

of predation on other nestlings, the adult could have eaten it.

It is interesting that when the body was decomposing, the female began lining the nest with *Syzigium cumini* leaves which are strongly aromatic.

In the light of this case of cannibalism, previous observations are noteworthy. In July 1995, while monitoring the reproductive success of colonial breeders, I observed an openbill stork (*Anastomus oscitans*) throwing a less than one month old dead nestling out of the nest.

In January 1997, one juvenile woolly-necked stork and one juvenile of blacknecked stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*) died in the nest at ages of 40 and 50 days respectively. In both instances the adults did not eat the dead juvenile. The bodies of the two juveniles

decomposed in the nests.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I thank the authorities of Keoladeo National Park, who allowed me to work inside the Park and US Fish & Wildlife Service for providing financial support to the Stork Ecology Project. I am thankful to Dr. A.R. Rahmani, Principal Investigator, Dr. Malcolm C. Coulter, technical advisor and Dr. Salim Javed, the Co-investigator of the Stork Ecology Project for valuable comments.

May 8, 1997

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### 8. INDIAN SHIKRA PREYING ON SHORT-NOSED FRUIT BATS

While conducting a survey of small mammals as part of our EIA studies at the lignite mines of Neyveli, Madras during May-June 1996, we recorded an interesting observation on the Indian shikra, *Accipiter badius* feeding on short-nosed fruit bats, *Cynopterus sphinx*.

On the evening of 3rd June, we set six mist nets on the edge of the pond in the afforestation area of Mine I to collect the bats. At 1915 hrs we saw several bats emerging out of their roosts from the nearby forest and flying around the pond. The size of the bats prompted us to classify them as fruit bats, though the exact identification of the bats was not possible. The bats kept flying above the water for about half an hour, diving intermittently to sip some water, and finally they flew away. We did not succeed in catching any bats then. At about 2230 hrs. we saw bats coming to the pond once again and flying around. Again, there was no score in the nets. We left the nets overnight and returned to our camp.

The next day, at about 0630 hrs we saw eight fruit bats in the nets. We released them in

the nearby bushes after identifying them as short-nosed fruit bats *Cynopterus sphinx*. As we were winding out the mist nets we saw one of the fruit bats rushing out of the bush and flying across the pond.

A crow was chasing the bat. As the chase was on, we saw a pair of shikra *Accipiter badius* emerging from another tree nearby, chasing the crow. While one of the shikras was chasing the crow, the other followed the bat which was flying above the pond in a zig-zag fashion. After a struggle of about 10 minutes, the shikra succeeded in capturing the bat. The pair returned to the tree and started feeding on the bat.

As we were winding out the last mist-net, we saw yet another bat coming out of the bush and flying above the pond. This time the second shikra of the same pair followed the bat and captured it within no time.

Shikra are known to feed on a variety of insects, lizards, small birds and mammals such as field rats, mice and striped squirrels (Ali and Ripley 1969). However, they have



not been reported feeding on bats. This is the first instance of shikra feeding on the fruit bats.

The other birds of prey known to feed on bats are Indian black-crested baza, East Himalayan besra or sparrow-hawk, laggar falcon, shaheen falcon, Central Asian hobby, Indian hobby, red-headed merlin, Indian barn owl (Ali and Ripley 1969), brown hawk-owl (McCann 1933) and brahminy kite (Manakadan and Natarajan 1992).

December 13, 1996

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### 9. SIGHTING OF RED KITE *MILVUS MILVUS* AT RANIKHET

While surveying raptors at Ranikhet (29° 40' N and 79° 33' E) in the Kumaon Himalayas in Uttar Pradesh, we observed a solitary red kite *Milvus milvus* on 11th June 1994 soaring at about 200 m above ground level with black kites *Milvus migrans* over Chaubattia (2000 m). Even with the naked eye, it immediately appeared different and stood out clearly from the flock of black kites. On further scrutiny through binoculars and a telescope, we were able to confirm the diagnostic characters, especially with several black kites present for comparison. The slimmer outline, the more graceful, easy, agile flight (the twists and turns almost tern-like) and deep elastic wing-beats separated it from the Black Kites. It also appeared larger with longer and more angular wings in comparison with the black kite. Further, the longer, deeply forked rusty tail with blackish outer tips, appeared prominently translucent orange against the light. Its overall plumage was paler, brighter and more contrasting — a mixture of red-browns instead of dull browns as in the black kite. The whitish chin and throat, deeper chestnut body, and contrasting underwing

(dark chestnut-brown underwing-coverts, prominent extensive white patch at base of primaries, black primary tips together with pale chestnut undertail with blackish outer tips) were clearly visible.

There are six published sight records of the red kite in India, mainly between January and March. Two from Gujarat in March — Little Rann of Kutch (Ali, 1954), and Jasdan (Shivraj Kumar, 1964); two from Orissa — Chilka Lake and environs of Puri in January (Jayakar and Spurway, 1965); one each from Rajasthan — Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur (Prakash, 1988); and Kashmir-Ladakh in July (Fily and Perennou, 1990). It has also been recorded from west-central Nepal in March (Rogers 1987, unpublished) where it was presumed a vagrant. The red kite does not differ significantly in habits from the black kite, being inclined to social aggregations in winter, and in most parts of its range, migratory during winter. Ripley (1982) describes it as a rare winter visitor to India. However, some authorities such as del Hoyo *et al.* (1994) dispute the occurrence of the red kite in





Muni, Manoj and Hegde, Vithoba. 1998. "Indian shikra preying on short-nosed fruit bats." *The journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 95, 338–339.

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