



MISTNET

Quarterly Newsletter of the Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN)



Volume 3 No 3

July- Sept 2002

Give a thought to common birds

By

Asad R. Rahmani

Director, BNHS

Indicator species, flagship species, rare species, and threatened species – we hear these terms very often in the conversation of conservationists and birdwatchers. Everyone shows concern about them, but what about the common species? Has anyone given a thought to them? Do we know what is happening to them? How are they faring in this rapidly changing world?

Out of the 1128 species of birds found in India, 79 are in Threatened and 58 in Near Threatened categories, according to the BirdLife International's highly respected tome, 'Threatened Birds of Asia'. This is a book I recommend to all our IBCN partners, either in its printed form (2 volumes, 3000 pages, 5 kilograms!!) or on CD (which BirdLife International has given us permission to copy and distribute to IBCN partners). A vast majority of Indian birds are still supposedly common and widespread. My worry is, are they still as common as they were 30 years ago? If not, what are the reasons for their decline, and how can we reverse this decline?

The recent catastrophic decline of the *Gyps* species of vultures in the Indian subcontinent has shown that no species is safe, no matter what its number is. Number does not guarantee safety from extinction. The Passenger Pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*) of North America is a classic example. It was found in millions, 'darkened the sky' during mass movement. The last one, a lonely female, died in 1914 in Cincinnati Zoo. This abundant species became extinct exactly 149 years after its discovery. Are we also seeing the decline, perhaps not as dramatic as that of vultures or Passenger Pigeon, of other 'common birds'? We hear that our ubiquitous House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) has disappeared from many areas in Chennai, Bangalore and Mumbai. There are less Black drongos (*Dicrurus macrocercus*) and Indian Rollers (*Coracias benghalensis*) in our farmlands – perhaps victims of farmers' folly of using biocides to protect crops from insects. Have you noticed that your garden Magpie Robin (*Copsychus saularis*) and Redvented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) have stopped singing – the neighbour's cat has done its job. Increasing numbers of House Crows (*Corvus splendens*) do not allow successful nesting of Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*). This year, the Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) could not find a nesting site as your neighbourhood pond was converted into a bus station! Have we all not seen these changes? Perhaps, the Little Grebe has moved to a wetland created by damming a stream. Perhaps, the Redvented Bulbul went to a garden where there was no cat. Perhaps the Drongo moved to crop fields where the intelligent farmer had not used biocides, or could not afford to purchase these costly and deadly chemicals. *Perhaps these birds have died.* It is the last sentence that should be worrying us. We may not have sufficient data on our common birds, but this worry is not unwarranted. Let us see how.

In the United Kingdom, a country that prides itself for having the largest number of birdwatchers in the world comparing to its relatively small human population, the highly respected British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) is collating data on common birds for the last 45 years. This data is collected through millions of members of

In this issue

Give a thought to common birds	1, 2
The Forest Owlet	3
Bird Banding in IBAs	4
Large scale smuggling of Sandalwood	5
Ramsar Tag sought for Sunderbans	5
Ramsar Wetlands Award, Evian Prize	5
Bird Census Training Workshops	6
Small grants	6
Gifts	6
Principles of Birding Ethics	8
Book Review	8
Expert Panel set up for forest plan	8
Partner Fact File	9
Hornbills decline	10
State Coordinators of IBCN	11

RSPB and other birdwatchers' societies. Ordinary members from housewives to school children to bank managers spend three days a year gathering information on backyard birds, and this information is sent to BTO where scientists analyze the data. The results are published in the BTO journal, regional newsletters, RSPB magazines and also sent to government. Most of the conservation priorities of the RSPB are based on the results obtained by BTO. The news is quite disturbing, not always but in most of the cases. For instance, according to the data from the BTO, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, RSPB and Breeding Bird Survey, between 1976 and 1995, there has been 49% decline in the breeding population of Skylark *Alauda arvensis*, 35% decline in Blackbird *Turdus merula*, 30% decline in Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, 46% in Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* (Gregory and Baillie 1998). Between 1994 and 2000, there has been some increase in the numbers of forest birds such as Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos cathpharius*), Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Long-tailed Tit (Noble, Raven and Baillie, 2001). Unfortunately, we do not have similar data for our common birds.

The Indian Bird Conservation Network and the BNHS, with the help of RSPB, are planning to start a scheme to census and monitor common Indian birds. As you are aware, during the consultative workshops of the IBAs, we came across many people interested in birds. Some have been maintaining meticulous data, others showed keen interest in monitoring birds of their area. During discussion with workshop participants, we realized that data are not taken systematically, so it is not comparable across years and across sites. Something has to be done to tap this hidden talent so that while enjoying bird watching, our partners can also record data in such a manner that it is useful for analyses. With a positive feedback from our IBCN partners, we developed a bird census training workshop module. Till now we have conducted 11 such workshops (Bharatpur, Mumbai, Hyderabad, New Delhi, Bhopal, Guwahati (twice), Gorumara, Dudwa, Tripura and Shillong). We found that such workshops are very popular and useful. We already have requests from five organizations to conduct similar workshops in their area. Before organizing these workshops, we asked two of our IBCN coordinators, Dr Rahul Kaul and Dr Salim Javed, both highly respected ornithologists, to write a simple bird census manual for a common birdwatcher. They have done a splendid job. During our 11 workshops, we distributed draft copies of this manual for consultation

and comments. Now, we are going to print this manual as a book.

After conducting these bird census training workshops, I feel confident that we can start a long-term bird monitoring project in India, involving IBCN partners and BNHS members. Some of you might be aware of the annual Salim Ali Bird Count, conducted by BNHS, and most of you must have participated in the Asian Waterfowl Census (AWC), coordinated by BNHS in India. We can convert the Salim Ali Bird Count into an annual common bird count.

My aim is to start a monitoring system for at least 100 points/sites in India where twice a year, common bird census is conducted in a systematic manner. The IBCN can collect, analyze and disseminate the data. For the first three or four years, we may not see any interesting results but soon, a pattern will emerge. Perhaps in another 8-10 years, this pattern will become clear.

There are numerous advantages of large-scale bird census and monitoring, involving a large number of volunteers and members. I list a few of them, not in any order or priority. 1) Assess bird populations quantitatively; 2) Assess changes in populations and distribution; 3) Provide baseline information for future surveys and sometimes more detailed work; 4) Help in prioritization of conservation action; 5) Increase environmental awareness, generate media publicity, help in fund raising, etc; 6) Strengthen the network; 7) Help collect information on other taxa; and, 8) Add scientific credibility to conservation work.

We are trying to generate funds to start a pilot project on bird census and monitoring. Meanwhile, I request our partners to write to us their suggestions about this future programme of IBCN. Let us help our bulbuls, prinias and mynas to survive, without whom our lives would be very boring.

REFERENCES

- Gregory, R. D. and Baillie, S. R. (1998). Large-scale habitat use of some declining British Birds. *J. Applied Ecology*, 35: 785-799.
- Noble, D. G., Raven, M. J. & Baillie, S. R. (2001). The Breeding Bird Survey 2000. BTO Research Report 265. British Trust for Ornithology, Thetford, U.K.

IBA NEWS

The Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti* in Western Khandesh

by

Girish Jathar

(Research Scholar at BNHS)

The Forest Owlet *Athene (Heteroglaux) blewitti* was said to be not uncommon in Western Khandesh. These are the comments of Mr. James Davidson in late 19th century. These owlets are still surviving, after they were considered extinct before 113 years.

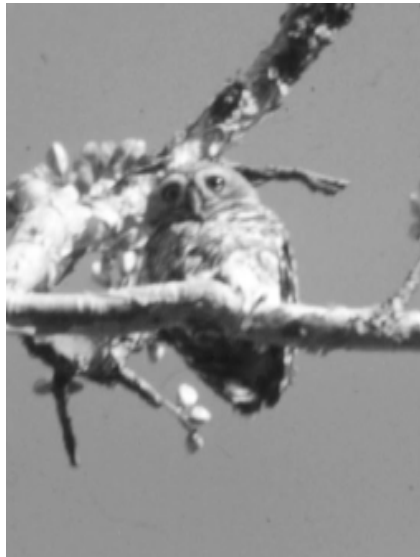
Rediscovery of this species was no less than a mystery. The last specimen of the Forest Owlet was said to be collected from Gujarat in 1914 by Col. Richard Meinertzhgen, that proved to be fallacious. While working on specimens of the Forest Owlet, Dr. Pamela Rasmussen of the Smithsonian Institution noticed this fraudulence and proved that it was Davidson's specimen. This led to the rediscovery of the Forest Owlet, in November 1997 in Toranmal reserve forest of Shahada, District Nandurbar, Maharashtra.

The owlet was named after Mr. Blewitt who collected the first specimen in 1873 from Phuljan area of Eastern Madhya Pradesh. Since then, only seven specimens were collected from India, of which five were collected by Mr. James Davidson from Western Khandesh (North-West Maharashtra) in the 19th century. He made brief comments on the habitat preference and behaviour of the Owlet.

Following the rediscovery in 1997, a one year study was conducted in 1998-99 by Dr. Farah Ishtiaq of the Bombay Natural History Society, with financial assistance from the Smithsonian Institution. This study generated baseline information on the ecology and behaviour of the Forest Owlet. In October 2001, a broader study was started in Toranmal reserve forest.

Twenty five individuals were recorded from four different sites in dry deciduous forests of central India. The Forest owlet, unlike other owlets, is a diurnal and crepuscular species. It prefers habitats near stream beds dominated by Teak and other tree species such as *Boswellia serrata*, *Anogeissus latifolia*, *Lannea grandis*, *Lagerstroemea pavifolia* interspersed with low lying bushes. It is restricted to 400-500m.

Since October 2001, seven pairs have been found in the Toranmal reserve forest. These pairs were followed persistently to gather information on various aspects of their life history. The owlet favours reptilian food, especially skinks and lizards, which often come out for basking in the morning and evening, and become an easy prey. This specially adapted food choice could be the reason for its diurnal behaviour. Its specially developed talons and highly feathered toes show the evolutionary significance of its special feeding choice. The owlet uses sit and wait strategy for foraging, which is the most cost effective method for such a predator.



The owlet uses natural hollows in soft wood trees. It has a prolonged breeding season from October to May. The male was observed to be highly territorial. At the beginning of the breeding season, it establishes its territory by emitting song calls and high pitched screeches. Sometimes, female also participates in territorial disputes. Fatal disputes were not observed between these birds. Like other owls, the male feeds the female during the breeding

season and female spends most of her time inside the nest incubating the eggs. Only the female was seen incubating the eggs. After hatching, the male was seen taking care of the fledglings and the female was seen protecting the fledgling from predators. Some uncommon and bizarre behaviours such as cronism, ovicide and fratricide were also observed.

Increasing human population in the reserve forest exerts enormous pressure on the fragile ecosystem. Habitat destruction due to illicit wood cutting and encroachment on forest land for agricultural needs is rampant. Cattle grazing and intentional forest fires causing destruction of microhabitat also directly influence the prey species of the owlet. Tribals use various owl parts for magic and therefore hunt the owlet.

If we take quick and positive steps towards the conservation of this species, then can we hope to listen to the mellow song of the Forest Owlet for years in the mountains of Western Khandesh.

Revaluation of the current status of threatened and restricted range (endemic) species through bird banding in selected Important Bird Areas

Dr. S. Balachandran
Scientist

Bombay Natural History Society

Introduction: Bird ringing/banding is a research method based on individual marking of birds by putting a numbered ring on the leg. Any record of a ringed bird, either through recapture and subsequent release, or on the occasion of its final recovery as a dead bird, will tell us a lot about its life, particularly its movements. In India BNHS is the only organization which has undertaken bird migration studies during the last four decades by ringing over four hundred thousand birds. The birds ringed in India have been recovered in 14 countries including Australia and South Africa in the southern hemisphere. The role of some important wetlands and forests for the migratory birds as well as rare, threatened and endemic species have been enumerated through bird banding. The occurrence of some of the threatened species such as Spoonbilled Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*, Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* (Chilika and Point Calimere WLS) White-winged Black Tit *Parus nuchalis* (Kutch) Broad-tailed Grassbird *Shoenicula platyura* (Point Calimere- earlier considered as endemic to Western Ghats) were documented only through banding.

Over 20 sites monitored for bird ringing have been included under the Important Bird areas identified by the IBA project of the BNHS sponsored by the RSPB.

Point Calimere WLS*, Gulf of Mannar*, Kaliveli Lake, Palni Hills*, Karaivetti Lake, Mundanthurai-Kalakkad WLS [Tamil Nadu]; Keoladeo NP [Rajasthan], Kachch, Khijadia WLS [Gujarat], Sri Venkateswara WLS *, Pulicat Lake* [Andhra Pradesh], Chilika Lake* [Orissa], Kawartal* [Bihar], Harike Lake [Punjab], Rutland [Andamans], Shivalik Hills [Punjab], Dachigam NP [Kashmir], Dihalia Jheel [Madhya Pradesh], Parambikulam WLS*, Thattekkad WLS [Kerala], Nandur Madhmeswar WLS [Maharashtra], Fambong Lho WLS, Kyongnosola WLS [Sikkim].

* sites revisited after 8 to 18 years for bird banding

Changes in bird population observed through banding

1. Point Calimere WLS: Among the waders the two arctic breeders namely Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* and Little Stint *Calidris minuta* which used to be banded in hundreds per day, are becoming uncommon at Point

Calimere. The total number of birds caught of these two species (599 for Curlew Sandpiper and 517 for Little Stint) in 110 days catches during 1999-2001, is less than that of the two days peak catch of these two species during the 1980s. The other two long legged waders namely Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* and Blackwinged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* which wintered in several thousands in the late 1980s have become scarce at Point Calimere. The decline in population (based on trapping data) for other larger waders such as Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*, Redshank *Tringa totanus* and Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* not as much that of the two common *Calidris* sandpipers. However, the banding data for the last four years shows that there is an increase in the numbers of two uncommon waders to India namely Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* and Red Knot *Calidris canuta*.

Four species of threatened species namely Spoonbill Sandpiper, Broad-tailed Grassbird Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*, and Spotted Greenshank *Tringa guttifer* were recorded from here. The occurrence of the former two species were recorded only through bird ringing. However, these two species were neither netted nor sighted during the last four years. The Spotted Greenshank recorded during 1999 from this sanctuary has been not sighted since then.

2. Parambikulam WLS: Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary was revisited for bird banding after 17 years in 1999 and five banding programmes ranging from 5 to 10 days were organised between 1999 January 2002 February. Six endemic species namely Small Sunbird *Nectarinia minima*, Rufous Babbler *Turdoides subrufus*, White-bellied Blue Flycatcher *Muscicapa pallipes*, Grey headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus priocephala*, White-bellied Treepie *Dendrocitta leucogaster* and Bluewinged Parakeet *Psittacula columboides* were ringed in considerable numbers during the Bird banders Training Programmes conducted between 1998 and 2002. The numbers caught and sighted for the above endemic species were relatively higher than that of the previous bird banding programme organised during 1983.

3. Palni Hills: The banding carried out at Palni Hills during four summer seasons (1970, 1982, 1984, 1990) and a winter season had generated baseline information on the bird community structure. The preliminary analysis of the data shows a tremendous changes in the bird community structure due to habitat alteration. Some of the forest interior species disappeared and some of them including some endemic species have become well adapted for the habitat changes. An increase in population was observed in certain globally threatened species such as Whitebellied Shortwing *Brachypteryx major*, and endemic species such as Greybreasted Laughing Thrush *Garrulax jerdoni*, Black and Rufous Flycatcher *Ficedula nigrorufa*, in spite of the

(continued on page 9)

ADVOCACY

Large scale smuggling of Sandalwood discovered in the Nagarhole National Park-an IBA site

INCERT investigation team has now discovered that smugglers are systematically looting and plundering the Sandalwood trees from the Nagarhole National Park. In just about a week's time, thousands of invaluable sandalwood trees and teak trees have been illegally felled by the smugglers in several parts of the park. Sandalwood and Teak trees are being looted chiefly from the following areas; 1) Dayyada Katte 2) Erekatte 3) Valageri Katte 4) Billena Hosahalli and 5) Chamalli Kadu. In addition another patch of 66 acres in the Mattigodu forest range, outside the National Park near Beruthammara halli, which is between BR Kaval and Titmatti Chain Gate, has also been a target of the sandalwood smugglers in recent weeks. Hundreds of Sandalwood trees have been systematically felled by them in this patch as well. One has to drive down a stretch of 5 kms from Panchavalli, towards BR Kaval to see the devastation being caused to this fragile ecosystem.

Leading newspapers have already published a note about the ongoing sandalwood looting activities in their respective newspapers on 16th July 2002.

The details of the Sandalwood smuggling activities along with some fifty photographs showing the truncated sandal wood trees, discarded barks etc. have been uploaded to our website:

<<http://incert.tripod.com/nagarholenationalpark/>>

We request you to kindly visit our website and write polite letters to the following authorities and urge them to take immediate remedial steps to curb this large scale sandalwood carnage inside the Nagarhole National Park:-

1. Sri S.M. Krishna Honourable Chief Minister of Karnataka, Bangalore, India Tel: (080) 225 3414(Off) (080) 225 2572(Res) email : <cm@kar.nic.in>,<cmk@bangalore.it.com>
2. The Secretary (Environment and Ecology Department of Forest, Environment and Ecology Government of Karnataka Multistoried Building Ambedkar Road Bangalore - 560 001, India Tel : (080) 225 4377 email : <psecfee@secretariat2.kar.nic.in>
3. Mr. S. K. Chakrabarty, IFS PCCF and Chief wildlife Warden, Karnataka Forest Department. 2nd floor, Aranya Bhavan, 18th cross, Malleswaram, Bangalore - 560 003, India Tel : (080) 3345846 (Off) (080) 3445431 (Res): email : <pccfwl@vsnl.com>
4. The Central Empowered Committee constituted by the Supreme Court of India, by its order dated 9.5.2002 in WP 202/95 & 171/96. at the following address:-
M.K. Jiwrajka, Member Secretary,
Central Empowered Committee Room No 106,
Paryavaran Bhavan, CGO Complex, Lodi Road,
New Delhi 110003
Tel fax 011 4363976

Ramsar Tag sought for Sundarbans: an IBA site

A proposal is being put forward by the State Forest Department to declare the mangroves of Sundarbans Tiger Reserve, a Ramsar site. The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands lists high priority conservation zones in the countries which are its signatories. The Bangladesh Sunderban was recently declared a Ramsar site and the officials are hoping that as a result of this, it should not be difficult for the Indian Sunderbans to be declared as well.

Ramsar Wetlands Award and Evian Special Prize 2002 for Chilka- an IBA site

The Chilka Development Authority (CDA) has been selected for the "Ramsar Award and Evian Special Prize 2002 consisting of US\$ 10,000.00" for its outstanding achievements in the field of restoration and the wise use of wetlands, as well as the impressive way in which local communities have been included in these activities. This prize will be donated by the Danone Group as part of a collaborative project with the Ramsar Convention. India would be the first country from the Asiatic region to receive this prestigious award. There are two other winners of this award for 2002. One is a consortium of NGOs working in the Morava-Dyje Floodplain transboundary region in Europe (Austria, Czech Republic and Slovak Republic). The four organizations are Distelverein (Austria), Daphne (Slovak Republic), Veronika (Slovak Republic), and the WWF International - Danube Carpathian Programme (based in Austria). The other is the Banrock Station Initiative of the BRL Hardy Wine Company, an Australian company, for its outstanding achievements in the fields of restoration and

wise use of wetlands on its property, public awareness and sponsorship of wetland conservation in Australia and other countries.

The Conference of the Parties will bring together the delegates of the 131 countries that so far have joined the Convention, plus many representatives of international organizations and NGOs.

Gifts from Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN)

Steve Parr, International Officer of the RSPB brought two used binoculars to BNHS. One was given to Mr. Bhagwat, watchman of Nannaj, Solapur, and the other to Mr. Adishisha, bustard watchman of Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary. We are trying to get some more binoculars for the frontline staff.

BIRD CENSUS TRAINING WORKSHOP

Tripura Workshop 19th July 2002

A training workshop was held at Agarthala, Tripura on 19th July 2002 and participated by 61 people, mostly from the Tripura Forest Department. The programme was inaugurated by His Excellency Lt. Gen. K. M. Seth, PVSM, AVSM (Retd.), Governor of Tripura.

Mr. Rohmingliana, IFS, PCCF of Tripura and Mr. Balbir Singh, IFS, Conservator of Forests, Wildlife, welcomed the guests and talked about the biodiversity conservation in Tripura. Dr. Rahmani briefed the participants about the need for bird census. Mr. Romingliana also emphasized about the need of training to forest officials through such workshops. Dr. Rahmani then gave a detailed account of the IBA programme and the IBCN followed by Bird Census Techniques. Next day, he took participants to the field to discuss how to initiate a scientific ornithological survey. He stressed that the participants should give more efforts to collect data during an ornithological survey. Dr. Rahmani also gave presentations on 'How to write scientific papers', 'How to write project proposals', and 'Need for Bird Ringing'.

Shillong Workshop 22-23 July 2002

Another training workshop was held at Shillong on 22-23 July 2002 and participated by 24 people from different parts of the region, mostly from the Forest Department of Meghalaya. The programme was inaugurated by Dr. Anwaruddin Choudhury (IBCN State coordinator of North-east). The programme was started

with a introduction by Dr. Anwar and Dr. Rahmani briefed the participants about the need for bird census.

Oriental Bird Club (OBC) small grants and the two annual awards

Small grants (up to Great Britain Pound 500) are available from the OBC to fund conservation fieldwork and projects to ornithologists in the Oriental region. Proposals are considered five times a year. For more information visit OBC website <www.orientalbirdclub.org>.

This year again OBC offers Forktail-Leica award for conservation (GBP1500). The 2002 Forktail-Leica Award for bird conservation is the fourteenth award supported by funds generously donated by Leica Camera. Proposals must be received by 1st September 2002. This award is only open to Oriental nationals and projects should wherever possible:

- Involve local people
- Support national non-governmental organizations
- Aim to influence Government decisions in favour of wildlife conservation

OBC targets this award to projects which include studies or surveys of:

- Globally threatened species
- Areas supporting concentrations of endemic species
- Poorly known areas likely to support globally threatened or endemic species.

The OBC-WildWings Conservation Awareness Award 2002 is the ninth award generously sponsored by WildWings, an independent travel agency for birders. The award of £1000 is being offered to Oriental nationals for projects designed to raise conservation awareness, particularly among local communities. The closing date for applications is again the 1st September 2002.

Examples of such projects include:

- Involving local communities in making decisions which benefit wildlife
- Funding publications and education material about wildlife conservation
- Funding wildlife camps for school children
- Interpretative material for visitor centers

Small grants up to £500 are offered for conservation work and conservation awareness projects. Small grant applications are considered at any time of the year. Criteria outlined for the two major awards apply also to

small grant applications, which are awarded four times a year. Applications should apply at least six months prior to the intended study period.

For guidelines, please contact:
Phil Benstead
Conservation Officer, OBC, PO Box 324
Bedford, MK42 OWG UK
E-mail: obc.admin@virgin.net
Website: <http://www.orientalbirdclub.org/>

BOOK REVIEW

“Wildlife Reserves of India - Sunjoy Monga”

I was fortunate to receive an early copy from Sunjoy. Well written book with excellent photographs. The describes the different wildlife reserves in India along with contact details, best time to visit and basic distance chart. The protected areas are well covered and the information precise. The book is divided into the 5 sections (North, South, East, West and Central).

Missing is the photographs name along the photograph (and to find the same is a tedious experience), also the caption of the photographs is not under it, but in the text on the same page, so if you do not know what the photograph is you have to go through all the text. The photographs in the book deserve a special mention. A must for all nature lovers.

— Nikhil Devasar, Delhi Bird Club
An IBCN Partner

EXPERT PANEL SET UP FOR FOREST PLAN, DEEPAR BEEL MAY GET SANCTUARY STATUS

The Assam Government has constituted an expert committee to suggest measures for formulating a comprehensive forest plan in the interest of maintaining the ecological balance in the State.

Kamrup Deputy Commissioner Absar Hazarika has been entrusted to prepare a feasibility study for declaring the Deepar Beel (An IBA site) as a wildlife sanctuary. The State Government in the meantime has decided to withdraw the May 29, 2002 order of the Principal Secretary of Forests L. Rynjah, which rescinded the January 1989 draft notification for demarcation of the core area of the Deepar Beel as a bird sanctuary.

The Minister of State for Forest Pradyut Bordoloi said that the expert committee consisting of Dr Anil Goswami, Dr Anawaruddin Choudhury, Dr Bibhab Talukdar, Dr Padmeswar Gogoi, Mr. D.P. Neog, Prof.

P C Bhattacharjee and Mr. S.K. Sen would formulate the forest plan to restore the forest cover and maintain the ecological balance.

Mr. Bordoloi said that as per the internationally accepted norms, the minimum forest cover in the plain areas should be 33 per cent, while it should be 60 per cent in the hills. But according to the Minister, the actual forest cover in the State is only 16 per cent which is quite alarming.

He said that about 18,000 hectares of forest land were freed from the grasp of encroachers in the recent eviction drive. The eviction drive has proved to be a tough job for the Forest department for different reasons, he said, citing example of some reserved forest areas where the department carried out eviction drive as many as 70 times.

Mr. Bordoloi said that the Kamrup Deputy Commissioner would examine all aspects including rehabilitation of 400 families of fishermen living along the Deepar Beel before submitting the report for declaring the Beel as a wildlife sanctuary.

It may be mentioned that the erstwhile government had refused to declare the Deepar Beel as a bird sanctuary for three factors — the close proximity to the Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport, passing of the broadgauge line from Jagighopa to Guwahati along the Beel area and widening of the NH 37.

Rio Tinto Birdwatch Event in India - 2002

Rio Tinto programme is based on a 5 year partnership with Rio Tinto, the multinational mining company which has many operations worldwide. One of the vehicles for promoting the Programme to Rio Tinto business is an annual birdwatch event which is associated with the World Birdwatch which BirdLife Partners hold during the month of October. Last year over 20 Rio Tinto companies took part around the world, resulting in 35 different events community participation, nearly 1000 people took part last year. India has not been a country which the Programme had engaged with. This is a very welcome development as it gives opportunities for the Programme to engage with further Rio Tinto companies and also to engage with bird conservation initiatives in India a very important area for bird biodiversity. The Birdwatch Event can be undertaken between October and November. For more information contact Mr. Zafar, BNHS.

PRINCIPLES OF BIRDING ETHICS

Source: American Birding Association (www.americanbirding.org/abaethics.htm)

Everyone who enjoys birds and birding must always respect wildlife, its environment, and the rights of others. In any conflict of interest between birds and birders, the welfare of the birds and their environment comes first.

Code Of Birding Ethics

1. Promote the welfare of birds and their environment.

1(a) Support the protection of important bird habitat.

1(b) To avoid stressing birds or exposing them to danger, exercise restraint and caution during observation, photography, sound recording, or filming.

Limit the use of recordings and other methods of attracting birds, and never use such methods in heavily birded areas, or for attracting any species that is Threatened, Endangered, or of Special Concern, or is rare in your local area.

Keep away from nests and nesting colonies, roosts, display areas, and important feeding sites. In such sensitive areas, if there is a need for extended observation, photography, filming, or recording, try to use a blind or hide, and take advantage of natural cover.

Use artificial light sparingly for filming or photography, especially for close-ups.

1(c) Before advertising the presence of a rare bird, evaluate the potential for disturbance to the bird, its surroundings, and other people in the area, and proceed only if access can be controlled, disturbance minimized, and permission has been obtained from private land-owners. The sites of rare nesting birds should be divulged only to the proper conservation authorities.

1(d) Stay on roads, trails, and paths where they exist; otherwise keep habitat disturbance to a minimum.

2. Respect the law, and the rights of others.

2(a) Do not enter private property without the owner's explicit permission.

2(b) Follow all laws, rules, and regulations governing use of roads and public areas, both at home and abroad.

2(c) Practise common courtesy in contacts with other people. Your exemplary behavior will generate goodwill with birders and non-birders alike.

3. Ensure that feeders, nest structures, and other artificial bird environments are safe.

3(a) Keep dispensers, water, and food clean, and free of decay or disease. It is important to feed birds continually during harsh weather.

3(b) Maintain and clean nest structures regularly.

3(c) If you are attracting birds to an area, ensure the birds are not exposed to predation from cats and other domestic animals, or dangers posed by artificial hazards.

4. Group birding, whether organized or impromptu, requires special care.

Each individual in the group, in addition to the obligations spelled out in Items #1 and #2, has responsibilities as a Group Member.

4(a) Respect the interests, rights, and skills of fellow birders, as well as people participating in other legitimate outdoor activities. Freely share your knowledge and experience, except where code 1(c) applies. Be especially helpful to beginning birders.

4(b) If you witness unethical birding behavior, assess the situation, and intervene if you think it prudent. When interceding, inform the person(s) of the inappropriate action, and attempt, within reason, to have it stopped. If the behavior continues, document it, and notify appropriate individuals or organizations.

Group Leader Responsibilities [amateur and professional trips and tours].

4(c) Be an exemplary ethical role model for the group. Teach through word and example.

4(d) Keep groups to a size that limits impact on the environment, and does not interfere with others using the same area.

4(e) Ensure everyone in the group knows of and practices this code.

4(f) Learn and inform the group of any special circumstances applicable to the areas being visited (e.g. no tape recorders allowed).

4(g) Acknowledge that professional tour companies bear a special responsibility to place the welfare of birds and the benefits of public knowledge ahead of the company's commercial interests. Ideally, leaders should keep track of tour sightings, document unusual occurrences, and submit records to appropriate organizations.

**PLEASE FOLLOW THIS CODE AND DISTRIBUTE AND
TEACH IT TO OTHERS**

PARTNER FACT FILE

NATURE CLUB

Date founded: 1991
Members: 60
Contact Person: Prof. A. Relton
 Email: reltona@yahoo.com
Phone: 0431-770136 Extn. 39



Contact address: Nature Club
 Bishop Heber College
 Tiruchirapalli - 620 017
 Tamil Nadu

Aim

Nature Club, Bishop Heber College is a student organization actively involved in various conservation activities. It provide opportunity for students to know about nature and in turn help others to understand it.

Objectives

- Learn to appreciate the beauty of nature and the need to protect and preserve it.
- Learn to identify fauna and flora and to understand their biology.
- Learn to relate man and environment.
- To educate the community, specially children about conservation.

Administration

Nature Club, Bishop Heber College is a student body attached to Heber Ausable Institute. The Principal is the Patron. There is a staff-advisor to guide the students.

Among the students, we have a president and secretary to moderate various activities of the Club.

Major Activities

- Regular bird watching, nature walks around Trichy.
- Field visits to various sanctuaries and national parks in Tamil Nadu and Kerala
- Regular video and slide shows
- Bird census, wildlife census in various sanctuaries.
- Community awareness programme in various places including rural and tribal areas
- Environmental Education Programme for school / college students in Trichy
- Wildlife Week, Environment Day, Earth Day celebration

Achievements

- Due to our efforts "Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary" a large irrigation lake was declared as "Bird Sanctuary" in 1996.
- We recently completed two year monitoring at that Lake, our checklist reports 188 species of birds.

(continued from page 4)

habitat alteration. The other major changes observed is the colonisation of low country birds in the medium and higher elevation areas which are crucial habitats for most of the endemic species. It will be interesting to examine whether the increase in populations of these species sustains for a long period.

Now BNHS has started a research project at the same sites to study the changes in the bird community structure especially of the endemic and threatened birds. The data to be generated through bird banding under this project would be compared with the earlier data to assess the changes in the bird population. From the first two months data, it appears that the population of three endemic species Greybreasted Laughing Thrush, Whitebellied Shortwing and Black and Rufous Flycatcher show an increasing trend despite the visible habitat alteration/loss.

4. Chilika Lake: The Chilika lake was monitored for bird ringing during the early 1980s. After a gap of 18 years, the BNHS has undertaken a research project to evaluate the habitat by using birds as the bio-indicators where bird banding is one of the study methods. This study is necessitated as Chilika Lake has undergone major ecological changes over the last several years, mostly due to the

salinity changes caused by choking of the outer channel and closure of its mouth to the sea, and the restoration measures (opening of new mouth) undertaken by the Chilika Development Authority.

The ringing data of the present study shows that the species composition and the relative proportion of the birds caught was similar to that of the 1981-82 ringing studies carried out during the corresponding months (February and March). This suggests that the ecological regime of this lagoon may also be the same as that of the 1980's, but needs further confirmation, as the sample size was not adequate. The threatened species of the Chilika Lake, the Spot-billed Pelican was seen in good numbers between 175 to 300, during the study period. The Spoonbilled Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* was neither sighted nor caught during the current project period. A pair of the threatened Pallas's Fishing Eagle was regularly sighted in Nalabana from December 2001 to March 2002.

To conclude, as bird population study complemented by bird banding will be exhaustive and more authentic, this technique should be adopted as the major methodology by ornithologists.

HORNBILLS DECLINE IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

The scenic beauty of the state of Arunachal Pradesh is unending. But more so, importantly the State has reached a milestone of 15 years since its emergence as a State. But in this beautiful State, the Great Pied Hornbill is facing extinction. Sri Chuku Loma, Deputy Wildlife Warden of **Pakhui Wildlife Sanctuary** (PWS) said that the sharp decline in the hornbill population has alarmed the authorities so much that they have decided to implement a 'protection strategy', involving the local residents, to save the endangered species. Pakhui is one of the international recognized sites as Important Bird Areas by the Bombay Natural History Society's **IBA Programme**, where other **Globally Threatened and Restricted Range species** include the White-winged Wood Duck (*Cairina scutulata*), Rufous-necked Hornbill (*Aceros nipalensis*), Beautiful Nuthatch (*Sitta formosa*), Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*), Purple Wood-pigeon (*Columba punicea*), Black-breasted Parrotbill (*Paradoxornis flavirostris*), Red-breasted Hill Partridge (*Arborophila mandellii*), Pallas's Fish Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucoryphus*), Marsh Babbler (*Pellorneum palustre*), Ward's Trogon (*Harpactus wardi*), Rufous-throated Wren-babbler (*Spellaeornis caudatus*), Hoary-throated Barwing (*Actinodura nipalensis*), Brown-throated Tit-babbler (*Alcippe ludlowi*), Beautiful Sibia (*Heterophasia gracilis*), White-naped Yuhina (*Yuhina bakeri*), Black-browed Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus canator*), and Broad-billed Flycatcher Warbler (*Tickellia hodgsoni*).

According to Sri Loma, The North-east has the largest number of hornbills in India, with Arunachal Pradesh harbouring 5 species. The hornbills are favourite of the Nyishi people who use the upper beak for ceremonial head gear, while the Wanchoo community adorn themselves with the tail feathers. Arunachal Wildlife and Nature Foundation (AWNF), an NGO, jointly with the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) have mooted an action plan to create awareness about the importance of conservation of the species by designing a replica of a hornbill beak made of fibre glass. Sri Loma said that the Nyishi people were at first apprehensive about the conservation efforts and considered them as an assault on their age-old tradition and culture. But they were eventually won over when they felt that the loss of hornbills would be a threat to their culture



Great Hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*), male © 2001 Laurence P.

Great Pied Hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*), male ©2001 Laurence Poh

and tradition, of which the bird was an integral part, he added. Another significant achievement in the field of wildlife conservation was the formation of four village forest development councils (VFDC) by the Pakhui Wildlife Sanctuary. The VFDCs have passed a resolution imposing a fine of Rs 5,000/- for killing or trading in wildlife. A ban on illegal fishing in Pakhui river in Seijossa had also been enforced, he stated. Sri Loma said the involvement of local people living in the fringe areas of sanctuaries and National Parks was essential and their services could be utilized for conservation of wildlife. Referring to the PWS, Sri Loma said that due to the involvement of the local people, the sanctuary was one of the best managed and protected ones in the entire North-East region. The sanctuary is also one of the best elephant habitats in the region with a population of 114-140 elephants (according to the recent census).

— Excerpted from *ASSAM TRIBUNE* and *IBA programme*

IBCN Network Coordinator

We have appointed Mr. Rajat Bhargava as IBCN Network Coordinator. He was working with WWF-India based in Delhi. Now onwards, he will be regularly communicating with all of you. Welcome Rajat to IBCN.

State Coordinators of IBCN

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Andaman & Nicobar Islands
Dr. Lalitha Vijayan
Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology & Natural History (SACON), Anaikatty PO, Coimbatore-641 108
Tamil Nadu. Email: sacon@vsnl.com</p> <p>2. Andhra Pradesh
Ms. Kalyani Kandula
H. No. 161
BHEL HIG Phase II
Madinaguda, Near Miyapur
Hyderabad-500 050
Email: mukal@eth.net</p> <p>3. Assam
Dr. Bibhab Kumar Talukdar
“Evergreen”, Samanwoy Path (Survey)
Beltola, Guwahati-781028, Assam
Email: bibhab1@sancharnet.in</p> <p>4. Bihar and Jharkhand
Mr. Arvind Mishra
Mandar Nature Club
Anand Chikitsalaya Road
Bhagalpur, Bihar
Email: mncarvind@hotmail.com</p> <p>5. Delhi and Jammu & Kashmir
Dr. Rahul Kaul
WPA Coordinator, South Asia Regional Office
S-56/1 DLF Phase III
Gurgaon- 122 002, Haryana
Email: r_kaul@hotmail.com</p> <p>6. Gujarat
Mr. Lavkumar Khacher
646, Vastunirman
Gandhinagar- 382 022, Gujarat</p> <p>7. Haryana and Punjab
Dr. Rajiv Kalsi
Department of Zoology
MLN College
Yamuna Nagar 1350 01, Haryana.
Email: rkalsi@nde.vsnl.net.in</p> <p>8. Himachal Pradesh
Mr. Sanjeeva Pandey
Director
Great Himalayan National Park
At-Shamshi- 175 125
Kullu, Himachal Pradesh
Email: dirchnp@sancharnet.in</p> <p>9. Karnataka
Dr. S. Subramanya
C-206 Pride Apts.
Bilekahalli, Bannerghatta Road
Bangalore – 560 076, Karnataka
Email: subbus@vsnl.com</p> <p>10. Kerala
Mr. P. O. Nameer
Asst. Professor, College of Forestry
Kerala Agricultural University (KAU)
KAU (PO) 680 656
Thrissur, Kerala
Email: trc_nameer@sancharnet.in</p> | <p>11. Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh
Mr. Arun M. K. Bharos
B-101 Gayatrinagar, PO Shankar Nagar
Raipur-492 007, Chhattisgarh
Email: CWSRAIPUR@hotmail.com</p> <p>12. Maharashtra
Mr. Bishwarup Raha
Hemant Vihar, 13, Savarkar Nagar
Off. Gangapur Road, Nashik-422 005, Maharashtra
Email: wolfajay@hotmail.com</p> <p>13. Orissa
Mr. Biswajit Mohanty
Wildlife Society of Orissa
“Shantikunj”,
Link Road, Cuttack- 753 012
Orissa. Email: biswajit_m@vsnl.com</p> <p>14. Pondicherry:
Dr. Priya Davidar
School of Ecology & Environmental Sciences Pondicherry
University, Kalapet, Pondicherry
Email: pdavidar@yahoo.com</p> <p>15. Rajasthan
Mr. Manoj Kulshreshtha
Snehdeep, B-33, Sethi Colony
Jaipur, Rajasthan
Email: snehdeep@jpl.dot.net.in</p> <p>16. Sikkim
Ms. Usha Ganguli-Lachungpa
Sr. Research Officer (WL)
Government of Sikkim
Department of Forest, Environment & Wildlife
Deorali-737 102, Gangtok, Sikkim
Email: ganden@dte.vsnl.net.in</p> <p>17. Tamil Nadu
Mr. P. Pramod
Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology & Natural History (SACON), Anaikatty PO, Coimbatore-641 108
Tamil Nadu. Email: salimali@md4.vsnl.net.in</p> <p>18. Uttar Pradesh
To be appointed</p> <p>19. Uttaranchal
Dr. Bivash Pandav
c/o Wildlife Institute of India
P.O. Box 18, Chandrabani
Dehra Dun 2480 01, Uttaranchal
Email: pandavb@wii.gov.in</p> <p>20. West Bengal
Mr. Kushal Mookherjee
Asstt. Secretary, Prakriti Samsad
65, Golf Club Road,
Calcutta-700 033
Email: kushal@cal3.vsnl.net.in</p> <p>21. North-east State
Dr. Anwaruddin Choudhury
C/o Mr Alauddin Choudhury,
Near Gate No.1 of
Nehru Stadium, Islampur Road,
Guwahati 781 007
Email: badrul@sancharnet.in</p> |
|---|---|

IBCN ORGANISATIONAL PARTNERSHIP



Manipur



Coorg, Kar.



Bhagalpur, Bihar



Calcutta, WB



Hyderabad, AP



New Delhi



Alipurduar, WB



Kokrajhar, Assam



Chhattisgarh



Cuttack, Orissa



Trivandrum, Ke.



Jaipur, Rajasthan



Dhakuakhana, Assam



Siliguri, WB



Dhubri, Assam



Gujarat



Guwahati, Assam



Malda, WB



Nasik, MH



INTACH, Bihar



Guwahati, Assam



Mysore, Kar.



Surat, Gujarat



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



Indian Bird Conservation Network

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.

Edited by: Dr. Asad R. Rahmani, Director, BNHS
M. Zafar-ul Islam, IBA Officer

Compiled, Layout and Designed by M. Zafar-ul Islam

Scanned by Gopi Naidu

Contributions should be sent to:

Editors, Mistnet, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, S. B. Singh Road, Mumbai-4000 23, INDIA.

Tel: +91 22 2821811, Fax: +91 22 2837615,

Email: IBAbnhs@vsnl.net

Deadline for the next issue : September 15, 2002



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.

BirdLife International Office:
Wellbrook Court, Girton Road,
Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK
Tel: +44 1223 277318
Fax: +44 1223 277200
Email: birdlife@birdlife.org.uk
Web: www.birdlife.net

(For Private Circulation only)



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.

Bombay Natural History Society,
Hornbill House, S. B. Singh Road,
Mumbai-4000 23, INDIA.
Tel: +91 22 2821811, Fax: +91 22 2837615
Email: bnhs@bom4.vsnl.net.in
Web: www.bnhs.org