



CHANDIGARH BIRD CLUB®



*PURPLE SUNBIRD
Clicked by: Parveen Nain*

Whispering Wings®

NEWSLETTER

Volume 8 - 1st Edition

July - September 2023



www.chandigarhbirdclub.com

cbcchandigarh@gmail.com



EDITORS DESK

**RIMA DHILLON****PRESIDENT, CHANDIGARH BIRD CLUB**

Monsoon is a season most of us look forward to for its cool breezes and soft drizzle. It is accepted as a time of relief from the scorching heat of the summer.

Just like the Asian Koel is considered to herald the onset of Spring, so the arrival in the north, of Pied Crested Cuckoo, or as its now known as Jacobin Cuckoo is thought to precede the Monsoon season. It is thought that a part of the population rides the monsoon winds to our west coast from Africa. Whatever the case may be the Piu, Piu calls are eagerly awaited promising relief from the scorching temperatures of the Indian summer. A healthy population of this bird was recorded in the Chandigarh ISCR.

Although the monthly fieldtrips were regularly conducted many a time the location had to be changed due to broken roads and landslides caused by heavy rains.

The monthly waterfowl survey of water bodies in Chandigarh along with the study of invertebrates in them is also being conducted regularly with the help of members of the club. This study is important as it is for assessing the health of the water body in relation to the number of waterfowl visiting it. This study was undertaken to assess the reasons for the decrease in number of wintering waterfowl over the last four years.

Karmanye Choudhary in his article has summed up the health of Sukhna Lake after the survey conducted from July through to September 2023.

As we go into the last quarter of the year we look forward to welcoming the wintering birds with the hope the numbers this season will show an upward trend.

Happy Birding!



**Sarbjeet Kaur**

Secretary

How bird watchers wait eagerly for the arrival of monsoon! Infact they wait for the Pied Cuckoo, known as the harbinger of monsoon. It enriches the environment with its melodious song of piu piu piu, not only in the plains but in the lower hills too, like Morni and Thapli near Chandigarh. Unfortunately this year monsoon's fury created havoc in Himachal causing landslides blocking the roads and tracks restricting our field trips to the plains.

Field trip for July was conducted at Motemajra instead of Jangeshu on the 9th of that month. There wasn't much activity in the village pond but male Baya Weavers in an Acacia tree adjacent to the pond were too active constructing their pendulous nests. A few Acacia trees are still surviving in this fast developing modern time to offer perfect habitat for our avian companions. Red collared Doves a little uncommon at this location, were sighted too. In spite of less activity in the pond, the total count went up to 51 species.

Siswan Dam was the location for club's August field trip. It was combined with our monthly Waterfowl Survey on the 13th of that month. Again there wasn't much activity. Due to excessive rains water level of the lake was high so hardly any wader were to be seen. Being residents, Lesser Whistling Ducks and Spot-billed Ducks are always around, flapping their wings, displaying their beautiful colors.

Sarangpur near Chandigarh is another hotspot, with a lot of shrubs, thick foliage of undergrowth that provides habitat for Francolins and Quails and some other species. Field trip was conducted to this little forest on 9th September.. Birders were quite thrilled at the sight of a Paradise Flycatcher male. After combing this area thoroughly, It was decided to visit Perchdam too - another artificial lake in the lower Shivalik hills that provides habitat to different species throughout the year. Palas's Fish eagle was the highlight of the day.

Let's hope next year monsoon brings joy and happiness.

If you want to enjoy birding, you must use binoculars.



Fieldtrip for the month	July 2023
Date & Time :	16.07.2023, 6.30 am -10.00 am
Location:	Siswan Forest Trail
Weather:	Heavily overcast and windy conditions.
Participants :	Rima Dhillon, Saroj Gulati, Sarbjeet Kaur, Gagan

Siswan Forest Trail is upstream of the Lake formed by the Siswan Dam near Chandigarh. It is one of the four check dams on the north-eastern periphery of Chandigarh. It is also a Community Reserve. There is mixed vegetation of Keekar, Ficus, Silk Cotton and other acacia trees . The fieldtrip was combined with the monthly Waterfowl Census which is being conducted by the members of Chandigarh Bird Club in collaboration with Avian Habitat & Wetlands Society.



There were just a few Spot-billed Ducks and Black crowned Night Herons on the lake.

The forest trail at the end of the lake is a great place for wintering birds as this forest is a corridor for birds coming down from the hills.

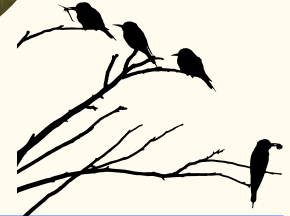
However during the monsoon months there were few species to be seen. Visibility was poor mostly due to the thick undergrowth.

Along with the common birds like Red-vented and Himalayan Bulbuls, Jungle Babblers, Common Mynas, Ashy Prinia and Common Tailorbirds the highlight was the sighting of a single male Oriental Pied Hornbill. It is an encouraging trend as this is the third spot within the 30km range around Chandigarh where these birds have been spotted over the last few years.

The other areas of sighting are Sukhna WLS where a pair was seen with two juveniles last year and Panjab University where also juveniles were observed back in 2017.

Soon it began to drizzle and the fieldtrip had to come to an end .



*Chandigarh Bird Club®*

Fieldtrip for the month	August 2023
Date & Time :	13.08.2023, 6.00 am - 9.00 am
Location:	MOTEMAJRA, MOHALI, PUNJAB
Weather:	Heavily overcast with a light breeze
Participants :	RIMA DHILLON, SARBJEET KAUR, MAHESH GARG, APRAJITA LOBANA, ALPANA NP SINGH, GAGAN, DR.GURDIP S BOPARAI, SUSHIL KUMAR, ROHIT BHONSLE, MANJOT SINGH, LALIT BANSAL, AARYAN BHALLA

Motemajra is a village on the outskirts of Mohali in Punjab. The village pond here has a healthy water system due to which a rich birdlife can be observed throughout the year. In winter the village panchayat rents out the pond to fishermen and also to Water chestnut growers. This brings in some income for the village and also some extra food for the waterfowl.

During the winter months a large number of species of migrant waterfowl like Bar-headed Geese, Pochard Species, N. Shovellers, Ruddy Shelduck etc along with many waders, can be seen in substantial numbers. In summer and monsoon a number of breeding birds like Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Common Moorhens, Grey-headed Swampheens, White-breasted Waterhens, Baya Weavers Indian Golden Orioles make it a popular site for birders in Chandigarh.

During the fieldtrip Baya Weavers were observed in a frenzy of nestbuilding. However it was surprising that only two acacia trees were hosting this colony. In years past many more trees with Baya nests could be observed. There isn't too much change in habitat here though of course the number of houses in the village have increased manifold. Indian Silverbill, Scaly-breasted Munia and the Indian Pied Starlings carrying nesting material.





This season provides ample opportunities to observe birds in parental mode. Juveniles of Pied Bushchat, Common Moorhens and White-breasted Waterhens were being taught to fend for themselves, Indian Golden Oriole juveniles were assuming adult plumage and preparing to fly south ,off to their winter abodes..

The monthly waterfowl & Wetland Survey for the month of August was conducted in conjunction with the fieldtrip.

Checklist of Birds seen:

1. Lesser Whistling Duck
2. Knob-billed Duck
3. Indian Spot-billed Duck
4. Norther Pintail-single female probably over wintering
5. Black Francolin
6. Little Grebe
7. Rock Pigeon (feral Pigeon)
8. Eurasian Collared Dove
9. Laughing Dove
- 10.Red Collared Dove
- 11.Spotted Dove
- 12.Greater Coucal
- 13.Asian Koel
- 14.Eurasian Moorhen
- 15.Eurasian Coot -single bird (over wintering)
- 16.Grey-headed Swaamphen
- 17.White-breasted Waterhen
- 18.Black-winged Stilt
- 19.Red-wattled Lapwing
- 20.Purple Heron





21. Indian Pond Heron
22. Intermediate Egret
23. Cattle Egret
24. Red naped Ibis
25. Black Kite
26. Eurasian Hoopoe
27. White-throated Kingfisher
28. Asian Green Bee-eater
29. Coppersmith Barbet
30. Rose-ringed Parakeet
31. Indian Golden Oriole
32. House Crow
33. Black Drongo
34. Common Tailorbird
35. Ashy Prinia
36. Plain Prinia
37. Zitting Cisticola
38. Wire-tailed Swallow
39. Red-vented Bulbul
40. Large Grey Babbler
41. Jungle Babbler
42. Brahminy Starling
43. Indian Pied Starling
44. Common Myna
45. Bank Myna
46. Oriental Pied Magpie
47. Pied Bushchat with juv
48. Brown Rockchat
49. Purple Sunbird
50. Baya Weaver
51. Indian Silverbill
52. Scaly-breasted Munia



*Chandigarh Bird Club®*

Fieldtrip for the month	September 2023
Date & Time :	10.09.2023, 6.00 am - 10.30 am
Location:	SARANGPUR & PARCH DAM (CHANDIGARH)
Weather:	Slightly overcast with light breeze
Participants :	RIMA DHILLON, SAROJ JYOTI, SOFIA, BINNDUO NANGIA, SUSHIL KUMAR, ROHIT BHONSLE, RUPINDER, APRAJITA MOHAN, ALPANA N P SINGH, GAJINDER BAINS, SARBJEET KAUR, MANJOT SINGH, SUBHASH SAPRU

Sarangpur village is on the western periphery of Chandigarh towards New Chandigarh. It includes the Chandigarh Botanical Garden. Some years ago a large part of the village land was acquired by the government as part of urban development. It is earmarked for various commercial projects. Although the area is cut up into plots bisected by a system of roads, the forest has not been cleared and is allowed to flourish. It is home to some wildlife like Sambar deer, Porcupines, Jackals, Wild Pigs and Blue Bull with a host of bird species. In the past both Grey and Black Francolins have been seen here and a family of Barred Buttonquails too. Passage migrants like Rosy Starlings have been seen to stop by.



The club fieldtrip was conducted in this forest to try to see some quails or francolins. Unfortunately due to the extensive rains during the previous months the foliage was very thick so visibility was very poor.

The bird sightings were few. The usual species of Bulbuls, Common Mynas, Indian Peafowl and Eurasian Collared Doves were around in satisfactory numbers. There was a lot of excitement at the sight of a pair of Indian Paradise Flycatchers. Domestic and other migratory birds like Humes' Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat were seen flitting in the canopy of the keekar trees.

As there were not many species to be seen here, it was decided to move on to Parchh Dam which is one of the checkdams bordering Chandigarh. It is only a few minutes drive from the location we were birding.

Chandigarh has several check dams located along the north western border of Chandigarh. Small lakes form behind these check dams providing food and habitat for many species of birds.

The highlight of this little detour was a Pallas' Fish eagle perched atop a tree on the far side of the lake. It was impossible to get much closer to it so there are only ID shots of the bird.

Though short on species list the entire fieldtrip was a great outing with a promise of more at another time.

Checklist

Perch Dam

1. Pallas fish eagle
2. Shikra
3. White-throated Kingfisher
4. Indian Golden Oriole
5. Black Drongo
6. Jungle Babbler
7. Purple Sunbird





Sarangpur Forest

1. Spot-billed Duck
2. Indian Peafowl
3. Asian Koel
4. Pied Cuckoo
5. Grey Francolin
6. Red-wattled Lapwing
7. Little Cormorant
8. Cattle Egret
9. Intermediate Egret
10. Indian Pond Heron
11. Shikra
12. Black Kite
13. Indian Grey Hornbill
14. White-throated Kingfisher
15. Asian Green bee-eater
16. Black-rumped Flameback
17. Alexandrine Parakeet
18. Rose-ringed Parakeet
19. Plum-headed Parakeet
20. Black Drongo
21. Hair crested Drongo
22. Indian Paradise Flycatcher
23. Long-tailed Shrike
24. Rufous Treepie
25. House Crow
26. Common Tailorbird
27. Ashy Prinia
28. Red-vented Bulbul
29. Humes' Warbler
30. Lesser Whitethroat
31. Jungle Babbler
32. Common Myna
33. Indian Robin
34. Oriental Magpie-Robin
35. Purple Sunbird
36. Common Rosefinch



paramnoor singh

HARMONY IN SUKHNA: THE VITAL DANCE OF AQUATIC INVERTEBRATES AND AVIAN LIFE

--Karmannye Chaudhary



In the heart of Chandigarh, where the city's rhythm meets the whispers of nature, lies the enchanting Sukhna Wildlife Sanctuary. This remarkable sanctuary, a testament to the coexistence of urban life and wilderness, holds within its tranquil lakes and vibrant wetlands a secret world that often escapes our attention - the world of aquatic invertebrates.

In the quest to understand the intricate tapestry of Sukhna Wildlife Sanctuary's ecosystem, a group of individuals comprising of myself, my brother, Navjit Singh, Narbir Kahlon, Rima Dhillon and the members of the Avian Habitat & Wetland Society, embarked on surveying the numerous water bodies of the Sukhna WLS, diligently collecting invaluable data. We delved into the heart of this wetland paradise, unraveling its secrets to shed light on the delicate interplay between aquatic invertebrates and avian life. This collaboration formed the cornerstone of our research, enhancing our understanding of the sanctuary's thriving ecosystem and paving the way for its preservation.

In this research effort we came across the Unsung Heroes of Sukhna! These minuscule creatures, including the likes of Daphnia, Cyclops, seed shrimp, and water boatmen, may be diminutive in size, but their significance in Sukhna's aquatic tapestry cannot be overstated. They are the tireless grazers of algae and detritus, the silent regulators of nutrient cycling, and the uncelebrated foundation stones of the aquatic food chain.

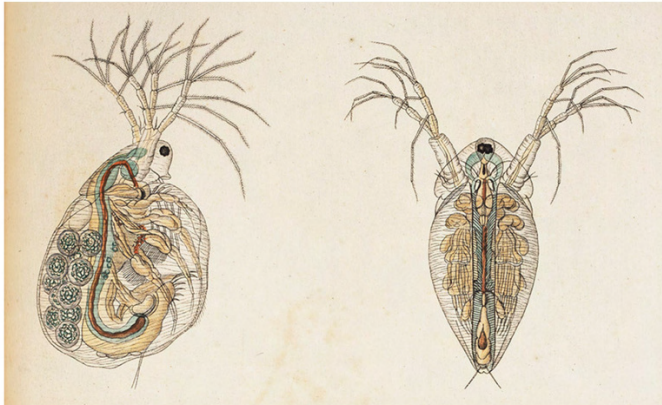
Now, let me take you on a journey through Sukhna's avian wonderland. The sanctuary is renowned for its diverse birdlife, drawing enthusiasts from all corners of life to its tranquil shores. From the elegant Northern Pintails to the resplendent Common Pochards, and from the graceful Cormorants to the vibrant Purple Moorhens, Sukhna is, without doubt, a haven for birdwatchers.

But have you ever wondered about the intricate web that connects these majestic birds to the tiny aquatic invertebrates? Picture this: a bird's day begins with the shimmering rays of dawn on the water's surface. Hunger awakens, and the hunt commences. Many birds, like the Northern Shoveler and Mallard, are masters of the art of dabbling. They sift through submerged vegetation, searching for a hidden treasure - the aquatic invertebrates. These minute creatures, invisible to our eyes, provide the vital nutrients that fuel these birds' energy-demanding endeavours.



A Tufted Duck (Left) and Mallard (Right) searching for food under the water.

Indeed, the importance of aquatic invertebrates becomes evident when you consider their nutritional value. Packed with proteins, fats, and essential nutrients, they are a veritable feast for waterfowl, sustaining their migrations, breeding, and overall health.



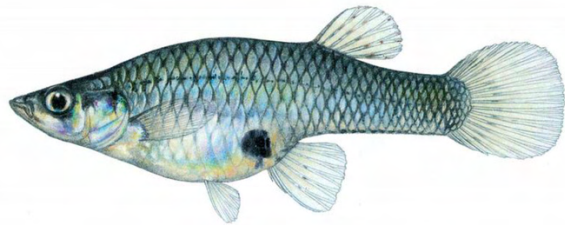
Side view (Left) and Top View (Right) of Daphnia

Migratory birds undertake epic journeys spanning thousands of kilometres, and they rely on high-calorie foods to fuel these incredible feats. Aquatic invertebrates, with their rich energy content, are a lifeline for these avian travellers at Sukhna.

Yet, the significance of these aquatic heroes goes beyond satiating the hunger of our feathered friends. Their presence signals a balanced and thriving ecosystem. A stable population of aquatic invertebrates ensures a consistent food source for birds year-round. Moreover, monitoring their numbers can serve

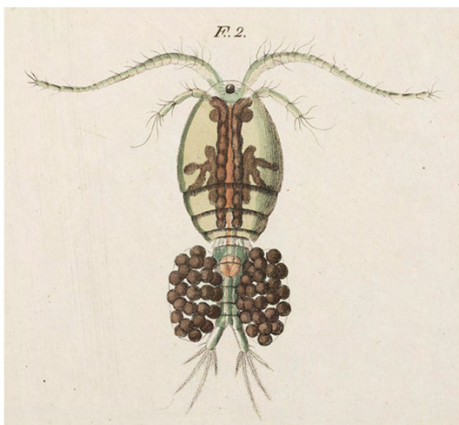
as an early warning system, alerting us to environmental stressors like pollution or habitat degradation.

However, in this delicate balance of nature, challenges abound. Invasive species, such as the notorious mosquitofish or *Gambusia affinis*, have disrupted the harmonious equilibrium of Sukhna's ecosystems. Introduced with the noble aim of controlling mosquitoes, these invaders have inadvertently wreaked havoc. They are voracious predators of aquatic invertebrates, leading to a decline in their populations. This, in turn, affects the avian residents that depend on these invertebrates for sustenance.



Gambusia affinis commonly and wrongly called as the Mosquitofish

When the sanctuary's waters face adversity, whether from agricultural runoff, industrial discharge, or the encroaching hand of urbanisation, these aquatic invertebrates bear the burden. Their populations dwindle, and diversity wanes, serving as nature's alarm bells. Just as the majestic Daphnia and Cyclops, with their fragile frames, falter in the face of chemical contaminants, so too does their decline herald the ominous presence of heavy metals and pesticides.



Cyclops carrying a clutch of eggs on its tail.

In this symphony of life, stoneflies and mayflies, the guardians of purity, fall silent in the polluted waters. Their absence paints a somber picture of an ecosystem in distress, where the shimmer of Sukhna's waters conceals the hidden strife.

But the tale doesn't end with the invertebrates alone. Oh no, it reverberates through the entire web of life. As these tiny creatures fade away, so does the sustenance for the fish that glide beneath the surface, the amphibians that croak in the twilight, and the waterfowl that grace the sanctuary's shores. The repercussions are felt far and wide, echoing through the very essence of Sukhna's being.

Yet, amid this melancholy, there lies hope and



responsibility. To protect Sukhna, to safeguard its natural beauty and biodiversity, we must heed the whispers of these humble invertebrates. They are our silent guides through the labyrinth of ecological change.

Our surveys have revealed the extent of this issue, and it calls for action. As stewards of Sukhna Wildlife Sanctuary, it is our responsibility to protect this fragile balance. We must acknowledge the interconnectedness of its diverse inhabitants, from the tiniest invertebrates to the grandest waterfowl.



-Karmannye Chaudhary



CUCKOO - A FAMILY WITH BIRDS MORE OFTEN HEARD THAN SEEN

Lalit Bansal.



Cuckoo is a family of birds and there are 147 species in this family. The cuckoo family of birds is interesting for many reasons, the main two are the parasitic behavior and the distinctive call. Besides 88 species, whose name includes "cuckoo", the family includes anis, roadrunners, coucals, malkohas, and koels. A total of 21 Cuckoo species are found in India and 9 Species are found in the Inter-State Chandigarh Region. These include Asian Koel, Indian Cuckoo, Common Hawk Cuckoo, Pied Cuckoo, Common Cuckoo, Sirkeer Malkoha, Greater Coucal, Drongo Cuckoo and Grey-bellied Cuckoo. While 5 are summer migrants the rest 4 are resident birds.

Brood Parasitism: Female cuckoos lay their eggs in the nests of other bird species, known as host birds. They often select host species that are smaller than themselves and have similar coloured eggs. The cuckoo egg hatches before the host eggs and the young cuckoo often ejects the host eggs or chicks from the nest, ensuring that it receives all the parental care and resources from the unwitting host parents. Not all but some of the species of the Cuckoos family are parasitic.

Distinctive Call: Another thing the cuckoos are famous for is the distinctive and recognizable call. Compared with other birds generally, cuckoos must be considered a highly vocal group. The most well-known call is that of Male, which is often described as a "cuckoo" sound and gives them their name. When you hear the call, you will immediately realize why the bird is called the cuckoo



The cuckoos are generally medium-sized, slender birds. Most species live in trees, though a sizeable minority are ground-dwelling. Some species are migratory. The cuckoos feed on insects, insect larvae, and a variety of other animals, as well as fruit.

I have so far captured all the cuckoo species in Chandigarh except one i.e. Grey-bellied Cuckoo. Each species of cuckoo is interesting for one or other reason.

Asian Koel / कोयल



A resident of the Chandigarh region, the Asian Koel or Indian koel is a most beautiful member of the cuckoo family of birds. The black beauty is also a widely used symbol in Indian poetry, known as Kokila in Sanskrit, and is very vocal from March to June during the breeding season in the Indian Subcontinent.

Indian Cuckoo



A summer migrant for this region, the Indian Cuckoo is a solitary and shy bird. This medium-sized cuckoo has both sexes alike and is a brood parasite. The call is loud with four notes. In northern India, they can be locally common during the breeding season with densities estimated at a calling bird for every 2 km². Indian cuckoo lays its eggs in the nests of a wide range of birds, including magpies, shrikes, and drongos. They feed on hairy caterpillars and other insects but sometimes take fruits.

Common hawk-Cuckoo / पपीहा



A summer migrant for this region, a Common hawk cuckoo popularly known as the brainfever bird is a resident of the Indian subcontinent. During the months before the monsoon in the breeding season, males common hawk-cuckoo produce loud repetitive three-note calls like Pee kahan also known as Papeeha in Sanskrit. Common hawk cuckoos are also brood parasites and mostly lay their eggs in nests of babblers.

Jacobin Cuckoo / चातक



Black-and-white cuckoo with a spiffy crest (also known as the “Jacobin Cuckoo” for its smartly attired appearance), the Pied Cuckoo is also a summer migrant for the Chandigarh Region. The Pied Cuckoo is also a brood parasite and lays its eggs in the nests of babblers, bulbuls, and shrikes. It has been considered a harbinger of the monsoon rains due to the timing of its arrival. It has been associated with a bird in Indian mythology and poetry, known as the chātaka (Sanskrit: चातक) represented as a bird with a beak on its head that waits for rains to quench its thirst.

Common Cuckoo



A summer migrant and the famous bird of Europe whose voice is imitated by cuckoo clocks (and whose call, coo-coo, gave the name to the entire cuckoo family). It is well known as a brood parasite: females lay eggs in nests of other birds, particularly pipits and reed warblers, which raise the young cuckoo. Common cuckoo species migrate to Europe and Asia during summer, and breed from northern India to Asia. During the winter season, Common Cuckoo is found in Assam, Bengal, and northeast states of India.

Sirkeer Malkoha / महोखा



Resident birds for Indian Sub-continent and this region, Malkoha species of birds are also part of the cuckoo family. Gray-brown cuckoo with a uniquely hooked red bill. Teardrop-shaped dark patch around each eye gives it a distinctly fashionable, elegant appearance. Forages on or close to the ground in the dense undergrowth of dry forests and scrubby areas. Scurries or flaps laboriously away when disturbed. Unlike other cuckoos, Sirkeer Malkoha is a non-parasitic cuckoo.

Greater Coucal / चकोर



A resident bird for this region and a non-parasitic member of the cuckoo family, Greater coucal is known as Chakor in Sanskrit, and also as Bharadwaj in some parts of India.

Fork-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo



Glossy small black cuckoo with a forked tail. Juvenile has a galaxy-like smattering of white spots all over the body. Square-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo has a less prominently forked tail; note less difference in length of outermost tail feathers. Adults may be confused with drongos, but are lighter-billed and smaller, with distinctly white-barred under tail. Song is an extremely loud ascending series of whistles. Lays its eggs in the nests of babblers, bulbuls, and shrikes.

Nest of the Baya- The Weaver Bird



Alpana N P. Singh



Says the Sparrow to the Weaver Bird

“Look where I live – a mansion, no less!

While your nest barely shields you from the wind and the rain. Yet you prize it as art?”

The Weaver Bird smiles, “There is no doubt, that my nest sways in the slightest wind, but I live in it gladly, for unlike the mansion you share with humans my house is mine and mine alone.”

“The joy of Independence “English translation of a Bengali Poem by Rajanikanta Sen which delivers a powerful message of freedom and self respect.

Baya weavers are best known for the elaborately woven nests constructed by the males. These pendulous nests are retort-shaped, with a central nesting chamber and a long vertical tube that leads to a side entrance to the chamber. The nests are woven with long strips of paddy leaves, rough grasses and long strips torn from palm fronds. Each strip can be between 20 and 60 cm (7.9 and 23.6 in) in length. A male bird is known to make up to 500 trips to complete a nest. The birds use their strong beaks to strip and collect the strands, and to weave and knot them while building their nests.





The story of 'uncommon' Common Babbler!

Don't go on its Name!

By: Aaryan Bhalla



We share our surroundings with millions of other organisms, which help in maintaining the ecosystem. Each and every being plays a key role in the ecological system as these play a primary role on which all other living beings depend.

Birding... birding... and birding... Never ends!! The passion for it continues as usual now though number of Lifers do not increase as fast as they used to! but still, you are pleased when you get one... either resident or not!



Saketri- The fields besides Sukhna, a satisfactory hotspot that never disappoints. Not far...not bad... always a pleasure to visit. That's all that I need. It was birding as usual but, there was a surprise that day... that triggered me to write this article, on the bird I just glanced at for a second. I had never seen it before that lucky day.

Saketri has rich long reeds and fields at the onset of monsoon, at other times it is a barren and fallow stretch of land with long weeds growing beside roads. That's why it offers a glimpse into the avian diversity and avifauna of the region!



I was exploring the village's countryside with my fellow birder Mr. Lalit Bansal when a bird with a long tail that had been feeding on the ground was quick to fly away as we approached. A Paddyfield Pipit! I thought. But, wait! instantly I corrected. It was a rare and uncommon Common Babbler!

It was probably the 4th record of the bird from the same area... You may not find them much in and around Chandigarh because of the great habitat loss. It is located in dry areas of India, population distribution is in dry regions with sparse and low thorny scrub vegetation, rocky outcrops and boulders, stony hills, cultivation and semi-arid regions.



Although, Jungle & Common Babblers are close cousins their preferred habitats are different.

The Jungle Babblers can easily survive within our gardens & such surroundings, whereas the 'Common' is shy. Unlike jungle babbler, which has adapted well to city and countryside living and also to human population contrary to their name- "Jungle".



The common babbler actually is a reed (sarkanda) dweller. There is hardly any sarkanda and local thorny trees it was used to. But various reasons have been given...There has been no research really but this is the observation by birders.

LOSS OF HABITAT:

Clearing of scrub & light forests including hillocks & broken undulating landscapes all around us for agricultural and housing purposes has caused the loss of breeding & foraging habitat of the Common Babblers. It has resulted in a massive drop in their population.





Jungle babblers showed little seasonal or annual changes in population size.

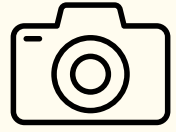
Common Babblers forage very close to the scrub habitat & retreat into it when approached- unlike the Jungle Babbler which comes right up to you if you are sitting in your house lawn/ garden. Habitat destruction is the main reason for many bird species moving away from their native places where they were seen earlier and also due to competition from species such as Jungle Babblers which are more aggressive.



So, let's Immerse ourself in the beauty of nature as we observe the birds in their natural habitats. Don't forget to bring your binoculars and camera to capture unforgettable moments. Explore the rich biodiversity of Saketri Village of Haryana, a heaven for bird enthusiasts near Sukhna Lake.

“It is us humans who are disturbing the environment just for our greed even when we know that world is standing on the verge of chaos... but still, we continue doing this. We have to do something to stop this destructing of habitat !!...

A STRANGE PHENOMENON



The other day, I happened to come across profile of a fellow bird-photographer who has mentioned a quote by Magnum Photographer Inge Morath as having said, “ Photography is a strange phenomenon, you trust your eye and cannot help but bare your soul”. Yes, we trust our eyes without paying too much attention to technical issues as these can interfere with creative aspects. No doubt a good photographer makes image with his feelings and some images do touch our soul.

Inge Morath has rightly expressed her feelings, but her emphasis on trusting our eyes made me ponder over a question does camera sees more than our eyes. If so, how and why. The answer to this question holds more significance for bird photographers and birders who keenly observe not only behaviour and anatomy of birds, but also their morphology.

An inquisitive mind may question similarities as well as differences between the camera and the human eye. Those who have better understanding of functions of optical devices also know that camera sees more than the human eye.

I have seen many birders who first see birds with their bare eyes, then through their binocular or monocular and then make a ‘record’ photo of the bird with the help of a long lens in the given situation so as to observe and study bird’s distinctive markings. They all understand that bare eyes or say ‘unaided eyes’ need modern gadgets to see beyond their limiting factors.

The technology is fast developing thus widening the gap between the functions of human eye and the camera. While the human eye has always remained as such, the technological developments that have taken place since the invention of camera obscura have unfolded a whole new world of visual media. This process is unending and future inventions may be more startling.



When we capture an image, only a visual record is made, which is flat and has two dimensions, but when we see the visual impact remains in our memory for a longer period of time and is of three dimensions - length, height and has depth of field. Also, a camera can create a brighter picture as it has the potential to collect light for a longer period.

We all know both the eye and the camera have a lens and both receive light through an aperture device. They also have a method to interpret that light as an image. In camera we can adjust light through aperture, automatically or manually whereas eyes have pupil, a round area in the iris, which controls light. In both, the camera and our eyes, the light and image are inverted by the receiving mechanism.

In eye, light is received by retina, which is almost of the same size of sensor of a full frame (35mm) camera and is an extension of brain. Light is transmitted to the back portion of brain and image is perceived. It is because of curvature of retina that its edges are about the same distance from the lens as the center. Therefore, unlike camera lenses, the retina has corner sharpness and we also see more in corners. On the other hand the flange distance, the space between where the lens is mounted to the camera body and to the camera's image sensor, is comparatively larger. The shorter a flange distance, the smaller and lighter a camera body can be. The mirrorless cameras have, therefore, shorter flange distance thus are lighter and smaller than the DSLRs. In case of lenses generally the corners are not as sharp as the center of an image is.

The question remains why camera sees more than our eyes. We know the camera sends every pixel data from sensor to the computer which may result in certain distortions like barrel distortion, colour variation and vignetting. Contrary to it, eyes are not so capable because data passes through optic nerve. Eyes adjust their sensitivity to see naturally, but cameras have a feature to adjust ISO manually or let it get adjusted automatically.



Camera sensor has regular grid of pixels with every square millimeter having exactly the same number and pattern of pixels. In cameras the field of view depends on the kind of lens. On the other hand, retina, a small central area of about 6 mm, has dense concentration of photo receptors. Interestingly this portion has best resolving ability than any camera.

Although our peripheral vision has high refresh rate, our eye is sensitive to moving objects, but has not much resolution to read letters. The focal length of the human eye is the distance between the retina and the eye lens and this focal length varies from person to person. Not many know that 50 mm camera lens closely matches the human eye as the angle of view created by the 50 mm focal length is almost the same as the viewing angle of the human eye. The built-in technology of eye can't match the ever-improving modern technology of camera.

The old saying goes, 'eyes are the windows to the soul'. Photography makes us trust our eyes, but it is also such a magical phenomenon where silence speaks louder than words. At times its sound is more deafening than words. Let's keep enjoying the sound of silence of this strange phenomenon of photography.

As I conclude, I am reminded of another female photographer, Maggie Steber, who has also rightly said, "The camera can open many doors, but sometimes you need to put it down and live."

Subhash Sapru



PAPUA NEW GUINEA



- KUNAL BAMBY

Papua New Guinea is an island country that lies in the south-western Pacific. It includes the eastern half of New Guinea and many small off-shore islands. Its neighbour includes Indonesia to the west, Australia to the south and Solomon Islands to the south-east. It is mainly mountainous but has low-lying plains in the southern New Guinea.

Papua New Guinea is an incredibly diverse island both in terms of its culture and its avifauna. Lying just beyond the easterly remnants of the Asian continent and Wallace's line it is in most respects very much Australasian. There are no Barbets, Woodpeckers or Trogons for example and likewise no primates. This isolation has allowed marsupials and many Australasian bird families to flourish. Particularly well represented groups include Pigeons, Parrots, Owllet Nightjars, Kingfishers, Australasian warblers and Fantails, Monarchs, Australasian Robins, Honeyeaters, and of course the Birds of Paradise for which this wonderful archipelago is justly famous.

This geographic isolation, combined with the rugged mountainous interior has also led to an incredible diversification of people. For example, over 700 languages are spoken, and nearly every valley seems to have its own culture and traditions, with some people not having had their first contact with westerners until the 1930s. Thankfully this has also allowed much of Papua New Guinea's natural habitat to remain, and there are still vast expanses of forest, alive with some of the most exciting birds on the planet.

New Guinea has more than 400 endemic bird species (including offshore islands), although the relatively arbitrary international boundary that bisects the main landmass means that mainland Papua New Guinea supports a mere 25 or so true endemics. However, these include some astonishingly beautiful species such as Brown-headed Paradise Kingfisher, Ribbon-tailed Astrapia, and Raggiana, Emperor and Blue Bird-of-Paradise.



In this trip, we covered 3 different destinations, the inter-connectivity can be possible only by the flights

- Mount Hagen (*central highlands*)
- Kiunga (*western Lowlands*)
- Port Moresby (*national capital & shore city*)

From India, we can fly only to the city of Port Moresby connected via Singapore, Manila or Hong Kong. Thereon, various domestic flights connect the capital city to Mount Hagen, while only a few domestic connections between Mount Hagen to Kiunga and Kiunga to Port Moresby.



Mount Hagen

Upon reaching Port Moresby in the afternoon, we took a domestic flight to Mount Hagen. The altitude of the city is around 1600 metres ASL, the climate in here is usually comfortable and overcast. Over the course of the year, the temperature typically varies from 13 to 22 degrees Celsius. The best time to visit here is from early-May to mid-October.

Here we met the organisers of the trip and got transferred to Kumul Lodge, which is in the neighbouring province of Enga. Some 50 kms of journey by a van, the very beautiful terrain of the highlands can be witnessed. Kumul Lodge is one of the best-known eco-tourism lodges in Papua New Guinea. The elevation of the lodge is about 2800 metres ASL.

The lodge is a basic one, entirely owned and managed by local people and employing local guides. The team at the lodge has been working to raise local environmental awareness and in time expecting that their ongoing efforts would lead to the area being declared a National Park in future. It has 2 different feeders around it and a few trails, where we may go bird-watching, accompanied with the local guides.

As we reached the lodge, immediately, we took out our gears and landed up in its famous feeder, the first bird we encountered was an Island Thrush, which is fairly common around the lodge. Friendly Fantail, White-Winged Robin, Gray-Streaked Honeyeater, Smoky Honeyeater, Belford's Melidectes, Brehm's Tiger-Parrot come to these feeders quite often and we have a good chance to watch them feeding on the papaya slices that the organisers set up for them on the feeding table. Also, 2 species of Bird-of-Paradise family, namely Ribbon-tailed Astrapia and Brown Sicklebill are the regular visitors, which we might not be able to photograph or even see, in the forest trails.

With its 3-feet long tail, Ribbon-tailed Astrapia has the longest tail-to-body ratio than any other bird in the world. The tremendously long tails of male Ribbon-tailed Astrapias don't help them survive, in fact they get in the way. Males sometimes have to pause to untangle their tails before they can fly away.

The other birds we found around the lodge are Rufous-naped Bellbird (recently discovered to be as one of the poisonous birds too), Large Scrubwren, Blue-capped Ifrita, Brown-backed Whistler, Papuan Lorikeet. Speckled Dasyure can also be seen around on the moss of the trees or even on the feeding-table sometimes.

The night birding can yield 2 very interesting species of Owlet-Nightjars, namely Mountain Owlet-Nightjar & Feline Owlet-Nightjar. They are mainly insectivores which hunt mostly in the air but sometimes on the ground. Also, we can see Archbold's Nightjar and Papuan Boobook. While looking for all these elusive nocturnal species, we came across a peaceful mammal around the lodge, a Cuscus, which couldn't be identified.



Clockwise from Upper-Left
Island Thrush
Smoky Honeyeater
Belford's Melidectes
Brown Sicklebill Bird-of-Paradise (female)
White-winged Robin



*below-left : Rufous-naped Bellbird
below-right : Brehm's Tiger Parrot*



*Above : Ribbon-Tailed Astrapia Bird-of-Paradise
Female on the upper-right*



Mountain Owlet-Nightjar
Brown Sicklebill Bird-of-Paradise (right)

The daily routine starts with a satisfying breakfast consisting of cereals, fruits and coffee at 5 AM. On the second day, we decided to go for the Lesser Bird-of-Paradise, the location was about 40 kms away from the Lodge. Passing through a trail containing some village houses, the task was to stay quietly on a particular lek, and trying your luck to see the male Lesser BoP displaying on the arrival of the female. The male birds did visit the place, but the female didn't turn up, so there was no display all through the couple of hours. The bird was seen but could not be photographed. All this while, we could see Red-capped Flowerpecker, Black-headed Whistler, Gray Shrikethrush, Amboyna Cuckoo-Dove, Ornate Melidectes and White-Shouldered Fairywren.

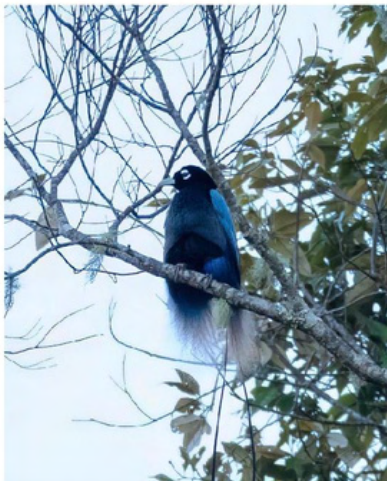
Just as we got out of the village to the way back, we stopped at another village, where we could shoot the female of the Lesser BoP, and surprisingly, a male Magnificent BoP and Greater Lophorina from quite a long distance. Some other birds were Yellow-breasted Bowerbird, Papuan Grassbird, Brown Falcon and additionally, an Azure Kingfisher in the stream nearby. Also, we came across some of the Singing Starlings and Hooded Munia behind a small hospital on the way back to our lodge.

The afternoon session was dedicated to the most amazing, the King-Of-Saxony Bird-of-Paradise, and to the best of our luck, the trail started with the visibility of a female bird sitting on the highest canopies of the fruiting tree. The male has brightly-coloured black and yellow plumage, and two stiff

plumes of up to 50 cms long above the eyes that move around when the bird is displaying. The land is home to the most colourful variety of Doves and medium-sized species of Parrots. Plum-faced Lorikeets, Yellow-billed Lorikeets, Papuan Mountain-Pigeon, Orange-bellied Lorikeet, White-breasted Fruit-Dove were seen fruit-eating on the high trees. Lesser Melampitta, Fan-tailed Berrypecker, Papuan Flycatcher, Black-billed Cuckoo-Dove, Tit Berrypecker, Dimorphic Fantail, Black-breasted Boatbill, Papuan Scrubwren and Rufous-backed Honeyeater were also noticed, all this time we were looking at the King-Of-Saxony BoP perched on a tree-top about 200-250 metres away from the last accessible point.

Another day's session starts with a steep climb of about 1100-1300 metres to the lek of the Blue Bird-of-Paradise. The bird was continuously making loud calls from far-away dense fruiting-tree. After 20 minutes of wait, it finally came out to the open perch, which was also very far-off distancing 300 metres away from us. All we could get is some of the record-shots only. While waiting for the bird to come out on an open perch with a better lighting condition this time, we saw a Mountain Kingfisher flying above us. Other birds we could see were Marbled Honeyeater, Mountain Mouse-warbler, Buff-faced Scrubwren and a couple of Yellow-browed Melidectes. Another bird-of-paradise species Short-tailed Paradigalla was seen from a distance.

While returning from the Blue BoP lek, we stopped near a small stream to see lots of Papuan Sittella (looks similar to the Nuthatch family), in the mix flock of Tit Berrypeckers. Lesser Ground-Robin was also heard at the same spot. Again, we tried to get a closer picture of King-of-saxony BoP, but conditions were still the same as the previous day. Pygmy Eagle was seen on a perch, but that too very distant.



left: Blue Bird-of-Paradise
right: King-of-Saxony Bird-of-Paradise

Another failed effort to photograph the Lesser BoP, as the local villagers mentioned that the bird has already arrived at the lek and have left the displaying area, without performing its rituals of displaying. Further we drove to a new area, which was lately explored by our guide and has a newly built lodge. The place is called Mount Komonge, distancing 100 kms from the Kumul Lodge. The journey through the tribal village is usually not safe as there is always a little probability of insurgency or unexpected disruption. It is the case with almost whole of the country. On our way, we saw an Azure Kingfisher near one of the fruit markets that came on our way. The owner of the

Komonge Lodge is the principal of a local school educating about 400 children in the middle of nowhere. We were escorted by a couple of cars up to the lodge.



White-Shouldered Fairywren (*left*) have always been a bird that have stayed by the roadsides, though is a shy bird, like wrens.

The lodge was situated in the middle of the forest-patch. So we could see a lot of birds from our balconies too. But before we got to the lodge, we decided to make a short walk overpassing a small stream. Our guide heard the call of Lesser Melampitta, which is a super skulker, we thought we could never got to see the bird in situation full of densely grown bushes. But yes, we were able to see and photograph it very well as the bird came out on an open perch.

Lesser Melampitta (*below*)



From the lodge, we could easily see Red-collared Myzomela, Blue-capped Ifrita, Rufous-backed Honeyeater, Regent Whistlers, Black-throated Honeyeater and Black-billed Cuckoo Dove. Again in

the evening, we walked down to the same spot from our stay, to the same point where we photographed the Lesser Melampitta, and this time we got to hear the call of one of the most demanded bird, **Spotted Jewel-Babbler**. We played the call and fortunately, the bird cooperated and came to a perch very very slowly, through the dense undergrowth. It was very disappointing to have not got any image of this beautiful bird, as it stayed there just for the fraction of a second.

Now the time for the trademark bird of the Highlands, the **Wattled Ploughbill**. The most striking feature of the male is the large, circular, pink wattles similar to two rose petals, extending from the gape to the sides of the throat. The bill shape is short, deep, sooty-black and has a hooked upper mandible.



Garnet Robin, Black-bellied Cicadabird, Black-throated Honeyeater were the other highlights of the evening session. We could also see the Goldie's Lorikeet, Black Sitella and the Mountain Peltops.

The other day, we started a downward walk to some of the areas where we could see the maximum species and heard the call of a very-very shy and important bird, the Papuan Logrunner. This guy didn't give us any image, but it was an important sighting indeed. Papuan King-parrot, Fantailed Cuckoo, Rufous-throated Bronze-Cuckoo, Great Woodswallow and Rufescent Imperial-Pigeon were additional highlights of the day.



Blue-capped Ifrita (*up*) is one of the lately discovered Poisonous bird species found here. Mountain Peltops (*lower left*) and Regent Whistler (*lower right*)





Red-Collared Myzomela (*up*) & Torrent Flycatcher (*down*)

The next morning, we had to drive back to the Kumul Lodge and on the way, we were able to do some very important target birds namely Torrent Lark, Mountain Honeyeater and the Torrent Flycatcher. The landscapes have always been pleasing all the way back from Mount Komonge to our last night's stay in the area.

There is a special lek for the Torrent Larks, supervised by the local villagers. It is a short-hike along the moist stream, leading to a beautiful waterfall. We spotted a pair of these larks, after patiently waiting for them for a long time. It is indeed a very important species. The

couple of birds flew to a nearby birch and then, went inside the curtain of a big waterfall.

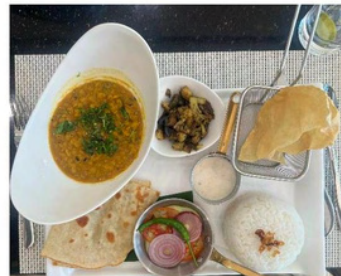
After finishing the evening session, we came down to the Kumul Lodge and had dark coffee at the lounge in the stay. Spent some time staying near the feeding table observing some resident species.



Last evening in the highlands it was, and we were looking for a couple of nocturnal species that we missed out so far. Archbold's Nightjar was the prime target along with the Papuan Boobook (*left*) and we were able to see them both.

So we are almost done with the Mount Hagen segment of the tour, supported by a very good weather, but some very tough photography and species. We missed the display of the Lesser BOP all the 3 chances we took. King-of-Saxony BOP has been perched very far-off in both the instances. So overall a tough birding, I must say.

The next morning, we were scheduled to fly to Kiunga. Here comes the shocker. Upon reaching the Hagen airport, we discovered that the airline has rescheduled our flight by 7 days. There is no frequent flying in this sector (Mount Hagen – Kiunga), and amazingly, no road network between these 2 stations too. Stranded at the airport for 3 hours, trying to reschedule to an earlier date, we got no luck and hence had to get back to the Kumul Lodge again. The only good thing that happened this day was that we got to eat some fresh cooked Indian food while returning back from airport. A service guy recommended this place for the Indian cuisine. Getting back to the lodge, sitting near the feeding station at the Kumul Lodge was the only option that evening, looking for the resident birds of the lodge.



There were many leks and hotspots where our tour-organiser didn't take us, example, the famous Rondon Ridge and the nearby areas is said to be rich in some other species of the Birds-of-Paradise family. But then here is how they save cost by the minimal travelling. We must finish our studies well before we plan for these tours so that we could make the best of our time and resources that we have applied to get involved in these trips.

We would close this part of the trip wondering whether we would be able to make it to our next destination, Kiunga. Getting no other option till 5 pm that day, we had decided that if we could not fly to Kiunga, we will suspend the tour and return back to the Port Moresby, and hence back to our country after spending 2 days in the capital city, depending on the availability of flights.

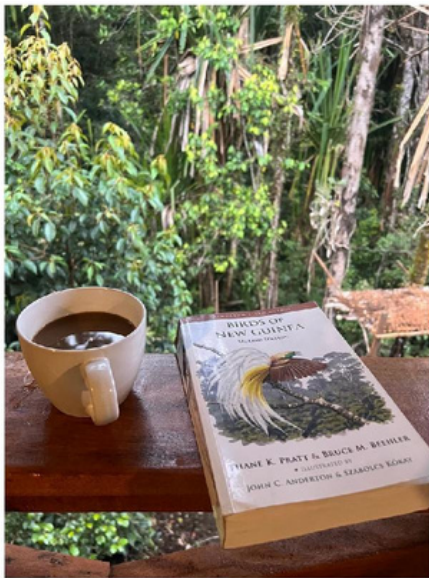
Signing out for now, we would continue the blog in the second part. I would really like to thank CBC, especially respected Reema Mam for inspiring me to compose this informational article about my birding trip to Papua New Guinea, in July 2023.



Stream where we saw the Azure Kingfisher



Lek of the Blue Bird-of-Paradise



Balcony of Mount Komonge Lodge



The display area of Lesser Bird-of-Paradise



Star Sightings



Grasshopper warbler
Paramnoor Singh Antaal



Red avadavat
Parveen Nain

Chandigarh Bird Club®



Tawny bellied Babbler
Pushkar Bali



Hornbill
Gagandeep Singh



Chandigarh Bird Club®

Whispering Wings®

Chandigarh Bird Club® is a registered organisation formed by a group of local birdwatchers. The idea is to record the local avifauna, its habitats and help make the residents of Tri-City aware of birds in our region and protect them.

Incepted 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 related to this activity.

Editor :- Rima Dhillon

Sub Editor :- Parveen Nain

**Newsletter Design & Layout :-
Nain Graphics**

President :- Rima Dhillon

Vice President :- Narbir Singh Kahlon

Hony Secretary :- Sarbjeet Kaur

Joint Secretary :- Navjit Singh

Hony Treasurer :- Mahesh Garg