

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>vii</i>		
Dr. Karan Singh			
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>ix</i>		
Samar Singh			
BIRDS DESCRIPTIONS AND PLATES			
Little Green Bee-eater- <i>Merops orientalis</i>	1	Yellow Wagtail- <i>Motacilla flave</i>	35
Oriental White-eye- <i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>	3	Brown-headed Barbet- <i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>	37
Purple Sunbird- <i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>	5	Common Stonechat- <i>Saxicola torquata</i>	39
Blue Rock Thrush- <i>Monticola solitarius</i>	7	Mynas and Starlings	41
Oriental Magpie Robin- <i>Copsychus saularis</i>	9	Red-wattled Lapwing- <i>Vanellus indicus</i>	43
Asian Paradise Flycatcher- <i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>	11	Yellow-legged Green Pigeon- <i>Treon phoenicoptera</i>	45
House Swift- <i>Apus affinis</i>	13	Rufous Treepie- <i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>	47
Red-vented Bulbul- <i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	15	Shikra- <i>Accipiter badius</i>	49
White-throated Kingfisher- <i>Halcyon smyrnesis</i>	17	Indian Grey Hornbill- <i>Psittacula krameri</i>	53
Common Kingfisher- <i>Alcedo athhis</i>	19	Common Hoopoe- <i>Upupa epops</i>	55
Spotted Owlet- <i>Athene brama</i>	21	Indian Cuckoo- <i>Cuculus micropterus</i>	57
Common Tailorbird- <i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	23	Asian Koel- <i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>	59
Yellow Crowned Woodpecker- <i>Dendrocopos mahrattensis</i>	25	Common Hawk Cuckoo- <i>Hierococcyx varius</i>	61
House Sparrow- <i>Passer domesticus</i>	27	Black Drongo- <i>Dicrusus macrocercus</i>	63
Indian Robin- <i>Saxicoloides fulcata</i>	29	Black Kite- <i>Milvus migrans</i>	65
Golden Oriole- <i>Oriolus oriolus kundoo</i>	31	Intermediate Egret- <i>Mesophoyx intermedia</i>	67
Baya Weaver- <i>Ploceus philippinus</i>	33	Rock Pigeon- <i>Columba livia</i>	69
		Little Brown Dove- <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	71
		Indian Roller- <i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	73
		House Crow- <i>Corvus splendens</i>	75
		Minivets	77
		Greater Coucal- <i>Centropus sinensis</i>	79
		Indian Peafowl- <i>Pavo cristatus</i>	81
		Shrikes	83
		Babblers	85
		CHECKLIST	87
		APPENDIX-Salim Ali - <i>Introduction-Usefulness of Birds-</i>	
		<i>Birdwatching</i>	

Introduction

Satam Sadthi Sangah was the motto chosen for the India International Centre (IIC) by its Founder President Dr. C. D. Deshmukh. It means a meeting place of good and true people. Added to this was the concept of a place of beauty in a near natural setting where 'the sharpness of intellectual encounter would be softened by the graciousness of good fellowship.' Joseph Allen Stein, the architect responsible for designing the IIC premises, explained this later in somewhat poetic terms as follows: '...a place where a certain kind of relationship exists—between the garden and the building and the water and the earth and the sky, and the learning and activities that take place and the things that happen ...' In giving such an orientation, Deshmukh and all those who collaborated with him in conceptualizing and establishing the Centre were surely motivated by a holistic approach, transcending 'homocentric alone' connotations. In this rather romantic scheme of things, the birds, bees, trees and other elements of the natural environment necessarily have their own place and relevance.

Somehow, over the years this important aspect of IIC's background seems to have been forgotten and the human element has been dominating the scene. In a sense, this publication seeks to remind the IIC fraternity of the original concept of the institution. It is also aimed at generating awareness and interest in the feathered beings that are very

much a part of the overall unique ambience of the Centre but are generally taken for granted. This is strange considering that birds have always fascinated humankind and the reasons are quite obvious. Among all the higher forms of life called the vertebrates or back-boned animals, birds are certainly the most beautiful, most melodious, most admired, most studied and most defended. They far outnumber all other vertebrates, except fishes, and can be found virtually everywhere throughout the world. Perhaps the central part of the Antarctic is the only place on the world's surface where birds have not been found.

Descended about 150 million years ago from the reptilian stock similar to the dinosaurs, birds have radiated explosively over the earth in a wide variety of sizes, shapes, colours and habits. Currently, they inhabit every continent and occupy almost every conceivable niche. Some even nest underground. Altogether, there are about 9,000 living species of birds, which the scientists have placed in 27 major groups called Orders and around 155 Families.

Considering that life on earth extends into the spectrum of time for more than two billion years, birds are a latter-day creation. Paleontologists believe that they began to branch off from the reptilian stock sometime in the late Jurassic period, about 150 million years ago, shortly after the first mammals appeared. Well-known scientist T. H. Huxley described birds as 'glorified reptiles' because birds share many characteristics with reptiles, such as certain skeletal and muscular features, somewhat similar eggs and an 'egg tooth' on the upper jaw at hatching time. However, the unique feature that sets them apart from all other life forms is that they have feathers, which are indeed a marvel of natural engineering. No other creatures possess this special feature.

The association between human beings and birds has been very long and intimate. In fact, birds have helped humankind

in various ways for thousands of years--from the geese whose warning cries saved Rome to the canaries that were used to warn coal miners of methane gas leakage. They continue to provide such life-saving service by acting as reliable indicators of the health of our environment, specially regarding the dangers arising from chemicals and other toxic substances in the atmosphere. Moreover, birds play a crucial role in maintaining the balance of nature by controlling insect pests and rodents as well as in cross-pollination of plant species, seed dispersal and as scavengers. Further, there are birds that have made remarkable contributions to human welfare, economically and otherwise. The classic case is that of India's wonder bird, the Red Junglefowl, which is the progenitor of all poultry forms worldwide and has been responsible for several outstanding contributions to medical research and human health.

India's richness in avian diversity is well recognized. Of about 9,000 bird species in the world, around 1,200 are found in India. This means about 13 per cent of the world's total, which is very remarkable for an area that is only about 4 per cent of the world's total landmass. The more spectacular part is the fact that out of 27 Orders and 155 Families of birds for the world as a whole, India accounts for about 20 Orders and 77 Families. Of the total of 1,200 bird species found in India, about 900 are resident species and the rest, about 300, are migratory, mostly coming from Central Asia and Eastern Europe during the winter period.

Several bird species are quite at home in urban areas. In this respect, Delhi ranks high as a city with a thriving bird population. In India, it is clearly the richest city in birds, with an amazing list of more than 400 species, which means at least one-third of the country's total number of bird species. Very few cities in the world can boast of such avian richness. Delhi's bird list includes several summer and winter visitors as well as passage migrants, mainly because the city is well

positioned along the north-south flowing Yamuna on one of the major Asian flyways. No doubt the most favoured areas are the riverbanks and the Ridge, but several large, well-tended parks and gardens and even the trees along the city roads, particularly in South Delhi, attract a rich variety of birds. Notable among these are the Lodhi garden and the adjoining IIC premises, which virtually form a single landscape.

Actually, the spacious Lodhi garden, with its abundant greenery and historic monuments, greatly influenced the choice of the location for the IIC and inspired its architect to think in terms of literally building 'in nature', as he himself put it. The outcome is like an oasis in the heart of the city, with its verdant greenery of trees, shrubs and creepers, along with lawns and pools, all of which naturally attract a variety of birds at different times. No wonder the total tally of birds for the IIC premises has come to 83 species belonging to 28 Families. Among these, the largest is certainly the glamorous National Bird, the Blue Peafowl, which mainly reside in and around the Lodhi garden and are occasional visitors to the IIC premises. The tiny birds include the dainty looking Purple Sunbird, the Tailorbird, the White-eye and the Minivets. The full list is given hereafter, along with a broad indication of the status of each species within the IIC premises. The descriptive notes are on selected species and cover the prominent and interesting ones. Care has been taken to include in the list all bird species about which there is certainty and to exclude those species about whom any doubt has arisen. The whole exercise took more than a year, mainly for the purpose of covering different seasons, which is very relevant for bird sightings. In all this work, especially in compiling the bird list, the help extended by Rahul Kaul, Junaid Nazir Shah and Ritu Singh (currently working in WWF-India) has to be acknowledged. Nevertheless, the possibility of adding to the list cannot be ruled out and comments or suggestions in this regard from knowledgeable and interested persons are most welcome.

In a book on birds, it is worthwhile to incorporate some tips on bird watching. Hence, a brief note on the subject by the famous ornithologist, the Late Dr. Salim Ali, is being included in this publication (see Appendix), along with his views on the usefulness of birds. For giving permission to do so, the Bombay Natural History Society has to be thanked. Here, it is pertinent to mention that within the IIC premises the best places to watch birds are the poolside and fountain lawns adjoining the Lodhi garden and the Plaza area with its ficus and other big trees. No doubt, the ideal time for bird sightings is early morning or in the evening before sunset. However, an interested bird watcher can often spot different birds at other times during the day, depending on the season.

Finally, the IIC management deserves full credit for undertaking this publication and it is hoped that this will serve its purpose, particularly in generating greater interest and understanding in regard to our feathered friends, who are silent but sure partners in the making of the romantic ambience of the place. On my part, I am very thankful to the IIC, specially its Director Shri P.C. Sen, for entrusting to me this interesting task. In carrying it out, I have received very willing help and cooperation from all concerned in the IIC, for which also I am equally thankful. I am grateful to both the photographers, Nikhil Devasar and Amano Samarpan, for their beautiful photographs, some of which they shot in the IIC precincts, and to Shobit Arya of Wisdom Tree for responding with whole-hearted enthusiasm to the idea of this publication. For me personally, it has been a fulfilling experience, made memorable by the fact that this is really the first time that such an exercise has been attempted for the IIC.

Samar Singh