

woodpecker, a mere 13 cm from beak to tail, couldn't be expected to hammer any louder. I was looking into the sun and it was difficult to tell whether it was the Brown-capped *Dendrocopos nanus* or Grey-capped *D. canicapillus*. For the Brown-capped, at about 1,067 m, this may well be an altitudinal record.

To work up an appetite for lunch, we gained several other ridge tops, ultimately reaching a pine-covered open patch, at least 457 m above Subathu. By now the sun was fairly hot and a few Common Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus* were floating on thermals, no doubt looking for food. But some Eurasian Griffons *Gyps fulvus* seemed to be riding the thermals for the sheer joy of it. As we settled to a sandwich-black coffee lunch, I noticed a bird hawking insects with short sallies into the air. It resembled the male Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis* and so I took no further notice. But when it perched on a bush directly below us, the bird revealed its powder-blue crown and nape. This lifer was a male Blue-capped Redstart *Phoenicurus caeruleocephalus*. That moment will also remain a lifetime's regret, for not having carried a spare film-roll. A moment later, a Great Barbet *Megalaima virens* came and perched so close at eye-level that I could count its moustachial bristles! This was a lunch hour, truly of dreams.

It was time for the last walk of the day, this time ostensibly to work up a thirst for a sun-downer! Descending through freshly ploughed, terraced fields, we put up clouds of sparrow-sized birds. The first impression was of an exclusive congregation of female House Sparrows *Passer domesticus*. That was untenable, of course. Closer observation revealed the birds to be Hodgson's Mountain-Finches *Leucosticte nemoricola* in flocks of upto a hundred. With that, the tally of my lifetime's first encounters, in the past 24 hour period, stood at an incredible six. Of course, altogether we had seen more than thirty species and heard an equal number in less than two days. So Subathu is definitely an attractive destination for serious bird watching.

Almost all Army Cantonments of Subathu vintage are steeped in the history of the Raj. When Simla became the summer capital, Governors' Generals / Viceroy of India rode up on horse-back and Subathu was the natural midway staging post. The garrison commandant's residence, which Capt. P.C. Kennedy had constructed around 1820, now inevitably became the great watering-hole for Raj personalities on their annual altitudinal migration (!) and in the process embalmed this quaint little cantonment with the mystique, nostalgia, romance and gossip of the Raj.

Once the railway track to Simla was commissioned, in 1903, Subathu slipped into one hundred years of solitude. But that most imposing colonial mansion, Kennedy House, was retained in its pristine dignity. Today it serves as the Garrison Officers' Mess and the trees around it are full of avian comings and goings the year long.

On the drive back to Chandigarh we lost count of the Streaked Laughingthrushes *Trochalopteron [Garrulax] lineatus* and the Blue Whistling-Thrushes that crossed our path. Stopping at a way-side eatery for a cup of coffee, we saw on the facing hill slope one Great Tit, a pair of Indian Robins *Saxicoloides fulicata* and several Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* in a tight knot on the ground, locked in mortal combat. What more could one ask of life, when you have an abundance of such innocent pleasures!

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Aasheesh Pittie

8-2-545 Road No 7, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India. Email: aasheesh.pittie@gmail.com

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Recoveries from the Newsletter for Birdwatchers (1965) - 10

Zafar Futehally

#2205 Oakwood Apartments, Jakkasandra Layout, Koramangala, 3rd Block, 8th Main, Bangalore 560034, Karnataka, India.

Email: zafarfutehally@gmail.com

By 1965, its fifth year, the *Newsletter* had become fairly well known in the then small birding community of India, and a few articles from Pakistan relating to birds common to our two continents reassured us—as we are essentially a part of one subcontinent.

Rev. A. Navarro, to whom you have been introduced before, took a group of students from St. Xavier's High School, Bombay, to Kendal in Ahmedabad district for bird watching, "instead of sitting at home for the Diwali holidays, firing crackers and feasting on sweetmeats"... (1) Our first impression of the situation was one of dejection and disappointment...the countryside seemed devoid of any interest for bird watching...But first impressions are not always the best...At the end of six days, footing it out for miles, we found to our great surprise and joy a list of hundred varieties of different birds." I quote one paragraph from this long four page article.

"Along the bullock cart ruts and *nullahs*, along side which there grew an abundance

of green grass with bushes and small trees to break the monotony, we saw seven varieties of warblers. This was a pleasant and refreshing sight. Here we saw the Indian Great Reed Warbler, Blyth's Reed Warblers, the Orphean Warbler, the Booted Tree Warbler, the Ashy Wren Warbler, and the Indian Wren Warbler. What a splendid company they made on the wing, bristling with the enjoyment of their environment. But of all this glorious company two of them—Blyth's and the Booted Tree Warbler—we were destined to watch more often on trees, while the others preferred to rest on bushes, reeds and grass. Blyth's Warbler, which was the most common everywhere, gave us the joy of hearing its rather monotonous 'chat-chat-chat' chant. But what was our surprised delight when we suddenly discovered him warbling at noon, trimming his throat to a sweet, melodious and soul-lifting song akin, we thought, to that of the Oriole: only his was a much softer and less high-pitched melody."

Brother Navarro had the distinction of discovering a new species for India during his visit to Fennel Hill (Karnala Bird Sanctuary) near Mumbai on 31.i.1965. "It must have been around 11 o'clock when I was almost at the top of the hill, on the right side of the road, when suddenly a noisy party, made up mostly of Warblers, Flycatchers and some birds of another variety, were enjoying themselves in a delightful cacophony in a very thick patch of the forest. My attention was caught by a pair of birds calling to each other incessantly. Their calls were altogether unfamiliar to me as much as their colour was. I sat down on the ground flora most ten minutes observing. Finally I was convinced that the birds that I was observing were something I had never seen before. So I decided there and then to secure at least one specimen of them."

"Luckily I did secure one of them. After examining it with some care I placed it, not without some misgivings, in the group of the Pied Shrike of the Genus *Hemipus*. Later