

**Common Noddy.** *Anous stolidus*.

More than twenty around the stationary ship at the mouth of the Red Sea in July '44, and sparse near the Twelve Apostles in May '45.

**Pomarine Skua.** *Coprotheres pomarinus*.

In May '45 good views were obtained of one near Suez and one in the middle of the Red Sea, mobbing first *Larus fuscus*, and on the second occasion *Larus hemprichii*.

Description:—Upper-parts brown, paler bar on the primaries. Under-wings and collar brownish, rest of under-parts pale or white. Neck white. Two protruding tail-feathers very noticeable.

**Brown Booby.** *Sula leucogastra*.

One at Aden in June '46, but otherwise only in the Red Sea, especially near the Twelve Apostles.

**Red-footed Booby.** *Sula piscatrix*.

Odd birds seen near Aden and in the Red Sea (including one near Suez in June '42) and occasionally from Aden to 900 m. east of there.

**Red-billed Tropic-bird.** *Phaëton aethereus*.

Odd birds at sea from 400 to 900 m. east of Aden in February and May, two in the Red Sea near the Twelve Apostles and two near Suez, in May.

**Red-necked Phalarope.** *Lobipes lobatus*.

Ten phalaropes 450 m. east of Aden in February '45, twelve there again in May, and sparse flocks of ten or less in the Red Sea near the Twelve Apostles in February '45.

They were almost certainly this species and not *Phalaropus fulicarius*.

LOENOWERLE,  
FEOCK, TRURO,  
CORNWALL, ENGLAND,  
3rd July, 1946.

P. I. R. MACLAREN.

## 7.—BABAR THE GREAT ON FLAMINGOES.

Some time ago, there was an appeal<sup>1</sup> in the *Journal* inquiring information about seasonal movements or any other general information about flamingoes. The other day, when reading the Autobiography of Babar the Great, Emperor of India, I came across some of his observations on birds<sup>2</sup> and as they throw some light

<sup>1</sup> Ali., Sâlim 1944. The Common Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*): An appeal. *J.,B.N.H.S.*, Vol. 44, pp. 476-477.

<sup>2</sup> Leyden., J. and W. Erskin, 1826. *Memoirs of Zehirudin Mohammad Bâber*, London. pp. 165-166.



on certain problems regarding flamingoes, I quote a few passages here:—

“...we reached Ab-Istadeh, when a wonderful large sheet of water presented itself to our view.... When I came within one kos of Ab-Istadeh, a singular phenomenon presented itself. From time to time, between this water and the heavens, something of a red appearance was seen, like the ruddy crepuscule, which again by and by vanished and so continued shifting till we had come near it. When we came close up, we discerned that this appearance was occasioned by immense flocks of Baghlan Kaz (wild geese) not ten thousand or twenty thousand, but absolutely beyond computation, and innumerable, and in their flight, as they moved their wings, their red feathers, sometimes appeared and sometimes were hid. But they were not wild geese alone, innumerable flocks of every species of bird, settled on the banks of this water, and the eggs of countless multitudes of fowl were deposited on every corner of its banks. A few Afghans, who come here and were employed in gathering these eggs, on seeing us fled and threw themselves into the lake...it was of one uniform depth, reaching up to the horses belly.”

*Ab-istadeh* means stagnant water, and it is the only lake in Afghanistan, still known by the same name. It lies at a height of about 7000 ft. from sea level ( $32^{\circ}30'N.$  and  $68^{\circ}E$ ) and about seventy miles south of Ghazni near the head of Tarnak river. It is an open country<sup>1</sup> from meridian of Mookoor to the hills on the right bank of the Gomul river and from Ghawasta to Ghazni, which is the basin of Ab-Istadeh. Waters of the river Ghazni from the north, of the Nahar from the north-east and of other brooks, which remain after watering the cultivated lands and also the superfluous waters of the spring rains in the valleys of Zurmet and Kutta-waz, all flow down into it. It<sup>2</sup> is about forty-four miles in circuit, having salt and bitter water of about uniform depth (not more than 12 feet deep in the middle) and fish entering the salt water from the Ghazni river sicken and die. Its borders are covered with low tamarisks. A plane tree, a poplar or a willow may be seen hither and thither near a *Karaiz* (under ground aqueduct for irrigation purposes), but no natural wood is present and the country is naked and uniform.

Keeping in view that flamingoes affect salt-water<sup>3</sup> and keep to sea-coast only when there is no inland salt-water lake and that the breeding colonies are situated on some lake or lagoon of little depth, with bare shores, it becomes evident that all environmental conditions are favourable for the birds to spend their breeding season in Ab-Istadeh. Again when we look at the pictures<sup>4</sup> of a flamingo city, which recently appeared in the *Journal* (populated

<sup>1</sup> Elphinstone, M. 1939. *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul*. London. Vol. 2, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> Y. . . H . . . , 1875. Afghanistan. *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 9th Edition, London, Vol. I, p. 230.

<sup>3</sup> Evans, A. H. 1922. *The Cambridge Natural History*. Vol. 9, p. 107.

<sup>4</sup> Ali S. 1945. More about the Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber roseus* (Pallas) in Kutch. *J.,B.N.H.S.*, Vol. 45, pp. 586-93.



by a vast number, not less than half a million birds), the emperor's wonder at the immense number appears quite natural. All these features lead us to conclude, as also the translators of the autobiography think, that the birds in question were flamingoes.

The word *Baghlan Kaz* used by the emperor to denote the bird also requires a little consideration. Baghlan does not mean *wild* as it has been erroneously translated, but it is a city to the north of Kabul. It is obvious that Baber, by using this word, means to refer to the same distinct kind of kaz or goose which he had previously seen at Baghlan.

Cumming<sup>1</sup> has recorded only two species of flamingoes to occur in Afghanistan, viz., *Phoenicopterus ruber roseus* Pallas, and *Phoenicopterus minor* Geoffroy, from Kohak, which is situated to the south-west of Ab-Istadeh, but Whistler does not take into account the former though he is confident that both species do occur in the country. The Emperor notices red birds and emphasises on this very character of redness by repeating it and using different words as *red appearance*, *ruddy crepuscule* or *red feathers*. Under these circumstances one is inclined to believe that the birds referred to above belonged to the species *P. ruber roseus*.

Some twenty-two years ago, a large flock of flamingoes was seen by Law<sup>2</sup> flying past over the sea to their winter quarters as early as the month of August. He remarks, "When one finds that a bird which migrates out of India in May at the earliest, returning as early as the 19th August, one is naturally led to suppose that the bird has been so journeying these few months somewhere in close neighbourhood of India". The earliest movements of the birds for their summer quarters do not appear to begin from May, but somewhat still earlier, as Cumming has noted a flock flying overhead at Kohak (outside India) on 28th April travelling northwards. The above incident at Ab-Istadeh, as it appears from the date given for the incident preceding it, cannot have occurred otherwise than at the end of March or in the month of April.

It may be surmised from the above account that the flocks of flamingoes fly during their migratory movements north-wards in early summer or spring over Kohak, Ab-Istadeh and Baghlan in Afghanistan and that one of the breeding places of these birds possibly the one nearest to India, is Ab-Istadeh, where the birds, most probably, belonging to the species *P. ruber roseus* Pallas gather in large numbers from the month of April onwards.

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KABUL,

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5th July, 1946.

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<sup>1</sup> Whistler, Hugh. 1945. Materials for the Ornithology of Afghanistan. J.,B.N.H.S., Vol. 45, p. 480.

<sup>2</sup> Law, S. C. 1924. A note on the early arrival of Flamingoes in India. J.,B.N.H.S. Vol. 30, pp. 226-27.



Akhtar, S. A. 1946. "Babar Tho Great on Flamingoes." *The journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 46, 545–547.

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