

BOOK REVIEWS

(I)

"Threatened Birds of India- Their Conservation Requirements" By Dr. Asad R. Rahmani

Indian Bird Conservation Network: Bombay Natural History Society, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Birdlife International. Oxford University Press.

Pp. xvi+864, Price ` 3000/-

Red lists have always been very important starting points for biodiversity conservation in the world. While these have been often used to highlight the importance of areas which house them, leading to their better protection and management, these lists do not often directly help the species themselves since the listing fails to provide the much required details for conservation action. We may have many areas in the form of protected areas and more recently important bird areas (IBAs) but species recovery plans are still very rare. The monumental work *Threatened birds of India* by the most learned and dedicated bird conservationist and the most prolific writer on the subject has finally filled this major information void and may take conservation of birds in India to new echelons.

The book describes 82 globally threatened, 66 globally near threatened, 2 data deficient and 3 additional candidate bird species which occur in India to great details. The individual chapters on these 153 birds requiring maximum conservation attention begin with sufficient description of the field characters of the bird. However, the section where a lot of effort has been made is the one on geographical distribution since this is very important for channelizing the conservation action to the right areas. Practically all recent publications have been sifted in order to get an updated distribution and the same has also been provided on very well made maps. Full advantage of the recent surge in ornithological observation has thus been made in drawing up a true picture of the status and distribution of the species. The section on ecology provides critical information, including that of breeding requirement for resident species, which is vital for its conservation. The last three sections namely threats, conservation action and recommendations are the key sections of direct value to conservation practitioners. Since most of the threatened birds are increasingly getting confined to a few pockets, details of site specific issues provide framework for conservation action by policy makers and field managers. It can be said that the chapters are like concise species recovery action plans which can straightaway put to conservation action without any further loss of time. Small box items on taxonomy and etymology give interesting information which is not easily available for most threatened birds. Each chapter has a meaningful collection of photographs covering not only the bird, but also its habitat and threats with apt captions. Layout and design deserve special appreciation.

Such a monumental work could not have been possible without wide ranging consultations and Dr. Rahmani, painstakingly reached out to all the important bird people of India to take this book to such levels of fine information. The zeal and perseverance with which he approached the long list of people given in the book left them with no option but to contribute enthusiastically to this great effort.

The book has a special meaning to the forest department officials of India. Conservation is going through a transition in India where every species is gradually assuming importance and gone are the days when wildlife conservation was synonymous with charismatic mega-faunal species. In this changed scenario birds are the first group to attract attention and certain recent issues such as Vulture and Sparrow decline have brought them to the fore of conservation debate. Even a common man now relates to issues confronting bird conservation. In such a situation, the book provides a great source of reliable and up to date information with directly implementable actions to tackle many an issues being faced by threatened birds. With this book in hand the field managers do not have to wait for expert advice to initiate conservation action to benefit threatened birds.

The book does not begin abruptly on the vital information on individual threatened birds of India, instead has a collection of eight nicely written articles by experts including the very informative introduction covering various facets of bird conservation issues in India for which the authors need to be complimented. It would have been desirable to include similar articles on conservation issues pertaining to birds of Himalayas and Western Ghats, two of the global biodiversity hotspots in India, which I am confident, would be covered in subsequent editions of the book. The author could have considered splitting the book into two volumes to improve its portability and ease of use by the practitioner.

- D. Mohan