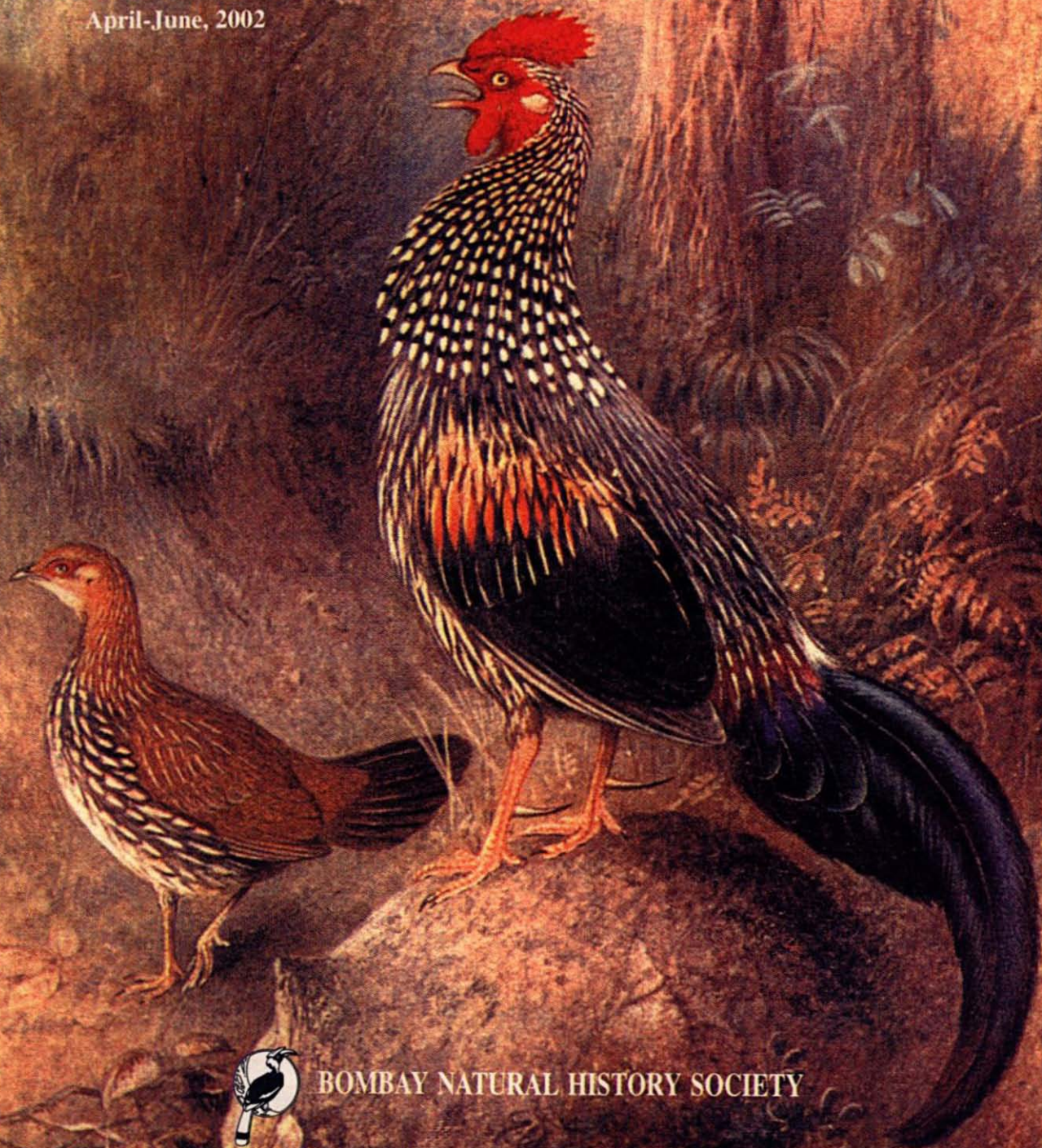


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April-June, 2002



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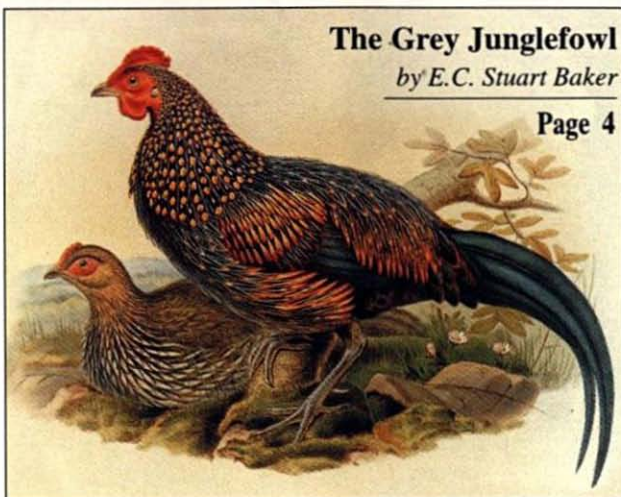
Cover:

Grey Junglefowl

H. Grönvold

Published and printed quarterly
by J.C. Daniel for the
Bombay Natural History Society,
Printed at St. Francis ITI Press,
Borivli, Mumbai.
Reg. No. RN 35749/79,
ISSN 0441-2370.

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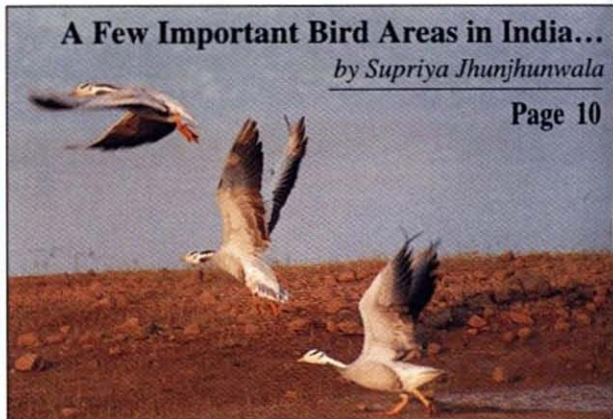
The Grey Junglefowl

by E.C. Stuart Baker

Page 4

You've met his look alike many a times in your backyard, but unlike his cousin, the grey junglefowl prefers the wild. In singles or parties, you will see this shy and suspicious bird in the plains and hills of the country.

A healthy ecosystem is critical for the long term survival of any species. The need of the hour is to protect important bird areas, which are vital to the survival of thousands of species.



A Few Important Bird Areas in India...

by Supriya Jhunjhunwala

Page 10



Dying Wetlands...

by K.S. Gopi Sundar

Page 18

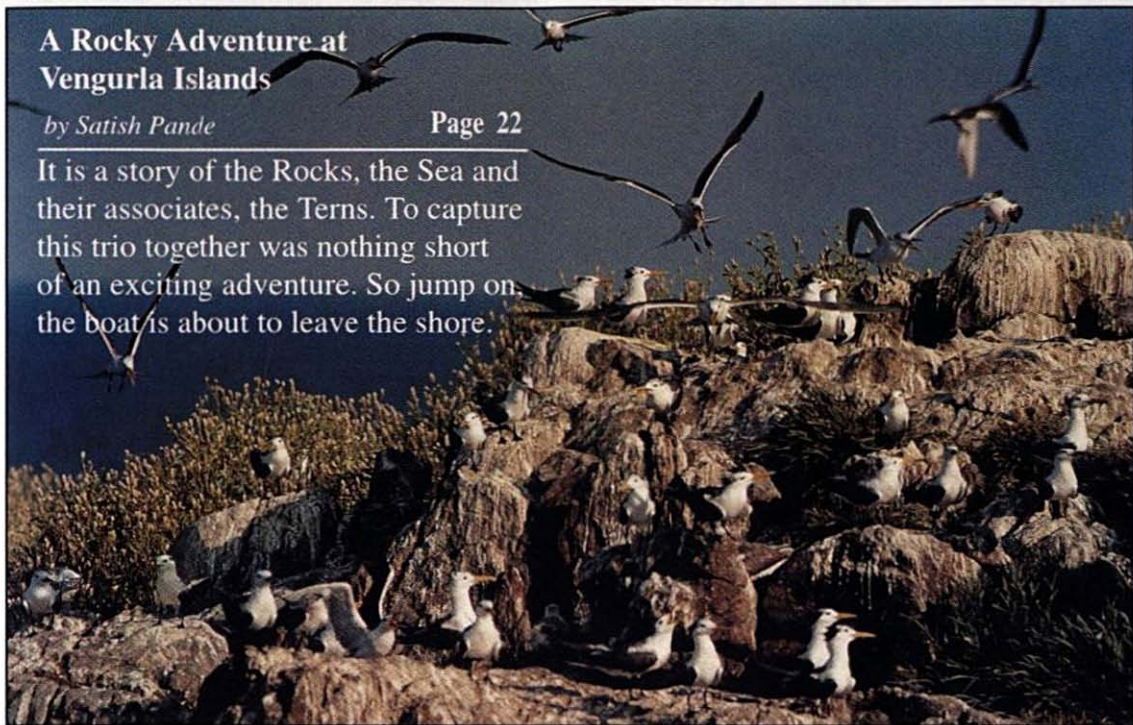
Naturalists emphasize that wetlands are not wastelands. A disregard for the inherent values of wetlands will reduce historic bird areas into one vast ecological desert.

A Rocky Adventure at Vengurla Islands

by Satish Pande

Page 22

It is a story of the Rocks, the Sea and their associates, the Terns. To capture this trio together was nothing short of an exciting adventure. So jump on the boat is about to leave the shore.



Footprints on the Sands ...

by P. Jeganathan

Page 26



They had left their footprints on the sands, but had been missing for a long time. This time, however, the vigilance is higher and the Jerdon's courser will not be given a chance to disappear again.

Avian Encounter

by N.A. Naseer

Page 28

Tomorrow is never another day when one is talking about wildlife photography. Here, an opportunity missed may never come again and the regret lasts for life.



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Life & Love #2

The grey Junglefowl

By E.C. Stuart Baker

Edward Charles Stuart Baker's contribution to the Society which he joined in 1898 and to its Journal was immense. His superb series on the "Game Birds of India" was serialised in the Journal from Volumes 11 to 13 and 20 to 38. These were later published by the Society in book form.

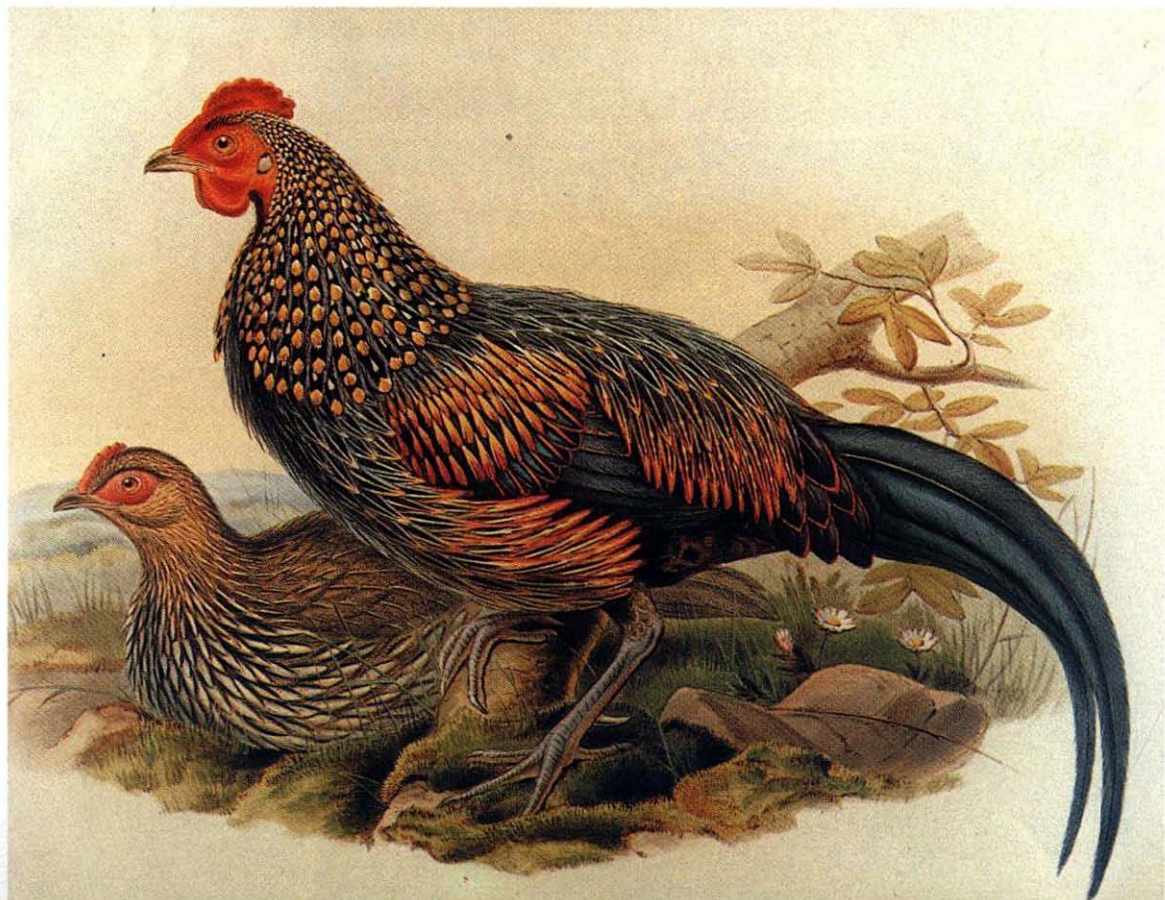
E.C. Stuart Baker writes:

Distribution — In 1898, Blanford defined the habitat of the grey junglefowl and since that date I have seen no record claiming any further extension.

"Throughout Southern and Western India in hilly and jungly ground. This junglefowl is found near the eastern coast as far north as the Godaveri, while in the Central Provinces its limit is some distance East of Sironcha, Chanda and Seoni. It is found throughout the Nerbudda Valley west of

Jubbulpore and in parts of Central India and Rajputana, as far as the Aravalis and Mount Abu, but no further to the northward or westward. It is met with near Baroda but has not been observed in Kattywar. It is common throughout the Western Ghats and Satpuras and it is found, though not abundantly, on the tops of the Nilgiri and Palni Hills."

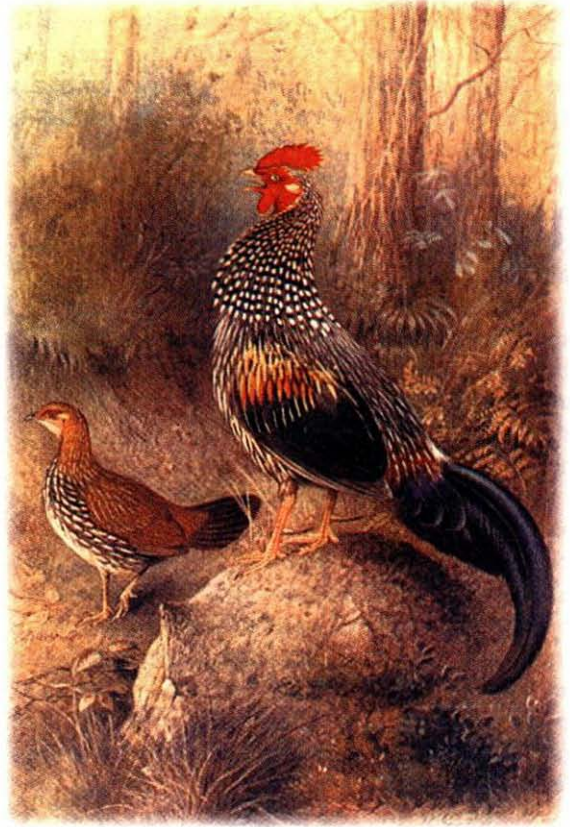
Southwards it is found almost, but not quite, down to the extreme south of Travancore.



Nidification — The breeding season, properly speaking, extends over February, March, April and May over the greater part of this bird's habitat, though Davison, writing of the Western Nilgiris, records October, November and December as the principal breeding months. As a matter of fact eggs, fresh and hard-set, and young, just hatched or nearly fully-fledged, may be found in practically every month of the year. The months in which most will be found are those in which food is most abundant, a matter dependent upon the rains and other climatic influences. In Travancore, they breed steadily from March to July, whilst Mr. T.F. Bourdillon took eggs as late as August 20. They make their nests — when they make any — and lay their eggs in much the same kind of country and jungle as do the red junglefowl and, like the latter birds, seem to specially approve of dense secondary growth and bamboo jungle. They breed freely in the sholas, or small woods, which nestle in the hollows in the Nilgiri Hills, whilst they also breed in just as great numbers in the vast woods of Travancore and Mysore. Often they lay their eggs in a small hollow, either natural or scratched out by themselves, in the shade of some bush or bamboo clump, the nest consisting merely of a slight collection of rubbish and fallen leaves. Sometimes the nest is formed of a mound of such material with a hollow in the centre for the eggs; more rarely it is comparatively well made of sticks, leaves, bamboo spathes, etc., matted together in a solid mass, whilst in yet fewer cases it is perched up on a dead tree or stump, or a clump of bamboos.

The number of eggs laid is rather a vexed question. There is a general tendency to over-estimate the number of eggs laid by game-birds and, from the testimony of modern collectors, I think it will be found that four or five eggs is the number most often laid, and that whilst a certain number of clutches of six or seven eggs may be found more than this is quite abnormal.

The eggs are of course very small, but can be otherwise all matched by varieties of the domestic fowl's eggs. The most common type is fawn, or fawn-buff, but they vary from very pale cream to a rich warm buff, generally quite immaculate, but sometimes covered with innumerable freckles of light brown and,



Source: The Game Birds of India, Burma and Ceylon by E.C. Stuart Baker

“During the rains
the male is a
poor mean-looking
object, not in the
least like his
handsome self in the
cold weather, and
fully conscious
of this fact,
he religiously holds
his tongue during
this period.”

occasionally, distinctly spotted and speckled with light brown, dark brown, or reddish-brown. In the latter case, the spots are generally sparsely and irregularly scattered over the whole surface of the egg, varying in size from that of a pin's head to spots as much as a couple of millimetres or more in diameter. These spotted and freckled eggs are, however, exceptional though comparatively a good deal more often met with than they are in the red junglefowl.

General Habits — Since Davison wrote his splendid description of this bird's habits there has been practically nothing further of value recorded and, so exhaustive and interesting are these notes, that it is not likely that there will ever be much to add. He writes:

"The grey junglefowl occurs but sparingly about the higher portions of the Nilgiris, but is common on the lower slopes, in the low country about the bases of the hills, and throughout most parts of the Wynaad. I have found it most abundant in the jungles between Metapolliem and Kullar, and between this place and Burliar, about halfway between Kullar and Coonoor, I counted 26 once (while riding up to Coonoor early one morning) feeding along the cart road here.

"Unlike the red junglefowl, this species is not gregarious, and though occasionally one meets with small coveys, these always consist of only one or two adults, the rest being more or less immature. As a rule, they are met with singly or in pairs.

"The crow of the male is very peculiar, and might be syllabled, *Kuck-kaya-ky-kuck*, ending with a low, double syllable like '*kyukun, kyukun,*' repeated slowly, and very softly, so that it cannot be heard except when one is very close to the bird. Only the males crow, and that normally only in the mornings and evenings, though occasionally they crow at intervals during the day when the weather is cloudy. The crow is very easily imitated, and with a little practice the wild birds may be readily induced to answer.

"They do not, however, crow the whole year through, but only from October to May, when they are in full plumage.

"When flushed by a dog in the jungle, they flutter up into some tree above with a peculiar cackle, a '*kuck-kuck-kuck,*' which, however, they

only continue till they alight.

"They come into the open in the mornings and evenings, retiring to cover during the heat of the day, unless the weather is cloudy, when they may be met with in the open throughout the day.

"Though found in evergreen forests, they seem to prefer moderately thin and bamboo jungle.

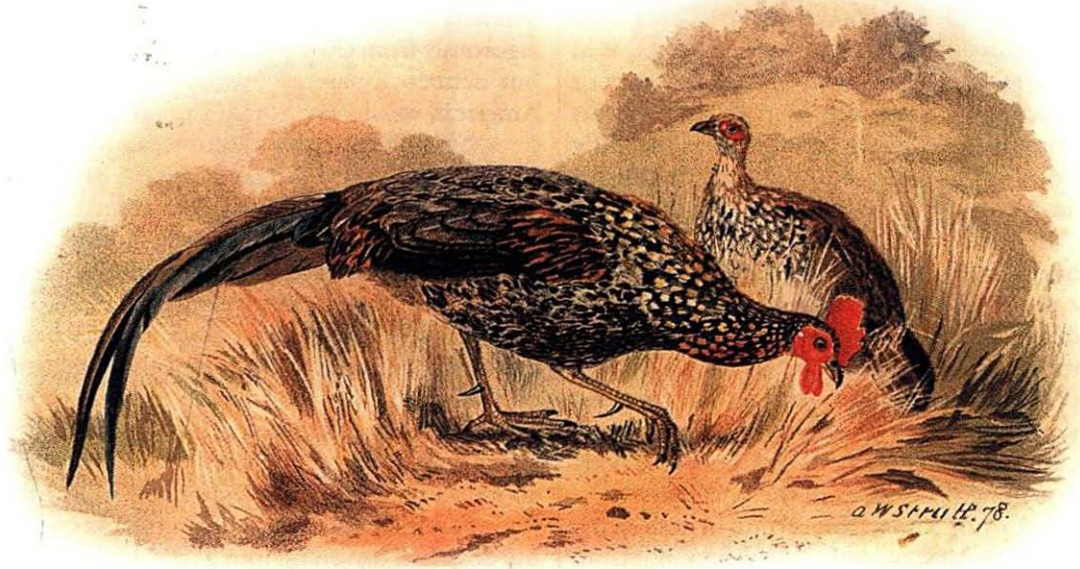
"Ordinarily, as already remarked, they are found scattered; but when a tract of bamboo comes into seed, or any other particular food is locally abundant, they collect there in vast numbers, dispersing again as the food is consumed. I remember on one occasion when the undergrowth of the sholas about Pykarra (which consists almost entirely of *Strobilanthes* sp.) seeded, the junglefowl congregated there in the greatest numbers. I mean by hundreds, and were excessively numerous for more than a fortnight, when they gradually dispersed, owing, I believe, not so much to the seeds having all been eaten, as to what remained of them having sprouted and so had become uneatable.

"In some ways they are not very shy; by taking an early stroll, even without a dog, along some quiet road by which cattle and grain pass, but when they have been at all disturbed and shot at, they become very wary, and in such cases they run till they think they are out of shot, and then rise, and instead of perching, take a long flight, often of many hundred yards, and when they do alight, commence running again.

"When out feeding they do not usually wander far from cover, and on any indication of danger they dart back into this. They do not, however, go far in, generally only for a very short distance, before stopping to listen, when, if all seems quiet, they reappear in a short time within a few yards of the spot at which they entered. If, on the contrary, after listening, they think that there is still danger, they then retreat quietly and silently into the depths of the jungle; occasionally, after they have got some distance flying up and hiding themselves in some bushy tree.

"When, however, as sometimes, though rarely happens, they are surprised some distance out in the open, they do not run, but rise at once and fly for the nearest cover, either perching in some leafy tree, or else dropping to the ground.

Some bare facts about the Grey Junglefowl



Source: *The Game Birds of India, Burmah, and Ceylon* by Hume and Marshall

Size: Domestic fowl, length male c. 60-80 cm (24-32 in.), female c. 46 cm. (18 in.).

Field characters: General effect as of domestic fowl, but cock with distinctly longer tail.

Male (breeding): *Above*, white-streaked dark grey with glossy purple-black wing quills, and long arching, sickle-shaped tail. Neck-hackles (forming a cape), upper back and mantle tipped or spangled with peculiar shiny orange or golden yellow sealing-wax like spots and streaks. No elongated lanceolate plumes on rump as in Red. *Below* blackish grey, broadly white-streaked on breast; uniform brownish-grey on abdomen; tinged with rusty red on flanks.

In non-breeding plumage, neck-hackles and sickle-shaped rectrices replaced by shorter dull blackish feathers. Comb becomes much reduced.

Female: *Above*, crown and neck speckled brown, the feathers streaked and scalloped paler. Rest of upperparts finely mottled blackish-brown and buff, and narrowly streaked with white. *Below*, chin and throat whitish. Rest of underparts white, boldly scalloped with black on upper breast. Normally without, rarely with rudimentary, exceptionally with well-developed spurs, once over 2.5 cm.

Young (immature) male like adult female but more rufous, more boldly blotched and barred; soon showing grey feathers. Tail black.

“They are very punctual in their appearance at particular feeding grounds, and when one or more are met with in any particular spot, they are certain, if not disturbed in the interim, to be found there again in the same place at about the same hour the next or any subsequent day on which they may be looked for. There was one particularly fine and remarkably shy and cunning old cock that frequented an open glade in the forest (above the Government Cinchona

Plantations at Neddivuttum) in the morning, whereas in the evening he always came into the plantation and wandered about under the cinchona trees and along the plantation roads. He never, to my knowledge — and I must have seen him fifty times at least — came into the plantation in the morning, or into the glade in the evening. There was no doubt as to this being the same bird that frequented the two places (nearly a quarter of a mile distant), for he was the largest, handsomest,

and to judge from his spurs, the oldest cock I ever saw.

"In June the moult begins, and the male gradually drops his hackles and long tail-feathers, the hackles being replaced by short feathers, as in the female; during the rains the male is a poor mean-looking object, not in the least like his handsome self in the cold weather, and fully conscious of this fact, he religiously holds his tongue during this period.

"In September, a second moult takes place, the short feathers of the neck are again replaced by the hackles, the long tail-feathers reappear, and by October the moult is complete and our Southern Chanticleer is as noisy as ever.

"The male usually carries its tail low, and when running it does so with the tail lowered still more, the neck outstretched, and the whole body in a crouching position as in the pheasants.

"I do not know for certain whether the species is polygamous or monogamous, but from what I have observed I should think the latter; for although the male does not, I believe, assist in incubation, yet when the chicks are hatched, he is often to be found in company with his mate and little ones.

"These birds are, I believe, quite untameable, even when reared from the egg, and though in the latter case they may not be so wild as those captured in maturity, they never take kindly to domestic life, and avail themselves of the first opportunity for escaping. It is needless to say that they cannot easily be induced to breed in captivity. I have known the experiment tried time after time unsuccessfully.

"They roost on trees, continually in the early mornings; just at daylight, when out shooting Sambhar, I have disturbed them from the trees on which they had spent the night.

"Although armed with most formidable spurs, they are not, so far as my experience goes, quarrelsome or pugnacious. In the wild state, I have never seen them fighting and I for many years enjoyed peculiar opportunities for observing them. In captivity half a dozen, with as many females, will live in the same compartment of an aviary in perfect peace.


"Another proof of their non-belligerent character is to be found in the fact that the native

bird-catchers never peg males out to attract others, as they do in every part of the East with all birds that are naturally pugilistic. Scores of times I have listened to two cocks crowing at each other vigorously from closely adjoining patches of cover, but neither apparently ever thinking of, as an American would say, going for that other cock.

"They are, I think, altogether less plucky birds than the red junglefowl, and they are so extremely wary, where birds and animals of prey are concerned, and wander such short distances from the edges of cover, that I think very few of them fall victims to any enemy but man. There are plenty of Bonelli's eagle and some hawk eagles too in the Nilgiris, but I do not think that these ever succeed in capturing the grey, as they do elsewhere the red junglefowl: at any rate, I have never once seen the feathers of *sonnerati* strewn about, as I have those of *ferrugineus* in Burma.

"I remember once watching an old cock that my dogs had driven up into a tree. For some time I peered round and round (the tree was a large and densely foliated one) without being able to discover his whereabouts, he all the while sitting silent and motionless. At last my eyes fell upon him; that instant he hopped silently on to another bough, and from that to another, and so on, with incredible rapidity, till, reaching the opposite side of the tree, he flew out silently, of course never giving me a chance at a shot.

"As for food, they seem to eat almost anything; grain, grass seed, grubs, small fruits and berries, and insects of different kinds. I have sometimes killed them with nothing but millet in their crops; at other times quantities of grass seeds, or again, after the grass has been recently burnt, the tender, juicy shoots of the new grass."

Mr. Alfred Ezra has been extremely successful in keeping these fine birds in a state of semi-captivity. At his estate in Chobham he has had a large area of field and wood wired in, where the birds roam about in freedom. Excellent cover is plentiful and the birds would have no difficulty in concealing themselves did they so desire, yet they have become very tame and allow close observation. Their crow, which to me sounds exactly like the yapping of a puppy, may be heard all through the day, though they are most noisy in the mornings or evenings. 

AUREUS

A matter of particular pride to the Society is the number of years a member has been associated with it. We find that as of date we have fourteen members of over 50 years standing. Hence this page of gold to felicitate them.



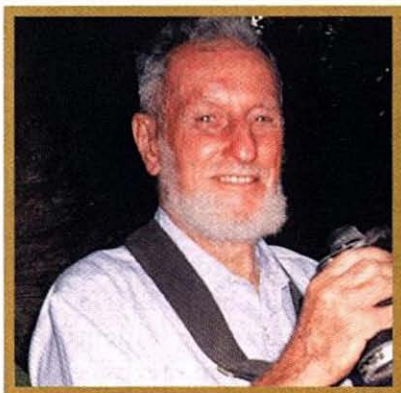
Margaret K. Wilkinson
Joined 18th October, 1944

A keen bird watcher and naturalist, Ms. Margaret Wilkinson contributed an interesting article to the Society's Journal on the Pelicanry at Kundhakulam in South Tamil Nadu.



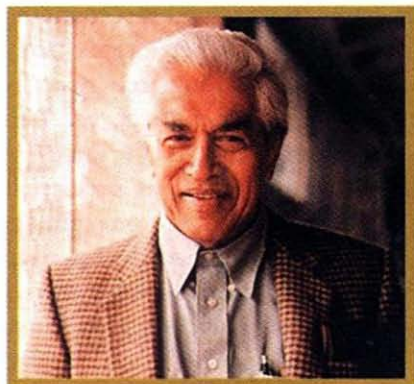
Thomas Norman
Joined 27th July, 1948

Dr. T. Norman spent much of his medical career in Assam. His main interest was Lepidoptera and he has published several notes in the Society's Journal on the butterflies of Assam, including descriptions of six new species and a very interesting article on the Natural History of Borneo (now Sabah).



Angus Finlay Hutton
Joined 29th November, 1945

Mr. Angus Hutton started life as a Tea Planter and in course of time became a world expert in Butterfly farming! An enthusiastic naturalist, he has published over 100 papers on a variety of subjects. He is a member of several learned societies in the UK and Australia where he is now settled. He has been specially honoured in Papua New Guinea for services rendered. To him goes the credit of discovering Sálím Ali's fruit bat and Hutton's pit viper.



Duleep Cherian Matthai
Joined 3rd December, 1948

A committed conservationist, Duleep Matthai has been associated with conservation organisations and bodies including the Indian Board for Wildlife, the apex body of conservation in India. He has been a director of several reputed companies and institutions.

A few Important Bird Areas in India...



Bar-headed geese *Anser indicus*

B. RAHA

Supriya Jhunjhunwala

Supriya Jhunjhunwala is the Important Bird Areas Ornithology Officer at the Society

AN EXPANSE OF WATER stretched endlessly before us. Far into the horizon a swarm of demoiselle cranes, their wing beats sounding like artillery fire, flew across in perfect synchrony and descended into the wetland as gracefully as a troupe of ballerinas. A quick flock count gave an estimate of a little over 13,000 cranes. Before our eyes were about 50,000 birds of various species, lesser whistling-teals, comb ducks, cotton pigmy-geese, Eurasian wigeons, spot-billed ducks, common teals, garganeys, pintails, northern shovellers, common pochards, tufted ducks, greater flamingos, Eurasian spoonbills, openbill storks, the list just went on and on. What we were seeing was just the tip of the proverbial iceberg that was Jaikwadi, a little known bird sanctuary in Maharashtra. Their presence had confirmed what we had suspected for some time now, Jaikwadi just got included in the list of some of the world's most important sites for birds, better known as Important Bird Areas or more commonly, IBAs.

The Important Bird Areas Programme

We, at the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), have been working on the BirdLife International Important Bird Areas Programme for three years now. The programme is a world wide effort aimed at identifying, documenting and advocating the protection of a network of sites internationally important and critical to the long term survival of wild birds. It is sponsored by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, UK and coordinated in India by the BNHS.

The programme identifies these internationally important sites using four globally uniform criteria, which cover a wide range of birds, hence IBAs form a common conservation currency, which ensures that all the IBAs in the world are equally important. While the criteria are scientifically robust they are also easy and cost effective to apply.

To qualify as an IBA, a site should have one or more of the 79 globally threatened bird species found in India and listed in the Asian Red Data Book. The site could also have any of the 77 restricted range (or endemic) bird species, or have species assemblages representative of a typical

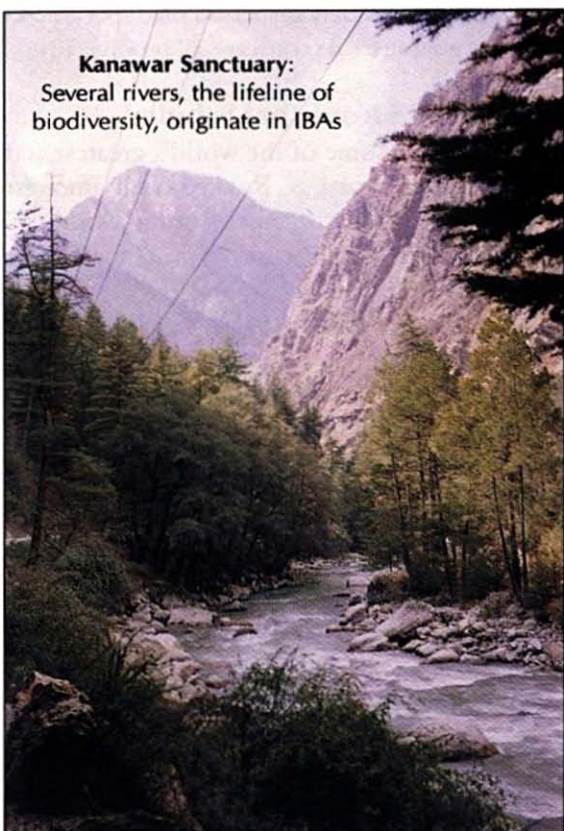
biome, or like Jaikwadi be a place where large numbers of birds congregate.

Though the criteria are fairly simple to apply, to apply them to a country of India's dimensions and biological richness was nothing short of a herculean task. Contributions have been made by a vast network of ornithologists, birdwatchers and conservation experts across India, and through collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organisations. Members of the Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN) met in regional workshops and mulled over a list of about 3,000 potential IBAs that the BNHS extracted through a literature review. After intense discussions, much deliberation, a little argument, additions and deletions, the list was narrowed down to about 1,000 potential IBAs. Several sites that were proposed were data deficient and some in their present *avatar*, largely thanks to human enterprise, had now been converted into potato fields, amongst other things. That the list needed filtering was abundantly clear.

The workshops also revealed the appalling lack of information from certain areas including biodiversity hotspots like Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram and Bihar. What was also lacking was the evident shortage of expertise to conduct surveys and collect information from these areas.

Workshops in bird census techniques were conducted and additional sites were identified after surveys and consultation. The list now has about 350 confirmed IBAs and is still growing. These IBAs cover a wide array of bird species habitats ranging from the snowclad peaks of the Himalayas to the deserts in Rajasthan, from the verdant forests in northeast India to the barren Pitti Island in Lakshadweep, from the vast expanses of India's wetlands to its much neglected grasslands.

Widespread ownership of the IBA is essential to their conservation. Communities living in and around IBAs also need to be involved in their conservation, and education and awareness programmes for a wide target group are underway. Though IBAs do not have any legal identity yet, they are recognised by international bodies such



Kanawar Sanctuary:
Several rivers, the lifeline of biodiversity, originate in IBAs

SUPRIYA JHUNJHUNWALA

as the Global Environment Facility and the World Bank in their strategies and action plans. The European Union has used them as a basis for legal judgments. The IBA programme also features in the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan currently being formulated for India.

Though the protected areas network forms the backbone of the project, the programme has unearthed several areas that are under no formal protection, but extremely rich habitats and in urgent need for conservation action. The Inventory of Important Bird Areas is scheduled for publication in 2003. It is intended to provide information and be used as a tool for site conservation and action, and as an advocacy tool to encourage policy and decision-makers to make informed choices.

The IBA Programme is a site based approach, so while the programme will also help conserve other biodiversity, it may not be

appropriate for widely dispersed bird species and does not guarantee to conserve all biodiversity.

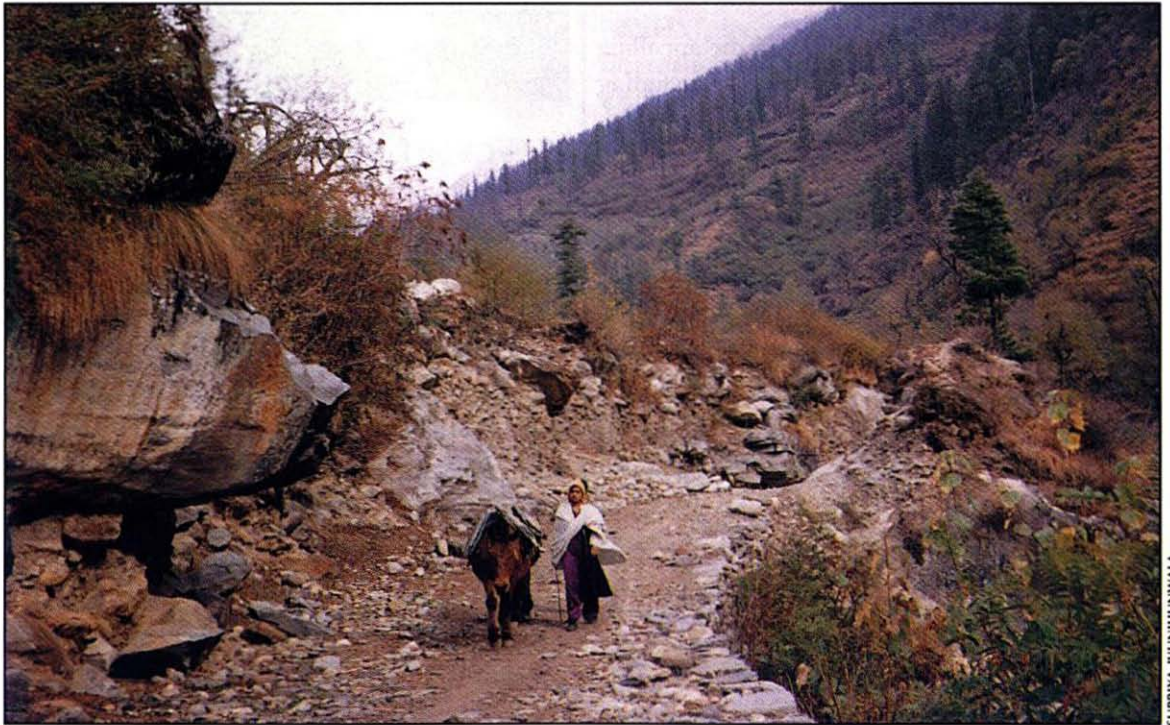
The treasure trove that is India

India has some of the world's greatest and most precious treasures. Ranked sixth amongst the 12 megadiversity countries in the world, we have a more than fair share of the pie of the world's biological wealth, be it mammals, reptiles, amphibians, plants or birds, the list is endless.

Conservative estimates attribute about 8% of the world's reptilian forms and 10% of the world's mammalian, insect, fish and bird species. We have about one thousand two hundred and twenty different resident or migratory bird species. On the flipside, we also have one fifth of the world's total population. The pressures that this country's extraordinary natural resources face from the demands of supporting this burgeoning mass of humanity are inconceivable. While we've been blessed with an unsurpassable wealth of species,

the exponential growth of our own is a curse. Many centuries of human activities have resulted in severe habitat degradation. To state the example of just one habitat type, the area of forested land in India with a crown density of 40%, diminished from 30% of the country's land area in 1947 to less than 11% in 1991. Consequently, species and habitats that share the planet with us are disappearing rapidly, all victims of this unsustainable growth. Though protected areas have been set aside, our national parks and sanctuaries cover a paltry 4.6% of the country's landmass, hardly doing justice to its megadiversity status. These too are fraught with more than their fair share of human related problems.

Though wildlife protection laws exist, species cannot be conserved unless their habitats are. Habitat loss has been identified as the primary factor pushing several species to the brink of extinction and most natural habitats are being lost rapidly due to changes in land use patterns. Urgent



SUPRIYA JHUNJHUNWALA

Rupri Bhabha Sanctuary: Nestled in the Himalayas, this Sanctuary supports a large diversity of habitats and wildlife including populations of the globally threatened western tragopan and cheer pheasant. It faces a major threat from hydel power projects that will submerge portions of the Sanctuary.



PETER WOOD

Andaman and Nicobar Islands: These emerald islands scattered in the shimmering Andaman Sea are undoubtedly India's crown jewels. Several IBAs have been identified here

efforts are needed to stem this loss. The IBA Programme is one such effort, only one amongst the armoury of weapons needed to fight the battle to protect our rapidly dwindling biological resources on which our own survival ultimately depends.

While the pressures are immense, resources to battle this loss are scarce. We need to focus these on priority species sites, habitats and people. These are not more important than others: they

are just in urgent need for conservation action and need to be conserved, not just for the resources they provide or aesthetic or biological value, but also as insurance against impending extinction ourselves.



For more details on the IBA Programme, contact the Important Bird Areas team at Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Mumbai 400 023, Maharashtra, India or bnhs@bom4.vsnl.net.in.

SÁLIM ALI INTERNATIONAL AWARD

The Bombay Natural History Society invites applications for **the 3rd Biannual Sálím Ali International award for 2002-2004.**

If you have candidates for consideration by the Award Committee, please write to:

The Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, S.B. Singh Road,
Mumbai 400 023, Maharashtra, India or bnhs@bom4.vsnl.net.in
for the application form



Sparrow Alarm

As a bird watcher and bird lover I have come across a few significant abnormalities in some common birds. The calls of some crows that I have heard of late seem harsher while many cannot even caw full-throated. Also, some of their wing feathers, which are more conspicuous during flight, are not pigmented. This may be due to pollutants?

Another notable change is the reduction in the number of female sparrows. About 2 years back, two male sparrows searching for an apt location to build a nest came to our balcony. They selected a place above a fixed wooden loft, which was announced very happily. I thought it to be a case of homosexuality, but was soon proved wrong when within three days one of them very aggressively drove the other one away. He then called for a female. This ritual started at 6.30 a.m. and continued up to 1 p.m. for days together. I wondered how a tiny bird like him could perform such a feat. At times, in desperation, he would also change the tone of his call. But his month long efforts went unrewarded.

After 2 months, he returned. But this time too, in spite of a new spot, his proposal was rejected.

I wondered what the reason could be and so watched the sparrows more closely. One conclusion that I drew was that the female population was dwindling. Of the 100 sparrows that I counted in the area only 32 were females. Is this just a local phenomenon or have other members of the Society also noticed this? If so, then shouldn't somebody investigate the reasons for this disproportionate sexual ratio before it is too late.

Kusum Gokhale
Thane, Mumbai.



Protection impacts

I have some comments and suggestions for the article "Protection of Grasslands and its impact" by Rachel Reuben in the January-March, 2001 issue of *Hornbill*.

The author while reviewing the status of the Rollapadu Wild Life Sanctuary, Andhra Pradesh brings to our notice how conservation success has increased the number of blackbucks from 17 in 1985 to 450. She concludes by noting that "A serious problem is the increase in blackbuck population and the resulting crop damage, which has negatively affected the peoples attitude towards the Sanctuary." Again note, the decision of the Maharashtra government, as reported in the press on April 23, 2001, to issue hunting licenses to curb the nilgai and wild boar numbers that are affecting a few farmers on the periphery of jungles and who are constantly in conflict with wildlife. While conservationists can congratulate themselves are they not to be blamed for ignoring the pleas of those most affected by the damage done by wildlife on their meagre landholdings.

Today even a child who watches documentaries on the National Geographic Channel or similar channels knows that other countries similarly placed are taking rational and comprehensive steps to protect and preserve wildlife, whether it is translocation, tourism, hunting or reintroduction. The approach is to find a comprehensive solution with the cooperation of the locals. In the 21st Century, if we presume that wildlife like everything else will have to sustain itself, then we are living in a fantasy world. Members of the BNHS should come up with practical solutions acceptable to those most affected by wildlife, as it is ultimately they who will preserve and sustain wildlife and not those who sit in air-conditioned homes and offices, and cannot relate to ground reality.

Adil Anklesaria
Panjim, Goa.



CALLS OF INDIAN BIRDS

Vol. II, Audiocassette and Booklet,
Released by Nature Club Surat, Gujarat, Rs. 160/-



Reviewed by Lt. Gen. Baljit Singh

Bombay Natural History Society is the symbol for preservation, scientific enquiry and dissemination of knowledge of India's natural resources. It was, therefore, expected that the Society should have set the trend for recording calls of Indian birds. Their set of two cassettes covering calls of 169 species was a significant benchmark. I shall never forget the sterling soundtrack of the call of the red junglefowl followed by the alarm call of his mate disturbed on her nest.

The Society and its members will be glad to know that the Nature Club Surat have quite successfully accepted the baton in this field. After releasing the first volume which covered 58 species they now have a second volume that covers another 59 species. All the recordings are of excellent uniform quality and the auditory effect of each has that true-to-life authentic ring. While enhancing the audio frequency of a call, of a tiny object like a bird, the background mush does creep in. It is so with 15 calls, but remarkably well managed that in some it is no more than a muffled rumble of the ocean from afar and in some others, like the smooth hiss of steady rain.

Of the many merits of this cassette the first is that most calls are played up to 50 seconds each and none less than 30 seconds. In the case of herons, owls, drongos, doves and bulbuls up to four species of each family are covered in separate clusters, which allows comprehension and assimilation of variations in call notes within a family. This is particularly interesting when calls of the crested hawk eagle and the crested serpent eagle or the Siberian and black-necked cranes or some cuckoos, babblers and flycatchers are played one after the other.

I have replayed the tape so many times that my household is ready to revolt! Yet, I am unable to single out the best call recorded. The call of the pheasant-tailed jaçana is very impressive. You get to hear all the call notes mentioned by Krys Kazmierczak and a few more. The rain quail surprises you with the precocious pitch of her call. The velvet smooth flow of the yodel of the Indian cuckoo has a sensual touch and, makes a soothing lullaby. The hoopoe demands your full attention. For dramatic effect, the super fast staccato drumming or hammering with beak by the black woodpecker spaced with vocal calls is unforgettable. The call of the Indian pitta vindicates my own transcription of his vocalisation as *Sweet-tree... Sweet-tree*. The rufous-backed shrike is so merry that he seems unstoppable. The complaining lamenting tone of the babblers is highly amusing. The racket-tailed drongo leaves you dazzled with his rich repertoire (I suspect this is the producer's favourite as the bird figures on the paper-jacket of the cassette). In sheer indiscretion, I am tempted to say that the delicate flute-like calls and song of the singing bush lark and the crested lark send the heart a flutter as nothing else does. All in all, the cassette is irresistible. 🐦

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MEHTA SCIENTIFIC EDUCATION & RESEARCH TRUST

for a generous corpus grant to constitute
the *Pratap Saraiya Hornbill Fund*
to support the publication of *Hornbill*.

Dying Wetlands...

Text and Photographs: K.S. Gopi Sundar

K.S. Gopi Sundar is a research biologist at the Wildlife Institute of India and is presently working on a national management plan for the protection of the sarus.

I FIRST VISITED Etawah and Mainpuri districts, in 1998. It was summer and the mercury was touching a merciless 45 degrees, dust storms and Mother Nature appeared a cruel monster. After one night in a dingy hotel where the electricity kept failing, I did not want to return. I had come to look for sarus cranes, and I was confident that this was not the place for them. The next day, after a brief survey, I had changed my mind, and ended up staying for two whole years.

The landscape, even in summer, was astonishing. While vast stretches of white soil indicated wastelands, nearly everywhere, tall reeds blew in the wind. The infamous *Prosopis* was trying in vain to conquer the land. The wheat had been cut, the grain sold, and the fields were fallow, waiting for the rains to come. But the wetlands remained. Waging their own private war with the sun, and the sand, marshlands of all sizes were tucked in between the fields, the white soil and the villages. The reeds flagged the presence of the rich ecosystems. On closer scrutiny, one could see immense spread of sedge, lotus stalks swaying in the breeze, and the grass growing like a thick carpet in the shallow water.

But before the tall reeds, the most prominent feature of the wetlands which caught the eye, were the birds — ibises, egrets, herons, storks, and cranes. Taxa notwithstanding, birds jostled for a place, probing, pecking, feeling and watching the waters and the mud beneath for food. Drongos flitted overhead, waiting to catch the bugs which tried to escape the melee down below. The herons wheezed their protests at each other, and the storks clattered their beaks. None, however, could match the power of the call of the sarus cranes. Standing proud and tall, incredible congregations of the sarus stalked the wetlands, flying in from miles around. Duet after duet rent the air as the pairs wrestled for supremacy. This had been their home for decades, even centuries, and here they would stay.



A sarus family happily feeding together may soon become a rare sight

After one year of traveling and detailed counting of sarus cranes in the two districts, I discovered that not only was I looking at the area with the highest numbers in India, but in the world. Numerically speaking, while the global population of the Indian race of sarus cranes is estimated to be between 8,000 to 10,000 individuals, my estimate in just two districts was a whopping 2,500 to 3,000 birds. Also accompanying the sarus in the landscape were the other endangered birds like the black-necked storks; at least 200 individuals had made this area their home.

The wetlands filled up beautifully after the rains, making the area into one vast mosaic of marshlands and habitation. Hundreds of thousands of ducks, as many waders, nearly six thousand great white pelicans, hundreds of graceful

spoonbills adorned the area. The great naturalist, A.O. Hume had seen these wetlands, surveyed them extensively in the late nineteenth century, and counted even Siberian cranes among the large numbers of wintering birds. Going by his writings, not much had changed. The immense tracts of waterlogged areas had lived on, and so had the birds.

Now, it appeared things were to change forever, and for the worse. A massive developmental plan, formulated by the Ministry of Agriculture in the area, endeavours to convert "wastelands" of the category "water-logged areas" into crop fields in its need to bring more land under the plough for the country. This it plans to do by digging a series of canals and culverts in the wetlands to remove all the water, thus rendering them convenient for ploughing and planting of grain. Needless to say, this plan, thanks to a deep disregard for the inherent values of wetlands, will, if allowed to proceed unhindered, reduce the historic areas into one vast agricultural desert. This

AREA WASTELANDS OF DIFFERENT CATEGORIES IN ETAWAH AND MAINPURI

Wasteland Category	Etawah (+ Auraiyya)	Mainpuri
1. Gullied Ravinous land	268.83	38.61
2. Land with or without scrub	2.26	-
3. Waterlogged and marshy land	24.05	15.90
4. Land affected by salinity/alkalinity	205.84	487.43
5. Unidentified/ degraded notified forest land	96.00	1.32

[Source: Wasteland Atlas of India, 2000.]
(Units in square kilometers)

is the only known area with such a large population of both sarus cranes and black-necked storks, and these water birds will be permanently affected by this plan. The developmental plan is particularly shocking when it comes to the fore that waterlogged areas are the category of wastelands with the least representation in the two districts and there are other not so ecologically valuable categories available.

I request the readers to please protest to the Government of India against this catastrophic development which is striking the wetlands of Etawah and Mainpuri. Protests have to be lodged with the Ministry of Environment and Forests, insisting that such an ecologically disastrous plan should not be allowed to proceed without a detailed Impact Assessment being conducted, and the plan be allowed implementation only after required amendments have been made. The Ministry of Agriculture needs to be petitioned for allowing such a short-sighted plan to take effect without consideration for wildlife, the invaluable ecosystems, and the historic value of these areas.

As I motored the roads of the same area in the summer of 2001, just two years after my first visit, things had changed visibly. The reeds were brown due to lack of water, no lotuses were to be seen and the sedges had been dug up after the wetlands had been ploughed. Already, the




Disappearing wetlands are pushing these sarus chicks towards an uncertain future



The female stands on guard over her two playful chicks, while the male preens himself

congregations of sarus, which frequently used to number 150 birds and more, were reduced to scattered flocks of 25 or 30 birds. The black-necked storks had become much rarer, flying off elsewhere in search of precious water and food. In January 2001, I could count only 300 great white pelicans in the lakes, which were much reduced due to the fields, which were hedging the waters, and decreasing the depth of the water bodies. The

ducks still came, as did the waders. But these changes had taken place even before the plan had taken effect in its fullness. It is depressing to think what would happen if the entire plan was completed.

For further information on the wetlands and its inhabitants contact the author at: 576, Karamganj, Punjabi Colony, Etawah 206 001; ☎ (0568)-56602. 

...Temporarily Saved

By Ashok Kumar

New Delhi, March 20, 2002: The Allahabad High Court on Tuesday March 19, 2002 stopped the draining of five wetlands crucial for the survival of the world's largest concentration of the endangered sarus crane (*Grus antigone antigone*). These wetlands in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, which are home to over 33 per cent of the global sarus crane population, were being drained under a World Bank funded wasteland reclamation project. There are only about 9,000 sarus cranes left in the world.

Delivering the final order on the Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by the Wildlife Trust of India, the division bench of Chief Justice S.K. Sen and Justice R.K. Agrawal directed that "further conversion of land and extension of canals be stopped." The judges also held the Chief Wildlife Warden of Uttar Pradesh (CWC), Dr. R.L. Singh, who was present in the court, to be personally responsible for protecting the sarus and its habitat in the districts of Etawah and Mainpuri. The order said: "All measures to be taken by the Chief Wildlife

Warden present here for conserving and protecting the sarus and its habitat." The judges gave the state government one month to do the needful.

"This is a major victory for the conservation fraternity," Aniruddha Mookerjee, Director Programmes, who filed the case said, "the wetlands were being drained with impunity. Even the district magistrate's orders were being flouted. We are glad that the court understood our point of view and paved the way for these wetlands to be declared sanctuaries for the state bird of Uttar Pradesh."

"The Allahabad High Court has shown the way to quick justice," WTI counsel Sudhir Mishra, who specializes in wildlife matters, said. "This is one of the quickest judgements pronounced on a PIL by any court in the country," he said.

Mr. Mookerjee had expressed concern in his petition that the situation in these two districts was grim, as work on the wetland conversion projects was in full swing and canals, which in some areas were nearly 20 feet wide, were rapidly draining the wetlands.

The five wetlands in Etawah and Mainpuri districts, namely Sarsai Nawar, Garh, Sauj, Ambarpur and Kudaiya support more than 3,000 sarus cranes, which is more than one third of the global population. The Wasteland Development Board of the government of Uttar Pradesh had declared these as saline wastelands and was draining them for conversion for other uses. The petition followed the published findings of a two and half year research project done by K.S. Gopi Sundar of the Wildlife Institute of India.

The petition pointed out that the CWC had visited these sites. And after assessing the ground situation, he wrote to the administration and the District Magistrates who immediately issued orders against drainage. The District Magistrates also stopped the issuance of pattas (ownership papers) in these wetlands on the grounds that they are important sarus habitat, despite which the work was carrying on.

It was also pointed out that the construction of a culvert at Kudaiya in Mainpuri has resulted in the draining of one of the wetlands and has resulted in the decline of the resident sarus population from over 200 to 22 only.

Mr. Mookerjee said in the petition that any further draining of water from the wetland will render the flocks homeless and force them to look for roosting sites in the nearby crop field where they can wreak havoc, leading to conflict situations that have historically never existed between man and this revered bird. Since this is the only known site of its size and quality in the country, it is beyond doubt that it is irreplaceable and we can not develop any alternative site.

The most important habitat is Sarsai Nawar, which is in Etawah district and has the largest population of this threatened species of sarus crane. Ten sarus crane pairs breed regularly in this wetland, which is more than twice the number of breeding pairs in Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary in Rajasthan, the best known for birds in the country. In winter, more than 40,000 migratory birds use the Sarsai Nawar wetland.

The second major wetland is Gaad in Mainpuri, which has a year long congregation of over 300 sarus cranes that feed on specific tubers of aquatic plants that abound in these wetlands. The third crucial wetland is Sauj Lake, also in Mainpuri, home to 4,000 great white pelicans in winter. Yet another crucial wetland is Ambarpur and Kudaiya, which has nearly 450 sarus cranes.

The petition had sought that these five crucial wetlands be declared as 'protected' as per the definition of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972. It was also pointed out to the court that sensing the alarming Dr. Asad R. Rahmani, Director, BNHS had written letters to the Chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Mr. Raj Nath Singh and to the Prime Minister Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, requesting them to conserve the wetlands in these two districts.

"The Ministry of Environment and Forests has estimated that India has about 4.1 million hectares of wetlands (excluding paddy fields and mangroves) of which 1.5 million hectares are natural and 2.6 million hectares are man-made." Mr Mookerjee said in the petition.



Ashok Kumar is a senior advisor and trustee at the Wildlife Trust of India

A Rocky Adventure at Vengurla Islands

Text and Photographs: Satish Pande

Satish Pande is a doctor by profession and is presently writing a highly interesting book on the Birds of Konkan, Malabar and Western Ghats



More than a decade back, in a brief article in *Hornbill*, 1988(1): 3, Stig Toft Madsen had written about the difficulties encountered by his team in reaching the Vengurla Rocks in June. The phrase that caught my attention was, 'the terns of the Vengurla Rocks still remain to be documented photographically.' This phrase haunted me for several years as I indulged in bird observation and photography.

The marine terns were reported earlier by A.O. Hume and Humayun Abdulali based on indirect evidence. In 1999, while conducting a brief survey of the birds in Sindhudurg district of Konkan, Ram Mone and I had asked the fishermen of Niwati-Medha village about the Vengurla Rocks swiftlets and their nests. We were categorically told that only pigeons were seen on the island. We did not pursue the matter then, due to time constraints. Finally, our upcoming book *BIRDS OF KONKAN, MALABAR AND WESTERN GHATS* compelled me to visit the Rocks to gather recent, authentic and first-hand information about the edible-nest swiftlets and the terns of this area. Vishwas Katdare and Ram Mone of Sahyadri Nisarg Mitra, Chiplun helped and supported this long pending visit, which became a nightmarish adventure, as we confronted poachers.

During one of our trips to the Rocks, we had come across several dead chicks, broken and unhatched eggs, dead and decaying terns on the island. This was encouraging indirect proof that the marine terns, which we so much wanted to study, still nested here. I had also corresponded with Mr. Heinz Lainer from Goa since his article, in the *Journal* of the Society in 1999, had mentioned these terns. Mr. Lainer sent prompt replies to all my queries and also cautioned me before undertaking the perilous adventure during the monsoon — marine terns nest on the Rocks only during the monsoon.

The monsoon had almost arrived as we planned our much-awaited visit. The Arabian Sea was rough, but we were determined to visit the Vengurla Rocks archipelago as it would soon become inaccessible even to the local fishermen. It was at this time that at a short notice Vishwas, Ram and Sachin Palkar paid a lucky visit to the Rocks in June. I call it lucky because they had a narrow escape then. As soon as they reached the shore, the monsoon unleashed its fury. A few hours delay could have cost them much. Vishwas had

succeeded in photographing and video-recording the beginning of the nesting activity of the marine terns. What they had documented was fascinating. Besides it was the first of its kind as hostile weather had not permitted cameramen to step on to these vertical laterite rocks during July, August and September earlier. But, unfortunately, I had missed this boat! My professional commitments had prevented me from doing so, an opportunity I still regret having lost.

The aerodynamic and long pointed wings of the marine terns help them conquer the skies. But when winds become furious and the sky is overcast with sable clouds, when bolts of lightning race from horizon to horizon and rain lashes with all its might, the marine terns wisely decide not to confront these wild unleashed forces of nature. They prefer instead to nest at this time. The terns lay eggs and incubate them, braving the hostile weather against all odds. They catch fish, fight the tumultuous waves and just manage to survive. The first sound that their newborns hear is that of the thundering sea and the first light that they see is that of lightning. It is, therefore, not difficult to reason why we saw so many unhatched eggs and dead chicks on our earlier visit.

After Vishwas and the others had returned, the fury of the southwest winds had seemed to abate. Now, I was anxiously waiting for my turn. But suddenly a cyclone lashed the West Coast and the conditions became more hostile. I was in constant contact with our fisherman friend Mr. Shridhar Metar from Niwati-Medha, the fishing hamlet from where we finally reached the Rocks. And then one day, while it was raining in Pune, I got a message from Shridhar that if I could come at once, the sea might permit a brief access for a day or so. Not wanting to miss this opportunity, I set out immediately with Saleel Tambe and Chandrahas Kolhatkar. The date was September 8, 2001.

The sea was rough, the waves swelled up ten feet high, and the head wind was strong. When our boat dipped into a trough all that we could see was the angry sea that waited to gulp us. But when the boat went over the crest, the limitless expanse of the restless water all around us scared us even more. The motor boat was to take us only up to few metres from the Rocks. Any closer, the lateritic rocky cliffs of Burnt Island would have shattered the fibre boat. I jumped into the sea, swam up to



The aerodynamic, long pointed wings of the marine terns help them conquer the skies. But when winds become furious and the sky is overcast with sable clouds, when bolts of lightning race from horizon to horizon and rain lashes with all its might, the marine terns wisely decide not to confront these wild unleashed forces of nature. They prefer instead to nest at this time.




Marine terns at the Vengurla Rocks: For them at least this beautiful Archipelago should be protected

the Rocks, and then with great difficulty pushed and pulled the boat with the help of a long pole, so that the others and the cameras could be safely delivered on to the island. Our slow climb towards the top of the island sent thousands of terns exploding into the sky, bridled terns *Sterna anaethetus*, large crested *S. bergii*, roseate *S. dougallii*, white-cheeked *S. repressa* and a pair of sooty terns *S. fuscata* were among the thousands that we identified. What we witnessed up on the cliff was amazing and wonderful, and also unique, as few had been lucky to witness this drama. Hundreds of nests and chicks of various ages swarmed all over the rocks, while adults were feeding them with fish. Up here we also saw the common *S. hirundo* and river terns *S. aurantia*.

We quickly documented what we saw as time was running out; the weather was becoming hostile again. The sea was swelling and the waves were

furiously lashing at the cliffs. The sky was overcast with dark clouds and the deep blue sea with its limitless expanse of unfathomable water was extending up to the horizon and beyond. The white flash of wings of the flying terns drew sublime lines on the grey sky, their graceful forms, silhouetted against the moving canvas of the turbulent sea, was like a masterpiece.

I succeeded in recording an infinitesimal part of this divine wonder on film. The earlier photographs taken by Vishwas and the present documentation would now finally allow several admirers of the marine terns, and those who for one reason or the other had missed the boat, to see these enchanting moments enacted on the remote marine archipelago called the Vengurla Rocks. Besides, this information will justify our reasons for wanting the Vengurla Rocks archipelago to be protected. 

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Footprints on the sands...

By P. Jeganathan

P. Jeganathan is a research biologist at the BNHS and is presently working at the Sri Lankamalleswara Wildlife Sanctuary

Jerdon's courser (Rhinoptilus bitorquatus), a small cursorial bird, nocturnal or crepuscular, that inhabits open patches in scrub jungles was first described by T.C. Jerdon around 1848.

Till the 1900s, some birds of the species were recorded in parts of Andhra Pradesh.

But subsequent efforts to sight it were unsuccessful. Special explorations organized by the Bombay Natural History Society in 1975 and 1976 with the collaboration

of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, and World Wildlife Fund-India

did not achieve positive results either. This led to the belief that the bird was extinct.

It was finally rediscovered in the Pennar river valley, Andhra Pradesh on January 1986.

The area where it was rediscovered was declared as a sanctuary for the Jerdon's courser.

The species is now listed in the globally threatened category

and is among the seven critically endangered species of India.



PAINTED BY: D.M. HENRY

Except sight records, virtually nothing is known about the ecology, population status and geographical range of the Jerdon's courser. To fill this void, the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) undertook a research project with the help of the Darwin Initiative for Survival of the Species, in collaboration with the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department.

Our team chose the Sri Lankamalleswara Wildlife Sanctuary near Reddipally, Cuddapah District, Andhra Pradesh to study this elusive bird. A brief preliminary survey revealed that though the conventional method to locate the Jerdon's courser was successful, the rate of sighting the bird per hour was very low. Hence, along with the conventional method, we tried other methods.

The first among these was the soil strip tracking method. We deployed soil strips in two patches where we had sighted the Jerdon's courser during our preliminary survey. Tracks of finely sieved soil collected locally were laid after clearing the ground of stones and small grasses. A thin layer of soil was then dusted with a sieve on top of the soil strip to camouflage it. We checked the tracking strips every other day and smoothened

P. JEGANATHAN

the soil surface for the new arrivals after we had recorded and made plaster casts. Rainfall, heavy wind, and humans and their livestock were the only hurdles here. The courser's presence in similar habitat patches was mapped by the Global Positioning System (GPS III).

Besides the Jerdon's courser, many other cursorial bird species, like the Indian courser, also left their footprints on the soil strips laid by us. One member of our team, Dr. Rhys Green from the Zoology Museum of



Pictures taken by the infrared camera put an end to the guessing game that could have arisen while identifying a bird just by its footprint


the Cambridge University carefully examined all the footprints before zeroing in on the one of interest. We also examined two skins, one in Cambridge and one at the museum of the Bombay Natural History Society in Mumbai, to make sure that we identified the bird correctly.

Not satisfied with just the footprints as the sole identifying criteria, we placed Trailmaster camera kits along the tracking strips, which were fitted only from dusk to dawn so that locals using the path did not leave their tracks to be trapped by our camera. The Trailmaster kit consists of a TM 1500 infrared transmitter and receiver which were arranged on pieces of wood driven in the ground at the two ends of a 5 m tracking strip, so that the infrared beam was about 10-12 cm above the ground; a TM 35-1 infrared camera which was placed on top of the receiver unit and a connecting cable. The receiver was programmed to activate the camera if the infrared beam was broken even for 0.05 seconds. Another photograph was taken only if the beam was broken again within one minute. The footprint and picture together left no room for doubt about the identity of the bird that had walked over the soil strip.

The detections methods perfected, we now turned our attention towards exploring the Sanctuary for our bird of interest — the Jerdon's courser. With the LANDSAT TM7 Satellite images of the Sanctuary we had already mapped 10 new places as potential sites for deploying the new soil strips. Simon Wottom from the RSPB, who was on a month long sabbatical, visited different parts of the Sanctuary with me to find other suitable habitats of the courser. Intermittent heavy rains interrupted the work at least five times till early Dec. 2001. But three new

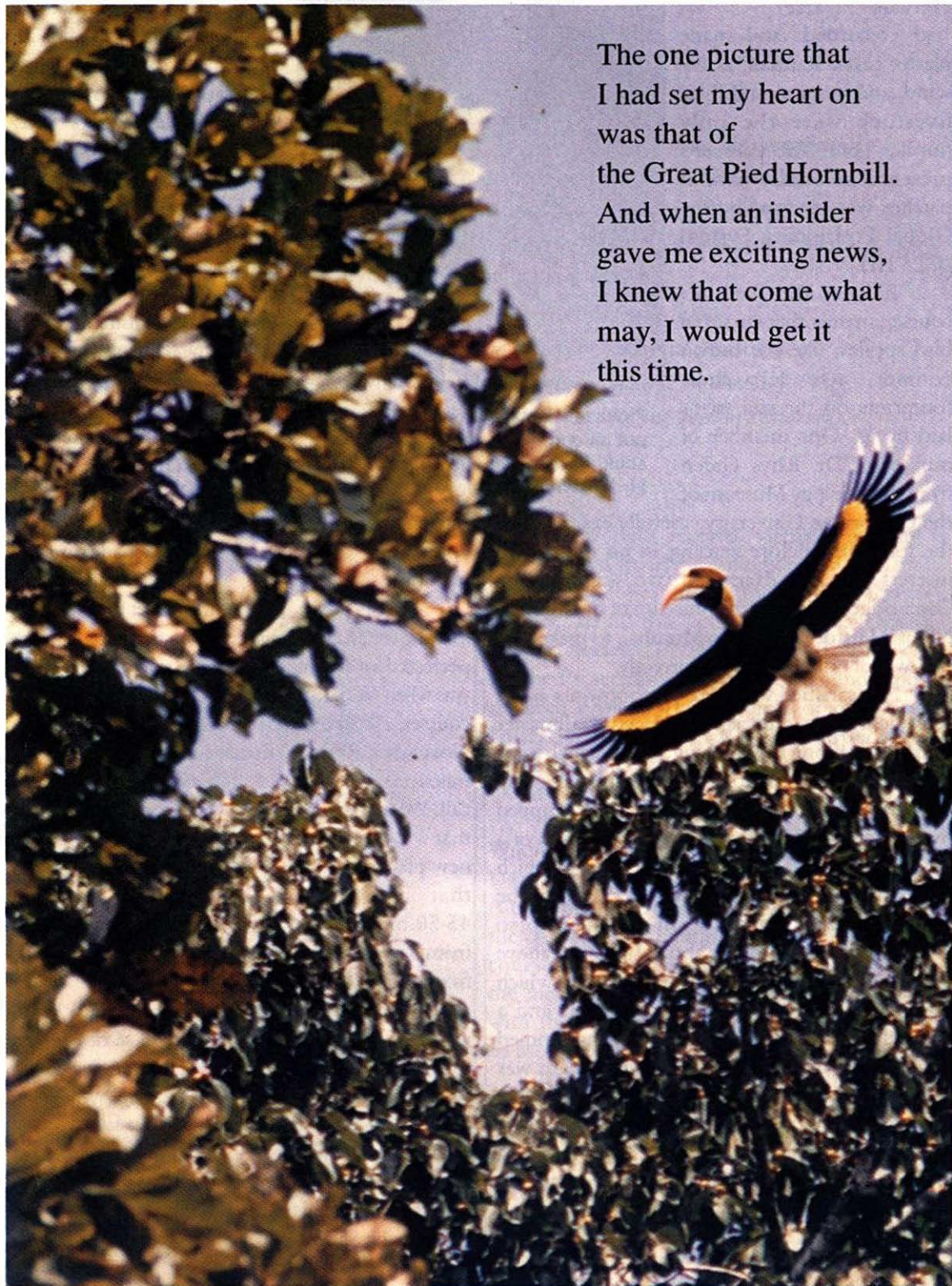
Jerdon's courser tracks at 4 km, 6.5 km and c. 14 km from the pre-viously known area made sure that our spirits were not dampened.

All this while, we did not forget that we were looking for an elusive bird and our methods, though perfected over time, were time consuming. That was when we decided to record the call of the Jerdon's courser, a task that remained. In the first week of November 2001, we finally crossed another major milestone; we had successfully recorded the courser's call. We used it to lure other coursers in the habitat that we were scanning and were able to record nine new places as potential sites. As of now, we know that the Jerdon's courser starts calling 45-50 minutes after sunset and a call session lasts from 5 to about 20 minutes and that it can be heard from about 200-250 m.

Since the tape lure experiments are quicker in identifying a Jerdon's courser, we have decided to stop using soil strips in new places. However, to study the habitat selection we did deploy 39 new tracks in places where we had heard the calls recently. Our efforts to fill up the gaps in the biography of the Jerdon's courser are far from over. We are still collecting and collating our data... footprints in the sands of the Sanctuary! 

AVIAN ENCOUNTER

The one picture that I had set my heart on was that of the Great Pied Hornbill. And when an insider gave me exciting news, I knew that come what may, I would get it this time.



Text and Photographs by: N.A. Naseer

N.A. Naseer is a life member of the Society and very interested in wildlife photography

IT WAS ABOUT 8 o'clock in the morning when I reached the Sálim Ali Centre, a place so dear to Dr. Sálim Ali, near River Kuriarkutty, Parambikulam Sanctuary, Kerala. Thomas Nelson, the Asst. Wildlife Warden of the Sanctuary had given me some inside information that had tempted me to make this trip with my friend Junai Nasi and watcher Chandrappan. He had sighted the great pied hornbill *Buceros bicornis*, the bird that I had longed to 'shoot' at close range.

The next day, we set out on a long search on the Orukomban side of the Sanctuary. The weather was unpleasant and the sky was covered with dark rain clouds. At 5 o'clock we reached an old forest quarter where we rested to spend some time plucking leeches off our feet.

For one week we wandered, our food supplies were depleting fast, and not a single frame

had been shot yet, as there were no signs of the torrential rains ending. Disappointed, we returned, not knowing that we would be coming back very soon.

When we arose at five the next morning, the sky was clear and bright. And then suddenly I heard the call that I had been seeking for days, the call of the great pied hornbill. Without a second thought, we ran towards the call that had come from the other side of Orukomban river. We waded across the river, sinking up to the waist.

The forest was dark and its floor was a "foam" bed of fallen leaves. As we walked along, following the call, leeches waiting for a good bait latched on to our feet. The call was soon louder and clearer as we approached a ficus tree. I looked up, and there amongst the leaves and ripening fruits of the ficus I saw the famous large bill and casque. But a glimpse was all that we got after that long and hurried trek. The hornbill flew away just as we sighted it, as if it had sensed our presence. Determined to get the photographs this time,





I decided to wait for the hornbill to come back. I chose a suitable tree that was as tall as the ficus and climbed on to it with my camera. Junai Nasi gave me a bottle of water from the river (my food

for the day), and climbed up another tree. I camouflaged my camera flash with leaves, and set the long lens on a stump and waited.

At about 4 p.m. I heard the cackling laughter of a pair of hornbills flying towards the treetop where I sat. Junai Nasi had in the meanwhile made one trip back to the quarters. But for me it was almost 10 hours of unending waiting after I had first sighted the bird. By now, both my legs and back were hurting and insects had a merry feast on my leech bites.

I could see the female very well. With her neck stretched out, she selected ripe fruit and ate them one by one plucking them with the tip of her bill. As she enjoyed her meal, I could see only her head, lovely bill and neck among the figs. The male soon jumped on to a stump of the tree on which I sat. He turned his head and body on the stump, staring into my lens before they both flew away.

It was late in the evening and I was stiff from the long hours spent on the tree. It was drizzling as we walked the 14 km back to the Centre. Darkness was slowly engulfing the little light that was visible. But my thoughts were of the lovely sight of the bird that I had set out to capture in my camera — an encounter that I would never forget. 🐦

EDITORS' CHOICE



Courtesy: Earthscan Publications Ltd, London

Humayun Abdulali Honoured

THE BIRD ROOM at the Bombay Natural History Society was dedicated to the memory of Mr. Humayun Abdulali, a doyen of Indian ornithology, on Monday, May 20, 2002 at Hornbill House. Dr. Rachel Reuben, former Director, Centre for Research in Medical Entomology and presently writing Mr. Abdulali's biography, was the chief guest.

The BNHS Bird Room, which houses 28,000 bird specimens representing bird fauna of the Indian region, had been Mr. Humayun Abdulali's second home when he worked on the bird catalogue.



L to R: Shri B.G. Deshmukh, President, BNHS and Mrs. Abdulali look on as Dr. Rachel Reuben commemorates the bird room to the memory of Mr. Abdulali

Global Partners' Meet

SIXTEEN CONSERVATIONISTS, each from a different country, representative of BirdLife International, visited the BNHS for the final workshop as part of BirdLife's Building on Experience programme on May 20-30, 2002.

BirdLife International is a global alliance of national conservation organisations working in more than 100 countries who, together, are the leading authority on the status of the world's birds, their habitats and the issues and problems affecting bird life. BNHS is the BirdLife International partner in India.

Dr. Asad Rahmani, Director of the BNHS said "The BNHS is a leader in the conservation field in India and this programme will enable the Society to pass on valuable knowledge gained through the programme to organizations across India through the Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN).

"There is an increasing number of bird species threatened with extinction throughout

the world; it is essential for conservation organizations worldwide to unite to maximize our global conservation efforts. The Building on Experience programme is an important initiative in that process".

Participants included the Bombay Natural History Society (India), Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (Thailand), Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (Jordan), Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (Hong Kong), Haribon Foundation (Philippines), Aves Argentinas (Argentina), Panama Audubon Society (Panama), SEO/BirdLife (Spain), Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds and Nature (Bulgaria), Danish Ornithological Society (Denmark), CECIA (Ecuador), Ghana Wildlife Society (Ghana), Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society (Ethiopia), Nature Kenya (Kenya), BirdLife South Africa (South Africa), Canadian Nature Federation (Canada).

Images of Earth Day



AS PART of the Earth Day Celebrations the Bombay Natural History Society and the Rotary Club of Bombay Sea Coast jointly organized a painting competition, on the theme Mother Earth, for students on the eve of Earth Day at the Conservation Education Centre of the BNHS. Besides sponsoring the prizes, the Rotary Club also arranged for eco-friendly

colours, while Nestlé Company provided the drawing paper and a Milo hot drink for all the 60 participants who were divided into three categories — air, water and earth. The innovative ideas of all the participants sent only one message loud and clear — that our Earth should be a cleaner, greener place, and that all species should be given a fair chance to survive.

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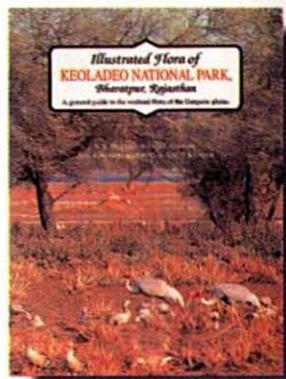
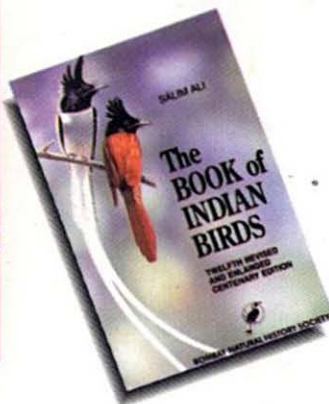
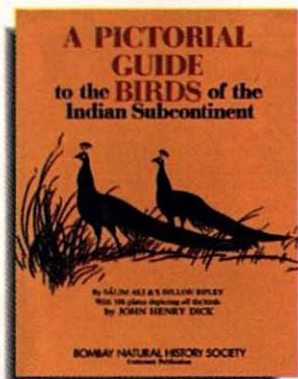
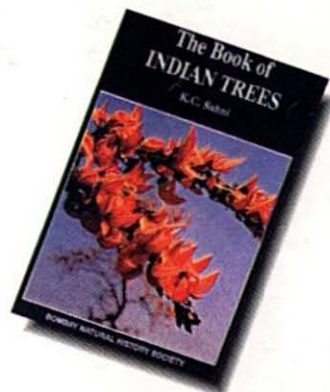
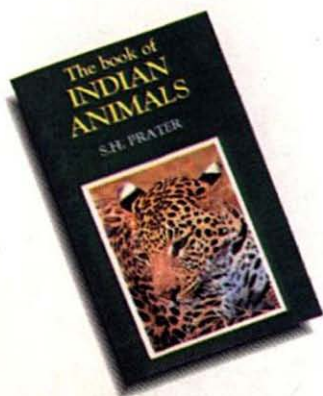
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