
Whispering Wings®

Newsletter of the Chandigarh Bird Club®



Volume 6 - 4th Edition

April - June 2021

From the Editor's Desk

First of all I would like to congratulate all the members of Chandigarh Bird Club on completion of 6 years of our news letter “Whispering Wings” with this issue. The first issue had come out in September 2015. The contribution of all members has been the sole reason for sustenance of the newsletter and Editorial Board is thankful to all and is certain the contributions shall continue.

Amidst the raging pandemic, it has been raining Indian Pittas as photographed and reported by birders from the ISCR and adjoining regions. It is also perhaps a result of more number of eyes in the field. Pitta being a novelty, is more sought after but other summer breeders like Blue-bearded Bee-eaters, Blue-tailed Bee-eaters, Comb Ducks, Lesser Whistling Teals, Indian Golden Orioles and Pheasant-tailed Jacanas have been recorded from different parts of the ISCR by the members in large numbers. A greater number of sightings speak a lot about the health of the habitat.

Areas adjoining ISCR like Chakki Mor, Thapli, Anandpur Sahib, Kasauli, Dagshai and Rajgarh have come up with very long bird lists, thanks to the members of CBC and other birding enthusiasts from the Tri-city, Punjab, Haryana and HP. The wonderful records have resulted in the emergence of this area as a birding hotspot.

The ardor of birders and the hard work they are putting in has given a new vigour to birdwatching in our region; the increasing number of birding enthusiasts being a testimony to this. Along with the increasing interest, members have been very busy educating people about the importance of avifauna as well as the wellbeing of their habitats. It is a great step towards bird conservation.

The need of the hour is to add to the data-base by constantly uploading bird lists to the digital platform eBird India and CBC bird lists. This will greatly help in updating as well as recording information for posterity. It would also help in dissemination of authentic information.

Another major need of the hour is to protect ourselves from the Novel Coronavirus! Please do not forget to get yourself vaccinated. While out birding, do not forget to follow Covid-19 protocol.

May you always hear the bird song!

Mitinderpal Singh Sekhon

Secretary's Report

With coronavirus once again dominating this past quarter, CBC was again doing much of its activities from home. Over the course of three months, members participated in many home-birding activities.

On 4th April, CBC conducted the monthly count of species in Chhappar Chhirri. There were 240 birds of 25 species, pigeons and crows the highest at 61 and 55 respectively. Due to travel restrictions and public health restrictions, the monthly field trip to Chhappar Chhirri was cancelled.

In May, on the suggestion of Narbir Kahlon, Vice-President of the Club, members participated in a project to observe and record species on a particular tree over a period of time. Members observed the breeding period of many birds like the tailorbird and jungle babblers among others. CBC members participated in the Census of Wildlife conducted by Chandigarh Forest and Wildlife Department in Sukhna Wildlife Sanctuary.

June was also dedicated to home-birding. Instead of the field trip, which dominated our second weekend, the club held an unofficial backyard bird count on 13th June, for its members, where they recorded species from around their homes. A total of 58 species were observed across the Tri-city by many of our members.

With the restrictions now easing, the club is hopeful of returning to holding field trips and physical meetings, albeit according to the latest public health restrictions.

Amandeep Singh Channa



**Black-shouldered
Kite, by Amandeep
Singh Channa at
Chhappar Chhirri**

My Farm in the Hills



A female Sambhar on a hill top

In the year 2009, my father bought a piece of untouched forest in village Haripur in Punjab, which lies in the Shivalik range. It was far away from civilisation with little to no population in a 500-acre radius at the time. It was until 2012 when I first went there and saw the tropical dry evergreen forest. My father had a prefabricated temporary house built there as permanent brick and concrete structures can not be built in that area. The house was in the middle of a valley, surrounded by mountains on all sides and one could see the sun setting perfectly behind the mountain range. The house was completely empty and abandoned and no one went there for quite a few years until the past 5 years. When I got into bird watching, observing wildlife and capturing it in my camera, I thought of what all rare and elusive fauna I would find in that place.



An aerial view of the farm in 2017

When I went there after so many years, it was still green and luscious but there seemed to be very little sign of wildlife which I had never noticed till that time. Well, of course, there was an occasional sighting of a Sambar deer and a few common birds, but it wasn't what I expected of an untouched dense forest in the hills. It was a great place nonetheless and I started going there more often with my brother and friends for fun and barbecues.



In 2020 after a forest fire

Once my brother and I along with some friend's scanned the land with a drone all afternoon and set up a barbecue till sunset and by the time we were done, it got dark and we started to walk back from the house to the entry point in the forest which is almost 5 kilometres and our car couldn't go beyond 2 kilometres so we had to navigate 3 kilometres through the dense forest at night. We had torches because without light it was complete, utter darkness and we couldn't see beyond a metre without them. We lost our way several times in the beginning as there were 10 foot long densely packed weeds and bushes in the way, but then we finally landed on the path made by a river which lead us back, but then we got lost again when the path divided into two and then finally we saw our car and everyone sighed in relief. On the way back to the car we even heard and saw a pair of Large Tailed Nightjar which was a new bird for me at the time. Then everyone got into the car, but it still takes a lot of time to get back to the main road because the remaining 2 kilometres is also a dense forest and one can't drive very fast there. One the way back to the main road we suddenly stopped the car as we were cut off by a long trail of Wild Boar's crossing our path and all of us looked at them with awe. As we approached the end of the path we stopped again to see a Jungle Cat sitting in the middle of our way. The Jungle Cat is an elusive species of small wild cats whose population is going down by the day. It was a wonderful experience finding such species of fauna and avifauna in a matter of hours, it was as if the forest came alive during nighttime. Every year



In May 2021, with water bodies

during summers the valley would fill up with Indian Pitta's and we could hear their melodious call from each corner. Once we even saw a group of 8 of them



Orange-headed Thrush (female-up; male-down)





Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher

surrounding a bowl of water at 7:30 in the evening.

As of recently, in the past 5 months that place has gone through drastic changes and for the better. In January, my father had a path cleared to the house and had all the unnecessary weeds and bushes removed. In a matter of weeks, my father acquired permission from the Divisional Forest Officer of Ropar Mrs Monika Yadav, to set up water for the flora and fauna of the farm. Several solar panels were set up behind the house to power a tube well which was used to fill up small ponds to provide water for the forest dwellers. Even the dried up seasonal river filled up with water to an extent. All the extra unnecessary shrubs and small trees were cut down. This process is called 'Thinning', in which selective removal of trees is undertaken to improve the growth rate or health of the remaining trees as overcrowded trees are under competitive stress from their neighbour's. Through planned forest thinning and carefully placed introduction of water, the whole area was now flooded with wildlife and several species of birds. In a census I conducted over a weekend I was able to record 124 different species of birds and animals such as Indian Muntjac, Sambar deer, Wild Boar's, Indian Crested Porcupine, Jungle Bush Rats, Indian Jungle Cats, Indian Golden Jackals and the Indian Palm Civet. The labour was still at work around the house, creating a water reservoir for irrigation in the forest and furnishing the house so that one can stay there overnight.

I ventured into the deeper forest in the evening and sat under a bamboo thicket facing an old brick weir which is basically a small dam. There was no activity for a bit, probably due to all the sound I made crushing the dried leaf loaded path when I walked there. After a while, I could hear several birds chirping, but it was very



Indian Pitta

difficult locating them through dense branches and leaves. Suddenly a small blue and orange bird caught my eye while it was foraging for insects on the ground navigating through the dead leaves. I looked at it through my camera to click its photo and saw that it was a Blue Throated Blue Flycatcher, a summer breeder in the Himalayas.

As I was capturing this bird in my camera a dash of orange swooped in from behind. It was a pair of Orange Headed Thrush collecting nesting material. I was overwhelmed with the amount of flamboyant birds I saw when suddenly I heard the sui generis call of the Indian Pitta right beside me as it appeared from the undergrowth. It was a bird that literally had 9 different colours on its body.



Spotted Owlet

It was extraordinarily wondrous seeing such colour in the dry and dull surroundings. While walking back to the house I saw several Green, Blue Tailed and surprisingly Chestnut Headed Bee-Eaters swooping in the main pond in front of the house to drink water. As it got dark we saw the sunset and the moon emerge from the skyline. Around 9:00p.m we started hearing Large Tailed Nightjar calls from several directions and my father and I went to find and photograph them.

My father held the torch and tweaked my camera settings according to the dark. Whilst following the Nightjars call we found some Spotted Owlets which was also a great sight and made for a good photo. A Barn Owl also flew over us but we came to a dead end with the Large Tailed Nightjar. We had walked till the very starting point of the farm where a Jackal was strutting around and ran away after seeing us and then we heard a different call from that of the Large Tailed Nightjar. It was a Savanna Nightjar which was flying in front of us and as my father followed it with a torch I tried to take its photo but got a blurry shot as it is difficult to click fast-moving objects at night. We returned to the house only to witness two Large Tailed Nightjar's swooping in on the pond to drink water in the dark, illuminated by the full moon.

The next morning I woke up and sat in front of the pond with my camera on a tripod and around 5:00 a.m there were so many birds that I lost count. I could see Peacock's dancing on the hills, several Red Jungle fowls and Bulbuls drinking water from the pond. A great many flycatchers, robins and warblers were all gathering on the bushes, a herd of Sambar Deer was roaming around to quench their thirst and the tips of trees were laden with Bee-Eaters, Yellow Footed Green Pigeons and pairs of Golden Oriole's. At this point, I was rather tired of clicking photos and had a month's worth of photos to post-process

I found it very astonishing how a water source and some selective reduction of vegetation can completely replenish a dormant forest and how my father managed to do so in the past five months. Work still remains unfinished in those forests as there are more water reservoirs to be built across the several acres of land and I look forward to seeing what all various, elusive and vibrant species of animal life arrives there in the time to come.

Karmannye Chaudhary

Secret behind an excellent photograph!

What is the secret behind an excellent photograph or how to make an outstanding image? It sounds like an interesting question, which generates curiosity in our minds and makes us think of possible answers. There is no scientific method to answer this simple question. Also, the reply of a seasoned professional will differ from that of a photo-enthusiast. Peoples' perception varies from person to person because of many factors including socio-cultural outlook. So does the perception of jury may vary which can turn an award winning image into an ordinary one. But what is the secret behind an excellent image.

While discussing the “secret”, no ace photographer will ever talk about his photography gear because he knows it is not that important. What do you think? Does the gear matter the most? No. What matters the most is the insight into what one thinks while composing the shot and pressing the shutter release button.

It is a fact that the most powerful sensor to record an outstanding image is not in any camera, but in yourself. You are to understand and explore it. Therefore, the secret lies in your ability to recognise what your sensor can record better. If you are very keen to create your own visual signature, please look within yourself. Yes, within yourself.

There is a word of caution. One should not get misled by marketing gimmicks of camera manufacturers and the so called “wow” factor on social media where even the novice comment like a master.

The desire to make an outstanding photograph emanates even before buying a camera. But did you ever think that all great photographers have one thing in common? What is that which makes their works inspire the viewers and makes their images highly different from others? It is their ability to tell a story. Yes, a visual story with a difference. Even the images of wild life having a story make lasting impact. Remember an image with a story, one that evokes emotions and curiosity will certainly over ride other images.

Some bird photographers are so much obsessed with the concept of storytelling that once while reading some of the reviews of images of wildlife

including those of birds at a website of nature photography, I found a few of the photographers who had clearly mentioned that before going out to photograph birds they had a story in their minds. This also underlines the significance of going out well prepared not only with the equipment, but also with thorough knowledge of behaviour of the species that you may encounter.

Making only record images of birds or animals, when they are not in action or not showing any behavioural trait, is a useless exercise. Look at images posted in social media sites and you will see a majority of these appear to be record shots because they do not have a story. One must try to understand how a “visual story” is scripted. One must learn to observe the subject and surroundings. Yes, with patience.

Get the factors like desire and curiosity infused in yourself. Just think of great adventures, all these were conceived and planned with ‘desire’ and ‘curiosity’. The way you view your subject impacts your style of photography. Therefore, one has to think like a visual storyteller, and not like a photographer. While making photographs, let desire and curiosity guide you. Lay emphasis on details and capture moments that most would let pass by. Do it with confidence, you may have a super zoom, but lack of confidence will get you a blurred or shaky image.

If you feel stagnation in your work flow, try to learn like a fresher. Remember, the limitations in your photography are within yourself. You have to “unlearn to learn” or say reboot the computer. Make a point not to follow the prevailing trends, but try to pave your own way. It will make you realise that the secret to outstanding image is short and easy to achieve.

Subhash Sapru



**Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch,
by M S Sekhon
Chakki Mor, HP**

Inside The Garden: Cactus Garden

The National Cactus and Succulent Botanical Garden and Research Center, is also known as the Cactus Garden. It is an eyeful for birders as it is a birding hotspot of sorts. I am keen to call it a birding garden, rather than calling it Cactus Garden. But yes it is a garden of cactus, I say yes it's a Cactus Garden gratefully known for its rare and endangered species of Indian succulent plants. As we know where there is nature, wildlife exists or can say where there is wildlife, nature exists, both sound great.



White-throated Kingfisher

When I started Birding back in August 2019, I started with some local parks around me. I did not know any thing about birdwatching. I decided to visit the Cactus Garden, where entry ticket is only Rs 10 but it's worth more than a lakh of



Laughing Dove



Oriental White-eye

rupees. As you can see variety of Cactus plants you can also see some rare succulent plants. But here I wanted to look at the main treasure, wanted to loose myself in the world of birds. You can really have a great time with birds, have great close-ups with them. The garden is not too big, but don't worry, it's a bird magnet, all you have to do is just sit around the little pond. White Throated Kingfisher can be easily seen catching prey, making a dive in water and then sitting on a perch with a fish. Birds like Purple Sunbird, Black Redstart, Indian White Eye (Specially feeding on the fruit



Shikra

of cactus), Himalayan Bulbul in winters, Hair Crested Drongos, Indian Grey Hornbill, etc., are easy catches in Cactus Garden.



Hair-crested Drongo

Get ready with your binoculars and camera and take a walk in this great world at Sector 5 Panchkula, Cactus Garden. Paradise for birders as well as nature lovers (A must visit place). Come on nature is waiting for you.

Vishal Sharma



Little Tern, by Pushkar Bali, Siswan, PB

पिंजरा

हृदय चाहे पर हों दो
ऊँची उड़ान आसमान
दायरा भी अतुल्य हो
है मेरी जान आसमान

अफ़सोस तुम्हारा ध्यान
परों तक सीमित क्यों ?
क्यों जाए न ध्यान उधर
जिनसे पर नियमित हों

पर क्या चीज़ हैं आखिर
बताओ किसको प्राप्त हैं
खुद को तो हैं नहीं तुम्हे
जिनको हैं, छीने, पाप है

क्यों दिखे अनमोल रतन
पिंजरे में बिकते आम
पर लगाना चाहते हो पर
तुम हो बिलकुल दीखते आम

प्रकाश में खोजना तुम
पंछी एक जैसे दूत है
पोथी में लिखा हुआ है
पूरा पक्का सबूत है

गर्जन हुई, जागे तुम
खुद पर अब नाज़ करो
पर मिलेंगे असली तभी
पिंजरे से आज़ाद करो

विशाल शर्मा 'कर्मठ'



Blue-tailed Bee-eater, by M S Sekhon, Baddi, HP



**Himalayan Bulbul, by Amandeep Singh,
Chakki Mor, HP**

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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**