

from quite a wide area and since birds should likely be on the move by March, I was hopeful something of interest might show up.

On arrival I headed straight into the fort to check out the forest there. There was no sign of any Nilgiri Wood-Pigeons and initially I saw just some of the typical residents and winter visitors: Spotted Babbler *Pellorneum ruficeps*, Blue-headed Rock-Thrush *Monticola cinclorhynchus*, Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*, and Asian Paradise-Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*. I decided to head into a somewhat more open glade with smaller trees where I had seen a Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassina* on a previous visit. This 'glade' is behind the back of the reservoir and contains a small nursery. I didn't have any luck with interesting flycatchers on this visit, but the 'glade' still turned up some nice birds. After viewing singles of 'Nilgiri' Blackbird *Turdus simillimus*—birds here are of the 'black-capped' form rather than the 'black-headed' form found in the real Nilgiris—and Tickell's Blue-Flycatcher *Cyornis tickelliae*, both local residents, I enjoyed cracking views of a male Indian Blue Robin *Luscinia brunnea* sitting right out in the open—a few of these handsome birds winter at Nandi Hills—and saw a total of three on this visit.

The smaller trees in the glade offer the opportunity to get some close views of *Phylloscopus* sp. warblers. Although I've only seen the regularly wintering Greenish Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* and Tickell's Warblers *P. affinis* at the Nandi Hills on previous visits, I always check close birds because there are several other species that winter in SW

India that might be expected to show up on migration occasionally. This time my luck was in as I noticed a 'phylloscopus' low down in the small trees. It was a Tytler's Leaf-Warbler *P. tytleri*—a lifer for me. I had very good views and saw the long, all-black bill, black legs, and the lack of wing bars. Incredibly, while looking at this I kept seeing another warbler that was obviously a 'Yellow-browed' type. After the Tytler's disappeared, I relocated this bird and had good looks at it. Hume's Warbler *P. humei* and Yellow-browed Warbler *P. inornatus* can be very tricky to ID, but the call, a slightly slurred 'too-it', was a bit different from the clear 'tsueet' of a Yellow-browed Warbler. And the bird was pretty dull with a slight buff tinge to the supercilium. Based on this, I believe it was a Hume's Warbler.

About ten minutes after seeing these warblers, I had incredible looks at an Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura* (also a lifer) that obligingly fed right by the path, in the open, for as long as I wanted to look. Subsequently on a visit to Kerala, I learned that Indian Pittas are primarily active at night and to see one there we had to look for them in the half light at dawn and then spotlight one perched in a bush. It was only then I realized how lucky I was to see one feeding openly in broad daylight.

Checking the open woodland at the very top of the hill proved somewhat anticlimactic, with just a group of Oriental Tree Pipits *Anthus hodgsoni* to add to the list. A last look around the woods in the lower part of the fort produced a somewhat out of place Hoopoe *Upupa epops*, which I tracked down after mistaking its call for some kind of cuckoo.

Recoveries from the Newsletter for Birdwatchers (1967)—14

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1967 was a particularly good year for the *Newsletter* and for me as these notes will show. The "AGM" was held on 17th December 1966 and "there were a large number of people present...undoubtedly (due) to the attraction provided by the showing of E.P. Gee's films later on." The annual subscription was retained at Rs 5 per annum.

The January issue was dominated by the article "From a Train" by the evergreen KS Lavkumar. He overcomes the problem of the shaking train, and hence the ineffectiveness of the binoculars by, "the compensation (provided) by the great area covered..." A total of a hundred species were listed, seen from trains, starting from the common house crow and ending with bar-headed geese. "The slower trains are an advantage in the greater opportunity they give to identify the bird. I have watched a pair of Sarus Cranes caring for their young, and another pair...standing over an egg on a heaped nest of rushes, Pied Kingfishers hovering over a lily-choked lake near Hyderabad, Whiskered Terns skimming edges of a tidal mud (bank) near Bombay, Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters rising in hundreds one early September morning from

an acacia in Marwar, solitary Kashmir Rollers buoyantly flying south on their autumn migration to Africa." In short, Lavkumar misses no bird even without his binoculars and even reported seeing "a migration flight of White-eyed Buzzards."

The *Newsletter*, being the only one of its kind in those days, was an effective tool for motivating amateurs to write about their experiences. I did not realise though that I was such a dreaded creature as E.D. Avari seems to suggest. "A psychological dread of appearing in print has enabled me to live happily, alas, until the letter arrived from the Editor of the *Newsletter*..." '...a long article / short article / review / letter, etc...' "I still shudder as I frantically type this after a hurried consultation of my moth-eaten notes."

But like many shikaris of the old days Avari was deeply interested and well informed as these extracts will show. "Two trips to Tibet during my school days come to mind. By and large I have found that the bird life of the hill areas is common to Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal and this district, which spreads its dense tropical foliage throughout the base of the

four regions I have mentioned above. In similar Savannah-like riverine forests are found the Lapwings, Ibisbills, Nightjars, Herons, Mergansers (Goosanders), Fairy Bluebirds, both species of the Himalayan Hornbills, the Great and the Lesser, the doves including the flashy Emerald, the Spotted, and the Rufous Turtle...”

“Among my best friends in the bird world can be counted the fearless little Sikkim Black Tit (*Parus rubidiventris beavani*) which kept up its cheerful little song, rather like the common Darjeeling Green Backed Tit, throughout a fearful thunderstorm with lightening striking the neighbouring Silver firs and Junipers, accompanied by the most awesome thunder only heard at the heights of Sandakhphu and Phallelung (Phajut) the tri-junction of Nepal, Sikkim and Darjeeling district at about 12,000 feet. While I stood cowering before this display of nature’s wrath, the little fellow called away merrily, “*whiwee, whiwee, whiwee,*” as if telling me not to worry. His lower altitude cousins would have probably died of heart failure on the spot as I nearly did during that frightful experience which lasted over an hour.” Avari concludes his article by saying, “For a person interested in birds, there are very few places like our environments here in the whole wide world...”

Tea plantations and coffee estates have been accused of cutting down forests in the Western Ghats and north-eastern India, and interfering with the migratory corridors of elephants and other wildlife. This cannot be denied but as R.E. Hawkins used to say, “Half a loaf is better than nothing.” Tea and coffee luckily both require shade trees to soften the light, and these native trees (*Erythrina* and the like) seem to have played a part in the survival of birds. The owners of these estates were often good naturalists, and I quote from the article, “A terai tea garden in March” by Maureen Thom. “Bare shade trees and well pruned tea bushes are a perfect background for birdwatching at present though the lack of shade and cover must be anything but a joy to the birds themselves. Fortunately for them some of the sections are only lightly pruned and they make full use of this. Already on March 18th, I saw a Common Mynah carrying caterpillars busily into a particularly thick patch, and the Magpie Robins who built last year in the tea to the east of the bungalow are hard at it again. In these still leafy sections, a few winter visitors still linger. Brown Shrikes, and Red-breasted Flycatchers are still with us, and Collared Bushchats were, up to about the 9th. There were at least two pairs of Tree Pipits around this month, who, disturbed from their investigations under the tea, fly up into the shade trees with their plaintive “peeping”, there to wag their tails slowly until all is quiet again when they drop straight down into the tea. I have not seen Grey-headed Flycatchers at all this month, but the sound of hedge-clipping still indicate the presence of Blyth’s Reed Warbler in the heart of a tea bush, and a little patience will be rewarded by seeing it emerge at the top “clipping” and jerking its tail.”

Another English lady, Sarah Jameson, continued her association with the *Newsletter* even after moving over to Coonoor later. But in 1967 she wrote from West Bengal for the October issue, “I have seen 4 winter migrants already. I noticed a couple of Brown Shrikes in the garden on September

11th and have seen them daily since. It would be interesting to know if they are the same two who were with us last winter. Just outside our garden is a small plot of ground that was used as a bed for paddy seedlings, and here standing in shallow water, I was surprised to see a couple of snipe on the evening of September 6th. 3 days later in the same place I saw two waders nodding their heads and wagging their tails up and down till suddenly they rose calling *dee-dee-dee-dee*. I identified them as Common Sandpipers. The next day I saw there a solitary Green Sandpiper the white on its tail showing very conspicuously as it flew away low over the paddy. The locally migratory Green Bee-eater arrived in the garden on August 28th. I am glad that this attractive bird with its cheerful *tree-tree* is back again. I have not seen or heard it here since April.”

I said earlier that 1967 was a good year for the *Newsletter* and for me. In September I was invited to attend the Third International Short Course on Management of National Parks and Equivalent Reserves organized by IUCN in the USA. We had a wonderful time wandering in the Parks—Yellowstone, Grand Teton and others in the Rocky Mountains. I wrote an account in the November issue and I quote a para, “...the course was organised as a travelling seminar commencing at the Grand Teton National Park on August 27 and ending at Grand Canyon in Arizona on September 22...To live intimately with so many conservationists from all over the world is in itself an education, it is quite unlike any other political or economic conference for among conservationists the words mine or thine have no meaning. The natural assets of the earth, its scenery, wildlife, and historical monuments belong to everyone and destruction or erosion of these anywhere is felt to be a common loss of the human race...”

The December issue had an unusual article by young V. Ravi, President, Nature Study Club, Guntur. I quote from the abstract, preceding the article, “In this note we are giving an outline...of the nesting behaviour of the House Sparrow. Dr Salim Ali’s appeal for a thorough study of this very common and important bird of the human environment, as well as D. Summers-Smith’s interesting monograph on it stimulated us to make the attempt.” The attempt was very worthwhile and much was learnt about selection of the nest site, construction of the nest, mating, egg laying, feeding the chicks, partnership, and “other social activities” as well.

The year ended with a question from Sudhir Vyas, then a young man, now a prominent diplomat yet deeply involved in bird watching. In the correspondence of December he says, “Today morning I saw a kite which appeared different from the Pariah Kite. It was soaring in company with two Pariah Kites so the differences were quite clear. It appeared slightly longer and had a curious pale head. The upper surface of the tail appeared bright chestnut when the bird banked in flight. The tail also appeared more deeply forked. Its flight was similar to the Pariah Kites. I think it was the Common Kite (*Milvus milvus*). Please let me know if my identification was correct and whether it has been recorded from Pune before.” Could it have been? Let someone from Pune respond.