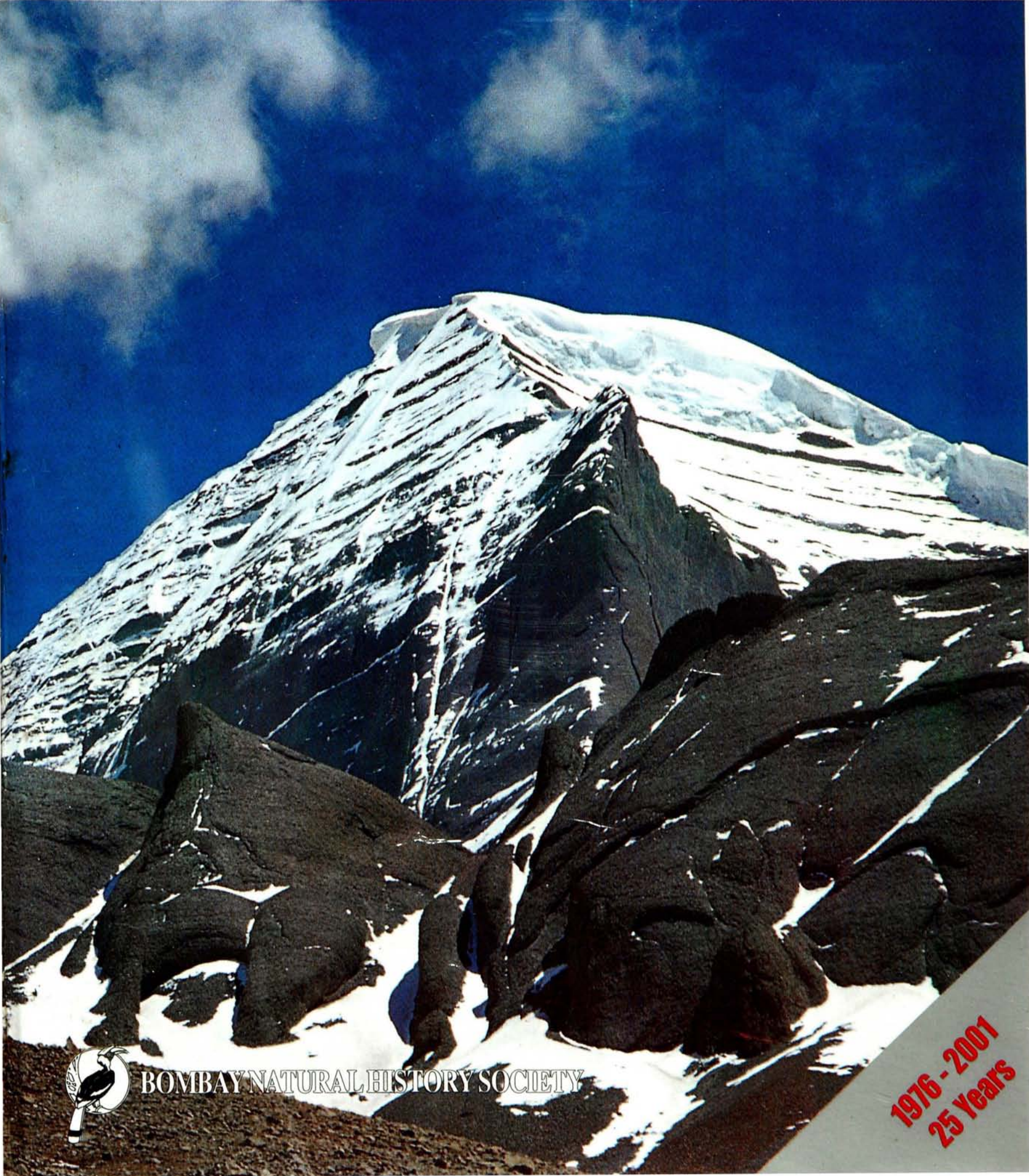


HORNBILL

A B O U T N A T U R E A N D U S

October-December, 2001



BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

1976 - 2001
25 Years



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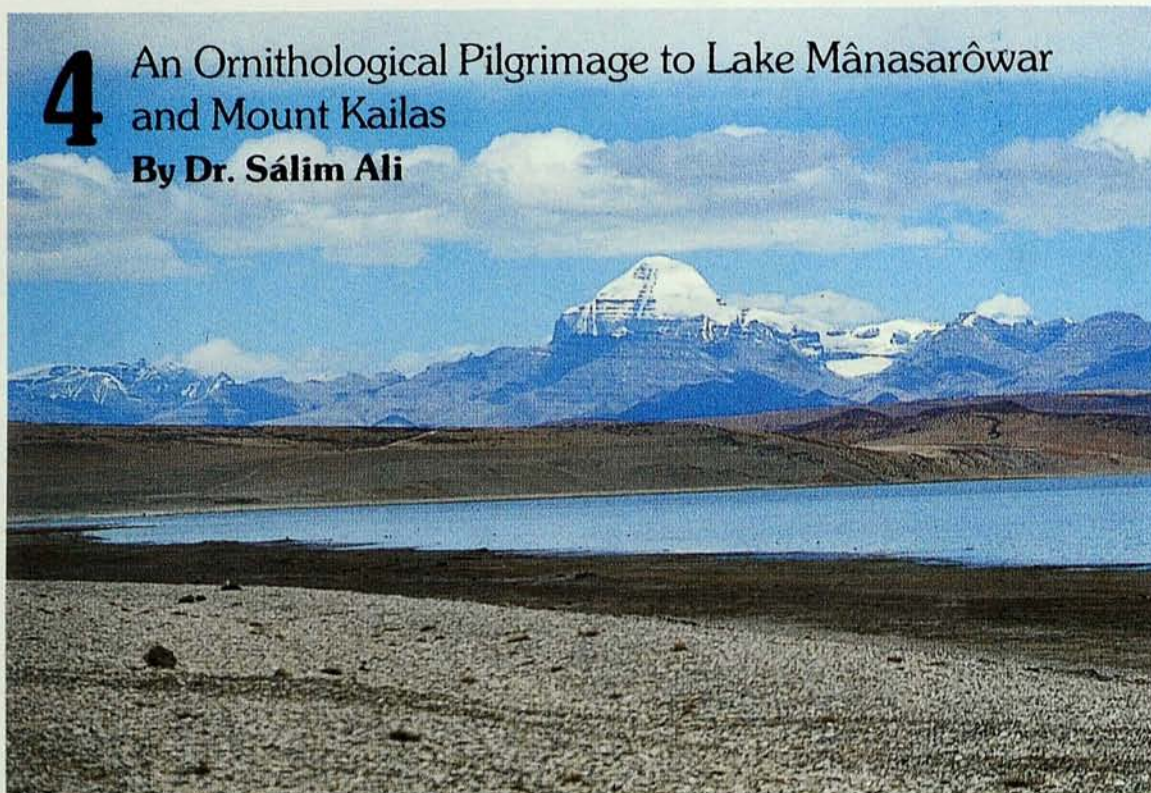
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Mount Kailas

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and Mount Kailas
By Dr. Sâlim Ali



A trek to Mount Kailas, in any season, can be tedious. But Dr. Sâlim Ali was anxious to study the breeding of some of his winged friends who visit India. For them, this expedition.

Birdwatching in Kenya **14**
By Rachel Reuben

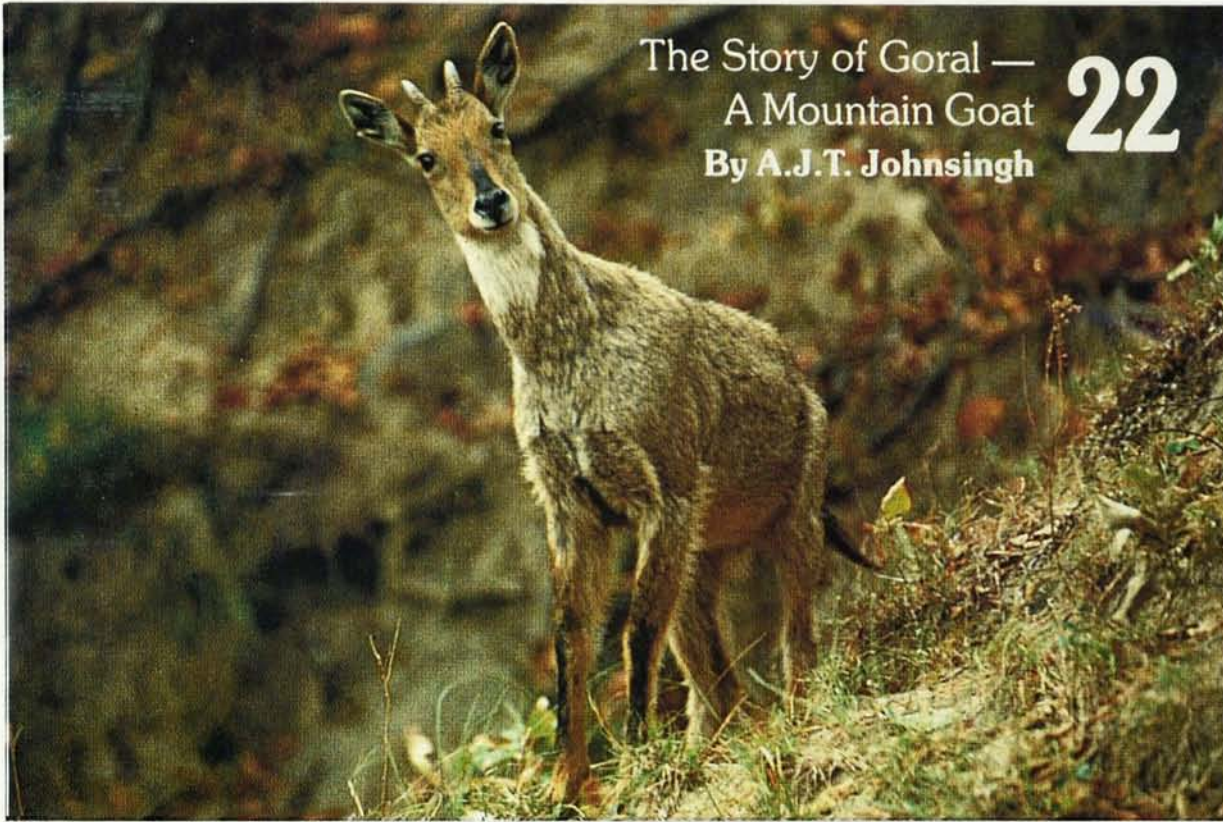


Birdwatching can be as exciting in Kenya, as it is India. Here you'll find not only the relatives of our Indian birds, but also some more that are unique.

For more information on the Society and its activities, write to the Honorary Secretary,
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The Story of Goral —
A Mountain Goat
By A.J.T. Johnsingh

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Not much was known about the behaviour of the nimble-footed mountain goat, the goral. This prompted the author and his team to investigate when an opportunity came their way.

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Remembering Sálim Ali
— Birds in Celebration
By Lt. Gen. Baljit Singh (Retd.)



It was celebration time for the birds not only because a wet, gloomy week had given way to a bright, crisp morning, but also as it was the birth anniversary of a dear friend, Dr. Sálim Ali.



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HORNBILL

25 Years

What has gone wrong, probably, is that we have failed to see ourselves as part of a large and indivisible whole... we have failed to understand that the earth does not belong to us, but we to the earth.

— **Rolph Edberg**

25 Years ago...

Editorial

THE Society's newsletter *Hornbill* is being revived with a view to provide communication between the members and the Society; to offer, in non-technical language as far as possible, information on various aspects of natural history and on conservation action generated by the Society and others; and which could be an expression of our members' concern over the dwindling forests and decimated wildlife of India.

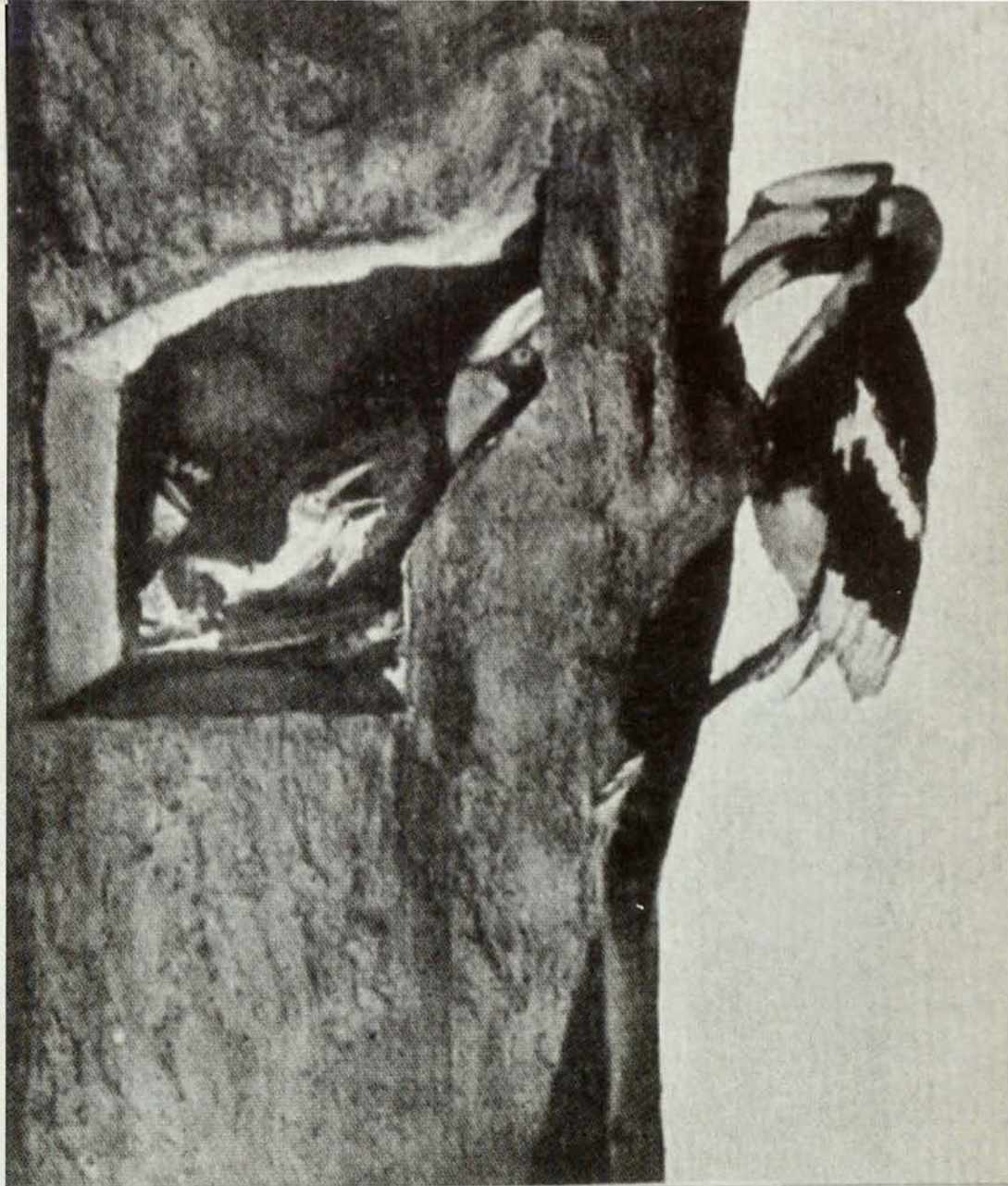
The issue is being published as a tribute to Dr. Sálim Ali, on his 80th birthday in November 1976. We are indebted to him for financial assistance for restarting the *Hornbill*.

WHY HORNBILL HOUSE?

THE frequency of the question makes me wonder how many remnants of the 'old guard' still remember, and how many members of the present generation have heard of William who was such a popular character in the Bombay Natural History Society in the early years of this century. William (from his bill!), a Great Pied Hornbill was the Society's well-loved mascot-cum-PRO for over 25 years. He had become almost synonymous with Phipson & Co., the wine merchants, as also with the fledgeling BNHS then occupying a part of their business premises in Apollo Street. This gracious old building, incidentally, had been the residence of the Chief Justice of Bombay High Court about the year 1860. The bird was introduced to us as a nestling from the Karwar jungles in 1894, and lived happily till May 1920 in a corner of the first floor, partitioned off by



wire netting. Affectionately known as the 'Office Canary', William became a prime favourite with Phipson's customers — good for business no doubt!—and was equally popular with the visitors to the overcrowded 'museum' of the Society—a hodge-podge of mounted heads of glassy-eyed tigers, leopards and bears snarling at you, perhaps more ferociously than they ever did in life. A claustrophobic assortment of heads and horns and miscellaneous sporting trophies cluttered the walls all round the room. Tables groaning under various



zoological bric-a-brac—sea shells, birds' eggs, boxes of mounted butterflies and beetles, and glass-sided cases with live snakes, desert gerbils, fat-tailed lizards and such like, were some of the other obstacles through which you stumbled your way, tripping over hoofs of sambhar skins and stuffed crocodiles which littered the floor! But by far the greatest draw of the BNHS in those early days as I recall, was certainly William the Hornbill in his wired cubicle, eagerly hopping about to be noticed. He had endeared himself to visitors by his unfailing readiness to play a game with them, deftly catching a tennis ball thrown from a distance of 7 or 8 yards with never a miss. William was a gourmand and an omnivore; he lost no opportunity to supplement his daily menu with cockroaches, mice and rats that rashly sneaked into his enclosure to share his food. Sitting inert on his perch yet intently watchful, he would suddenly make a lightning jab and seize the hapless intruder in his bill, and batter it into submission and suitable limpness before bolting it down. Unfortunately, his omnivorousness did not end with misguided rats and mice: William actually died of overeating bits of iron wire from his cage! Although the grieving Society installed several successors in turn, to continue the tradition and the good Public Relations he had built up, none proved so long-lived or so friendly as the original William. It is, thus, the hallowed memory of our William I that has inspired the name of the premises which now house the Society's administrative offices, library and zoological collections, and of the Newsletter which makes its debut with this issue.

An Ornithological Pilgrimage to Lake Mânasarôwar and Mount Kailas

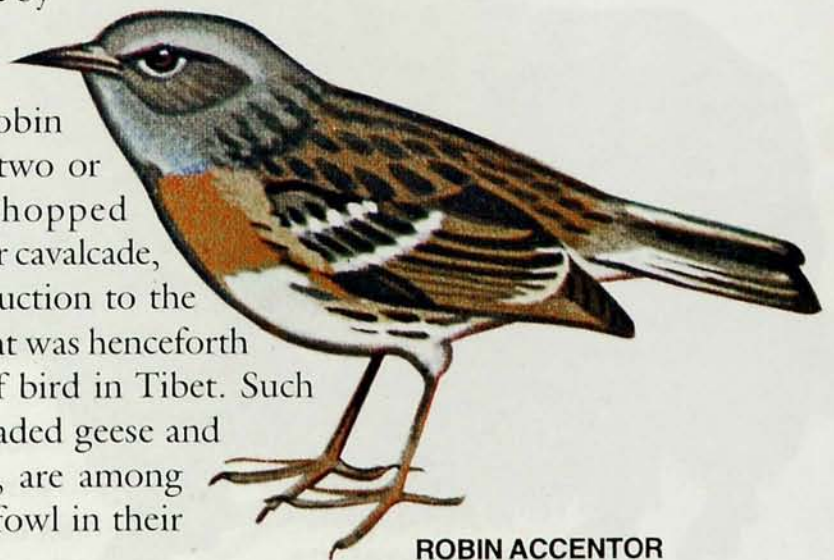


SÁLIM ALI

What primarily attracted me to Mânasarôwar was the opportunity to study the natural conditions under which birds live on the Roof of the World, to ascertain at first hand what species breed in that area, and to determine, if possible, some of the ecological factors that foster their doing so. Although not interested in birds purely from what may be called the subspecific point of view, I nevertheless feel it a great pity that practically no collecting could be done in an area that is so seldom visited by an ornithologist. I was advised by those who administer our External Affairs not to carry a gun to shoot birds with. Presumably it offends the religious scruples of the Tibetans to see birds killed by other people. None of these scruples were detected in the case of animals killed by themselves, and in a manner that would have made shooting seem a kindness. However, that is another story. But in the absence of skins for verification, some of my identifications may have to be taken with reserve.

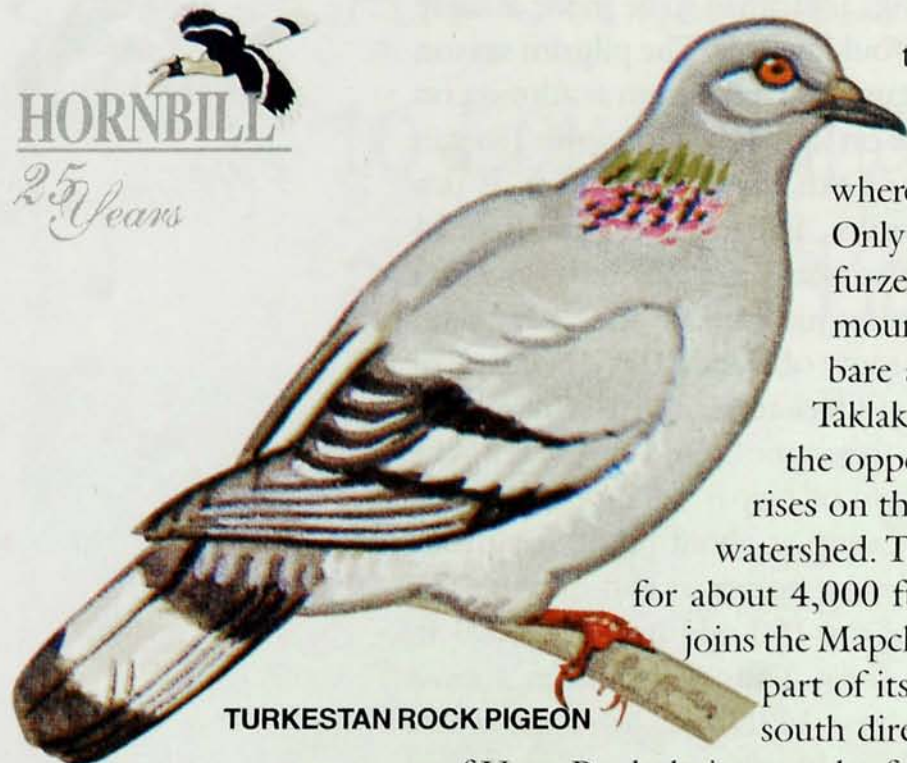
To enable me to be there for the nesting, a start had to be made as early in the season as the snow on the Lipu Pass would permit. The pilgrim season proper does not commence until about August. My trek began at Almora on 14th May, 1945 and ended at the same place on 22nd July. Up to the Tibetan frontier, crossed on this route by the Lipu Lekh Pass at 16,750 ft, it is a matter of about 16 marches, nearly 160 miles. Baggage over the first 14 marches traveled coolie-back. The regular trace takes a northeasterly direction from Almora, and passes through some picturesque Himalayan scenery, with superb views from various places along the route of Nanda Devi, Nanda Kot and the Panch Chuli peaks. For more than half its latter length, it follows the right bank of the torrential Kali river which forms the boundary between the Kumaon district of Almora and the kingdom of Nepal. At Lipu Lekh, the Kali is run to its source. The trek, commencing at about 5,200 ft altitude (Almora), goes through an unending series of steep ups and downs. The lowest point ever touched in the course of the 160 odd miles is 2,200 ft, where the path crosses the Gauri Ganga river. Thus, it furnishes a cross section through an altitudinal range of some 14,000 ft, from the warm subtropical jungles of the Himalayan foothills through various climatic and vegetation zones, up to above the limit of tree growth. The accompanying changes in the bird life, as one crosses from one altitudinal zone or stratum to another, are often so clear cut that using them as indicators one soon learns to hazard a fair guess of the approximate elevation, even without the help of the aneroid. It is this constant change of levels, and the meeting and parting with new or familiar birds, that to my mind makes trekking in the Himalayas so particularly delightful.

On 8th June, the Lipu Lekh Pass was still under fresh and fairly deep snow. It had to be crossed in the unearthly hours of the morning while the surface was still hard, and passable for the baggage ponies that had replaced the porters at Garbyang. After groping our way uncomfortably over boulders in pitch darkness, with the dubious help of two miserable electric torches, the summit of the Pass was reached at 6.15 am, just as the sun peeped out from over the barrier of mountains to the east. Here, among the cairns or piles of Mani stones, contributed laboriously one by one by grateful pilgrims and wayfarers (such as mark the head of every mountain pass in Tibet), was my first meeting of the trip with the robin accentor (*Prunella rubeculoides*). The birds — two or three — were delightfully tame; they hopped unconcernedly on the snow within four feet of our cavalcade, picking up food. This was also my first introduction to the amazing confidence and complete lack of fear that was henceforth to be experienced from almost every species of bird in Tibet. Such behaviour came strangest of all from the barheaded geese and brahminy duck which, as every shikari knows, are among the wariest and most wide awake of our waterfowl in their winter quarters in India.



ROBIN ACCENTOR


HORNBILL
25 Years



TURKESTAN ROCK PIGEON

Immediately across the Pass, the character of the country, now Tibet, changed abruptly. Trees, of course, are non-existent here, but other vegetation was also exceedingly scanty wherever the dry stony slopes were free from snow. Only small patches of low shrubs of *doma* or Tibetan furze *Caragana spinosa* clung here and there to the mountainsides, which were otherwise completely bare and scree covered. The route from Lipu to Taklakot runs all down the right bank of the river – the opposite number of the Kali, as it were, which rises on the Tibet side of the Pass, the latter being the watershed. This river descends in a gently winding course for about 4,000 ft in the 12 odd miles to Taklakot, where it joins the Mapcha or Karnali. The latter, after flowing a great part of its length through Nepal territory in a north-south direction, joins the Gogra in the Kheri district of Uttar Pradesh, just south of the Nepal boundary.

One of the first indications that one has left Indian soil and is now in a different ornithological region is provided by the pigeons, which here suddenly change over to the Turkestan rock pigeon *Columba rupestris*. This species is easily distinguished from our familiar blue rock by its whitish underparts and a broad white bar across its tail. Flocks of these birds were to be seen gleaning in the fields of young barley and gram surrounding the village. A few often visited our camp to pick up what grain they could round the kitchen tent. They were as tame and trustworthy as their pampered relations in the midst of Bhuleshwar (Bombay), for example, and other centres of Hindu benevolence.

The Tibetan raven *Corvus corax tibetanus* takes the place of jungle and house crows as the village scavenger, though it is seen in smaller numbers.

Skylarks — apparently *Alauda gulgula lhamarum* — were soaring and singing plentifully above the cultivation, while redbilled choughs

Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax grubbed away merrily on the outskirts. The house sparrow, presumably *Passer domesticus bactrianus*, was here in some numbers, but not as abundant as I was to find it on the return visit a month later.

At Taklakot, the 6 baggage ponies were exchanged for 4 yaks. And here a short digression may be permissible. The yak is an extraordinary beast. From in front, it looks like an overgrown bear; from behind like a very shaggy hill pony. It possesses boundless energy,



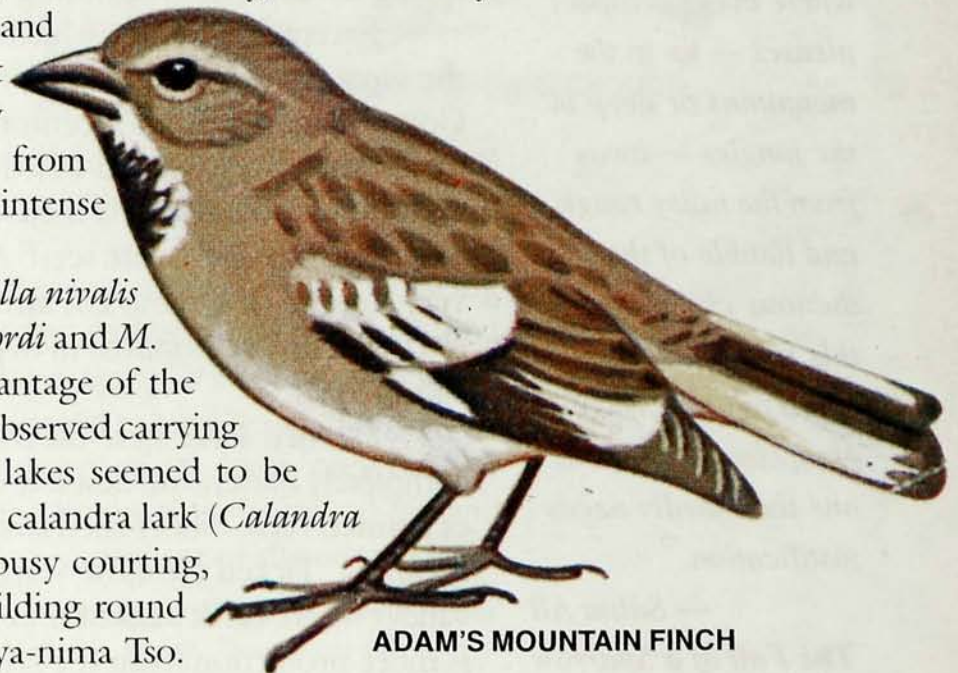
YAK

and seems impossible to tire out except when the weather is hot. It is highly sensitive to and impatient of the heat, which seems to be the only element that will ever lower its spirits. At the end of a long fatiguing all-day march, carrying on their backs 2 maunds (160 lbs) of often the most angular and uncomfortable load, and with just a few mouthfuls of scanty grass snatched while we halted for the mid-day meal, our yaks would frisk and romp obviously feeling 'as fresh as a daisy'. It was disconcerting when ebullience of spirits prompted one to buck and throw your baggage — boxes containing delicate and precious meteorological instruments that, moreover, didn't belong to you! A bridge is anathema to the yak. It is not every animal that will walk over it. Neither is it every day that even the same yak will consent to walk over one. There may be some justification for its preferring to leap into an icy cold torrent and swim across rather than use the highly unconvincing rickety wooden structure swaying perilously above it. One is frequently tempted to do so oneself. But the soaking is not always beneficial for your baggage, particularly when this happens to be your bedding or warm clothes. Luckily, bridges are few in Tibet. The yak has an unpredictable temperament, and you never know beforehand how one is going to react to any given set of circumstances.

Immediately on crossing the summit of Gurla Pass (16,500 ft) the first view is obtained, glorious and breath-taking, of the twin lakes of Mânasarôwar and Râkhas Tâl, with the ice-covered dome of Mt. Kailas towering in the distant background to the north. The lakes are separated by a ridge of low hills forming an isthmus, 3 or 4 miles at its widest. Along this lies the route to Barkha Plain, and the holy mountain.

My first camp on Mânasarôwar was pitched at Ngâçyezç (*ca* 15,200 ft) on the southwest shore of the lake. The water surface of Mânasarôwar is 14,950 ft above sea level. It is 54 miles in circumference and surrounded on all sides by mountains, many of them well over 20,000 ft high, with snow-covered tops. The greatest depth sounded by Sven Hedin in 1907 was 269 ft. The colours on the lake, changing not only with time of day, but with every fleeting mood of the sky, are undescrivable, and not likely ever to be forgotten. From almost snow-white at one end, it ranges to every imaginable shade of green and blue, and from the deepest jade and the purest emerald to intense ultramarine blue and purplish-black.

Adam's mountain finch (*Montifringilla nivalis adamsi*) as well as its two cousins *M. blanfordi* and *M. ruficollis* were everywhere, taking full advantage of the rat holes as nest sites, and quite a few were observed carrying food into them. The tundra around the lakes seemed to be breeding ground *par excellence* of the large calandra lark (*Calandra maxima*). Hundreds of these birds were busy courting, chasing one another, singing and nest-building round Mânasarôwar, Tseti Tso, Ding Tso and Gya-nima Tso.



ADAM'S MOUNTAIN FINCH





“I have watched birds through half a century and more, chiefly for the pleasure and elation of the spirit they have afforded. Birdwatching provided the excuse for removing myself to where every prospect pleases — up in the mountains or deep in the jungles — away from the noisy rough and tumble of the dubious civilization of this mechanical high-speed age. A form of escapism, maybe, but one that hardly needs justification.”

— *Sálim Ali*

The Fall of a Sparrow

Short-toed larks (*Calandrella acutirostris*) were also present in the tundra zone at Mánasarôwar in large numbers. This was somewhat puzzling at first, but it was soon discovered that they visited the bog merely for collecting insects for their young, and flew off with beakfuls over long distances to the bare stony country above the furze belt where they were nesting.

Of the waterfowl, bar-headed geese, brahmíny duck and goosander were the most prominent representatives, the first two in considerable numbers. The geese, it seemed fairly certain, were not breeding in the immediate neighbourhood. Their favourite nesting ground is on two boggy islands in the Rákhas Tâl, but without a boat it was not possible to explore these. A mixed flock of over 50 duck was observed on the water as they flew over, but it was difficult to tell with certainty what they were, besides the few gadwal and pintail, which were unmistakable. They were evidently not meaning to breed here either. Crested grebes were abundant, and numbers of their floating nests dotted the water some distance from the shore, particularly on a small lagoon by the side of the main lake. Brown-headed gulls, Tibetan terns and a couple of Pallas's fishing eagles practically complete the list of birds seen about the southern end of Mánasarôwar Lake.

The official pilgrimage of Mount Kailas begins at Tarchan, or Darchan (alt. 15,500 ft), a ramshackle village of a few hovels of piled up loose stones, with a Gompa or monastery and attendant filth as its centrepiece. It also boasts of a small *mandi* (village market), open in summer but now lying derelict. The circuit of the holy mountain is 28 miles round and involves the crossing of the pass (Dolma La) 18,600 ft high. Furze growth peters out at about 16,000 ft and above this elevation perennial vegetation is practically non-existent. Birdlife along the entire circuit, in fact above 15,000 ft altitude was poor, but this may partly be due to the fact that I was much too early in the season. Places that had been recommended to us as rich alpine pastures and flower meadows were as yet little more than bleak and desolate snowfields dotted with recently melted patches here and there, where the first hesitant spring herbage was beginning to peep out.

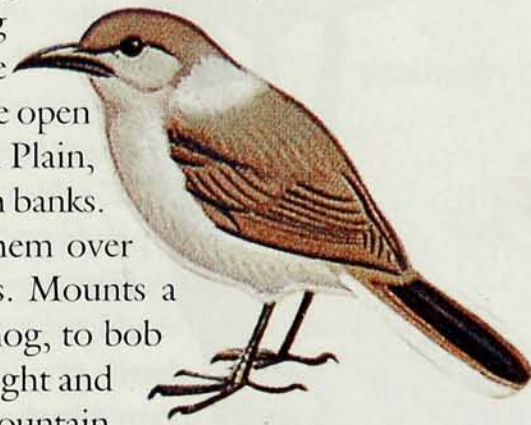
Except for redstarts which were particularly abundant and nesting among the scree fans near Diraphuk or Diripu, a few pigeons and ravens about the Gompa there, a robin accentor with nest and eggs on the edge of a partly frozen stream, several red-billed choughs, and a couple of Himalayan griffons and lammergeiers beating majestically over the hillsides behind the monastery, practically no birds were seen. A couple of pigeons were encountered on the very summit of Dolma La, attracted there by the grain sprinkled according to custom by pious *jaatris* in thanksgiving for the culmination of the arduous climb.

Horned larks nest on the Barkha Plain in great profusion, both in completely barren and desolate spots as well as where there is a scanty growth of stunted furze. Short-toed larks are more partial to the latter facies. Ground choughs, Tickell's willow-warblers and redstarts evidently prefer the side valleys where earth banks for nest-holes are readily available, and where there is more protection from the ferocity of the regular diurnal winds.



The Ding Tso lake proved a particularly fruitful place for birds. From the cosy comfort of the sleeping bag, and without raising my head from the pillow, could be watched through the open fly of the tent almost any time of day, numbers of geese, cranes and brahminys, as they sauntered about and grazed complacently on the grassy margins of the lake and in the surrounding marsh, within easy shotgun range. My diary records: 'Delightful, but oh for a .22 and roast goose on the menu!' Along the lake's eastern and northern shores is an extensive tundra belt 3 or 4 miles long, in places fully ¼ to ½ mile broad. Many of the uneven spongy humps here are actually floating, and separated from each other by a good long jump over deepish water. One had to be nippy and constantly on guard lest the hump underfoot should disappear below the surface before one had time to jump across to the next. It was an uncomfortable and flustering feeling to find oneself suddenly down to the waist in ice-cold water and sinking steadily. It was necessary to plan out several jumps in advance, and decide quickly. And the possibility of quicksand here and there, against which I had been warned, added to the excitement of the game. However, it was fascinating work, and the exploration of this marshy belt proved well worthwhile. I found breeding here, not only bar-headed geese and black-necked cranes, but also brown-headed gulls, Tibetan terns, redshanks, crested grebes and large calandra larks.

■ ***Hume's Ground Chough** *Pseudopodoces humilis* Hume: Quite common, generally in pairs or family parties of 4 or 5. Certainly one of the commonest birds in the Mânasarôwar-Barkha area. Highest met: ca 16,000 ft i.e. the limit of furze growth. Evidently commencing to breed early. Frequents screes or stone littered gentle hummocks, and lower hillsides in preference to the bare open plain. Partial to the side valleys opening on the Barkha Plain, and here to dry watercourses with steep outscoured earth banks. Hops about amongst loose littered stones, pulling them over with its curved bill or digging vigorously for insects. Mounts a stone every little while, or occasionally a furze hedgehog, to bob violently a couple of times like a chat, but standing upright and not ducking its head. General appearance very like the mountain finch (*Montifringilla n. adamsi*) with the same colour pattern



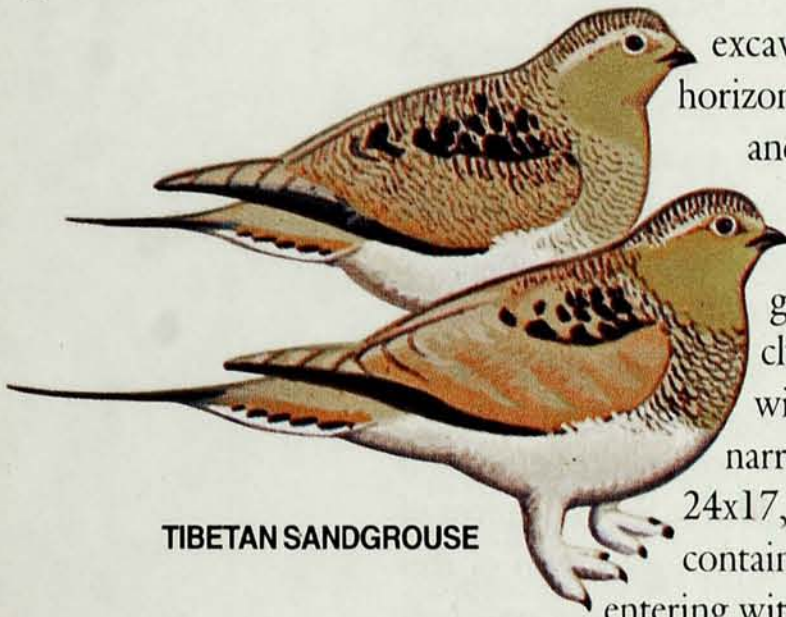
HUME'S GROUND CHOUGH

of tail — white outside feathers, brown middle ones — but no white wing bar. Twitches tail open laterally every now and again, and also shivers wings, especially while bobbing. The flicker of the white tail feathers in the distance is often the only indication of the bird's presence in its obliterating environment. Progresses on the ground with an upright carriage in long hops, bouncing like a rubber ball. When rummaging or digging among the stones, and also in flight (when the tail is spread exhibiting the white-and-brown pattern,) the bird reminded me strongly of the large grey babbler (*Argya malcolmi*). The likeness is heightened by the slightly curved bill and the darkish lores. In other ways, the bird is reminiscent of the wood shrike

*Notes on some of the birds observed in the Mânasarôwar-Kailas region of Western Tibet from 8th June to 8th July, 1945. For the original article see JBNHS Vol. 46, pp. 286-308 — Eds.



(*Tephrodornis pondiceriana*). Calls: The *Chip-cheep cheep cheep cheep* commonly uttered, is very like call of the yellow-eyed babbler (*Chrysomma sinensis*). There is a slight pause after the initial *chip*; the rest of the notes are quick-repeated. It also has a feeble whistling note like that of the spotted munia, but more prolonged.

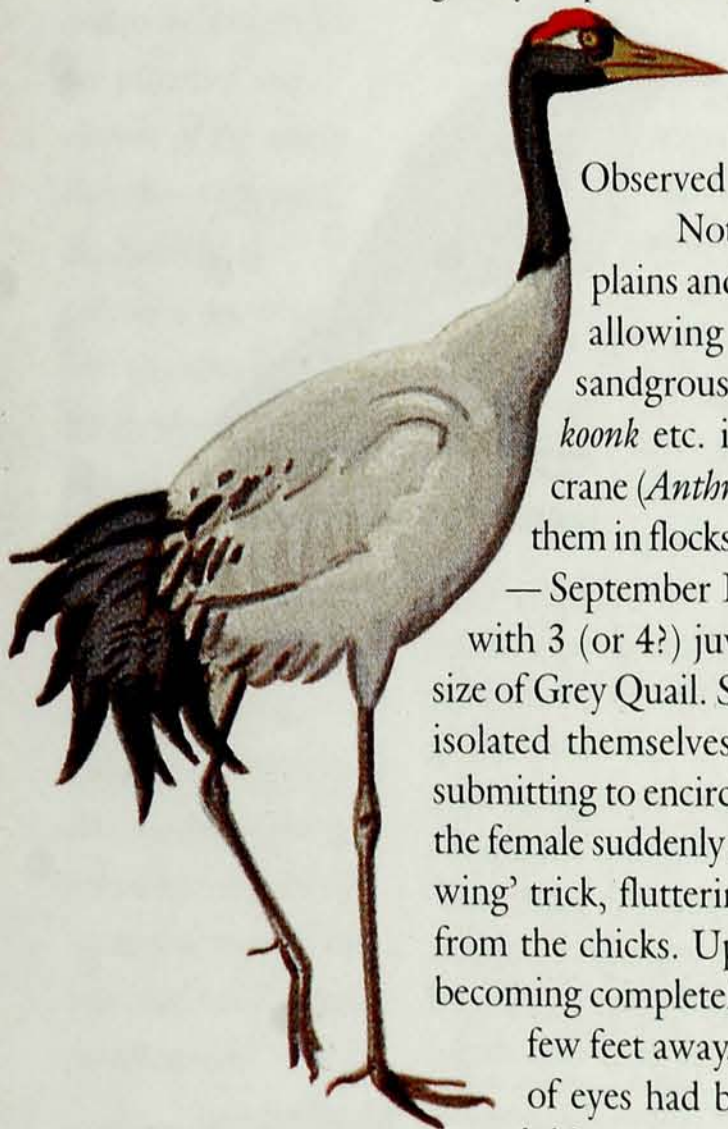


TIBETAN SANDGROUSE

Nesting: Nests in holes in earth banks, self excavated. One nest (22 June) was at the end of a horizontal straight tunnel in a steep earth bank 4 ft long, and 3 in. in diameter. The tunnel ended in a widened chamber 9 to 10 in. across. The nest itself was an enormous pad of sheep's wool on a foundation of green moss and weighed over 1½ lb. It contained a clutch of 6 eggs, slightly incubated, immaculate white with translucent pinkness, longish ovals only slightly narrower at one end. They measured 23.5x17, 23x17, 24x17, 24x16.5, 24x16, 23.5x17 mm. At another nest containing young (24 June) both parents were observed entering with food and removing packets of faeces.

The bird does not alight outside the nest-hole before entering but 'helicopters' into it directly, vibrating its wings rapidly as it approaches the hole. For photographs, the hole had to be temporarily blocked with a stone.

From much in its general get-up, habits and behaviour I should not be greatly surprised if a proper anatomical study revealed the correct taxonomical position of this bird to be in the Family Timaliidae (Babblers).



BLACK-NECKED CRANE

■ **Tibetan Sandgrouse** *Syrrhaptes tibetanus* Gould:

Observed at Ranging, Sekang, Gemoshisa. Highest ca 15,000 ft.

Not uncommon. In pairs or parties of 6 to 15 on bare gravelly plains and drinking at tundra-girt streams etc. Surprisingly tame, allowing approach within easy catapult range. Call: typical sandgrouse but deeper and more musical — a pleasant loud *koonk-koonk* etc. in slightly varying keys, reminiscent of the demoiselle crane (*Anthropoides virgo*). Usually uttered on the wing. Ludlow found them in flocks of 20-30 and very tame, between Râkhas Tâl and Gartok — September 1932. On 1st July a flock was come upon including a pair with 3 (or 4?) juveniles in mixed down and feather plumage, about the size of Grey Quail. Swift runners. When approached, the parents and young isolated themselves and walked away from the rest of the flock. After submitting to encirclement by 3 people for over 5 minutes for photographs, the female suddenly apprehended danger and commenced doing the 'broken wing' trick, fluttering piteously along the ground for over 20 yards away from the chicks. Upon this the chicks immediately lay doggo and 'froze', becoming completely obliterated from view among the gravel though only a few feet away. They would have been quite easily lost if only one pair of eyes had been watching and that momentarily distracted by the adult's antics.

■ **Black-necked Crane** *Grus nigricollis* Przewalski: Observed at Ding Tso, Lejandak Tso, Gyanima Tso (Kharkho), all ca 15,000 ft. Frequents tundra bogs around the margin of lakes. In pairs during June and early July, and breeding pairs prancing and leaping widely, and bowing to each other exactly as in the sarus crane. Voice and trumpeting calls also very similar to that bird's, only somewhat higher pitched.

A nest consisting of a few reeds spread out, with a single fresh egg, was found on 25th June on a spongy grass-covered hump or floating islet, in the broad belt of bog on the northern edge of Ding Tso lake. The egg is greenish-grey or olive-grey in colour, with rough splodges of faint reddish-brown all over, more densely at the broad end. It measures 107 x 66 mm. Its contents, equal to about 6 fowl's eggs, were delicious scrambled, and provided a welcome change from the eternal dal and rice.

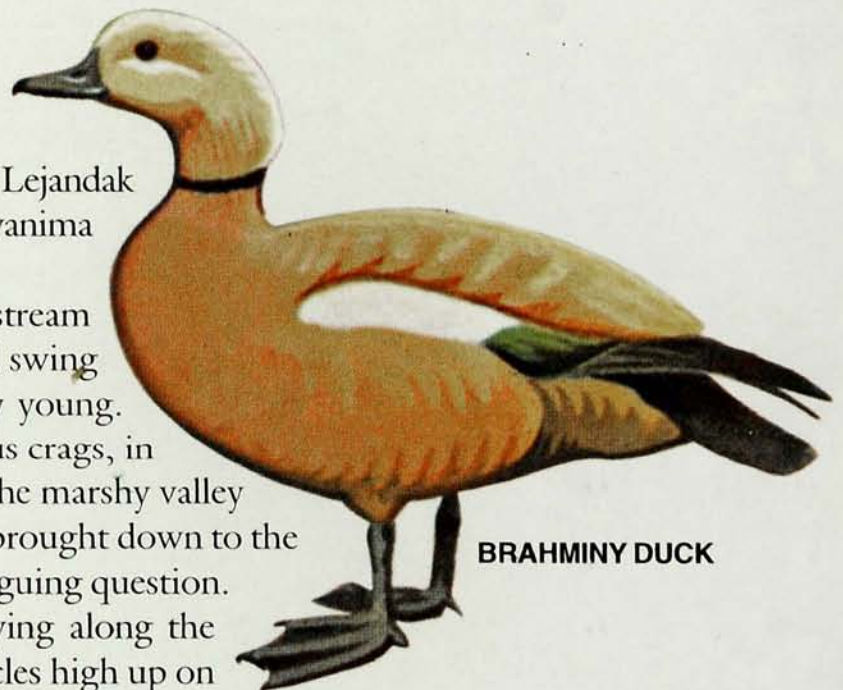
■ **Brahminy Duck** *Tadorna ferruginea* (Vroeg): Observed at Sekang, Ngayeze, Tseti Tso, Ganga Chhu (near Jiu Gompa), Lha Chhu (near Dirapukh and on Barkha Plain), Ding Tso, Lejandak Tso and Jumbo (stream valley), Gemoshisa, Gyanima Tso (Kharkho), Shelehookar, 15 to 17,000 ft.

Common at all lakes. Also in flat boggy stream valleys flanked by high cliffs. Breeding in full swing during June, and many pairs leading downy young. Many breeding high up in holes in precipitous crags, in one case at least 15,000 ft above the level of the marshy valley bottom. How the fluffy hatchlings would be brought down to the water from this great height remained an intriguing question. It was a curious sight to see these ducks flying along the rugged contours and alighting on rock pinnacles high up on the mountainside, behaving in fact very like rock pigeons.

On a shingle bank by Mânasarôwar Lake, a party were observed in some sort of communal (prenuptial?) ceremonies on 13th June. Individuals seemed to be chasing individuals on the ground, and pairs pairs. The aggressive attitude was very vulture-like: neck craned forward stiffly, bill to ground, wings drooped at sides, and tail spread open and depressed, almost scraping the ground. These antics were accompanied by angry notes. They had obviously something to with pair formation and approximated to the incitement displays described by Heinroth (*Die Vogel mittel Europas*, III: 183). 🐾

Bird paintings by John Henry Dick and yak painting by Paul Barruel, © BNHS

Photograph by: Gautam Mallapur/Porpoise Photostock



BRAHMINY DUCK

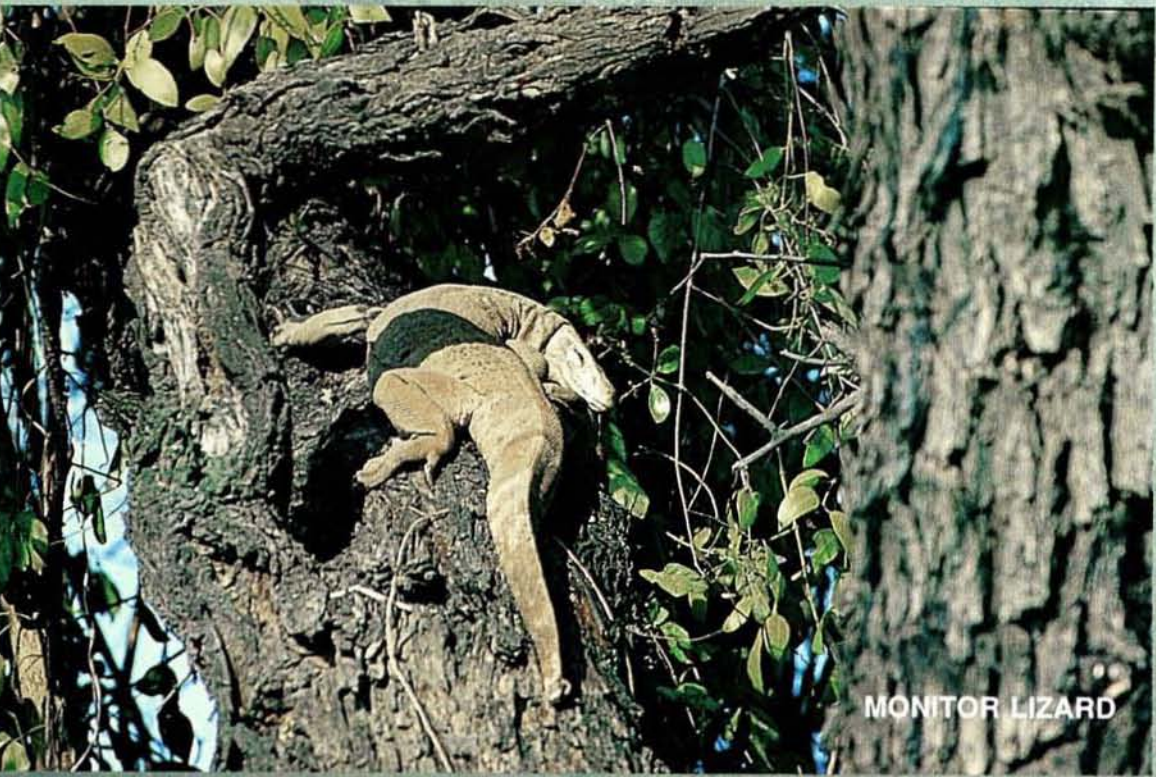
The Centipede's Problem

The centipede was happy quite, until a toad in fun
 said "Pray, which leg goes after which?"
 That worked her mind to such a pitch,
 she lay distracted in a ditch
 considering how to run!

— Anon.



FIVESTRIPED SQUIRREL

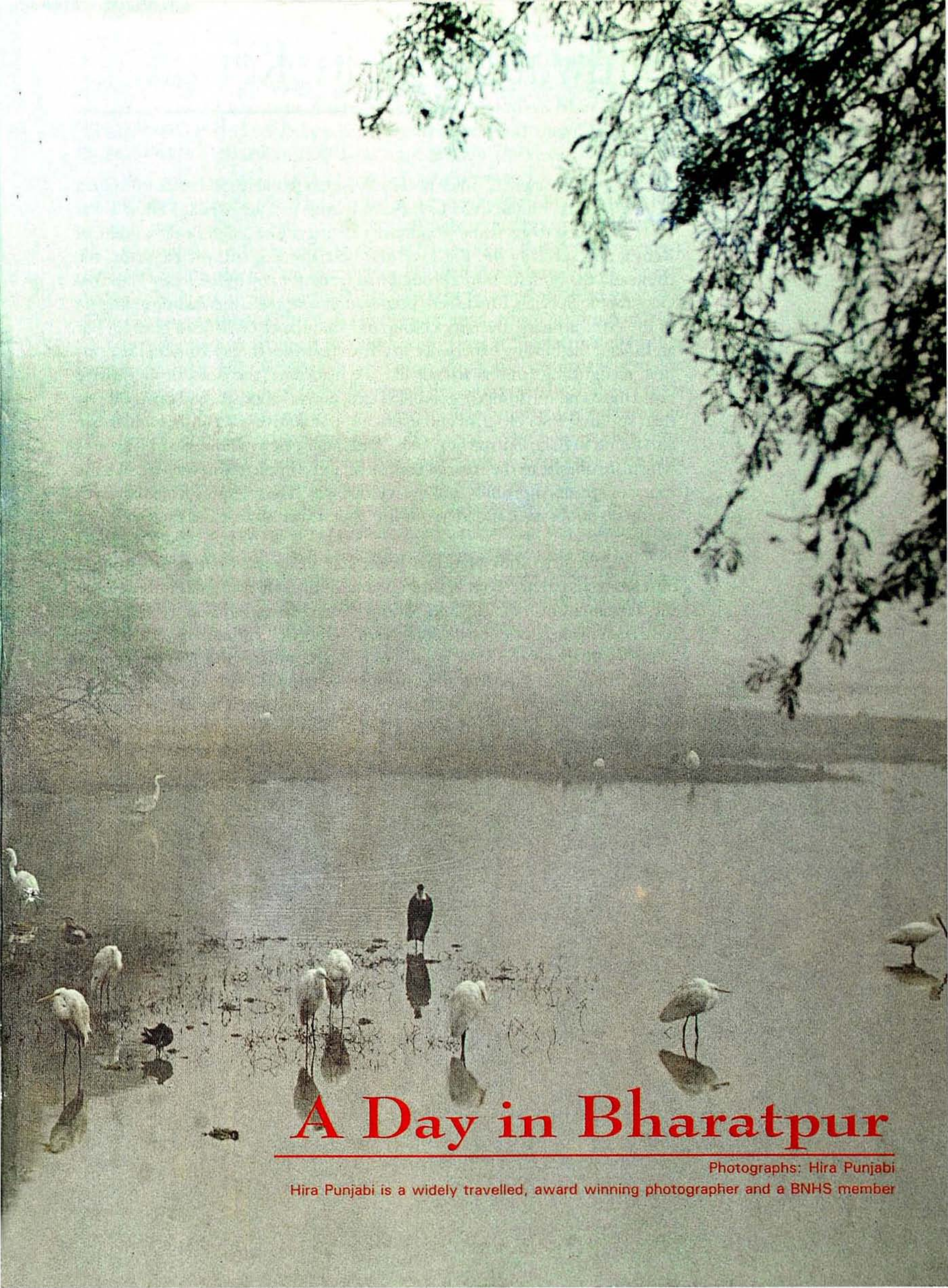


MONITOR LIZARD



PAINTED STORKS





A Day in Bharatpur

Photographs: Hira Punjabi

Hira Punjabi is a widely travelled, award winning photographer and a BNHS member

Birdwatching in Kenya

TEXT: RACHEL REUBEN
PHOTOGRAPHS: HIRA PUNJABI



When I joined 22 other BNHS members in the second week of August 2001, on the third BNHS study tour to East Africa, I knew I was going to get some wonderful viewing of the magnificent wildlife of Kenya, and specially the Big Five: the lion, the leopard, the elephant, the rhino and the buffalo. But nothing I had read, nor any of the many National Geographic Specials I had seen, prepared me for the overwhelming impact of the extraordinary diversity, colour and abundance of African birdlife. For an Indian, the birding experience in Africa provides three distinct pleasures: first, recognising familiar friends like the black kite, the black drongo (here called the common drongo), gull-billed tern, purple moorhen, and many others; then spotting the colourful and exotic representatives of families which are also found in Asia, like the hornbills. And finally, viewing the exciting groups which are unique to the African continent and completely new to us, like the touracos, ground hornbills, and the widowbirds. The migrants from the north would no doubt have added to our lists, but it was August and they were not there.

We went to four National Parks and Reserves, each representing a different ecosystem. From Nairobi, we went directly south to Amboseli, on the Tanzanian border, close to Mount Kilimanjaro. Amboseli's elephants have been made famous by the long-term studies of Cynthia Moss and others. Every elephant in the Park is individually recognised and named. At our lodge, there was a poster advertising \$75 trips by helicopter, in which participants could take part in a daily census of elephants. One of our younger members went racing off to the Reception to enquire, but returned disappointed, as the project was over. Amboseli is swampy, and its waterbodies

OSTRICH



attract a great variety of waterbirds and waders. We went next to Masai Mara National Reserve, in the southwest corner of Kenya, separated by the River Mara from the much larger Serengeti in Tanzania. In August, the great herds of wildebeeste and zebra had crossed into Masai Mara after their annual migration, and the plains were thickly dotted with them. They would return to Serengeti in September and October, when fresh grass had sprouted after the rains. In Mara, we had ample opportunity to see the birds of the savannah grasslands. We then headed north, to Nakuru in the Great Rift Valley. Lake Nakuru is one of a chain of alkaline soda lakes in the valley, and the assemblage of flamingos at the lake has been called "the greatest ornithological spectacle on earth" (see *Hornbill* April-June 2001). At our lodge at Nakuru, there was a wildlife biologist on the staff, who gave us a slide show, and who led bird walks in the mornings, which unfortunately we did not have time to take part in. Our last stop was at Samburu, still further north, dry and arid, with dense vegetation along river courses where one could view concentrations of birds around the cottages in the lodge. This is 'Born Free' country, just north of the area made famous by Joy Adamson in her books about the release into the wild of the lioness Elsa and her cubs. Joy Adamson herself spent the last years of her life in Samburu, returning captive leopards to the wild.

On the swamps and small waterbodies of Amboseli, we saw the sacred and glossy ibises, and the great Goliath heron, rather like the purple heron, but standing about one and a half times higher. There were black-headed herons and the familiar grey herons. Also a large number of Egyptian geese and southern pochard, a dark species with a grey-blue beak, the female of which has curious white markings on the face. We had our first sight of the African jaçana here, and there were quite a large number of flamingos of both species close to the road, so that we could see the differences in size, colour and method of feeding up close; the greater flamingo probing the mud, while the lesser moved its long neck and beak in a semicircular movement, as it filtered algae and small crustaceans from the water.

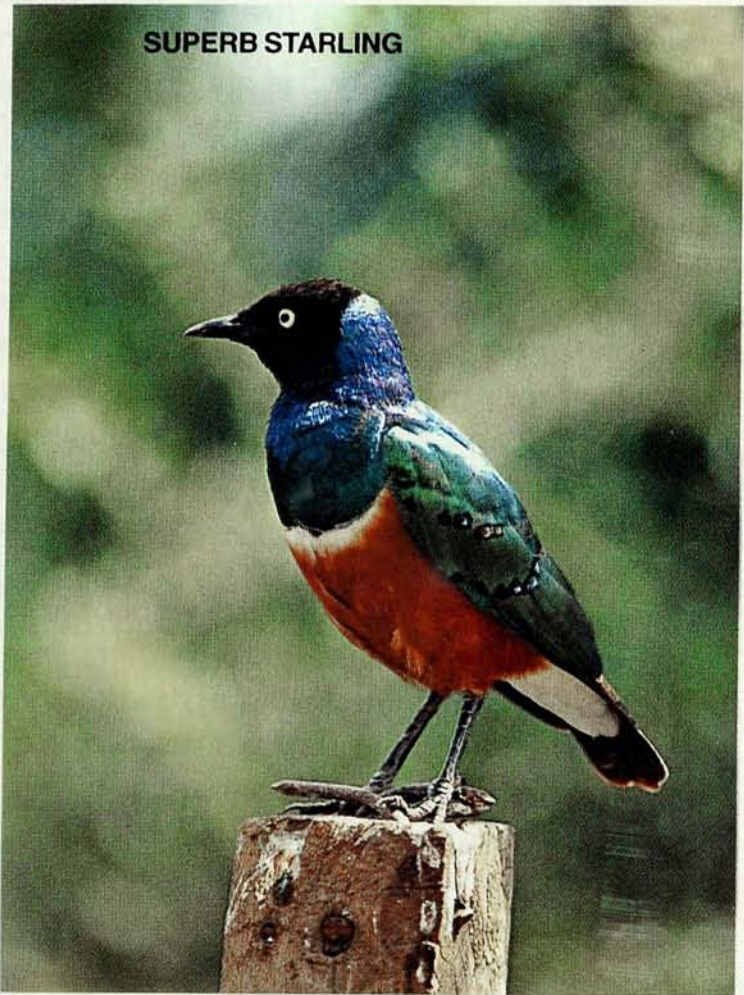
WHITE-HEADED BUFFALO-WEAVER



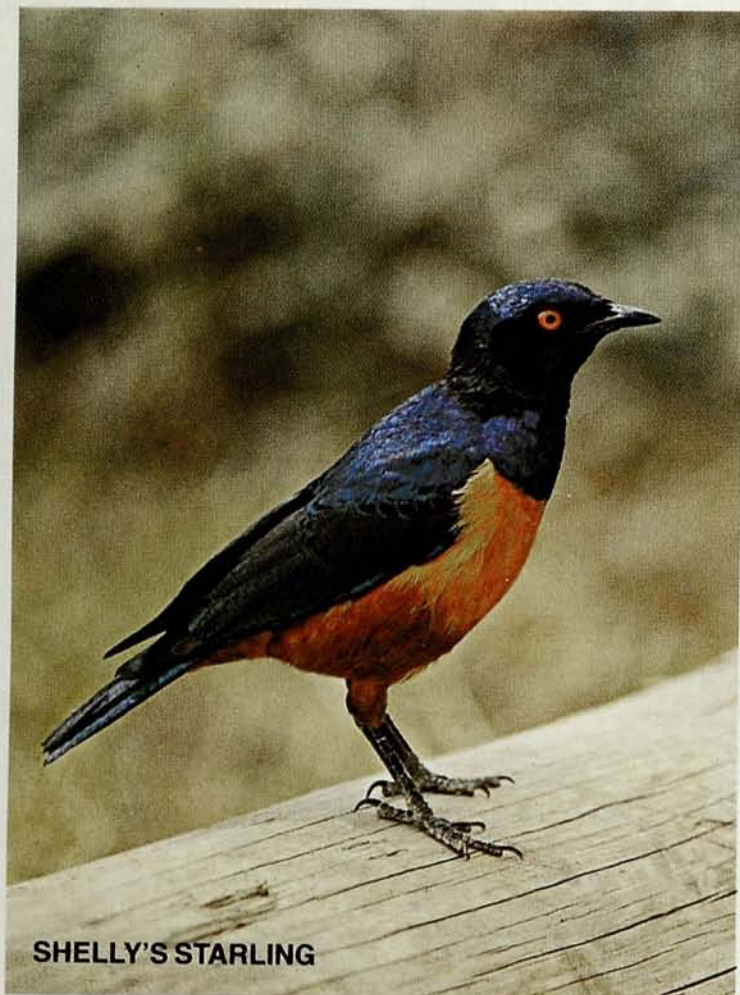
BIRDWATCHING IN KENYA

We saw flamingos again at Lake Nakuru, thousands upon thousands of the lesser flamingo, and I have an unforgettable memory of two rhinos by the lake, silhouetted against a deep pink mass of birds, with dramatic dark rain clouds above. At one end of Lake Nakuru there were over a hundred great white pelicans, looking distinctly rosy themselves!!

Among the commonest birds everywhere was the superb starling, singly or in pairs in open country, and in groups within the parks. And they are superb, with brilliant flashing blue wings and dark heads and rufous orange bellies separated from the dark breasts by a narrow white band. The common starling seems to occupy the same ecological niche as that of our mynas, to which they are related. There were also greater blue-eared (glossy?) starlings, a longtailed starling and a pair of sober coloured wattled starlings near the lodges. Related to the starlings are the red- and yellow-billed oxpeckers, which pick blood sucking ticks off large mammals and are commonly seen on and around them.



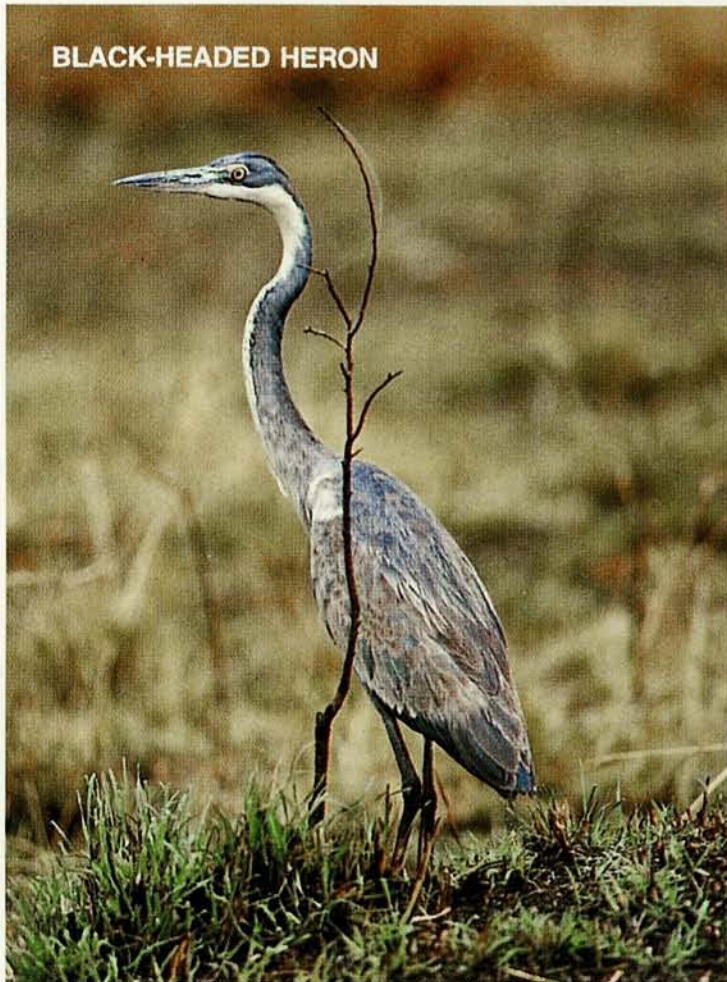
SUPERB STARLING



SHELLY'S STARLING

The common ostrich is the most conspicuous of the large ground birds, and we saw many, adults and immatures, on the plains in the south. There is another species in the arid north, but we were not lucky enough to see it. Then there is the bizarre southern ground hornbill, black with bright red wattles, looking a bit like a turkey and about the same size. Generally they wandered around in pairs, but once we saw one on top of an *Acacia*, so they *can* fly! Grey crowned cranes were quite common, in pairs or small groups, and the storks were represented by the scavenging maribou and the yellowbilled stork in Masai Mara. And then there is the secretary bird, which is really an aberrant eagle, which strides about with the plumes on its head looking like pens tucked behind the ear, hence the name.

Smaller ground birds that we saw included the yellownecked spurfowl and guinea fowl, of which the helmeted is the commonest. We identified three lapwings, the blacksmith, the crowned and the black-winged. A group of five pintailed chestnut bellied sandgrouse flew up from



BLACK-HEADED HERON

the road on the last day, and we saw a solitary white-bellied bustard. There were large numbers of pipits and finch larks, but frustratingly, we did not have the time to glass and identify them. But we did see the African pied wagtail around the lodges. The red-billed hornbill was everywhere in the savannah and open country, and we also had a sighting of the more uncommon yellow-billed hornbill. The common lilac breasted roller looked very much like its Indian counterpart, but had two long pinfeathers in the tail, and there were many little bee eaters. The sooty chat was plentiful in Masai Mara, but was replaced by the rather similar northern anteater-chat in Nakuru and Samburu. We also saw a white-browed coucal, dusty brown and streaked, flying heavily in the bush just like our own coucal.

One of the most characteristic sights in east Africa is the numerous round weaver bird nests near the ends of the branches of the umbrella acacia and other trees. There are forty species of weavers in the region, and the Field Guide with me has four plates of *Ploceus* weavers alone. Some of them

do build helmet shaped nests, but these are rather crude in comparison with our baya. Everywhere in the savannah we saw large flocks of weavers, but the only ones I managed to identify were the grey-capped social-weaver and the white-headed buffalo-weaver, with large white patches on the dark wings and an orange-red rump conspicuous in flight.

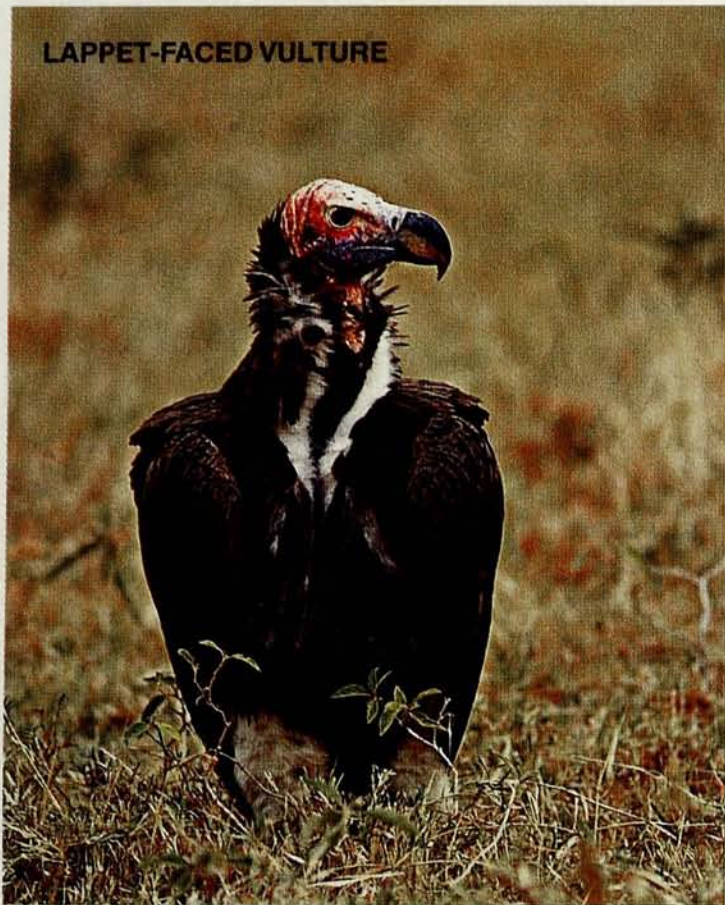
East Africa is a paradise for the raptor watcher. We saw three vulture species on the Mara plains, happily free from the disease which has stricken ours. These were the African white-backed vulture, the lappet-faced vulture and Rüppell's griffin, the last a splendid, large, spotted vulture. The African wood-owl roosting in a big tree, and a pair of spotted eagle-owls in another, tolerated our close approach. There was a tantalising variety of buzzards, eagles and hawks which we had no time to stop for, but which definitely included the black-shouldered kite hovering, the Augur buzzard sitting lumpishly on telegraph poles, and perhaps the martial eagle. The majestic African fish-eagle was to be seen near the River Mara. The crowning



YELLOWNECKED SPURFOWL

BIRDWATCHING IN KENYA


LAPPET-FACED VULTURE



moment for me also came in Masai Mara. While everyone was taking photographs of giraffes, I looked up and saw a bird overhead gliding across the plain and settling in a tree. The outline was characteristic, wings very broad based near the body and tapering. The white wing linings contrasted with the black body and the red legs protruded beyond the short chestnut tail. A Bateleur, one of Africa's most interesting eagles! The other cherished memory is of the Gabar goshawk on top of a tree, an attractive hawk, pale grey with a white rump and coral red beak and legs.

Some of us were fortunate to see a widowbird, with wonderful long, black curving plumes, and we all saw the white-bellied go-away-bird, which is the commonest of the touracos, and the speckled mousebird. I also saw a little flock of crimson-rumped waxbills and my personal tally was 75 by the end of the trip.

I wonder if I have been able to make you want to go birding for yourselves in east Africa? Want to outdo my tally? You can probably double the number of species, or more, if birding is the main purpose of your tour. A tip for serious birders: the drivers of the Combis that you travel

in are also trained and experienced guides, and they have with them *THE BIRDS OF EAST AFRICA* by Williams *et al.* But this book is now outdated and covers only about 650 birds. It will add greatly to your enjoyment to have your own field guide right at the beginning of the tour. Make a quick visit to the Text Book Centre, a bookshop on the first floor in one of Nairobi's big shopping malls. There is a whole range of field guides to suit various pockets and levels of interest. At the top of the range is the *BIRDS OF KENYA AND NORTHERN TANZANIA* by Zimmerman, Turner and Pearson (1999), covering about 1,100 birds, but there is also a good Collins field guide, and various pictorial guides to common species. There are also maps and books on trees, wild flowers and mammals. Across the way is a shoe store, selling tough Hunter boots of camel leather, and downstairs you can buy mineral water for hot, thirsty bird drives. Good luck and happy birding! 

Dr. Rachel Reuben is a former Director of the Centre for Research in Medical Entomology, Madurai.

Hira Punjabi is a widely travelled, award winning photographer.

Both are BNHS members.

WHITE-BELLIED BUSTARD





Distribution questions

THE NOMINATE race of the lesser spotted eagle *Aquila pomarina pomarina* is a palaeartic bird, as rightly pointed out by Mr. T.J. Roberts (*Hornbill*, July-September, 2001). But, according to the HANDBOOK of Salim Ali and Dillon Ripley, the form that occurs and breeds in India is a distinct subspecies, *Aquila pomarina hastate* (Lesson), which is endemic to the Subcontinent, and is rare and endangered. The confusion arose because of my probably misguided desire to keep clear of subspecific names in a popular article in *Hornbill*.

Rachel Reuben
Mumbai.



A question of convenience?

I HAVE been reading Lavkumar Khacher's most interesting notes on birds in your Journal, especially the one in *JBNHS 97(3): 15* about golden oriole using plastic sheet in weaving its nest. Clearly the bird preferred convenience, as we all do when opting for plastic.

I may add here that about 3 years ago, on a visit to Agra (Western Uttar Pradesh) I saw a beautifully built nest of a pair of redvented bulbul, made entirely of strands of PVC, which are normally used for tying parcels.

The nest was built in a flowering Madhavilata (Rangoon Creeper), and though we left it undisturbed, we realised within a few days that the nest had been abandoned with no evidence of egg laying or any other use.

Vibha Kaul
Mumbai.



BNHS Stalwarts Remembered

I

I WAS very sad to read of the death of Mr. Humayun Abdulali, what an enormous loss that is for the BNHS. I did not know him personally, but I think that all members must feel

as though they did, as he was such an integral part of the organization. His legacy will live on for many years and members into the future will be grateful to his dedicated methodical work on the BNHS collection. Please convey our sincere condolences to his family members.

Joanna Van Gruisen
By email.

II

I WOULD like to add my own appreciation of J.S. Serrao to those which have already appeared in *Hornbill*. Mr. Serrao was such a kind man, so helpful to visitors to the Society and especially to its large library; so proud of the Society, of Bombay, and of India's wildlife Heritage. It was a delight to have known him, and my wife and I look back with such pleasure talking with him about the history of the Society, looking up and reading old research papers together, and going to Borivli with him. We will miss him greatly.

Prof. Colin Groves
By email.



Some more on pistol shrimps

I WOULD like to add some more information to that given by Beefsea for pistol shrimps in *Hornbill*, January-March, 2001.

When the knob on the finger of the claw is thrust into the socket on the thumb, the water from the socket is squeezed out at a velocity of 30 m/sec. As the pressure in the socket decreases, the water vaporises. The vapour bubble grows in size, but slows down in speed, and finally collapses with the decreasing pressure — a process called cavitation. Pistol shrimps communicate in this manner; there may be as many as 10,000 of them on a mud flat.

Pooja M. Kanal
Jhansi.



View Point

Looking at a bleak future

At the end of 25 years, we at the "Hornbill" find that the passage quoted below conveys precisely the status of our natural resources.

"We lose at least 10,000 square kilometres of forest each year and at least 50,000 square kilometres of dense forest canopy are thinned out by the timber mafia. The central government puts the loss each year from forests at 50,000 crores or 1,200 million dollars. The actual level of depletion could be far higher. Few realize that 300 rivers and perennial streams flow from the forests of the tiger. Natural resources are exploited by politicians and businessmen; the exploitation is then rationalized in the name of 'development'. It is a partnership in crime that cripples this country each day as the face of our land is ripped apart and scarred; rivers are drowned in so many toxic chemicals that river water has become a lethal cocktail of poison. Environment and wildlife laws are violated and every structure of enforcement is paralysed. Resources allocated to protect our environment add up to 50 crores each year when our loss is 50,000 crores annually."

— VALMIK THAPAR

Quoted from WILD TIGERS OF RANTHAMBHORE

KNOCKED OUT?



The Story of Goral

A Mountain Goat

HORNBILL

25 Years

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS: A.J.T. JOHNSINGH

As a boy, I enjoyed reading Jim Corbett's stories on man-eating tigers and leopards. One of the narrations I particularly liked was an episode in 'The Man-eaters of Kumaon', which describes the hunting of goral, when Corbett was on the trail of the Champawat man-eater. While camping in Pati village (Pali according to Corbett), he asked the villagers whether he could be led to goral, promising to take one for his camp and two for the village. Three men from the village readily agreed and took the hunter to a ridge where goral were said to be plentiful. On reaching the base of the ridge, Corbett and his men sat under a tree, quietly watching the slope. Soon, a movement nearly 200 m up the ridge attracted his attention. It turned out to be a goral watching them. Corbett lay down, held his rifle against the root of an oak tree, took aim at the white throat of the goral, and fired from an uncomfortable angle. The villagers saw no movement on the slope and concluded that Corbett had mistakenly shot at a dry bush. Moments later, a goral materialised from out of the cover and started sliding and rolling downward. This disturbed two more goral, which jumped over the bushes, stood still for a few seconds, sounding their characteristic wheezing alarm, and ran rapidly along the slope. Corbett swiftly shot them down one after the other. All three goral rolled down and reached the tree where the party had been sitting. The villagers were so impressed by this performance that they later spread the story that Corbett's magic bullet not only killed the hidden goral, but also brought them to the place where he was waiting. Instantly, Corbett became a hero and



won the confidence of the villagers who thereafter willingly followed him in the man-eater terrain. Interesting information on the goral emerges from this narration. They live in small groups, rest under cover in the noon heat, and when alarmed, run for a short distance before standing still to sound the alarm. In March 1985, when I joined the Wildlife Institute of India, one of my immediate desires was to see a goral in its natural habitat. The opportunity arose in December 1986, when I was camping in Dholkhand in the Rajaji National Park, almost adjacent to the Institute. One morning I suggested to my colleague Dr. G.S. Rawat, a man with immense experience in the Himalaya, that we should explore the high ridge in front of Dholkhand forest bungalow, which to me looked like a perfect goral habitat. We clambered up the slope, and within two hours saw five goral. Soon we decided to initiate a private study on goral in the National Park (NP) during weekends and on other holidays. When we explained our ideas to Dr. S.P. Goyal, another colleague who before joining the Institute had climbed only the sand dunes of Thar desert, he willingly decided to join us, and we began working as a team. We named the area Goral Ridge.

The goral is a stocky, goat-like animal 65 to 70 cm at the shoulder and 20 to 25 kg in weight. Both sexes have horns and a conspicuous white throat patch. It is difficult to distinguish between the sexes from a distance. There are, however, some differences in their horns. The male's horns are thicker at the base, and when viewed from the front, more divergent than those of females. Taxonomists have placed the goral in a group popularly known as 'goat-antelopes' (Tribe *Rupicaprini*), said to be the common ancestor of both goats and sheep. The tribe seems to have an Asian origin. *Pachygazella grangeri* of the Pliocene, which is about 10 million years old, found in fossil deposits in China, was the probable ancestor of the rupicaprines. The *Rupicaprini* once had an extensive distribution in Eurasia and possibly in Africa. For example, a large goral, *Gallogoral meneghinii*, lived in the past in areas around present day Italy. Living relatives of goral are the serow *Nemorhaedus sumatraensis* of south-east Asia,



Goral prefer open habitats with good grass cover, and avoid shrub-rich patches, particularly where the shrubs exceeded their shoulder height

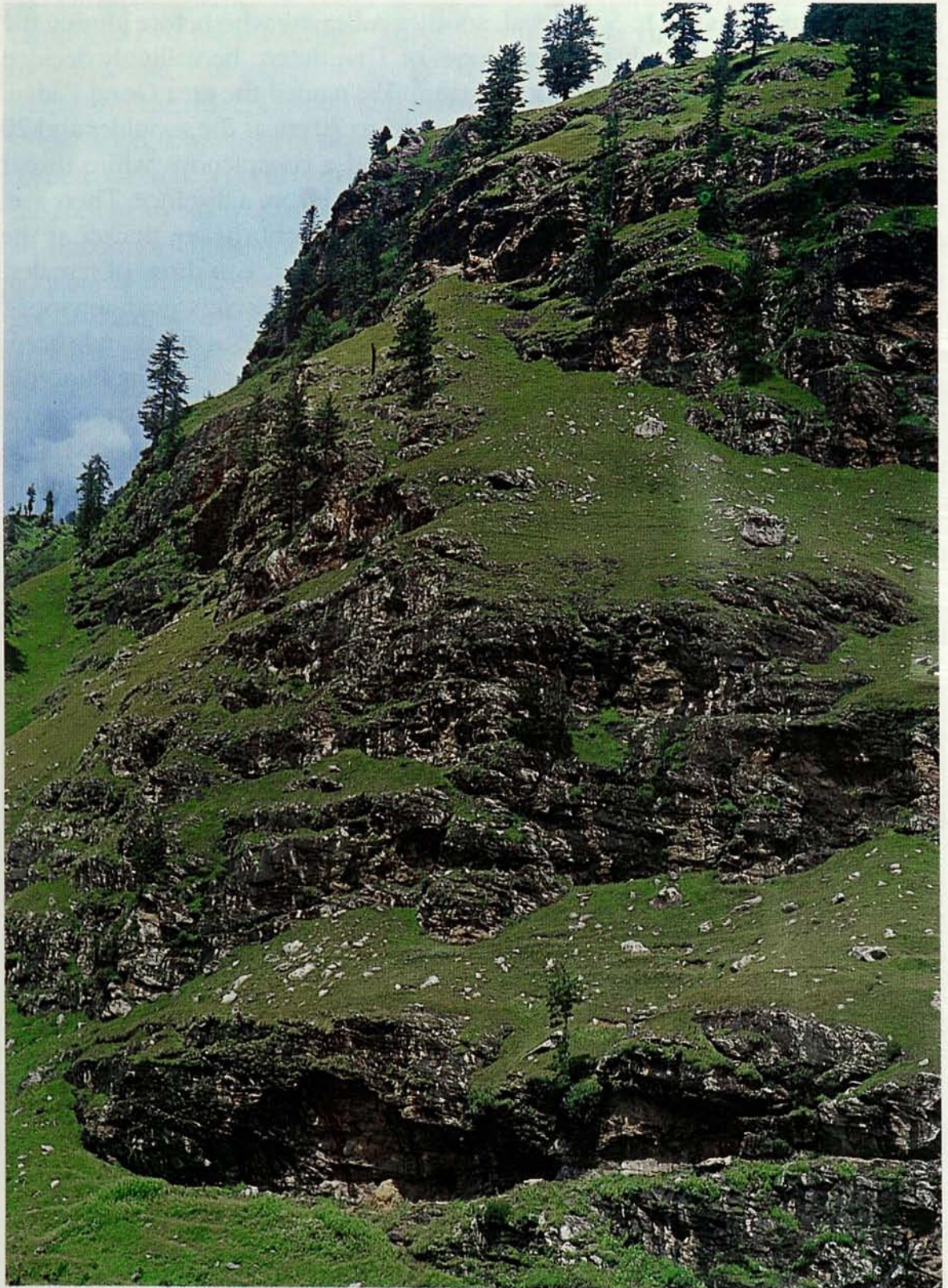


GORAL — A MOUNTAIN GOAT



Taiwan and Japan; Rocky Mountain goat *Oreamnos americanus*, of North America; and the chamois *Rupicapra rupicapra*, of Europe.

Goral has a wide distribution, from the Indus-Kohistan region in Pakistan in the western Himalaya, across the eastern Himalaya, to Myanmar, Thailand, and in a few scattered areas in South Korea, North Korea, eastern Russia and the adjoining regions of China. Along this arc, which is discontinuous now, there are several species and subspecies. Within the Himalayan region of the Indian subcontinent, there are three species: the Himalayan goral (*Nemorhaedus goral*), with two subspecies: grey goral *N.g. bedfordi* in the western Himalaya,



There are three species of goral within the Himalayan region of the Indian subcontinent

GORAL — A MOUNTAIN GOAT

and brown goral *N.g. goral* in the eastern Himalaya), Evan's long-tailed goral (*N. caudatus evansi* in Nagaland and possibly in Assam) and Burmese red goral (*N. baileyi cranbrookii* in northeast Arunachal Pradesh). Both Evan's long-tailed goral and the Burmese red goral are found in Myanmar. Thailand has one species (Evan's long-tailed goral). China has four subspecies: Chinese long-tailed goral (*N.c. caudatus*), Tibetan red goral *N. baileyi baileyi*, Grey long-tailed goral (*N.c. griseus*) and Korean or Amur long-tailed goral (*N.c. raddeanus*). This species occurs in North Korea, South Korea and the Russian montane forests along the border with China and the coastal cliffs overlooking the sea of Japan.



When alarmed, goral run for a short distance before standing still to sound the alarm

GORAL — A MOUNTAIN GOAT



In India, goral is found in the Himalaya and Shivaliks of Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal (formerly part of Uttar Pradesh), Sikkim, West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh. Goral is also reported to occur in the state of Nagaland and Assam. They prefer varying altitudes, from 200 m in the Uttaranchal Shivaliks, to 4,000 m in the Garhwal Himalayas. There could be 1,00,000 goral in the Indian Himalaya. The action plan for Caprinae, compiled by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), reports that poaching is the single major problem threatening goral throughout its range.

Our research resulted in the collection of much new data on this little known species. Goral are primarily grazers, although they feed upon tender shoots of certain shrubs and herbs when available. On the Goral Ridge, we observed that when langur (*Semnopithecus entellus*) were feeding up in the trees, the goral tended to group below, feeding on fallen leaves, flowers and fruits. We have also seen sambar (*Cervus unicolor*), chital (*Axis axis*) and barking deer (*Muntiacus muntjak*) join goral in such situations. On rainy days, goral can be seen throughout the day. In winter, however, there appears to be a morning and evening peak in feeding. The animals tend to rest for the remaining part of the day, and if the weather is cool, they may be seen basking. In summer, goral retreat into cover as early as 7.30 a.m. emerging only late in the evening when the heat has died down. When thirsty, they will, nevertheless, visit waterholes even in the heat of the noonday sun, usually choosing a water source close to steep ridges.

Approximately sixty per cent of our goral sightings were of solitary animals, or of females accompanied by a yearling or a kid or both. The largest group comprised seven animals, which rested on a gentle slope after feeding on the lush grass of the monsoon. We frequently came across the pugmarks of leopard and tiger on the Goral Ridge. Analysis of tiger scats (droppings) indicated that the large but agile tiger does occasionally prey on the nimble-footed goral.

From what we gathered, based on walking transects, and wanderings over the hilly tract of Rajaji NP, which is around 300 sq. km, we estimated that there could be about 1,000 goral in the Park. The Ganga, however, divides the population. West of Ganga river the best concentrations appeared to be in two areas, the Dholkhand and the Bom Dhera ridges. Both areas are free from cattle grazing and tree lopping, a scourge all through the Park. Both locations also have water in the valley, even in summer,



Trapping a goral with your camera is not an easy task, it requires a good hiding place and lots of patience

but they suffer the problem of *bhabar* grass (*Euliopsis binata*) cutting by villagers in winter. Fortunately, poaching is not a major problem here, a fact that is reflected in the high density of sambar and barking deer.

One benefit of cutting the grass in winter is the increased availability of protein-rich tender grasses in summer, a boon to ungulates. Probably the Shivalik habitat could do with some form of resource manipulation, like controlled burning of grasses, in order to provide more nutritious food in summer, leading to a higher density of wild ungulates. Grass cutting by villagers, which seems to be uncontrollable, leads to two conservation problems. One is stealing of predator kills by the grass cutters all through the winter, and the other the erosion caused in the fragile Shivaliks by the rolling of grass bundles from hilltops. Grass cutting, along with other disturbances such as cattle grazing and poaching, can gradually lead to the decline of prey and predators, and therefore should be stopped at any cost.

Our studies in Rajaji inspired two of our students, Charudutt Mishra and Anand Pendharkar, both nimble-footed like the goral, to take up research on this mountain goat for their M.Sc. dissertation. Charu carried out his study in Majathal Wildlife Sanctuary, and Anand in Simbalbara Wildlife Sanctuary (both in Himachal Pradesh) and the adjacent Darpur Reserved forest in Haryana. Charu found that goral fed almost entirely on grass. In his study area, goral preferred open habitats with good grass cover, and avoided shrub-rich patches, particularly where the shrubs exceeded their shoulder height. The goral was partial to steep ($>30^\circ$) slopes. Anand observed that goral were not particularly social. Females were more social, while males associated with female groups only during the breeding period in November.

Having read through accounts on goral, I realized that so far, few good pictures of this species have been taken in the wild. Therefore, I took it up as a challenge to take a good photograph of goral using the immensely satisfying traditional method, hiding and waiting in an appropriate location. As a result of

my intensive and extensive wanderings and observations, I discovered two places which offered the potential for photography. One is the ridge top opposite the Dholkhand forest bungalow, and the other, two small watering points in a valley, about 8 km from Chilla on the Chilla-Laldhang road, east of the Ganga river. Over my long years of field research, I have discovered that animals seldom see people if they remain hidden in trees, and to me, waiting



Female goral are more social than the males who associate with them only during the breeding period



GORAL — A MOUNTAIN GOAT


HORNBILL
25 Years

When thirsty, goral head towards waterholes, usually choosing a water source close to steep ridges. ▶




in the trees was much more exciting than remaining hidden in a ground hide! Therefore, in the valley habitat, I made a simple hide up in a *Mallotus philippinensis* tree, hardly 15 m from a slushy area near a natural salt lick, which was frequented by goral during the hot hours in summer. I have taken some good pictures sitting in this tree hide, and recorded some interesting observations on the behaviour of goral.

However, I got more pleasure from waiting and photographing goral from two small trees on the top of Goral Ridge. In the course of time, I realized that photography was possible only in summer, late in the evening, when goral left the cool cover of the valley habitat and came to the ridge top to feed. This, however, necessitated a steep climb at around 2 p.m., when it was exceedingly hot. One *Ougeinia oojeinensis* tree at the edge of the ridge top, and the other a *Grewia elastica* tree about 10 m away, near a trail frequently used by goral, gave me the necessary hideouts on the ridge top. I found it scary to sit on the *O. oojeinensis* tree, as it swayed even in the light wind. I was afraid that strong wind might uproot the tree, and a straight fall of 50 m or so would make my wildlife adventure a fatal accident. Once when I sat on this tree, a female goral came right under me and started feeding on the leaves that I had plucked and thrown down, to improve the visibility around. The leaf of *O. oojeinensis*, a leguminous species, is reported to be highly nutritious. I could have easily jumped on to the back of the goral 3 m below! In spite of these close encounters, I eventually gave up sitting on this tree.

One of my visits to the *Grewia elastica* tree is worth recording. It was the time when there were reports of terrorists from Punjab spilling into the confines of Rajaji National Park. The temperature soared over 40 °C as I made my way up the ridge. The oppressive heat and the steep climb forced me to stop every 50 m or so. On my way up, while passing a dense patch of *Bauhinia vahlii* along the ridge, I flushed two goral resting in the shade. A short while later, a sambar doe with a yearling hind and a fawn, resting in the scanty shade of trees, ran out of cover and went up the hill. By the time I settled down in my hide amidst the foliage, it was around 3 p.m. An eerie silence enveloped me. The air was still and not a leaf rustled.

When the sun began to set, I noticed a palpable change in the mood of the jungle. A steady cool breeze made the branches dance. And several animals seemed to waken from their slumber. A group of sambar and even an elephant bull appeared out of nowhere, and began to feed on the valley vegetation. The alarm calls of chital, sambar and barking deer all around the ridge indicated that the time had come for predators to get on the move. I even heard the distinct footsteps of a goral on the dry leaf litter as it slowly made its way up from its resting site through the forest, towards the grass-covered slope, which I faced. It was a male, feeding peacefully on the tender shoots of the understory vegetation. When he reached the grassy strip, he began to gorge on the green leaves of a bamboo-like grass, *Neyraudia arundinacea*, and the sprouting shoots of *bhabar* grass. I sat motionless amidst the foliage and allowed him to approach within five metres of me, and surprised him by taking a photograph. The sound of the camera startled him, and he ran away from me, leaping effortlessly 20 m down the steep slope. He then stood looking in my direction, stamping his forefoot and whistling his alarm to the jungle at large. I froze till he slowly and nervously resumed feeding.

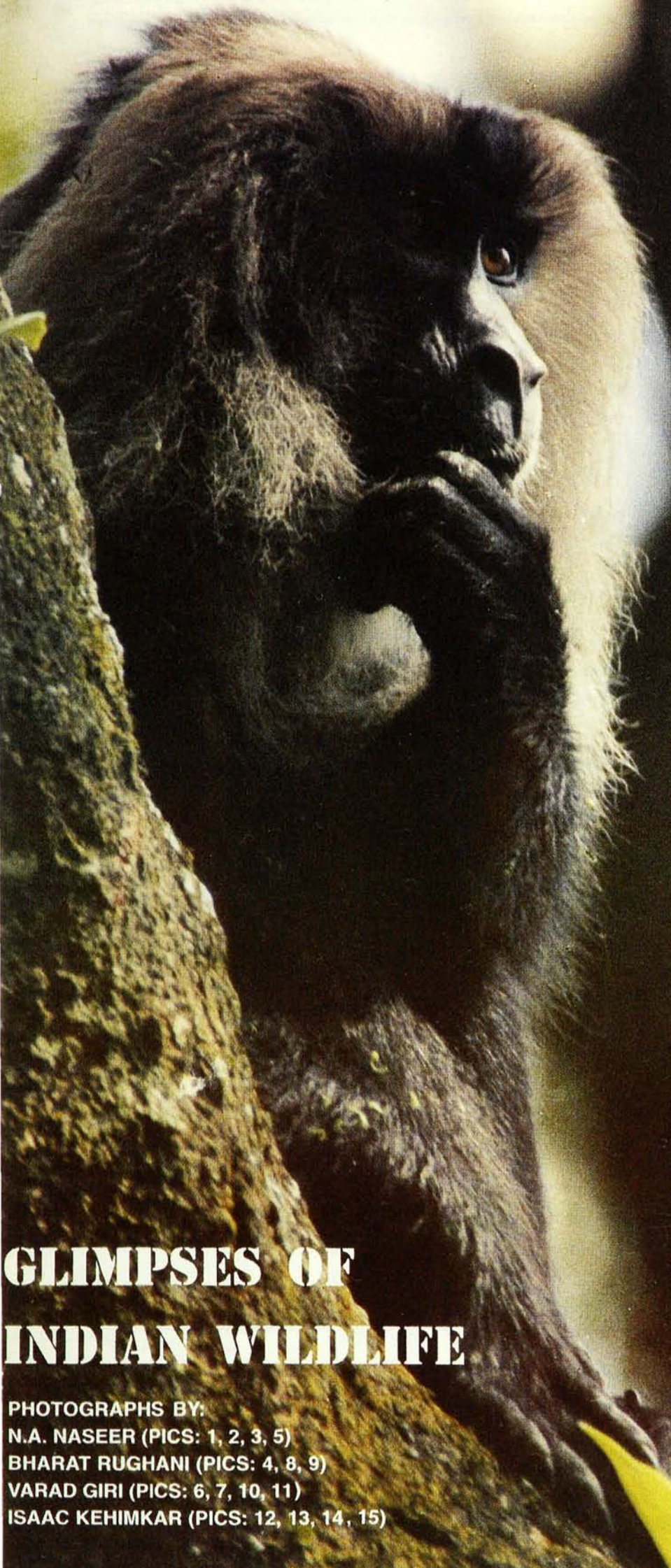
When the sun touched the horizon, I decided to leave. As I started out, I thought to myself that if there were no elephants on the way, it would take me around 40 minutes to reach the Dholkhand forest bungalow. I did not worry much about elephants, as I was confident of avoiding them if I encountered them on the path. Ironically, of all the imagined dangers of the wilds, the ones I feared the most were from my own species, the terrorists from Punjab. I am glad that the terror is now no more than a bad memory, and I hope Rajaji National Park, with its exquisite wildlife and enchanting goral habitats, will remain a safe haven for wildlifers to wander, wait, photograph and enjoy wildlife. For the goral, I wish that a much stricter control on poaching be put in place, to enable this interesting species to survive in the natural habitats across its distributional range. 

Dr. A.J.T. Johnsingh is the deputy director of the Wildlife Institute of India. He is a well known wildlifer and has been associated with BNHS for a very long time.

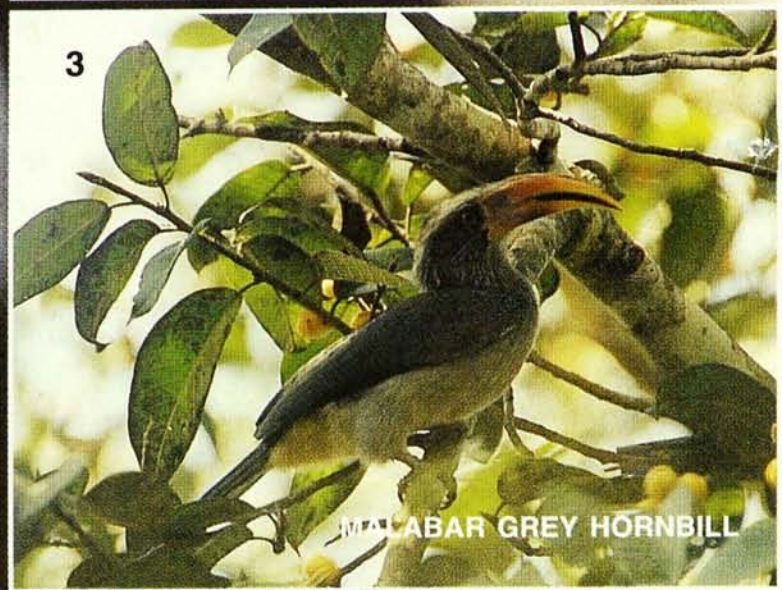
“Bugs are not going to inherit the earth — they own it now.
So we might as well make peace with the Landlord.”

— Thomas Eisner





ELEPHANT



MALABAR GREY HORNBILL



INDIAN PITTA



DHOLE

GLIMPSES OF INDIAN WILDLIFE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY:
N.A. NASEER (PICS: 1, 2, 3, 5)
BHARAT RUGHANI (PICS: 4, 8, 9)
VARAD GIRI (PICS: 6, 7, 10, 11)
ISAAC KEHIMKAR (PICS: 12, 13, 14, 15)

6



MALABAR GLIDING FROG

10

CATLEG SPIDER



COMMON OWL MOTH



SEA GULLS



11

MONTANE TRINKET SNAKE



WHITE PELICANS

12



PAINTED HANDMAIDEN MOTH
IN GLIRICIDIA

13



HILL TURMERIC

14



GRAHAM'S GROUNDSEL

15



FLAME OF THE FOREST

REMEMBERING SÁLIM ALI

Birds in Celebration

LT. GEN. BALJIT SINGH (RETD.)

PAINTINGS BY CARL D'SILVA AND J.P. IRANI, © BNHS



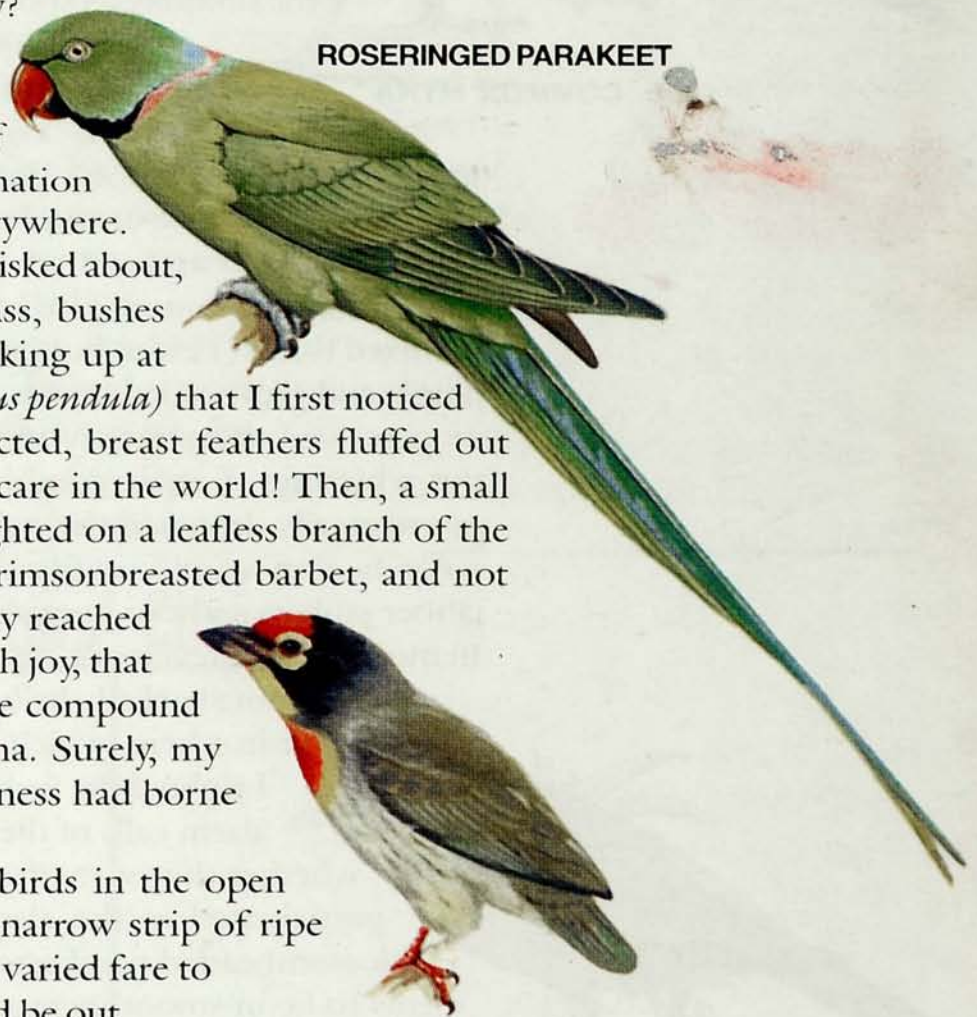
After a week of wet, damp and gloomy days, the dawn of 12th November, 1999 was brilliant. It was to be a memorable birding morning, triggered by the assembly of crimson breasted barbets.

Unlike Homo sapiens, birds need no special occasion for celebration. But surely this was a special day as it was the birth anniversary of their friend — Dr. Sálim Ali.

There were fourteen crimsonbreasted barbets, taking the early morning sun on 12th November, 1999. All of them were perched on leafless branches on the crown of a tall tree. These barbets rarely flock in such numbers. Surely this was a special and beautiful kind of happening? Perhaps in celebration of Sálim Ali's birth anniversary?

After a week of wet, damp, gloomy days, the dawn was brilliant: a clear blue sky above, a mere touch of breeze, shafts of sunlight creating slanting tunnels of illumination through the mist, and vibrant birdsong everywhere. Our dogs picked up the morning mood and frisked about, sniffing so many scents from blades of grass, bushes and dew drenched soil. It was then, on looking up at one of the tallest trees, a dhontha, (*Anogeissus pendula*) that I first noticed five roseringed parakeets, their necks retracted, breast feathers fluffed out and relaxed in deep meditation, with not a care in the world! Then, a small bird flew across my field of vision, and alighted on a leafless branch of the dhontha. There was no mistake, it was a crimsonbreasted barbet, and not just one, but two, three, four ... and the tally reached an incredible fourteen! My heart skipped with joy, that the three acre wilderness within our cottage compound had become an attractive refuge for avifauna. Surely, my wife's perseverance in nurturing this wilderness had borne fruit!

It seemed like a good day to watch birds in the open country. So I took the village road along a narrow strip of ripe paddy fields. I knew that they offer rich and varied fare to birds, and it was just the day that birds would be out in numbers. I was not one bit disappointed. Perched on power transmission cables were three whitebreasted kingfishers, one facing me, and two looking away. Nothing shows up the true profile of a bird sharper than a cable perch against a crisp



ROSERINGED PARAKEET

CRIMSONBREASTED BARBET



blue sky, and nothing better displays the rich brilliance of plumage than the morning sun. The two birds looking away had their wings, mantle and upper tail coverts sparkling with turquoise iridescence, in sharp contrast with the plumage of the nape, a rich deep brown tinged with scarlet. The bird facing me was conspicuous by its dense, milk white, triangular patch of breast feathers, imparting an exaggerated reddish pink translucent brilliance to its long, broad bill. Some 50 paces southwards was a little brown dove. They are uncommon



WHITEBREASTED KINGFISHER



COMMON MYNA

here and I simply had to halt discreetly in the shadow of a tree and take a good long look at the mellow pastel colours of its plumage. I am ignorant of the new classification and names of birds, but enchanted by the new avatar of this bird as the laughing dove, derived no doubt from the lilt of its song. From the far edge of the paddy, a lone ring dove sang in salutation to the dawn. Strangely, the ubiquitous spotted dove was in hiding.

The mynas were in high celebration, as we Indians know best how: loud, garrulous and don't give a damn for the sensibilities of those around us! They perched atop bushes scattered in the paddies, an abundance of common, pied and brahminy, mostly in mixed flocks. Fewer, but prominent also, were the jungle and greyheaded mynas. Whether out of mischief or perceived danger, they would all take wing, and the whirring of their combined wingbeats momentarily drowned their chatter. In a few seconds, they would swiftly alight on the bushes, instantly resuming their jabber jabber, without prejudice to whatever had been the cause for alarm. In moments of irreverence, my wife calls them the Army Ladies' Club session!

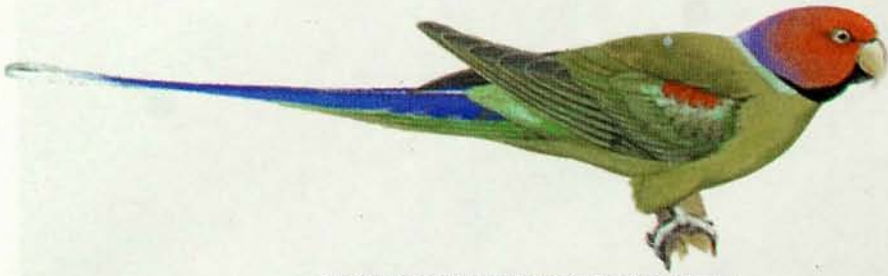


PIED MYNA



BRAHMINY MYNA

The rufousbacked shrike and its blackheaded subspecies is a winter visitor here, which I have noticed over the past seven years now. I sighted the first rufousbacks of the year that morning, but the alarm calls of the mynas drove them off before I could fathom whether they were the blackheaded subspecies. Among others who participated in the alarm call were a flight of darting, screeching blossomheaded parakeets. They seldom fly a straight course, their fun seems to lie in smoothly executed aerial hi-jinks. I watch with fascination as they attain full throttle in less than 5 seconds of flight and when coming to a halt, terminate it with almost instant zero deceleration to alight on a perch nonchalantly — the ultimate in flight dynamics that still eludes aeronautical engineers.



BLOSSOMHEADED PARAKEET

Less than a kilometer away from where I started the walk, the paddy fields ended at a large deep rainwater pond. One little grebe parent was busy imparting the ways of their world to her brood of three. They went about in an ambience of 'one with the universe' happiness, paddling, diving and chattering with each other. One pond heron sat in deep concentration for its prey, while a common sandpiper walked up and down the waters' edge, every now and then thrusting his long beak into slush and simultaneously flicking his stubby tail up and down. The lantana bushes that fringed the pond were alive with the calls of redvented bulbuls. The jungle babblers rummaged among the leaves, and not far from where I stood showed up a tailor




RUFUSBACKED SHRIKE

bird. I walked home in the company of many spotted munias, in parties of 5-8, they looked for food on the dirt road. No sooner than I reached the threshold of their safety limits, they would fly away.



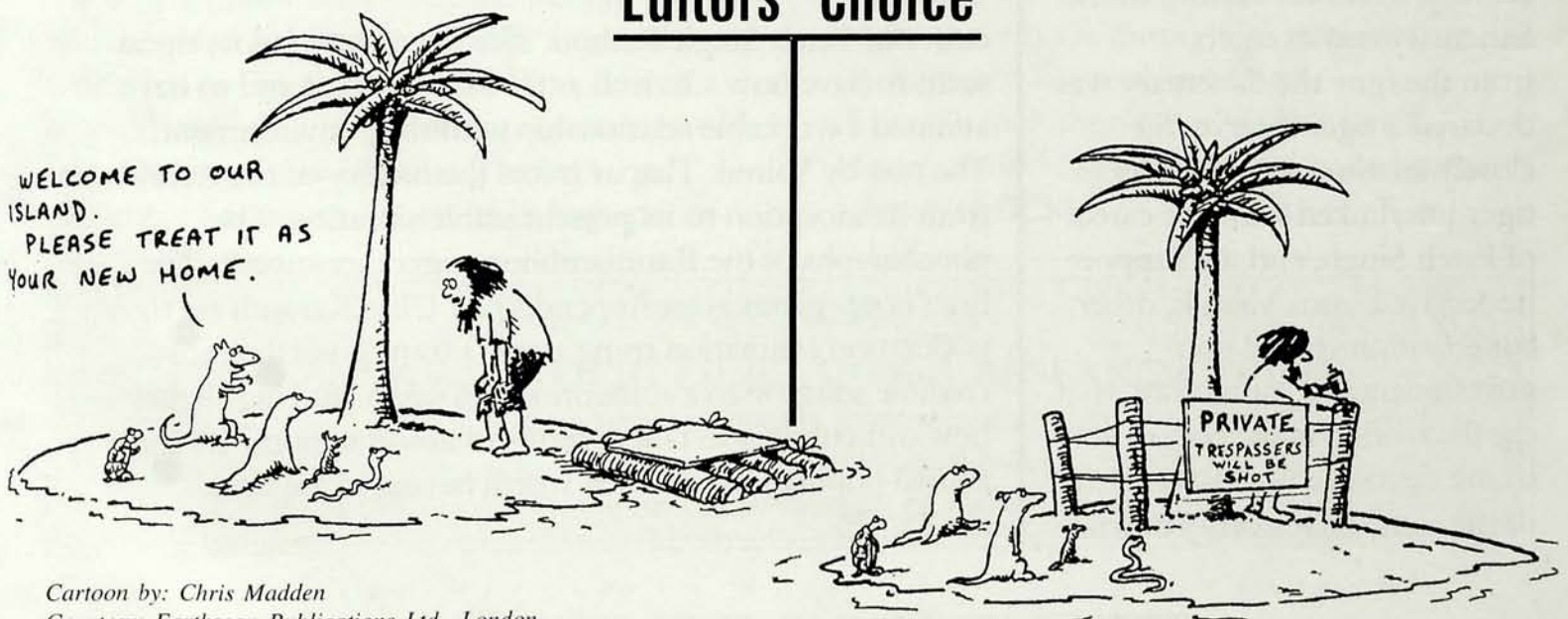
LITTLE GREBE



What a memorable birding morning, triggered by the assembly of crimson-breasted barbets. Unlike *Homo sapiens*, birds need no special occasion for celebration. Indeed, celebration is the very stuff of a bird's daily life, just as birds were Sálim Ali's. 

Lt. Gen. Baljit Singh (Retd.) is a keen naturalist and a BNHS member

Editors' Choice



Cartoon by: Chris Madden
Courtesy: Earthscan Publications Ltd., London.

WILD TIGERS OF RANTHAMBHORE

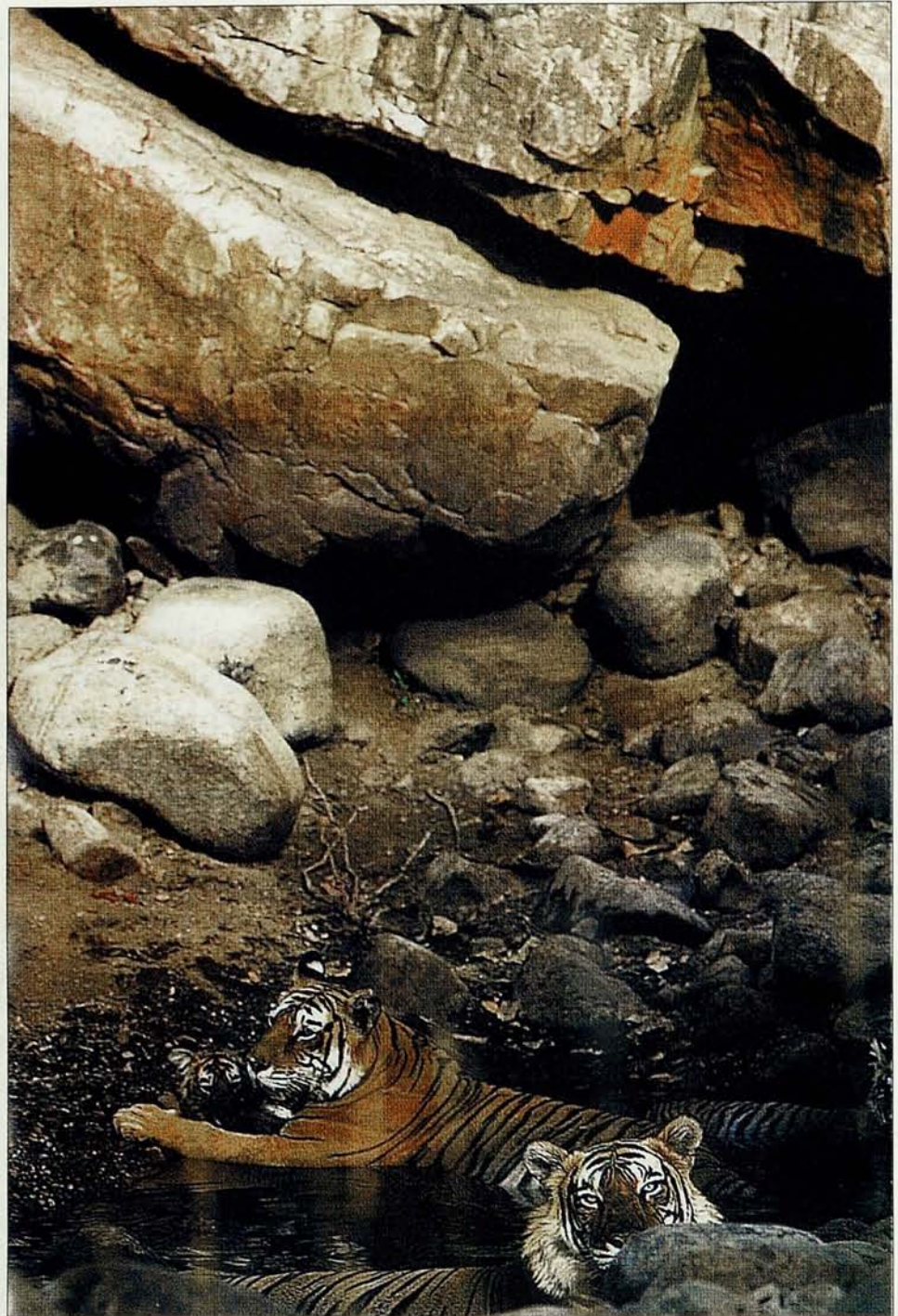
by Valmik Thapar.


Published by Oxford University Press, pp. 156, hardbound, 30 x 22.5 cm, price Rs. 1,500/-.

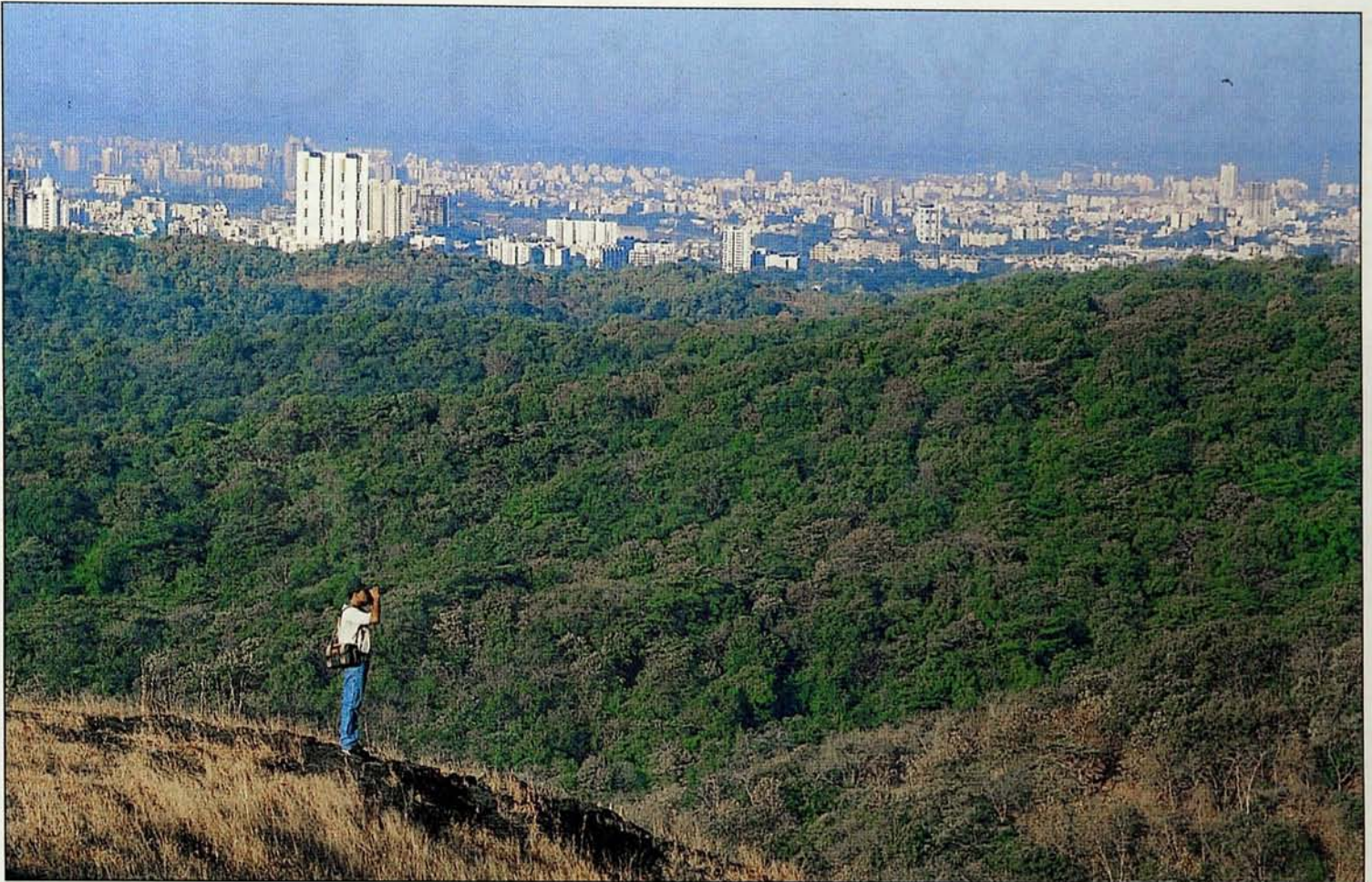
REVIEWED BY J.C. DANIEL



The tiger is the symbol of the conservation conscience of the nation, and its status is an indication of the commitment to conservation of the Government. Project Tiger was the first evidence of the concern of the Central Government for the protection of India's living natural resources. The first among the three Project Tiger reserves that outshone the others in management was Ranthambhore of Rajasthan, managed by the flamboyant Fateh Singh Rathod, whose name became synonymous with Ranthambhore. In this photographic essay on the tigers of Ranthambhore, Valmik Thapar, who has been associated with Ranthambhore and its tigers for the last quarter of a century, traces the history of the Sanctuary and its tigers from the time the Sanctuary was declared a tiger reserve. So closely are the fortunes of the tiger interlinked with the career of Fateh Singh, and the support he received from Valmik, other conservationists and non-governmental organisations, that the fluctuation in the population of the tigers seems closely related to the somewhat stormy official



career of Fateh Singh Rathod. The Sanctuary and its tigers seem to have now survived a troublesome past and to have attained a workable relationship with their environment. The text by Valmik Thapar traces the history of the reserve from its inception to its present stable situation. The photographs of the Ranthambhore tigers are superb. The brief note (given as an Appendix) by Ullas Karanth on tiger population estimation using camera traps gives the most credible solution to a contentious problem, and highlights how difficult it is to talk in terms of absolute numbers for animal populations. A book worth having in anyones' library. 



**CITY FOREST:
MUMBAI'S NATIONAL PARK**


by Sunjoy Monga.

Published by India Book House Ltd,
pp.159, hardbound, 28 x 26 cm,
price Rs 1,200/-.

REVIEWED BY J.C. DANIEL

We who live in the city of Bombay (Mumbai) have a natural wealth which, as far as I know, no other city in the world has: a city forest. This 110 sq. km of tropical semi-deciduous forest protects two of our drinking water lakes, and holds a diversity of fauna and flora, including species

as spectacular as the leopard. The forest has been the training ground of the naturalists of the city, who spend their weekends and holidays in instructive walks through the lovely forests literally at their doorstep. One among these is the author of this superb book, Sunjoy Monga. To Sunjoy, the Park has been, and continues to be, a magnificent obsession. He describes with loving care and much erudition the life, both plant and animal, of the Park. It comes to life in the pages of the book through his exquisite photographs illustrating the text.

A book which should find a place in the library of all those who appreciate and care for nature. 

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to support the publication of *Hornbill*.

The Western Ghats

Portrait & Panorama

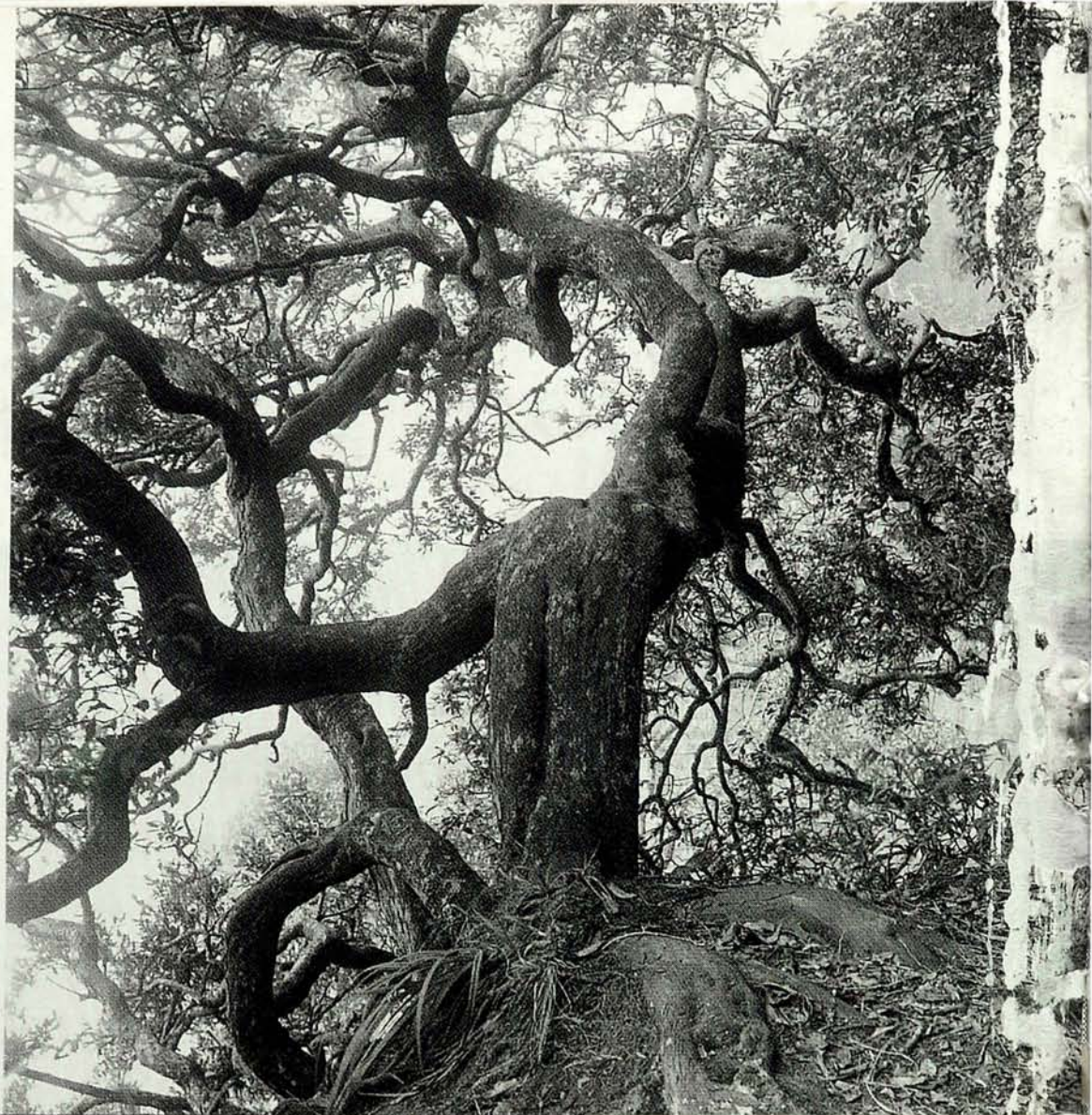


Photographs: Ian Lockwood

Ian Lockwood is an educator, photographer, and environmentalist with a passionate interest in the natural history, culture, and peoples of South Asia.

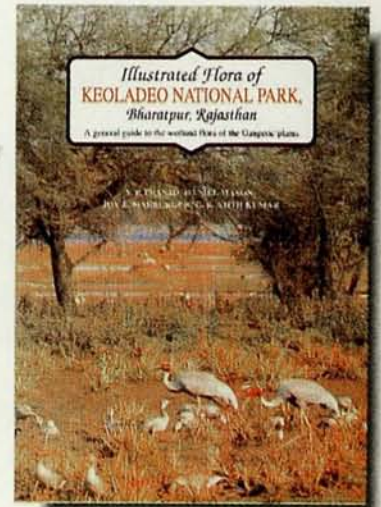
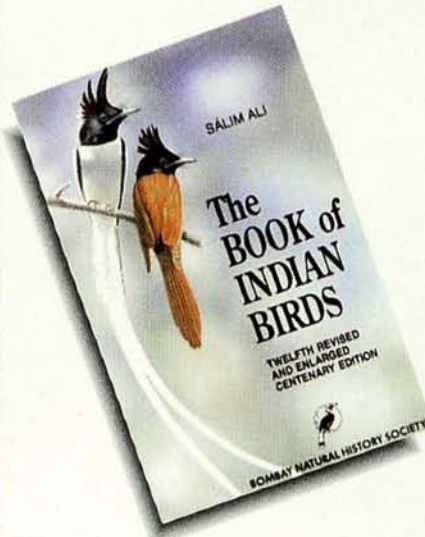
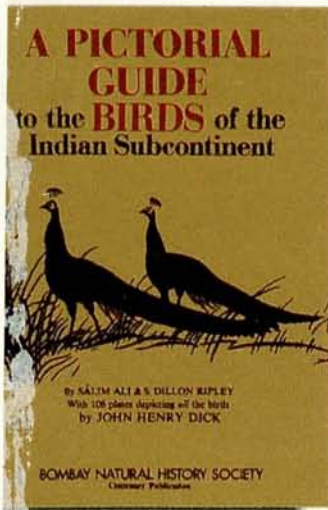
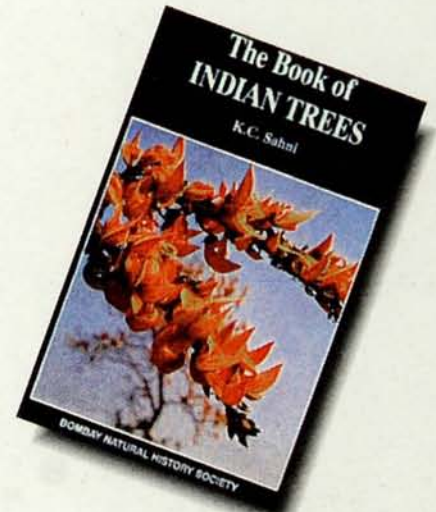
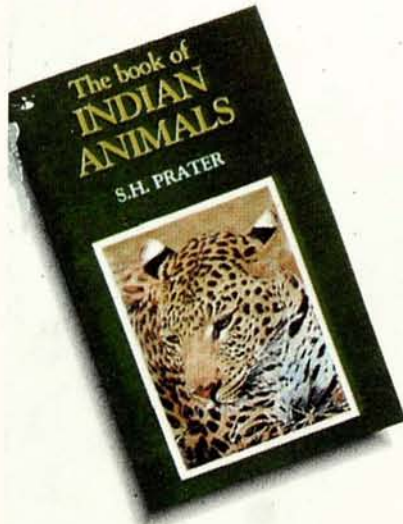


The Western Ghats running from the Tapti river north of Mumbai down to Kanyakumari in the south, are a biodiversity 'hotspot' of India. During the monsoon, the heavens open upto transform the natural forests of the area into a storage ground of precious water, which gives birth to several important rivers and other sources of fresh water, extremely vital for the regeneration of life during the drier seasons of the year. The Western Ghats are a valuable genetic reserve of several wild plants that are the precursors of cultivated crops.



Today, the status of the Western Ghats is depressing. They are under enormous pressure from plantation expansion, unregulated tourism, mining, logging, dam builders and encroachment. BNHS has been documenting and working towards conservation and protection of this unique and fragile ecosystem. Greater protection and an increased public awareness of India's most beautiful yet fragile ecosystem, is perhaps the only way to preserve this unique wealth from slipping into ecological oblivion.

Discover the
LIVING WORLD



Other titles....

Common Indian Wild Flowers
by Isaac Kehimkar

Some Beautiful Indian Climbers and Shrubs
by N.L.Bor & M.B.Raizada

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