
Whispering Wings®

Newsletter of the Chandigarh Bird Club®



Volume 6 - 3rd Edition

January - March 2021

From the Editor's Desk

With the winter months finally coming to a close and summer now upon us, we can look forward to the arrival of summer migrants, and the nesting period of both visitors and residents.

The current public health guidelines due to coronavirus has forced many a birder to their own nests. But, these times have meant that instead of visiting the fabled hotspots of Chakki Mor or Morni have found their own little parks and gardens, the new hotspots. Looking at the pictures of birds the members have posted on our Facebook and Instagram accounts have been encouraging. This shows an increasing list of birds found in our vicinity.

Home birding has become a common pastime for many people, especially children. Various international bird conservation societies and organisations have launched many such initiatives to keep the populace engaged at home. We as a club must follow suit. Keep a lookout for birds this season as summer migrants come to our part of India. One may see much more than one expects. One may even begin to like their environs more than they ever had.

But in all this, keep yourself safe. Stay indoors as much as you can, and keep birding at home.

Amandeep Singh Channa



**Lesser Whitethroat, Chhattbir, 28 February 2021
By Amandeep Singh Channa**

Secretary's Report

As the New Year dawned there was a collective sigh of relief from around the world heralding the advent of better things to come and the passing of the awful time the universe had to witness in 2020

In January 2021 Chandigarh Bird Club members participated in the annual Asian Waterfowl Census conducted by the Punjab Wildlife Department in Ropar, Nangal, Harike, Ranjit Sagar, Shallapattan and Keshopur.

Ropar was picked as the venue for Bird Festival where three weekends were earmarked for birdwatching. Members actively participated in the event .

CBC supported the events organised by the Wildlife Department of Punjab on the occasion of World Wetlands Day, World Water Day and World Environment Day.

CBC also supports World Sparrow Day by taking up a different school every year to put up nest-boxes on the campus.

HSBC Chandigarh Birdrace was a great success with 14 teams participating. Northern Lapwing was spotted after a gap of a few years.

With the resurgence of Covid cases in February all meetings of CBC were held on Google meet and field-trips were taken in small groups.

CBC successfully launched its website with members helping provide material and photographs related to the ISCR.

CBC gave a presentation and set up nest boxes on World Sparrow Day at MCM DAV College.

Amid the pandemic crisis birders find a welcome release in birding activities and hope for a safer tomorrow.

Happy Birding,

Rima Dhillon

Jungle Babbler Nest

Jungle babblers have been a part of my garden ever since I moved to this house six years ago. The incessant screeching and babbling became a familiar part of the morning. I soon discovered there was another family dominating my neighbours garden and the loud protests and squabbles erupted when they met on the fence between the two houses. They would fluff up their feathers and hop around in circles or tumble in the dust, going into huddles like rugby players.

They were so familiar to me that they settled down nicely in my subconscious. I didn't pay much heed to their behaviour, just amused at their antics as I sat sipping morning tea in the verandah, till the day last month when I saw them build a nest on the lowest hanging branch of the jackfruit tree just outside my bedroom window. Every time I looked out I could see the pair carrying building material weaving a loose cup shaped nest. They tried to hide it artfully by pulling and tucking some of the leaves around the nest to secure it against predators. However, it was plainly visible through the glass window. I thought this was a good time to get a ringside view of this aspect in the life of a Jungle Babbler. I decided to set up my Nikon P900 in the window and capture what I could on video. I did get some interesting footage. I also took some photos from behind the water tank on the roof. No foliage was removed to get better shots which, considering the location of the nest was impossible anyway.



There were three light turquoise eggs being ministered to by the pair. If one took a break the other sat watch over the nest. From time to time the other members

of the clan would come and sit around babbling, as if enquiring about the wellbeing and the confinement.

The eggs hatched so silently that I didn't notice till one morning I suddenly saw feeble movement in the nest and discovered it to be the beak and head of a tiny new born.

There was a flurry of activity. At one point I saw three adults feeding the chicks. One would finish feeding the babies and two would be waiting in line with a beak full of high protein morsels. The helper was around for the first eight or nine days then the parents were left to bond with their kids. As far as I could tell two of the eggs hatched a few days before the last one.

Since there is no dimorphism in Jungle Babblers, I couldn't tell the Dad from Mom. I did notice that they are very house proud and hygienic.



The chicks are not allowed to mess up the nest. A signal passes between the parent and the baby and instantly the parent is ready to grab the fecal matter even as it leaves the tiny bottom. It is carried away from the nest before being discarded- possibly to hoodwink any nest raiders. The adult constantly fusses around the chicks cleaning them with the beak and fixing the twigs in the nest to keep them secure. The little home was spic and span-making me a little embarrassed at the clothes strewn untidily on the chair in my bedroom!

Over the next ten days I witnessed the life in a nest. The three siblings were squashed together in the tiny space but they seemed quite happy to huddle up. It probably provided a sense of security. The only time they nudged and squabbled was



when the food was dangled over them. Often the youngest or the one furthest back got ignored but eventually they all had their fill. Happily the entire brood seemed to be doing very well without any mortality. Jungle Babblers carried a mixture of insects, caterpillars and moths in their beaks and fed them directly to the hatchlings. They were not regurgitating the food into the tiny beaks.

As the days went by the naked skinny hatchlings started to grow some coarse body hair. Unlike ducklings or chicks of hens they were not downy and cuddly! Soon they were covered with the grey mantle of feathers and tiny wings were visible. The fledglings learnt to preen themselves seemingly to prepare for life in the big world outside.





One early morning a lot of agitation from the nest signalled a crisis in the lives of the three juveniles. A huge storm in the early hours had caused the nest to tilt precariously. The siblings were trying to stay in the nest which was threatening to disintegrate in the strong winds still blowing. It was a frightening sight. The winds buffeted the nest all day and well into the night but the chicks refused to give in and their tiny claws tenaciously gripped the twigs in the nest while their parents tried to repair the damage as best as they could. After almost twenty four hours of battling the elements the nest finally slid off the branch and fell to the ground chicks and all.

Fortunately the fall was broken as it got caught in a hedge of lantana bushes. Babbling and screaming in abject concern the entire clan gathered around to help in this crisis. They positioned themselves all around on various perches offering advice and maybe chastising the young couple for having picked such a flimsy spot for the nest.

The older two siblings managed to perch on the branches in the hedge but the youngest was still in the nest-and that's where it stayed all day. The parents kept up a constant stream of food for their brood while the clan kept vigil for predatory cats .

By the next day the parents decided to start introducing the tiny members of the clan to their new surroundings. They were encouraged to attempt short flights and by the evening they had happily settled down in the nectarine tree just a few steps from the lantana hedge where the nest had fallen.

Harpo, Groucho and Chicco ,as I began to think of them, were inseparable .They snuggled against each other as they waited for their parents to

return from food gathering. Yet when the hunger pangs started it was each man for himself. All three tried to make a grab for the food jostling and clambering over each other. The parents were kept busy trying to satiate their new family. With a composting heap close by they did not have to go far. All this while the three juveniles were trying their hand at self-feeding too by pecking at any little insects coming into their space.

For the next few days the juveniles were introduced to different parts of the garden-Jackfruit tree, Chikoo tree, Mango tree-and each day as the wings became stronger they ventured higher and higher into the branches.

The clan across the fence also came to visit and give their blessings to the new members on their days out.



Jungle Babblers are well known for their community living. Members of the extended family help out new parents in feeding and protecting the young. They are often seen all preening and indulging in what could be considered ‘nannying’.

The extended’ joint family system ‘seems to be benefitting the Jungle Babblers as their populations are seen to be flourishing.

Rima Dhillon

Another Feather in Our Cap

Last year has been a hiatus for much of the club's usual activities of monthly meetings, school activities, etc. But, we have been busy. A long held dream of the club was to increase our social media presence. The club has vibrant community on Facebook, where about 3000 members post their pictures. For us, that wasn't enough and certainly wasn't the last platform.

We continued with our meetings online, and organised member-limited events like bird walks and our biannual waterfowl census and in the background we continued our work on our website, and Twitter and Instagram accounts. For reference, we looked at different bird watching websites and designed, on paper, a layout of what we wanted to be in our website. In a meeting of the website committee, we discussed the ideas brought forward and finalised the contents of the website.

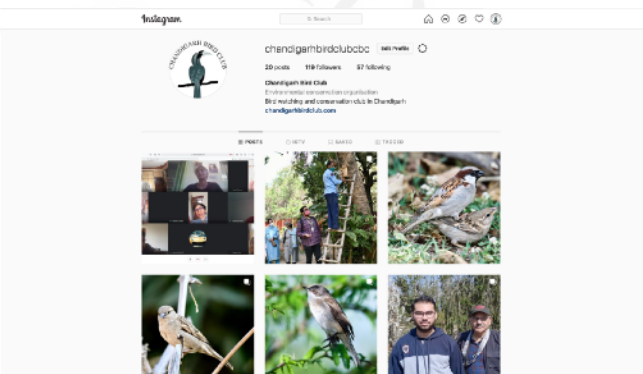
With the help of fellow member Munish Jauhar, and his team of excellent designers at Greycell Tech, we created a modern, dynamic website for the club. Through them I learned the basics of website-designing and editing. We were also able to get the most simple and most rememberable domain name for the website as well.

The website is simple in its content but it is far from rudimentary or basic. On the home page you will find a section titled 'Latest News' where all our recent activities. Below that is the logo and a small description. And finally we have an 'About Us' section, where you can find our objectives, and next to it is a link to our membership form. The next page is Calendar where we list all of our events and activities for the year. Following that is 'Events', where a slideshow of our past events (at least those for which I have pictures) keeps running. On the page 'Bird List' you can see a list of birds on the Interstate Capital Region (ISCR). Each name is linked or is being linked to a picture of the bird. 'Map' is, well, eponymous to the content you will find there; an interactive map with hotspots marked on it, and a list of hotspots beneath it. 'Gallery' and 'Trip Reports' are self-explanatory. 'Whispering Wings' is where we now put our quarterly newsletter now. We have also a list of our members in the 'Members' tab. And finally a tab for you to 'Contact Us'. Beneath every page, there are links to our Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts.

With our new website, we have consolidated what was earlier done via separate channels. Newsletter, membership, trip reports and event calendar could now be accessed from and uploaded to a single platform.

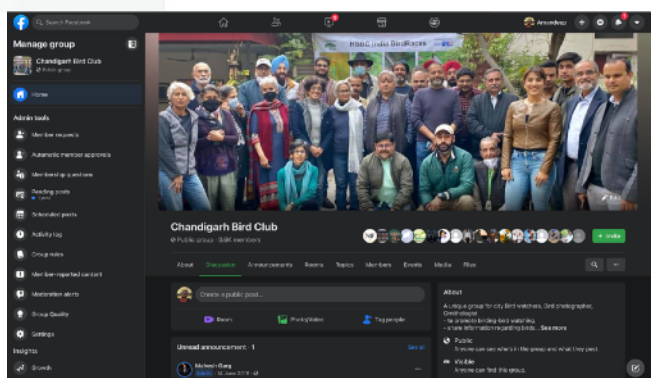
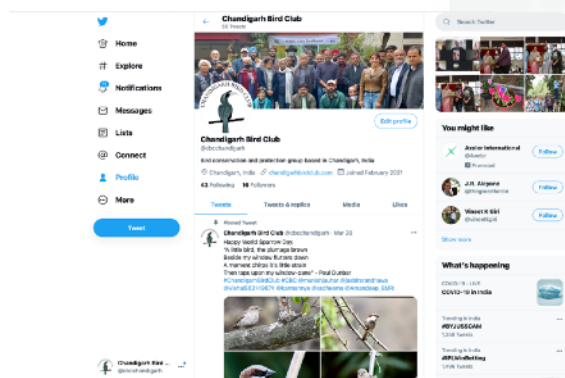
Website - www.chandigarhbirdclub.com

Instagram - @chandigarhbirdclubcbc



Twitter - @cbcchandigarh

Facebook - Chandigarh Bird Club



Amandeep Singh Channa



Story of Ibisbill and an Arrogant Birder

There are birds and then there are target birds, like the one I mentioned in the title. The Ibisbill, a bird that I chased for a long, long time. The chase happens when you go to a place and do research for the likely birds in that season at that place.

When I planned a trip to the Jim Corbett, it was not the tigers on my mind but two birds that were still refusing to be ticked as my lifers, the Collared Falconet and the Ibisbill. The Falconets are residents in and around Corbett and seen with very regularly but fairly often on the very top of the tall trees, so that was not really my concern, I was sure that I will be able to see them. It was the Ibisbill, the altitudinal migrant that moves to the higher reaches of Himalayas that was my main target. With March around the corner and the weather slowly changing, it was difficult to guess if the bird was there. The last bird logged was a week or so ago so the surety that the bird will be around was anything but a certainty.



Anyway, I tried to get a bird guide under my wings and unfortunately - it being a high season, none of the guides that mattered were available. The alternative is sometimes better than hiring a Bird-guide — get a Gypsy driver, the ones with permits for forest, the good ones many a time rival the best of the guides spending years learning on the field. I contacted and managed to persuade Mr Kaleem Khan to be with me for a day and a half.



Next morning, he was there dot on the time waiting for us at the gates of our hotel. There was a quick exchange of pleasantries and as we chatted, I listed out the list of birds that were desirable and stressed — the Falconet and the Ibisbill. He replied almost immediately, Falconet — a sure thing, but Ibisbill, I could see the gears of his mind tossing and turning to process the information. As he taugth out a reply I was thinking, with my father who was nearing 80 and my son who had both accompanied me to Corbett, the chase of the tiger was a priority as of now as we were to do a safari, do birding while on the safari if possible, then drop my father and son back to the hotel and go for some unadulterated birding, Ibisbill in particular.



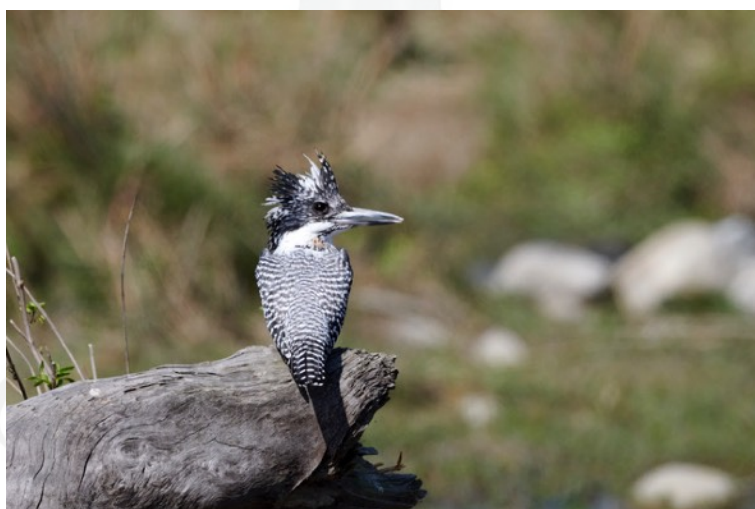
River Lapwing

Though we were lucky to see some animals and birds but more or less the first slot of Safari was uneventful. To get it on record, we did see some Falconets but as expected, a bird the size of a bulbul can hardly be appreciated on top of a tall tree

even with the binoculars. After the first slot of safari, we dropped my father and son to the hotel and drove to hunt for the place, a few km away where the Ibisbill was last seen. The chances were anybody's guess as the last sighting was a full week back and since then the weather was getting hotter. The bird being an altitudinal migrant - chances were that it had moved to the upper reaches of the streams in the Himalayas. In any case we were not giving up, so here we were, on our way to the river bed where the bird had been seen regularly during the season.



We reached the location, walked a almost a kilometre and I was quickly disappointed. I scanned, fairly meticulously the entire riverbed both the sides and saw no signs of the Ibisbill. Two three scans and I had already started checking out other birds in the area. All this while my mentor, my guide, Kaleem kept saying, “Sir this is a difficult bird to see. It merges with the rocks and you have to be careful while scanning the area and it takes time.”



Crested Kingfisher

Ah, to hell, after birding (as in birding with effort and dedication) for almost 30 odd years, you think someone else will teach me that a bird the size of chicken can hide from me? Hell no, and I disregarded his advice. All the same Kaleem continued scanning both banks of river looking for clues. Meanwhile the ‘*disappointed me*’ chased and clicked a flock of little egrets, flying shots of a little egret, pied kingfisher and river lapwings. Then I spotted a Crested Kingfisher sitting in the far distance, I pointed it out to Kaleem who almost seemed disappointed in me and had his eyes peeled on the banks, peering through the binoculars finding ‘*my target bird*’ with all his concentration. Meanwhile I started making my way to the Crested Kingfisher with confidence of getting close to it. The tactic was simple. Move at a tangent not peering towards the bird, Take a few steps, stop, click and pray that you will not agitate the bird to fly away. Another few steps, stop, slowly raise the camera, click. Repeat it till you are satisfied respecting the bird’s space.



Ibisbill

All this went on for almost an hour and a half. I looked back at Kaleem and he was still doing his thing - scanning the banks of the river. What the hell? I thought to myself. Why is guy so bloody hell bent on finding the bird that I was confident was not there? Another half an hour passed and I was chasing all the birds other than what I had set a target for. Suddenly I saw movement through the corner of my eye and that was Kaleem in the far distance with excitement, pointing to some place towards the river. I hobbled over the big stones of the river bank and took almost 10 min reaching him and in hushed, but excited voice he said, Ibisbill, there. I just could not believe it, birding for years and I was so arrogant to take advice of someone who was perhaps more dedicated to ‘*my desire*’ than myself. We saw the bird and it was

there, a lifer, a bird I did not know how I could have missed. We moved to position myself for some pictures and the bird did not oblige. As we moved closer, it flew further. All the shots I got are highly cropped, but I celebrated the moments spent with my lifer.

This incident taught me an important lesson of my birding life, be patient, listen to the guides, after all, they might have more experience and than you hope in their circumstances and place. Oh what an arrogant idiot I had been. I thank the Ibisbill and Mr Kaleem to humble me and get me down to the roots of being a good birdwatcher.



I still sit and fondly remember the moments... Oh what a fool I had been...

Simerpreet Singh Gheema

पक्षी की पुकार

लानत है ऐ इंसा जग को
तूने कर्म भरपूर किए
वृक्ष काट मुनाफे खातिर
पंछी के घर दूर किए

प्रशंसा हो तेरी उन्नति की
तेरे घर की दीवारे चार हैं
उड़ता हुआ एक आए पक्षी
अपने घर को ढूँढे, दरार है ?

तेरा पानी तो है नल में
बाहर लू का डेरा है
तेरा क्या तू जब उठ जाए
वही तेरा सवेरा है

पंछी पूछे क्या कभी कुछ
सोचा तूने मेरा है ?
जब दिखे प्राकृतिक विपत्ति
तब क्यों ध्यान जाता तेरा है ?

तेरी जान पर न बने
तुझे रहे हर्ष सदा
पंछी उड़े ये बोल कर
तुझ पे रब का स्पर्श सदा

विशाल शर्मा “कर्मठ”



**Himalayan Vulture, Siswam Dam, 3 March 2021
By Vishal Sharma**



**Indian Roller, Thapli, 31 March 2021
By Vishal Sharma**

Whispering Wings®

Newsletter of the Chandigarh
Bird Club



Accepted in 2008, the Chandigarh Bird Club dedicated itself to its goal of protecting the environment.

The Club owes its existence to those few dedicated and expert members, who started this Club in the Chandigarh Boat Club, namely Navjit Singh, Narbir Kahlon, Vikramjit Singh, Mrs Rima Dhillon, Mrs Sarbjeet Kaur, and Mrs Geeta Goswami.

The fundamental objectives of Chandigarh Bird Club continue to be to:

1. Bring people, especially the younger generation closer to nature, through birding and help them to enjoy the outdoors while making out a fun activity.
2. To make individuals and government more sensitive towards the environment to create a dynamic database for analysis to focus on conservation efforts.
3. To create a forum for birders to share information and discuss issues related to this activity.

Editors:-

Mitinderpal Singh Sekhon

Amandeep Singh Channa

- **President - Mitinderpal Singh Sekhon**
- **Vice President - Narbir Singh Kahlon**
- **Secretary - Rima Dhillon**
- **Joint Secretary - Sarbjeet Kaur**
- **Treasurer - Mahesh Garg**