

had been carrying it with its feet — and as the film flew away in the wind, another kite swooped down and grabbed it. This kite in turn dropped the bag and another bird came down and caught hold of it. The bag was dropped a third time, and again it was caught. At least three birds were involved in this catch-and-drop activity. I suspect more of them were doing this, as two bags were aloft. I had to leave at this point, and I do not know how much longer the carry-bag activity continued.

I believe the kites were playing with the carrybags. Of course there might have been some food in them, or the birds might have mistaken them for something edible. That, however, seems unlikely. As playthings for pariah kites, we now have something to say for the much maligned plastic bags!



MISREPORTING OF MALLARDS. SUJAN CHATTERJEE, DB-75, Salt Lake City, Calcutta 700 064, West Bengal

Mallards in South West Bengal, Vol.39, No. 2 — Mr Kaushik Deuti has done it again! In NLBW, Vol.37, No.5 (back cover) he identified large cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) as Japanese cormorants (*Phalacrocorax capillatus*) from the back covers of NLBW Vol.37, No.4 and claimed it to be the first record from India. As a result he was criticised by Krys Kazmierczak as mentioned by Aasheesh Pittie in NLBW Vol.38, No.1&2. Now he is the claimant of the first record of the Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) from southern West Bengal. In an article in the "Journal of Landscape System & Ecological Studies" Vol.1, No.1 (1990), Dr A.K. Ghosh (Ex-Director of Zoological Survey of India) mentions about the collections made by of Zoological Survey of India of mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) between 1964-69. The collection was made from the now reclaimed marshlands near Calcutta known as the East Calcutta Wetlands now Salt Lake City. In a book "Mid-Winter Waterfowl Census in Southern West Bengal 1990-1997" — published in 1999 (where Mr K. Deuti has assisted in research), by a birdwatching organisation — Prakriti Samsad, it is mentioned that 17 mallards were recorded from Dabur Chaar (near Sunderbans) in 20th Jan 1991. Lt. Col. S.R. Banerjee (Now State Director of WWF-India Eastern Region) and Mr D. Ghosh also saw 2 mallards at Durgapur Barrage (southern West Bengal) in January 1995. It seems that mallards have always been present in southern West Bengal in small numbers.

He should be more careful about his articles in future because these can lead to a lot of confusion among serious birdwatchers and other researchers and could be very detrimental to a reputed organisation like the Zoological Survey of India.



USEFUL STATISTICS. ARUNAYAN SHARMA, N.S. Road, Malda 732 101, West Bengal

Recently I received a copy of "Compendium of Environment Statistics — 1998" from Central Statistical Organisation, Department of Statistics, Ministry of Planning and Programme Implementation, New Delhi.

I found a few important facts which may be useful for birdwatchers. In the fauna section the total number of Indian bird species mentioned is 1228. The total number of bird

species of the world is 9026 we have 13.61 % of the total 13.61% (page-43). In another section (page-46), it is reported that the total number of endemic bird species is 69, and threatened bird species is 55.

How many bird watchers know that India is estimated as the tenth among the plant rich countries. Out of the total twelve biodiversity hot spots in the world, India has two, one is the north-east region, and the other is the Western Ghats.



VAGRANTS OF DAKSHINA KANNADA AND UDUPI DISTRICTS OF KARNATAKA. N.A. ARAVINDA MADHYASTHA, "Inchara" Chitpadi, Udupi 576 101, Karnataka, India

Dakshina Kannada and Udupi, formerly a single district was separated into two. These districts comprise 5 and 3 talukas respectively. Both the districts together have a total coast line of about 141 kms. and provide a good opportunity for bird watchers who are particularly interested in the shore and sea birds.

These dual districts are very rich in bird diversity and about 275 species of birds have been recorded. This list includes migratory and vagrant birds. Of the 275 species recorded about 40 species are migratory shore birds and seabirds and about 13 species, are vagrants.

The vagrants offer opportunities to see some uncommon birds, brought to the shore by the monsoon winds, and due to crash landing as a result of exhaustion during their long migration.

The first record of a vagrant for the district was in August 1964, when a South polar skua was spotted and it was identified by Sri P. Gopalakrishna Nayak of Katpadi. This bird was ringed by United States Antarctic Research (Bird Banding) Program, on 5-3-1961.

A similar ringed bird was recorded at Malpe (13.2°N) in January, 1982. The bird was ringed in Russia, crash landed on a fishing boat in Malpe and was identified as a common tern.

Since then a number of vagrants have been described for the district and most of them were monsoon waifs. The local newspapers played a key role in giving wide publicity for these visitors of the coast. But for their co-operation some of the vagrants would not have been recorded.



COMMUNAL COURTSHIP (?) IN THE YELLOW WATTLED LAPWING. VIKRAM GADAGKAR, SHYAMAL. L., N.V. ARAKERI, MUKUND RAMAKRISHNAN, ANKUR KUMAR and UDAY RAGHAVAN, G.A. C/o. D- 240, Indian Institute of Science Campus, Bangalore 560 012

The Indian Institute of Science has an air strip located at the end of the Institute's premises. The air strip is a clearing surrounded on all sides by dry grass and shrubs which give it the impression of an arid grassland habitat. Yellow wattled lapwings (*Vanellus malabaricus*) are not an uncommon sight on entering the air strip. Yellow-wattled lapwing nests and chicks have been observed repeatedly in the month of May.

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.
VIKRAM GADAGKAR, SHYAMAL. L., NAVANIT VIJAY ARAKERE, MUKUND RAMAKRISHNAN AND ABHISHEK LAHIRI, C/o D-240, Indian Institute of Science Campus, Bangalore 560 012

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.

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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