

The species has not been listed from Bharatpur (Grewal & Sahgal 2006) but has been recorded within a radius of a few hundred kilometres in other parts of Rajasthan including: Sariska Tiger Reserve (Sankar et al. 1993) where they record it as abundant, July to October and otherwise rare, Ranthambore (Wildlywise 2006). Further south in the state of Rajasthan, it is recorded from Dungarpur (Saxena 2003) and nearby in the southern part of Mount Abu in the late 1800s by Butler (1875, 1876), though Sangha & Devarshi (2006) did not find it there more recently. It is recorded to the north in the Delhi area, with few observations during March, April and September recently summarised by Harvey et al. (2006). (It is also recorded in neighbouring Madhya Pradesh (Dhar, Hoshangabad and Mandla) by Hobcroft (2006) and Indian Holidays (2006).

Grimmett et al. (1998), record the Grey-headed Starling as a resident in the NE subcontinent and a winter visitor to central and west India, with scattered records elsewhere, while Harvey et al (2006) consider it an irregular passage migrant between wintering quarters in the peninsula and breeding grounds in the Himalayan foothills.

Our observation of the bird in Keoladeo, foraging with other mynas in lightly wooded country, fits in well with the general habits and habitats reported by Grimmett et al. (1998) of the bird feeding in flocks with other starlings and myna, taking nectar, berries, figs and fruit in lightly wooded country, groves, young forest plantations and sometimes around villages and towns.

If the Grey-headed Starling is a regular migrant to this region of the peninsula, it is surprising that it has not been recorded in a site as well watched as Keoladeo National Park.

Acknowledgements

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Grey-headed Starling *Sturnus malabaricus*

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Recoveries from the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* (1968)—15

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My bound volume of the *Newsletter's* eighth volume is surprisingly thin. The only issues I have are of February, March, April and August. The ones I have are without the usual printed cover page, with only the cyclostyled shield with sketches of birds, owls, swallows, little ringed plover, and an especially attractive one of a pair of Bar-headed Geese by T. J. Roberts. However, there are so many worthwhile articles in this limited number that I will deal with them instead of going on a hunt for the rest.

The father and son team of the Flemings, long time residents in Nepal, are well known for the work they have done on the ornithology of that mountain country. Robert L. Fleming Jr., in

a scholarly article on the birds of Pulchowk writes, “Pulchowk, a heavily forested hill on the SE edge of the Kathmandu Valley is a favourite place for bird enthusiasts. Last week my father, Dr R. L. Fleming Sr., and I spent several hours observing bird life between 6,500 ft. and 7,500 ft. elevation. The forest at this height is mainly broad-leaved evergreen with three species of oak (*Quercus* spp.) predominant. The understorey includes daphne and rhingal bamboo. The air rings with the calls of Black Bulbuls and Black-capped Sibilias [see Louis Werner in *Newsletter* Vol. 7 (11)].”

He writes about the sprightly Black-faced Flycatcher-Warbler *Abroscopus schisticeps*, referring to their remarkable

tameness, which made it possible for him to watch several individuals from as close as 2 m. “We noted that the ‘wing-flip’ and the ‘tail-fan’ occur simultaneously and at the rate of about one per second.”

“The tail-fan seems to be more vigorous than the wing-flip. Occasionally they hover beside a leaf but rarely for more than a second.” Fleming says he found them in medium-sized bushes, which differs from Salim Ali’s observation, “Usually seen high up in the foliage canopy”.

An interesting observation about a group of 14 Chestnut-headed Babblers *Alcippe castaneiceps* seen in central Nepal was that they remained in groups of their own kind while further east they were usually in small parties of mixed species. The careful notes of the Fleming family, over many years in Nepal, have been greatly appreciated.

There have been occasional reports about female birds feeding not only their own young but also the progeny of others of the same species. Jungle Babblers *Turdoides striata* are well known for looking after their nephews and nieces. D. N. Mathew reported the case of a full-grown Black-headed Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus* moving from tree-to-tree, looking for caterpillars, spiders, etc., under leaves. A fledgling followed at a distance of 2 m, calling frequently. The adult would collect food and, unless the chick was very near, swallow it. Curiously, the youngster was able to forage on its own, but if it saw the older bird collect some food, it would beg and, was often rewarded! The author was not sure whether the older bird was the parent of the younger one and enquired whether there were any reports of communal feeding among orioles.

Among the people who followed Salim Ali’s advice to establish branches of the Birdwatchers’ Field Club of India, was Joseph George. He reported, “Field outings were organized once a month or oftener. The average attendance was six, which was considered very encouraging in a small town like Roorkee. A rare bird seen was the Terek Sandpiper. Nest boxes installed in gardens and school premises were taken by Black-headed Myna, Roller, and Spotted Owlet.”

In February a team of birdwatchers, sponsored by the Fauna and Flora Preservation Society, London, led by Sir Hugh Elliot, Secretary General of the IUCN, landed in our garden in Andheri, Bombay, like a swarm of locusts and demanded breakfast, which was provided by our ever-willing servant Paul Isae. I accompanied the group on their visit to the Gir Sanctuary. I wrote later in the *Newsletter*, “We in India have got used to the Coppersmith *Megalaima haemacephala* and seldom take time to admire its elegant colouring, but our friends from temperate lands were quite overcome by the sight of the bird tonking away from the top of a bare teak tree. Another delightful bird, much appreciated, was our Golden-backed Woodpecker *Dinopium benghalense* whose golden and scarlet colours and merry laughter enlivens the somber setting of a dry teak forest.” Incidentally, reports by this group about their visit to the Gir played an important part in the setting up of the Gir research station with the assistance of the Smithsonian Institution.

I must have run out of material because I see that I copied an extract from Gilbert White’s *Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne*, August 1778. Few books are so fascinating and simultaneously so educative. Reading the account of the qualities required of an ornithologist I wonder whether I was

the right person to edit the *NLBW*. Gilbert White writes, “A good ornithologist should be able to distinguish birds, by their air, as well as by their colours and shapes, on the ground as well as on the wing, and in the bush as well as in the hand, for though it must not be said that every species of bird has a manner peculiar to itself, yet there is somewhat in most genera at least that at first sight discriminates them and enables a judicious observer to pronounce upon them with some certainty.”

“Thus, kites and buzzards sail round in circles with wings expanded and motionless, and it is from their gliding manner that the former are still called in the north of England gleads, from the Saxon word glidan, to glide. The kestrel or wind-hover has a peculiar mode of hanging in the air in one place, his wings all the while being briskly agitated. Hen Harriers fly low over heaths or fields of corn and beat the ground regularly like a pointer or setting-dog. Owls move in a buoyant manner as if lighter than the air, they seem to want ballast...Magpies and jays flutter with powerless wings and make no dispatch, herons seem encumbered with too much sail for their light bodies, but these vast hollow wings are necessary in carrying burthens such as large fishes and the like...” Our readers would like more of this I am sure but time is running out.

As I have often remarked, Stewart Melluish was one of the most dependable supporters of our *Newsletter* in its early days. In his letter of 24.i.1968, he said he was disappointed to miss our AGM, but hoped that we would approve of the way he spent that day: “My activities were in sympathy with your interests and those of your society...”

“The objective was to follow up a hunch about Glossy Ibises. There appears to be a conspiracy among writers of Indian birds to deny to the south-east of the country the regular occurrence of many species which are in fact quite common visitors, and to assume that occasional vagrants are singular rarities. A good instance of the penchant is that of the Black-tailed Godwit; “common...south to Bombay (Salsette), less common to very rare in the peninsula and Ceylon” says Ripley; perhaps he got this idea from the Vernay surveyors who put the bird family in square brackets and wrote, “This species is however so rare in central and southern India that it could not be included in the Presidency list until a more positive record is forthcoming.” The Bar-tailed Godwit they ignore altogether and Ripley restricts it West Pakistan, western India and Ceylon; which is precisely the same range he allows the Whimbrel. Now both the Black-tailed Godwit and the Whimbrel commonly winter on the Madras coast and the Bar-tailed Godwit is not impossibly rare (I saw a single bird last Sunday at Pulicat). These are merely examples of what seems to be a trend in the literature of the Indian avifauna—due probably, more to a paucity of human observers and correspondence than to any genuine lack of birds—a tendency to underestimate the quantity and variety of migrants, which regularly or sporadically reach the south-eastern seaboard. This is not a thing for which the authorities should be censured. The distribution of birds is not a static phenomenon and for want of observers they must often rely on out of date records or make assumptions from the absence of any. But it means that on the question of range of some

species the field is wide open for discoveries.” What Stewart says has been confirmed by present birdwatchers who so often succeed in extending the range of species mentioned in the books. Salim Ali himself used to advise not to treat

anything written as gospel truth. What Stewart says about the possibility of the Glossy Ibis occasionally reaching the south-eastern seaboard of India has probably already been confirmed by later day birders.

A flight down memory lane—1: Half a century of birds!

Lavkumar Khacher

Khacher, L. 2006. A flight down memory lane—1: Half a century of birds! *Indian Birds* 2 (6): 178–179.
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I had anticipated spending the remaining years reading about experiences of other, younger people, but your editor persistently called for articles. Had he not been someone I have admired for his dedication and maturity, I would not have responded and in time, his exhortations would have faded away. Apart from having a high respect for him, there is a small degree of personal vanity involved, because in a small measure, he is a product of my endeavors; as he confided in me, he was an active member of the Nature Club of his school, which Captain N.S. Tyabji (Retd.), a very respected member of WWF-India, had started in Hyderabad. The Nature Clubs were part of the Youth Education Movement that I had the privilege to initiate in 1976 for WWF-India. Besides, he was very persuasive, explaining how my years of experience would “enrich” the contents of *Indian Birds*. Flattery is terribly and I succumbed to it! Besides what did I have to lose since, at my age, memories are the only things that are there apart from the aches and pains of a faltering body; old people also love to talk about the wonderful world of their younger years, amusingly oblivious of the fact that if today’s world is a trifle wanting, it is because of the acts of omissions and commissions of our generation. Of course the world was a far better place for birdwatchers when I was a youth, than what it is today, and perhaps, I may be doing a service to the cause of bird conservation if I not only wrote about those halcyon days, but also attempted to show where we had failed in conserving it. If nothing else, there will be something to keep me occupied, enjoying what I am doing.

Actually, in measuring back from 2006 gets my math wrong; I had done some of my most exciting and active birdwatching in the 1940s through to 1960. Taking into account the bird rich years of my early childhood—when birds were every where, even right inside homes, it would be correct to say that it has been a full life time of birds. In those early years of the last century, almost every one was aware of birds: sparrows, mynahs, doves, pigeons, parakeets, koels, wagtails, pariah kites, vultures, owlets and barn owls, and not to forget the ubiquitous and rascally house crows. Peafowl freely entered compounds and Sarus Crane *Grus antigone* were affectionately referred to as “the couple” (*beladi*). Every cool season saw the arrival of skeins of Demoiselle Crane *Grus virgo*, flighting from a daytime waterside resting place, to fan out across the countryside to glean grain fallen in stubble of harvested millets and sorghum. When I think of it, every one was familiar with

a surprising number of species. For those from families of country gentlemen, who enjoyed *shikar*, the repertoire of familiar species went up exponentially: ducks, snipe, partridges (now known as ‘francolin’), bustards and the several birds of prey were casually referred to! I am sure many of today’s well informed birdwatchers would be happy to be able to list as many species as we did as children. It was not surprising then that there were such knowledgeable birdwatchers of the likes of Dharmakumarsinhji, Sálím Ali, Humayun Abdulali and a galaxy of British ornithologists, all within the span of one generation. Growing up among such luminaries could not but have had some influence on my young and highly receptive mind. That I have not been able to achieve far more as a naturalist is what I greatly regret.

The opportunities and the encouragement were there. Sheer lethargy is what I would accept. As a student at the Delhi University in the late 1940s, I had been commissioned to write a serial on ducks of the Delhi region! I am proud of my full length articles on birdwatching in the Garhwal region of the Himalaya and on the trek into Tibet in 1954 being accepted for publication in the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*. I keep on asking myself why there were not more papers by me since then? The reason why I am mentioning this is to emphasize, for the legions of bright young bird watchers of today, not to be casual. Salim Ali invariably insisted that I, “maintain a regular diary with meticulous notes,” recording everything, howsoever insignificant. How I wish I had followed his advice! Where are the once familiar birds? Even crows are missing around my Rajkot home! I have explanations for the declines in populations of most birds, but without records over the years, they can be accepted, at best, as well informed conjectures. Given the wonderful binoculars and telescopes backed up by high quality cameras, the young birdwatcher of today must not be casual as so many of the earlier generation were. Another piece of advice which Sálím Ali gave was to take a harder look at the surroundings of every bird and not limit observations to the bird itself. We will not be able to help the birds if the habitats they have evolved in are destroyed. A couple of days ago my friend, Himmatsinhji, phoned up from Kachchh and lamented that we had been rather myopic in focusing on the species and not paying much attention to the habitat. He was referring to the degradation of the grasslands of his native area, pointing out that in the end, the cattle herders were under great stress,