

from among the water hyacinth and drop it in front of the chick. The male sarus suddenly reared its head and made a jabbing movement into the hyacinth with its open beak. It had chanced upon an incubating spotbill duck (*Anas poecilorhynchos*) which hurriedly took flight, calling loudly. The male began feeding on the eggs, and proceeded to swallow them one by one, lifting them, and raising its beak upwards. The female, meanwhile, herded the chick towards the nest and swallowed one egg. The male bird had swallowed four eggs continuously and a distinct bulge had formed at the top of the neck. The female then lifted one egg from the nest and dropped it on the ground near the chick and pecked at the egg to open it up for the chick to feed on. When the chick began feeding, the female moved towards the nest, broke open one egg and fed on the contents. The male regurgitated part of the eggs and the chick fed on this as well. The spotbill duck had, in the

meanwhile, made several unsuccessful attempts to drive away the cranes from the nest by flying close and calling out loudly. The three cranes ate at least nine eggs during this observation. They stayed at the nest for over two hours after eating and preened themselves.

Eggs have never been known to be in the diet of the sarus crane. The adult birds are, however, reputed to feed the chicks on the egg shells just after hatching (A. R. Rahmani *pers. comm.*). This behaviour has been observed in the sand-hill crane (*Grus canadensis*) where the adult offers pieces of the egg shell directly to the chicks, or drops the pieces in front of them (Archibald and Meine 1996).

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# 11. CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE OF BREEDING OF THE NILGIRI WOOD PIGEON *COLUMBA ELPHINSTONII* (SYKES) AT NANDI HILLS, NEAR BANGALORE

The Nilgiri wood pigeon *Columba elphinstonii* is known to occur in the Western Ghats complex including the Anamalais, Nilgiris, Palnis and the hills of western Mysore, where it affects moist evergreen forest from the foothills to the highest shola forests (Ali and Ripley 1983).

Outside this designated area, the Nilgiri wood pigeon *Columba elphinstonii* has been

reported at the Nandi hills (13° 22' N, 77° 41' E) about 60 km north of Bangalore (Subramanya *et al.* 1994).

I visited Nandi hills on March 23, 1997. While bird watching in a clearing adjoining an evergreen patch, the sound of a snapping twig drew my attention. A pigeon flew out of the dense canopy of the evergreen patch into the open. It



alighted on a tree almost in the middle of the clearing, with the twig in its beak, about 6 m from the ground. When it moved to the centre of the tree, it was not visible until it flew out without the twig.

Subsequently, the Nilgiri wood pigeon was seen walking on the branches of nearby trees, moving towards the slender, dry twigs, balancing itself with great difficulty. On selecting the twig, it broke it off and carried it to the nesting tree.

Both individuals of the pair were seen carrying nesting material. One individual had

the central rectrices missing, which made identification of the two individuals possible.

This observation of the Nilgiri wood pigeon at Nandi hills is significant, as it is the only breeding report of the species in the recent past.

November 9, 1998

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#### 12. USE OF PLASTIC AS NEST MATERIAL BY GOLDEN ORIOLE *ORIOLOUS ORIOLOUS* (LINN.), FAMILY: ORIOLIDAE

While still following nest designs traditional of orioles, golden orioles in the Indroda Park have shown innovations in the selection of nest materials. Plastic sheets and tape have been added to 'grass and fast fibres bound with cobwebs', THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS by Sálím Ali.

Uday Vora, DFO, Gandhinagar took me bird watching on Sunday, July 19, 1998, in the Indroda Park, Gandhinagar. The Park borders the Sabarmati river and is, in his words "a maternity home for birds". He has a keen eye for locating nests and had taken me to see a white paradise flycatcher incubating freshly laid eggs. The nest was up on a babool (*Acacia* sp.) tree, which had nests containing full grown chicks of a black drongo pair, a whitebrowed fantail flycatcher incubating eggs and a white eye on eggs. Nearby was a golden oriole's nest from which young had just flown, the family was in the vicinity. In another babool tree, again a black drongo nest associated with a paradise

flycatcher's, this time with hatched chicks being fed by a chestnut male.

Further on, among eucalyptus trees he showed me two golden oriole nests, from both of which the chicks had flown — the birds were in the vicinity — the liquid calls of the males and the harsh responses of the females and the juveniles were continually heard. It was to these nests that Uday drew my attention. Glassing them, I confirmed a discoloured white piece of plastic sheet incorporated among the traditional fibres and grass in one nest, the other had plastic tape — the type used for tying packages — woven into the structure! The nests were some 8 m up in the sparsely crowned trees, both extremely exposed. I have suggested to Uday Vora to have the nest collected and the plastic material photographed.

July 30, 1998

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