

One nest of the red wattled lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*) has also been recorded during May 1995.

On 10th March, 1994 we witnessed a spectacular performance by the yellow wattled lapwings in the air strip which seemed to be a form of communal courtship. We were scanning the ground when our attention was drawn by four yellow wattled lapwings which flew over to a small clearing about ten metres away from us. It was 7.15 a.m. Our interest began to deepen rapidly when the four birds quickly aligned themselves in a single row, next to each other. They then lowered their heads and began to run simultaneously in one direction for a few metres, while calling loudly. They then stopped, made an about turn, and returned to their original positions in an identical fashion. At this stage, another set of four lapwings joined the group and all the eight birds together performed the 'ritual' described above for about 2-3 minutes. The lapwings then dispersed in pairs and mated. Whether there was any relationship between the relative positions of the birds in the earlier configuration and the membership of the mating pairs, could not be determined.

This singular and interesting episode will forever be in our memories. Could it be communal courtship? Has such behaviour been recorded previously in the yellow wattled lapwing? Any comments or information regarding other such observations in the yellow wattled lapwings or other species will be greatly appreciated. [I recall groups of tailor birds (about 20) twittering most energetically, suggesting communal courtship.] Editor.



LITTLE GREBE OR DABCHICK - A NEW SIGHTING IN THE INDIAN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE CAMPUS, BANGALORE.
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The Jubilee Gardens, located in the Indian Institute of Science Campus, is a patch of land dominated by an *Acacia* plantation. However, many other species of bushes and trees are also found there. In close proximity to the entrance of the Jubilee Gardens, there is a small rocky depression, popularly called Jubilee Pond, which is usually dry in summer but gets partially filled with water during the monsoon.

On 20th August 1995, we were surprised to find a nest with two eggs right in the middle of this pond. A careful examination revealed that the nest belonged to the little grebe or dabchick (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), the identity of which was confirmed when the adult itself surfaced. Subsequently, we observed a single chick following the adult on 24th September and three chicks during the next week. The dabchick was a new sighting in the Indian Institute of Science as it had never been recorded previously although it is quite common in neighbouring lakes and tanks. The unexpected nesting of the dabchick on the campus provided opportunities for us to make observations of its nesting behaviour.

With the addition of the little grebe, the total number of bird species recorded on the Indian Institute of Science Campus, Bangalore, now stands at 160.

References :

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ARE VULTURE'S A DYING SPECIES? Ms. SANTOSH BHALLA, C/o. The Straw Board Mfg. Co. Ltd. Ambala Road, Saharanpur 247 001.

I have a query - are the scavenger vultures a dying species? Scores of vultures used to come for a night halt to a huge silk-cotton tree next to our house. But for the last 10/11 months, we have not seen any passing this way. Could you enlighten me please. I only hope this useful bird is not on the verge of extinction.



A NEW WILDLIFE SERVICE. ViceAdmiral M.P. AVATI, PVSMV.S (Retd.) "PAWAN", P.O. Nirgodi, Phattan 415 528, Satara

I am putting on paper my views on the conservation and the protection of wildlife in India. Our wildlife stands on the brink of vanishing from our midst. The cheetah went more than fifty years ago, the tiger and the Asian elephant all have reached a point of no return in a few years. The snow leopard has all but vanished. Some of the high altitude ungulates, which were commonly seen in Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh a few years ago, are now so rare that a sighting is considered an event. The Nilgiri black langur is now limited to a very few remote sholas in the high Nilgiris and other southern hills, the Eastern sarus has left India to recede eastwards into Vietnam and Cambodia, the black-necked crane is only an occasional visitor to Ladakh and even less occasional in the upper reaches of Arunachal Pradesh. I could go on like this indefinitely with this list of vanishing species, creatures which were fairly plentiful in their respective habitats in my father's days, less than 50 years ago. I wish to ask, "What will our sons and grandsons view in our wilds?" As a wag has said, "India will soon be left with only the cockroach, the crow and the creeper *Ipomea* as representatives of her once prolific wilds.

I blame the forest department for this state of affairs. An important contributory factor is undoubtedly the wild and unchecked growth of population. This problem is a political one, and therefore, regrettably, outside the purview of this letter. But I do believe that a reorganisation and a recasting of the role of the Forest Service will help considerably. As a first step this Service has to attend to the recruitment of its top cadres. It is currently haphazard in the extreme, a hit or miss affair, totally unfocussed on the tasks it has to discharge as Conservators of our forests and the wildlife which dwell in