

## 11. CRANES WINTERING IN SAURASHTRA

In January-February 1983 I had an opportunity to travel in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat in the company of Dr J Van der ven, chief of the Nature Conservation Department in the Netherlands. In visiting the wetlands and reservoirs of Saurashtra, our main purpose was to look for the wintering numbers of Demoiselle (*Anthropoides virgo*) and Common (*Grus grus*) cranes; but such was the richness of the avifauna encountered, that it was impossible to restrict oneself merely to cranes. However, cranes being our first concern, the estimated numbers of cranes observed at different reservoirs are given below:

DATE	NAME OF WETLAND	NUMBER OF		
		DEMOI-SELLE	COMMON	SARUS
27 Jan.	Lalpari (Rajkot)	5000	Nil	Nil
„	Veri (Gondal)	Nil	25	2
28 Jan.	Sayala	250	300	4
„	Thoriari	35	Nil	Nil
„	Muli	2000	Nil	Nil
29 Jan.	Kharaghoda (Little Rann)	Nil	3000	Nil
31 Jan.	Vijaysagar (Kutch)	Nil	25	6
31 Jan.	Jodiya	Nil	12	2
1 Feb.	Singach	100	Nil	Nil
2 Feb.	Alansagar (Jasdan)	1000	Nil	Nil
„	Ponelia	Nil	7	Nil
„	Brahmani	25	Nil	Nil
3 Feb.	Nyari (Rajkot)	3000	Nil	Nil
4 Feb.	Mitana (Morvi)	3000	400	Nil
„	Ramdarda (Rajkot)	500	Nil	Nil

(The estimates are rounded to the nearest hundred.)

In addition small flocks of Common cranes numbering 10 to 25 birds were observed in flight several times. Distant views of large flocks believed to be of Demoiselles, were also seen especially around Rajkot and Jamnagar. In all, we must have seen an estimated 25,000 cranes belonging to both the species.

Pairs and small flocks of Sarus were also seen. But Sarus appears to have a very dispersed distribution and is by no means common in Saurashtra.

Sightings of cranes indicate that Demoiselles were more common in the west while, as you travel from west to east, the Common becomes more numerous.

The daily routine of cranes appears to be as follows: The cranes leave roosting areas which are normally on the banks of reservoirs, early in the morning to feed in fields on fallen groundnut of previous harvest. They return to the roosting sites between 10.30 and 11.30 a.m. to spend the noon and afternoon there. In the evening around 5 p.m. they go out again to feed and return to the roost in gathering dusk. Common cranes were also seen feeding in *jowar* and *gram* fields.

A number of juveniles were seen among flocks of Common cranes, though not many among Demoiselles. On two occasions a Demoiselle pair with a young was seen feeding away from the main flock.

On the whole, cranes permitted a fairly close approach and were not unduly scared by our presence. In certain areas like Sayala, where they are protected by the local people, they were even tamer.

All the reservoirs and wetlands also presented a rich diversity of aquatic birds. Shovellers were seen to outnumber all other ducks, though sizeable numbers of Pochard and Tufted Duck were seen. Over two thousand White and a few Grey Pelicans were also seen. The Khijadiya wetland encompassing freshwater and saltwater habitats, is extremely rich in waterbirds including Pelican, Greater and Lesser Flamingo, storks, heron and egrets, various ducks, avocets and curlews

and other waders, coots and moorhens. This extensive marshland may very well be a candidate for inclusion in the Ramsar list as a wetland of international importance.

The lake in the centre of Jamnagar, a busy industrial town, is a veritable paradise for

birdwatchers. Scores of Greater Flamingos, hundreds of ducks, waders, terns and coots and many cormorants, darters, ibises and moorhens, not to say skimmers, crowd this shallow lake.

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## 12. A NOTE ON THE STATUS OF *BRACHYPTERYX CRYPTICA*

In March 1979, in the Tirap District of Arunachal Pradesh, our joint Smithsonian-Bombay Natural History Society Expedition collected a series of five specimens of a bird species which Dr Sálím Ali and I assumed we had not previously encountered in our Indian field studies. It was a small, buff-brown, undistinctive chat-like bird, which I subsequently described as a new species of shortwing thrush, *Brachypteryx cryptica* (Ripley, 1980). I postulated that this new form was most closely related to the poorly known *Brachypteryx hyperythra*, from Sikkim and northeastern India.

On returning to Arunachal Pradesh for continued ornithological field investigation in December-January 1981-82, we collected four more specimens, noting in one case the typical chat-like stance of an individual standing on an exposed rock. Later in Calcutta we saw three more specimens collected by the Zoological Survey of India, eight months earlier, in 1981, these being identified as the new *Brachypteryx*. At this point, Dr. Sálím Ali and I began to have reservations. Could the species be a timaliine? In Washington, consultation with Dr Richard Zusi revealed the fact that the nasal operculum in our new species is only

partly closed, thus resembling forms in the genus *Trichastoma* (a timaliine). Additional evidence, the degree of fusion of the basal phalanges of digits three and four (greater in *Trichastoma*), coupled with the slightly longer rictal bristles, placed these birds in that difficult timaliine genus. No specimens of *Trichastoma tickelli assamense* had been identified by us, although we had collected the species to the north in heavy undergrowth in the Mishmi Hills in 1946. Thus my supposed shortwing becomes a synonym of *Trichastoma tickelli assamense*.

None of the birds we collected uttered a sound, a factor which, added to the presence of other shortwings in the area, and none of the *Trichastoma abbotti* or *Pellorneum* which might have reminded us of *assamense* (the widespread *Pellorneum ruficeps* was of course common and noisy) served to throw us off the scent completely.

The boundary separating the smaller chat-like thrushes (Turdinae) from the similar small Indochinese babblers (Timaliinae) is poorly defined. *Trichastoma* is a timaliine genus generally considered to be on this borderline (Deignan 1964). A perusal of the original designations of many taxa now included in



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