that water?

It's only up to your ankles.

Oh! …Hey I thought you said it was only up to the ankles, how come my shorts are all wet?

Oh, the tide must still be going out, it's not so bad; it will be OK on the way back.

[15 minutes later]

Oh…how come all those birds are up in the air?

Some Kite must have scared them; they will be back in a while.

Oh…I thought you said they were coming back?

Well they sometimes come back, maybe those fishermen are making them nervous, well we had better head back now the tide is coming in again.

But we haven't seen any birds?

Oh birding can be like that, otherwise why would we do it, eh!

We can always try Morjim beach at high tide that usually has some terns on the incoming tide?

No thanks; I think I will give it a miss.

All right then, maybe see you tomorrow.

Well I might come just to see you riding down that track with a plastic chair on the back of a motorbike and your tripod straddled across the handlebars, you must look a rare sight.

Yes, you should see the looks I get, they think I have some new super-dooper, radar device or machine gun placement, well bye, not such a great day today, if the wind picks up maybe we will see a Shearwater or Tropicbird tomorrow!

(P.S. this was a couple of days written before I actually saw a frigatebird and Brown Noddy on one day, so there is definitely a God).