



MISTNET

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Rising number of birds threatened with extinction: 'Threatened Birds of India'

by

M. Zafar-ul Islam and Asad R. Rahmani

Seventy-eight out of the 1224 species of birds in India are in danger of extinction, mainly due to habitat destruction, habitat fragmentation, poaching and trapping. The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), along with many other conservation organizations and government, is working to prevent this extinction. One of the ways is to identify and protect Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and nearly 400 IBAs have been identified.

The book, 'Threatened Birds of India' (by M. Zafar-ul Islam and Asad R. Rahmani), briefly describes all the 78 bird species that are threatened, including the 8 species considered as Critical and immediate danger of extinction. In the critical list are Pink-headed Duck *Rhodonessa caryophyllacea* last seen in 1935; the Mountain or Himalayan Quail *Ophrysia superciliosa*, last seen in 1876 near Mussorie in Uttranchal.

Unfortunately, three species of vultures, which were extremely common a decade ago, have also joined this Critical category after almost 98 percent decline, perhaps due to some viral disease. Jerdon's courser *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus* was considered extinct for 86 years till its discovery by BNHS in 1986 in Andhra Pradesh. The BNHS is conducting a three-years study on this elusive, nocturnal bird. Another species in the Critical category, which is being studied and protected by Bharat Bhushan of BNHS, is the Forest Owlet. This bird was also considered extinct for 117 years till its discovery in 1987 by an American team of ornithologists in Shahada area of Maharashtra. Since then, the BNHS scientists have found it in four more areas.

The BNHS and BirdLife have also identified 57 Indian birds species as 'Near Threatened', meaning that if immediate

measures are not taken to reverse the trend, they will also join the Threatened category.

In order to publicize the plight of these disappearing species, the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) has published the book 'Threatened Birds of India', under the Environment Information System (ENVIS) of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India. Mr. S. C. Sharma, Addl, Inspector General of Forests (Wildlife), Ministry of Environment and Forests, released the book at a gathering of leading conservationists and ornithologists of India. We hope this book will become an important document for ornithologists and managers of protected areas in our country. Besides describing distribution and population of each Threatened and Near Threatened species, the book also describes main threats and conservation measures. There are many common species such as House Sparrow, Indian Roller and Black Drongo are also becoming uncommon, and there is an urgent need to start common bird monitoring programme. Unless we know the reasons of decline of common species, effective conservation measures cannot be taken.

BirdLife International has collated information on 323 threatened species of Asia, in the 'Threatened Birds of Asia' (TBA) in two volumes with maps and detailed species account. The information on threatened birds of India was abstracted from TBA and we also added some information from IBA Project.

The 'Threatened Birds of India' is free for IBCN members, otherwise it is Rs. 100/- inclusive of postage. ■

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IBA status reports

Conservation Education for communities in and around Gangapur dam and grassland (IBA site)

By

B. Raha and N. Bhure

Nature Conservation Society, Nashik

The Gangapur earthen dam across the river Godavari was designed during the British rule by visionary Sir. M. Vishweshwarayyah, an eminent engineer. The 37m high dam spans almost 4 km, with a water spread of 2,231 ha, and watershed 35,700 ha. with a storage capacity of 7200 TCM.

The lake created by the dam is at the foothill of Anjaneri, close proximity of Trimbakeshwar, where the river Godavari originates. On one side, it is surrounded by hilly wooded area and on the other side are extensive grasslands, and cultivated fields. The Gangapur area in and around the lake has become an ideal bird habitat. Birds diversity studies conducted by the Nature Conservation Society of Nashik (NCSN) reveals more than 200 species, including nearly 90 migratory ones.

The site is unique in having birds such as Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus*, Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* and Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica*, while also supporting good populations of White-backed Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* and Long-billed Vulture *Gyps indicus*, two species which are rapidly declining elsewhere.

The site is also a good nesting ground for resident birds, particularly grassland birds such as the Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*, Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus*, Indian Courser *Cursorius coromandelicus*, Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedipnemus*, Weaver Bird *Ploceus philippinus* and various species of larks, warblers, partridges and quails. Among the important migratory birds, found here are Ortolan bunting *Emberiza hortulana*, (spotted after two decades), Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*, Lesser Flamingo *Phoenicopterus minor*, Demoiselle Crane *Grus virgo*, Common Crane *Grus grus* and Barheaded Goose *Anser indicus*.

The project site, situated in and around the Gangapur lake, nearly 15 km away from Nashik, and extending over an area of 50 sq.km, has nearly 14 villages, 24 hamlets and numerous temporary dwellings of farmers, workers and fishermen surrounding the lake. The villagers depend on the lake for irrigation, fishing, drinking water, water requirements for cattle, manuring and removal of sand, murrum and earth, thus disturbing the birds. It became necessary to study and lessen this impacts. Phased out weekly work schedule were prepared and strictly followed to get the complete socio-economic surveys of the local population. The work was conducted during December 2000 and January 2001. The main target groups studied were:

a) Local farmers who suffer crop damage by birds, and hence try to chase them away. These farmers also use pesticides, insecticides, indirectly impacting birds.

b) Nomadic tribals who indulge in poaching, labourers brought from outside who try to get fish, birds, hares for food, people engaged in activities such as brick manufacturing, shepherds indulging in large scale grazing, and sport anglers all of whom harm birds and pollute the water in the lake.

c) Industrialists and politicians who have purchased land with the intention of creating irrigated farmland. The importance of fallow land was emphasized to them.

d) Owners of brick kilns, fisheries and forest departments and temple priests were made aware of the importance of wetlands, grasslands, birds and other biodiversity. Numerous slide shows were conducted publicity material such as posters and pamphlets were distributed. During Diwali, symbolic crackers with less noise and attractive but dull illumination were distributed and people were motivated to use them. On Nagpanchami, special slide shows on snakes were given, and during Holi, special patrolling were done to save trees from hackers. Also Wildlife Week was celebrated locally in the company of villagers with guidance from local forest officers, revenue officers, engineers, architects and educationists.

A Bird banding programme was under taken and a workshop on Environmental education for school teachers was organized at Nashik with the help of IBCN and BNHS.

Regular bird watching trips were conducted with the participants some times involving school children also. Essay writing, painting, and nature quiz competitions for children were held and prizes were given by local politicians to highlight the site.

Regular monitoring of birds was undertaken and checklists prepared and sent to those people who are interested in bird conservation.

The project was completed under IBA/IBCN by Mr. B. Raha and N. Bhure of NCSN, Nashik, Maharashtra. ■

Birds on the Menu in Bhubaneswar

Bird poaching and trade in Chilika lake in winters had become rampant. These birds (after dressing) were being brought to Bhubaneswar city and sold to rich people. After receiving information that a consignment had been delivered at a premier Club in the city for a dinner party, our IBCN state coordinator for Orissa Mr. Biswajit Mohanty, has demanded a probe from the Chief Minister and also from the Forest department. It would be tremendous help if IBCN members write to CM <cmo@ori.nic.in> in support of Mr. Mohanty.

IBA status reports ...

Birds of Kottiyoor Reserved Forest

Kerala has 16 sites identified as IBAs, 15 of which are forests lying along the Western Ghats, one of the eight endemic bird areas (EBA) of the Indian sub-continent. 12 of these come under a protected area, Kottiyoor Reserved Forest (11°51'-11°55'N and 75°32'-75°57'E), situated on the western slopes of the Brahmagiris (Kottiyoor East Section) in Kannur district, Kerala, having an extent of 32.87 sq.km. Contiguous with the Aralam Wildlife Sanctuary and Hilldale Reserve Forest (RF) at the northwest, northeast and east, the south and southwest of this forest is bordered by Bavali Puzha, beyond which lie thickly populated villages with intensively cultivated homesteads, rubber and cashew plantations. The main forest types are west-coast tropical evergreen, west-coast tropical semi-evergreen and southern hilltop tropical evergreen. A significant extent of this RF is covered by grassland at altitudes ranging from 900 to 1361m, while a small part (1.37 sq.km) has been converted into teak plantation. The area is well watered as this valley belongs to the watershed of the Valapattanam river and several perennial streams run into the Bava Puzha, one of its major tributaries.

Kottiyoor RF fulfils categories A1, A2, and A3 of the IBA criteria and therefore qualifies as an IBA. Broad-tailed Grassbird and Nilgiri Pipit were for the first time recorded in the western slopes of the Brahmagiri in the grassland of Nirappu Mala at the Surya Mudi area.

Western Ghats, an important EBA, has 16 endemic species, 10 of which were found in the study area. The percentage of restricted range species was highest in the evergreen habitats of Kolihattu and Palchuram followed by the grassland/evergreen habitats of Surya Mudi and Kottancheri. The restricted range species are Blue-winged Parakeet *Psittacula columboides*, Malabar Grey Hornbill *Ocyrceros griseus*, Nilgiri Pipit *Anthus nilghirensis*, Grey-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus priocephalus*, Broad-tailed Grassbird *Schoenicola platyura*, Small Sunbird *Nectarinia minima*, Indian Rufous Babbler *Turdoides subrufus*, White-bellied Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis pallipes*, White-bellied Treepie *Dendrocitta leucogastra*, and Wynaad Laughingthrush *Garrulax delesserti*.

The study area falls under Biome 10 (Indian peninsula tropical moist forest) and Biome 11 (Indo-Malayan tropical dry zone). 14 out of 15 species belonging to biome 10 and 8 out of 60 species belonging to biome 11 were recorded during the survey. Sri Lankan Frogmouth (*Batrachostomus moniliger*), Malabar Pied Hornbill (*Anthraceros coronatus*), Rufous-bellied Babbler (*Dumetia hyperythra*) are some of the significant species in this category that occur here.

15 species of diurnal raptors were also recorded at Kottiyoor RF. Merlin *Falco coumbarius* sighted at Kottancheri is the first record of this species in Kerala. Nests of Besra Sparrowhawk *Accipiter virgatus* and Changeable Hawk eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus* were also located at Kolihattu. All these raptors are included in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972.

Direct and indirect evidences of the presence of Elephant, Gaur, Sambar, Barking Deer, Mouse Deer, Black-naped Hare, Bonnet Macaque, Nilgiri Langur, Wild Boar, Indian Porcupine, Jackal, Common Mongoose, Indian Giant Squirrel, Tiger and Leopard were found during the survey. Indian Pangolin, Palm Civet, Monitor Lizard, Indian Python



Nirappu Mala, habitat of Broad-tailed Grassbird, view from Surya Mudi

and several species of snakes were also found. This forest is also rich in butterfly diversity and very large congregations of certain species of butterflies were observed at several parts of the RF. Large scale migration of butterflies along river Bavali Puzha was also observed in December.

The main threats to the site include poaching of wild animals, burning of grasslands by poachers, anthropogenic disturbances by local people especially while collecting firewood.

It is recommended that the Reserve Forest should be included in the Aralam Wildlife Sanctuary to provide more security to the existing forests of the sanctuary and awareness programme should be conducted for villagers living in the periphery of the RF (Kottiyoor, Kandapunam, Ambayathodu, Palchuram tribal settlement). While 170 bird species have been recorded from the RF, more detailed long term avifaunal study is necessary to assess the real conservation value of the area. ■

Project completed under IBCN by
Mr. C. Sashikumar <cn_goshawk@sancharnet.in>

IBCN NEWS

IBCN/IBA Website launched

Mr. Steve Parr, International Officer of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds launched the IBCN and IBA website on September 19, 2002, at Hornbill House, BNHS.

The site will highlight issues at the national level, encourage researchers, forest managers, professionals and amateur conservationists to work together for conservation, collect information and maintain databases, which can be further disseminated by its partners who have access to this data. Information on IBA and details on threatened birds, restricted range birds, biome related birds and congregatory birds will be freely available on the site. For further information visit www.ibcnetwork.org or email at <IBAbnhs@vsnl.net>. ■



Mr. Steve Parr launching the IBCN website along with the IBA team

Bird Census Technique Workshops

After July 2002, four bird census technique training and IBA related workshops were held at the following places:

2-3 September 2002 at Itanagar (41 participants)

7-8 September 2002 at Thane (13 participants)

21-22 September 2002 at Guwahati (20 participants)

16-17 October at Gondla WLS in Goa (14 participants)

The Forest Department of Goa organized training workshops especially for their field staff who could participate in bird monitoring activities. Three IBAs have been selected, in Goa, so regular monitoring can be done with the help of foresters and bird watchers who visit regularly and can assist in collecting further information.

The Forest Department in Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh, also helped in organizing a Bird Census Training Workshop where most participants were from the Forest

Department and other institutes and agencies working with conservation issues in Arunachal Pradesh. It was a very well participated workshop and the Forest Department assured future help to IBCN.

Many organizations working on conservation issues in Thane district, Mumbai, who regularly participate in the Asian Wetland Counts (AWC) and wanted to collect data scientifically and in a systematic way, asked BNHS to conduct a Bird Census Training workshop.

In Guwahati, 20 participants from different north eastern states exchanged information on identified IBAs. As a result, 60 IBA sites have been identified in Assam, as against 28 sites that had been prioritized earlier by the BNHS. Dr. Anwaruddin Choudhury and Mr. Kulojyoti Lahkar were amongst the participants who helped in providing information on these sites. ■

Telugu PITTA funded by the IBCN

Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh (BSAP) has been publishing *Pitta* - a monthly newsletter in English since 1987. The BSAP is now printing its newsletter called *Pitta* in Telugu, which will not be literal translation of English bulletin. It is aimed to impart environmental education in general and that of birds in particular. The Telugu *Pitta* will be a newsletter in its own right, for budding birdwatchers rather than a newsletter for seasoned birdwatchers. This *Pitta*

issue will be circulated free to schools, junior colleges, environmental education centers, Forest Department and district science centers of Andhra Pradesh.

The Indian Bird Conservation Network has sponsored and funded the publication of Telugu *Pitta* issues for a year. ■

For further details Aasheesh Pittie <aasheesh@vsnl.in>

Appeal

Dear IBCN members, it is always encouraging to receive your letters and suggestions. We will be starting the conversation column for making the Network much more interactive. We hope to receive your suggestions to improve and broaden the Network.

Request: Kindly send your correct email IDs at <IBAbnhs@vsnl.net>. Thank you.

ADVOCACY

Endangered bird as Rotary Logo

The Greater Adjutant Stork (*Leptoptilos dubious*) has been adopted by the Rotary Club of Nagaon as its logo to appear on its flag, stationary, etc. It symbolizes the concern of the members towards environment and wildlife conservation.

Of the 20 species of stork found worldwide, 9 are found in India and 8 in Assam alone. The Greater Adjutant Stork is the largest bird of the Stork family. Out of a global population of less than 1000, it was estimated that 600 Greater Adjutants were present in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam in 1996. Nagaon can boast of the presence of two of the largest colonies known worldwide with a Greater Adjutant population in excess of 150.

These two sites comprise of groves of huge trees at North Haibargaon and Khutikatia. Earlier, there were two colonies at Dakarghat and Krishnaighat near Nagaon which have been lost due to the felling of the nesting trees.

The Greater Adjutant Stork, locally known as the 'Hargila' is often mistaken for the Lesser Adjutant Stork (*Leptilos javanicus*) known as the 'Bortokola'. The Greater Adjutant is bigger in size and has a pale pink pouch, about 30cm long, suspended from its neck.

Being a top avian carnivore, the Greater Adjutant helps maintain the ecological balance. Being a scavenger bird, it forages in garbage dumps and feeds on inedible

parts of fish and meat and helps in keeping the environment clean.

The nesting colonies of the Greater Adjutant Stork are traditional, i.e. the same colonies have been used, year after year.

Due to their gigantic size and long breeding season, the stork needs food in the form of fish, amphibians and reptiles. Destruction of forests and wildlife and decreasing number of fish in the wetlands have also contributed to the Greater Adjutant's plight.

It is an astonishing fact that they have managed to adapt themselves not only to live in small groves near human habitat but also to the pollution and commotion of Nagaon town.

As it is a rare bird, it needs to be protected and preserved and has the highest concentration in undivided Nagaon district (i.e. including Morigaon), the Rotarians of Nagaon have unanimously decided to use it on the club's flag and as its own logo and/or its mascot to suit the needs of the club and thereby promote the cause of the need for the bird's protection at the international level. ■

By Raj Phukan

*Source: Nagaon Rotary Club Charter Presentation
(Souvenir) page 1.*

Impact of drought on IBAs in Gujarat

I would like to draw everyone's attention towards the state of water-bodies in Gujarat. The famous birds sanctuary of Nal Sarovar, spread over some 120 sq kms and the biggest stop for over two lakh migratory birds every winter has completely dried up!

Nal usually dries up in March. Its for the first time that it has dried up so early - in mid November to be precise. It was only during 1980s, during three consecutive drought years that the lake had dried up so early.

Instead of hundreds of thousands of birds that would be seen in the Nal at this time, all that is seen is a parched landscape. (Incidentally there was lobbying to place this lake under Ramsar sites but unfortunately it never materialised). Today, local rickshaws and other vehicles are plying through this lake!!!

Nothing is known about the fate of these birds. However, reports suggest that numbers of birds in the satellite water bodies have increased. Unfortunately, due to bad rains, farmers are lifting water from such water bodies to irrigate their crops, mainly jeera and cotton. Some of

these lakes, like Nava Talao near Patadi-Dasada have over a hundred diesel pumps fitted on the periphery, rapidly emptying the second largest water body in this area. This could have emerged as the next best destination for many a bird.

Same is the fate of other sanctuaries like Khijadiya near Jamnagar and Thol near Ahmedabad where too the farmers are lifting water - despite both the places being declared birds sanctuaries!

The future seems quite bleak for the winged visitors. I have written about these problems but I am not very optimistic. I do not want to sound critical and bitter but I wish the plethora of NGOs, naturalists, ornithologists and wildlife enthusiasts in Gujarat would ponder over this problem and raise a voice in protest. ■

*Sent by: SHYAM PAREKH
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ADVOCACY...

Recognition of Community Involvement in Sarus Crane Conservation in Kota, Rajasthan

Community Involvement in Sarus Protection

The Sarus Crane (*Grus a. antigone*) is an endangered species found largely in the Indian wetland habitats. To assess the situation of Sarus Cranes in the northern part of the country where its population is comparatively large, the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) initiated a project in March 1998 titled “*Impact of land use changes on the habitat and ecology of the Indian Sarus Crane (Grus antigone) in the Indo-Gangetic flood plains, India.*”

The Project has documented at least 20 nesting sites of Sarus Cranes along the irrigation canal system created wetlands and agricultural landscape in and around Kota city during the years 1998-2002. Significantly high proportions of these unprotected nests were destroyed or robbed by village urchins. During the 1998-2002 nesting seasons, through constant vigil and awareness campaigns conducted by the project, the local village folks have been made aware of the plight of Sarus Crane and what they could voluntarily do to help save Sarus Cranes in their surroundings. The “*Rural Village Sarus Protection Group*” was created during the three year’s study period and the group was instrumental in protecting adult birds from being poached, the nest and hatchling to successfully fledge and wean. In this exercise, a local NGO, Hadoti Naturalist’s Society and the Kota Wildlife division were also associated towards awareness creation among the local villagers.

Recognition Award to Villagers

To achieve this, Sarus Crane project proposed the involvement of national and local wildlife NGOs to recognize the roles played by these “Rural Village Sarus Protection Group” through a scheme in which a token award is given in recognition of their conservation contribution. The Indian Bird Conservation Network and the Wildlife Trust of India, came forward to support this programme by contributing Rs 10,000 each. Fourteen grass root level villagers from Kota district who physically guarded the Sarus nests were the recipient of the “**Sarus Crane Conservation Recognition Certificate**” on 5th October 2002 during the Wildlife Week celebration conducted jointly by the Rajasthan Forest Department, and Hadoti Naturalist’s Society, Kota. Along with the recognition certificate, the IBCN and the Wildlife Trust of India presented each of the recipients with utility materials such as all season Jackets, Torch Light and Cap along with a Bird Book in Hindi by Dr. Salim Ali. The local print media extensively reported this event.

List of the recipients who got the Recognition Award for Sarus Crane Conservation in Kota district. Rajasthan: Lattur Lal, Suresh, Hajari Lal, Mohan, Ramlal, Sitaram, Mahaveer Choudhry, Chitar Ji, Gajanand, Sanjay, Mahaveer, Radheyshyam, Ashraf Ali, and Shakir Ali ■

— *Jatinder Kaur & B.C. Choudhury*
Wildlife Institute of India, Dehra Dun

Supreme Court bans tree felling in the Andaman and Nicobar islands

A joint petition filed by the environmental action group Kalpavriksh along with the Port Blair based Society for Andaman and Nicobar Ecology (SANE) and the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) has resulted in the Supreme Court issuing an order banning the felling of trees from naturally grown forests in the Andaman and Nicobar islands and asked the authorities for a response to the order in two weeks time. The order was passed on October 10, 2001 as the result of an Interlocutory Application (IA) No. 502 in Writ Petition (Civil) No. 202/1995 [TN Godavarman Thirumulpad Vs. Union of India and others].

Earlier to this, these three organizations had filed a Writ Petition No. 76 of 1999 before the Circuit bench of the Calcutta High Court in Port Blair in the matter of the deforestation being carried out in Little Andaman and the threat this posed to the Onge tribal community that lives on this island. The intervention in the Supreme Court was filed in this matter following an order of the Calcutta High Court dated August 31, 1999 urging the petitioners to draw the attention of the Supreme Court to the matter.

Subsequent to the October 10 hearing, the matter had

come up for hearing in the Supreme Court again on November 23, 2001 before a bench comprising, Mr. Justice BN Kirpal, Mr. Justice KG Balakrishnan and Mr. Justice Arijit Pasayat. Further to the stay on all felling of naturally grown trees the bench directed that, ‘no sawmill’ plywood or veneer factory shall utilize any naturally grown trees without further orders from this court. The court also appointed an expert commission under Mr. Shekhar Singh of the New Delhi based Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA). The commission has been asked to ‘look into the state of the forests and other related matters in the islands and submit its report in six weeks time. The report is likely to be submitted towards the end of the month of January 2002.

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are an internationally renowned hotspots of biological diversity which have been increasingly threatened. Importantly, these islands are also home to indigenous tribal communities like the Onge, Jarawa, Sentinelese, and the Shompens who critically depend on the forests for their survival and whose very existence was being threatened with logging activities and loss of forest cover. ■

ADVOCACY...

A step to conserve Crane through India Crane Working Group (ICWG)

Cranes are clearly among the most majestic creations of evolution and 15 species presently grace our planet. India is blessed with large areas with wetlands, and five species of cranes that live in these wetlands. Owing to the burgeoning human population, which has exceeded a billion in the country, wetlands in the country are facing acute pressures and these are posing critical concerns to flora and fauna that are characteristic of these habitats. Cranes, along with the other large fauna, are usually the first to be affected by changes in wetland characteristics. Cranes thus perform as a reliable flagship species to the wetland ecosystem as a whole.

In India, the most widespread and most recognized of cranes is the imposing Sarus Crane that has the distinction of being the world's tallest flying bird. This species is a classic study of how changes in land use in the country have affected the well being of fauna dependent on natural components in the landscape. Widespread increase in agricultural activities compounded by an increase in reliance on mechanized techniques and artificial chemicals have frequently caused the decline of the quality of natural habitats in the landscape, thus affecting the habitats of the Sarus.

These challenges are not insurmountable and there certainly is no lack of information on the problems and ways to overcome them. There is a lack of forum to concentrate on these opportunities for conservation, and provide a leading role to the concerned governmental and



development agencies as to the importance of wetlands, and how to carry out development without damaging the natural environment.

The India Crane Working Group (ICWG), a group of dedicated and interested naturalists and scientists, is being envisaged to assist in providing the forum. A preliminary meeting on November 29, 2002 at Bharatpur was held to decide the aims, objectives, and the running of the ICWG. Mr. Gopi Sundar has been appointed as ICWG coordinator.

For further details on ICWG: Contact Mr. Gopi Sundar,
Wildlife Institute of India, Dehra Dun
<gopi_sundar@yahoo.com>

Central Asian-Indian Flyway (CAIF)

The region of central and south Asia encompasses one of the world's greatest but least known bird migration routes. Tens of millions of individuals of Arctic nesting species, migrate through the region to the Middle East and Africa and the Indian subcontinent.

This continental flyway comprises vast areas of semi-arid habitats with limited areas of crucial importance, particularly in the staging areas. Many countries along the CAIF have developing economies with only modest allocation of resources for research and conservation. Many of the wetlands are situated in areas with dense human populations and are consequently threatened and in need of internationally co-ordinated conservation measures.

In 1996 the Bonn Convention called on Parties to take an active role in the development of a conservation initiative for migratory waterbirds in the CAIF. This is partly being done by the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement which extends into the Central Asian Republics and the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation

Strategy which partly covers the Central Asian-Indian Flyway.

The project "Towards a Strategy for Wetland and Waterbird Conservation in the Central Asian-Indian Flyway", is being coordinated by Wetlands International from its Moscow office. Geographically, the project includes the area from northernmost breeding grounds in Russia to the southernmost wintering grounds in Maldives and thus incorporates 21 Range States of Central and South Asia, and Trans-Caucasus.

The first significant event within the CAIF project was a workshop held in August 2001 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

The CAIF workshop examined current conservation status of migratory waterbirds and wetlands in the Central Asian-Indian Flyway (CAIF) and reviewed the first draft Action Plan. A new version of the Action Plan is being discussed for presentation to the governments of the Range States for consideration and further adoption. ■

Contact: Wetlands International

MISCELLANEOUS

Project Kagu online birding

Much information on bird numbers and distribution is published in the form of bird atlases, technical reports, site guides and scientific papers. However, large quantities of information are 'lost' – for example in birdwatcher's personal notebooks, in unpublished trip reports or on data sheets that have not been computerized. There are probably millions of bird records that fall into this category, many of them for countries that have very high bird diversity but no common system of monitoring their numbers. If it were possible to pull all these records together, from both local and visiting birdwatchers, they would provide a tremendous database that could be used by general birdwatchers and professional conservationists alike.

Project Kagu is an initiative to develop a global web-based data entry and management system to capture all these 'lost' data and add them to published data. Birdwatchers prepared to input their own personal observations through a user-friendly Web page will help to produce a vast database of bird sightings around the globe, and will be able to participate in the conservation of their heritage at a variety of different levels.

With the powerful analytical tools that Kagu will provide, everyone will be able to:

- Produce distribution maps of species, showing where each is most frequently encountered
- Plan birdwatching trips in their own and other countries
- Access and contribute to definitive and complete lists of bird species at all important sites
- Assess their chances of seeing a particular species at a particular site
- Manage their own records to produce day, year and life lists, summary statistics and maps
- Help to identify and monitor areas of conservation priority
- Help to monitor the populations of all species
- Help to monitor the environmental health of important sites

To allow us to develop this system, we need to know how many people have data like this and would be prepared to add them to the database, how people record their observations and what people would like to be able to do with the huge amount of data that would eventually be available to them.

After initial trials, an on-line system will be developed, demonstrated, refined and then made

available in the pilot countries. Roll-out of the system to other countries will depend on external funding, but the plan is to bring as many countries on-line or linked into Kagu in the shortest time possible (in countries where an initiative is already up and running it would be linked into Kagu, not replaced by it).

Timescales: We intend completing the initial fact-finding pilots in several countries, completing the studies and desk-based analyses by November 2002. Development and implementation of the first phase of an on-line system is planned for 2003.

Obligations and Expectations: As Project Kagu will need the help of several countries to run the pilots, organizations or individuals getting involved must understand the obligations of each party involved so that they know what is needed from them and also what they should expect from the Project.

What participants should expect from Kagu

Expertise – members of the Kagu Team will be available for advice, sharing ideas etc on issues associated with the web-based provision of conservation information.

Data security – all data remain the property of the participants, and will not be passed on to a third party; at the end of the pilot, if the participants do not want to have the data included in Kagu, the data will be returned to them and no copies kept.

Use of Kagu – at the end of the pilots, the system developed by Project Kagu will be made freely available to the participants of the pilot, along with training in how to use it. As a country's 'owner' of Kagu, all of that country's data will be available, and the web-based system for that country will have the organization's branding (along with reference to the Kagu partners).

Pilot results – a report or set of papers containing all non-confidential information and findings from the pilots will be provided to all participants.

BNHS from India has circulated the form and received 130 filled forms.

The Kagu Team

BirdLife International – Martin Sneary (World Database Manager) <martin.sneary@birdlie.org.uk>

RSPB – Ian Fisher (Head of Conservation Data Management) <ian.fisher@rspb.org.uk>

RSPB – Paul Donald (International Research) <paul.donald@rspb.org.uk>■

PARTNER FACT FILE

Green People India

IBCN Partners Name: Green People India (GPI)
 Date Founded: 12 November 1995
 Publication: Twitcher (Quarterly Newsletter)
 Contact Person: Samiran Jha (Secretary)
 Green People India, Prantapally, Post and District:
 Malda-732 101, West Bengal



Malda, WB

Tel: 03512-66019
 Email: greenmalda@yahoo.com
 Membership strength: 27

Aims

Collect, collate and disseminate information on Natural History of India and also to encourage the younger generation of India to undertake study on Indian Natural History. It also tries to find solution for sustainable development. The GPI dreams to see Indian citizen as green people. ■

Monthly meetings

Monthly meetings are arranged on the last Sunday of every month, where members share their experience and exchange views on various conservation issues. During the monthly meetings, slide shows and VDO films are also arranged. ■

Field trips

One of the major activities of Green Peoples India is field trips in different parts of West Bengal and India. Monthly visits are organized in different areas of the district and also in Kulik Bird Sanctuary (a proposed IBA site), which is very popular among its members. Some major camps were arranged in Buxa Tiger Reserve, Varsey Rhododendron Sanctuary and Singalilla National Park. ■

National Birdwatching Day

Every year, GPI organize birdwatching camp on Sunday close to 12th November to commemorate Dr. Salim Ali's birthday as "National Birdwatching Day". For the last few years, GPI is getting mixed response and number of student participants are increasing every year. ■

Major activities

Collection of trade intelligence regarding illegal trade in wildlife, mainly birds and turtles. The Malda district due

to its close proximity to an international border is slowly becoming a center of illegal wildlife trade.

Carrying out mass awareness campaign on bird conservation, in schools in and around wetlands and wildlife sanctuaries.

- To gain support from local villagers the GPI organises health camps in and around villages close to a sanctuary or wetland.
- Every year it participates in mid-winter waterfowl census (AWC). In the last few years it had collected vast information on the wetland flora and fauna of central West Bengal.
- Participate in trekking in various areas in Eastern Himalaya.
- Organize nature camps for school children.
- Documentation of important wildlife habitats and endangered species of northern West Bengal.
- Participated in SACON project "Inland Wetlands of India" and contributed information on the wetland and its fauna/flora of central West Bengal. ■

Ongoing campaign

Campaigning to save 'Naya Bundh', a wetland along the Indo-Bangla border which attracts more than ten thousand waterbirds of different species including few globally threatened species. Over ten thousand signature of common people, students and teachers were collected and were sent to the Forest Minister of West Bengal.

Undertaken campaign against illegal egg collection, chick lifting and killing of birds in Kulik Bird Sanctuary which is possibly the biggest Openbill Stork breeding colony in India and a proposed IBA site. ■

Asian Wetlands Count (AWC) 2002

The IBA has been funding this programme since the last two years and this year 301 persons participated and 355 sites were covered. 163 species were covered of which 10 were globally threatened and six near threatened. The annual report has been sent to all the participants. For 2003, the form will be circulated soon. We hope you to participate in

the Count for 2003 which will be held in January and February 2003. Wish you happy birding during the AWC count in upcoming AWC festival. The electronic form of AWC can be obtained from IBCN office at BNHS or email us at <IBAbnhs@vsnl.net> or download the form from www.bnhs.org/awc.pdf ■

The Indian Bird Banding Manual

–Compiled by S. Balachandran, BNHS

The Indian Bird Banding Manual was released on 11th November 2002 during the Annual Research Seminar of BNHS at Hornbill House, by Mr. David Ferguson, SFC co-ordinator, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington. This Manual is intended to serve as an introduction to the techniques of bird banding and related studies proposed to be undertaken in India by amateur and professional bird enthusiasts. The purpose of this Manual is to provide bird banders in India with the basic information for safely and effectively conduct bird banding. The purpose of banding, the Bander's Ethics Code and the qualification for a bander are explained in the Introductory Chapter. Among the various trapping methods, mist-netting is dealt with in detail, as it can be operated efficiently by one person with experience. The basic techniques of removal of birds from the mist-net, safe handling and banding, and measuring of various features such as wing, bill, tarsus and tail, are described and illustrated. The other aspects dealt with are the data entries both on the banding sheets and moult cards, and analysis of banding and moult data by using simple statistics. The techniques of ageing birds and moult scoring are explained. Possible bird study proposals based on bird banding are mentioned. ■

The manual is available at BNHS at subsidized rate of Rs. 100/-

Tie up between BNHS and National Geographic Channel

The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) has collaborated with the National Geographic Channel (NGC). The two like minded organizations who have dedicated their life to the study and conservation of nature have forged an alliance to promote each others work.

The National Geographic will get access to the various research projects carried out by the BNHS, While BNHS will get more exposure in NGC publications and on their programmes.

The BNHS will screen National Geographic Channel films on regular basis, and also invite its film-makers and researchers to give slide-talks on their work.

The National Geographic Channel is planning to set up a "Library Corner" in the BNHS, which will contain films, documentaries, CD-roms, books and journals on the major discoveries and expeditions of NGC adventures.

Hybridization of Stoliczka's or White-browed Bushchat *Saxicola macrorhyncha*?

This desert specialist has a small, declining population because of agricultural intensification and encroachment, which qualifies it as Vulnerable. The Stoliczka's Bushchat is found in a circumscribed semi-arid area (NW India and E Pakistan). There were only 15 records between 1974 and 1994, but during four intensive surveys in 1993-1994 about 86 birds were located in 18 localities (Threatened Birds of India, Islam and Rahmani 2002).

There is a recent discussion on probable hybrid Stoliczka's Bushchat *Saxicola macrorhyncha* with Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maura* in Goa, on which some information is provided by Ewan Urquhart book "Stonechats - a guide to the genus *Saxicola*" (Nov 2002). Since 1996 apparent hybrid(s) appear annually in Carambolin grasslands. They were photographed by James Walford. Based on the photos supplied by James Walford and descriptions supplied by Paul Holt and Dan Zetterstrom, Ewan Urquhart discussed in the book, the likely parentage of this particular bird and has come to the conclusion that it is most likely to be a hybrid *S. macrorhyncha* x *S. maura* (*indica*). As no nest has ever been found of *macrorhyncha*, it is not known where exactly and how this species breeds but in February 2001 Bill Harvey and Nikhil Devasar found an adult male and thereafter a male with female apparently holding territory at Sultanpur Jheel 30 kms southwest of Delhi which disappeared after a few weeks (Oriental Birding 35, June 2002). This area or nearby is maybe where *macrorhyncha* breeds and if so this area also encompasses the breeding range of the Siberian Stonechat subspecies *S. maura indica*. In the book Ewan also states that it is unlikely that this bird is a hybrid *S. macrorhyncha* x *S. rubetra* (Whinchat) as there is such a huge disparity in the respective species usual ranges. It is also very unlikely to be a hybrid *S. rubetra* x *S. maura*. In size the bird observed by Paul Holt was considered 10-15% larger than Siberian Stonechat and appeared more attenuated with a proportionately longer tail with the individual retrices appearing subtly slimmer and longer. Both Siberian Stonechat and Whinchat have relatively short tails and bills and both are short and stocky in appearance and could not be described as attenuated. Based on the plumage details and photos, Ewan suggested that this bird is a hybrid between Stoliczka's Bushchat and Siberian Stonechat of the race *indica*. There is a possibility that this could be a hybrid between Stoliczka's Bushchat and White-tailed Bushchat *S. leucura* but this is less likely as respective species habitats suggest they differ markedly with *macrorhyncha* preferring dry, semi desert areas and *leucura* generally preferring areas close to rivers. After publication of book, Adam Bowley the illustrator has visited Goa and reported the presense of 3-4 such hybrid individuals which certainly poses some interesting questions. ■

— Ewan Urquhart

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36 organisations are partners of IBCN but all do not have logos



Indian Bird Conservation Network (www.IBCnetwork.org)

The Indian Bird Conservation Network is set up by BNHS in collaboration with BirdLife International and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) (BirdLife partner in UK). The mission of the Network is to promote conservation of birds and their habitat through development of a national network of individuals, organisations and Government.

The Network invites two types of partnership-individual and organisational. To join the Network, write to your State Coordinator or the National Coordinator.

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BirdLife International is a global partnership of conservation organisations, represented in over 100 countries, working for the diversity of all life through the conservation of birds and their habitats.

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The BNHS was founded in 1883 for the purpose of exchanging notes and observations on natural history and exhibiting interesting specimens. Today, it is the largest non-governmental organisation (NGO) in the subcontinent engaged in the conservation of nature and natural resources, education and research in natural history with members in over 30 countries. BNHS is a BirdLife Partner Designate in India.

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