

[The last authentic record of the Pinkheaded Duck dates back to 1935. It is feared that the species is extinct, and for some time now the Society has been making enquiries about it. A report of an unsuccessful investigation in north Bihar is published at pp. 415 ff. of Vol. 57 of the *Journal*. Immediately after the report follows a claim by Mr. K. L. Mehta, Deputy Game Warden, Himachal Pradesh, to have seen Pinkheaded Duck in February 1960 about 40 miles south of Simla. This, however, was in circumstances which made identification difficult, by torchlight between early dawn and sunrise (see H.A.'s review at page 626 of Vol. 59 of the *Journal*). The present claim comes from near Bakhtiarpur (generally known as Simri Bakhtiarpur to distinguish it from Bakhtiarpur in Patna District), formerly in Monghyr District and from 1965 in Bhagalpur District, where a pair of Pinkheaded Duck were shot in 1924 (see Plate opposite and our Editorial Note at the top of page 417 of Vol. 57 of the *Journal*).

The letter of testimony referred to by our correspondent has not been traced. Mr. E. O. Lee is dead. Sir Hugh Dow, now in London, remembers the shoot but not the shooting of a Pinkheaded Duck. He adds, however, that he sees no reason to doubt our correspondent's statement. It is not impossible that the species still survives in some remote corner of its former haunts. We are therefore placing the present claim on record, in the hope that those of our readers who live in or visit this area or any other area where the species is known or believed to have been seen will keep a look-out for it. We may add that since 1956 it is a punishable offence to kill or capture the bird. Sportsmen would therefore be wise to learn to recognise the bird. If the bird is found, intimation should be sent at once to the Society.

We are grateful to Mr. T. P. Singh, Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar, for sending us the photograph of the Pinkheaded Duck exhibit in the Patna Museum.—Eds.]

8. AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR OF A SPOTTED OWLET [*ATHENE BRAHMA* (TEMMINCK)]

A pair of Spotted Owlets, *Athene brahma* (Temminck), have their roost under the roof of the Range Forest Office here. One of the pair has an annoying habit; when they come out of the roost in the evening, it attacks anybody walking or sitting outside in the Range Office compound.

On 20 March 1966, at about 17.15 hrs., while I was walking about the compound, it swooped down on my head from behind giving me a nasty shock! At that time, I thought it overshot one of the common yellow bats (*Scotophilus heathi* ?), which were flying around, and landed on my head and I was thankful that I am not bald! On 27 March

evening, I was talking with a gentleman sitting outside in the Range Office compound ; I saw both the birds come out of the roost and perch on a branch of a *Zizyphus* tree. Suddenly without any reason or provocation, one of the owlets came sweeping down on my companion's head from behind. It made three more unsuccessful and determined attacks on us within the next fifteen minutes, and we beat a hasty retreat ! Only one of the pair made the attacks—the other just took a ringside seat.

The Depot Officer, who lives next to the Range office, reported that almost everybody in his family had been attacked by the owlet. The old forest guard sadly said that the *saitan* (devil) has a special liking for him, once or twice inflicting bleeding wounds. Only today the Depot chowkidar had the benefit of unwelcome attention from the owlet.

I do not know what makes it attack. It is not nesting and does not attack anybody in the Office—otherwise I would have run away by this time because they have their roost just six feet above my head, where I am sitting now.

RANGE FOREST OFFICE,
BASUGAON,
GOALPARA, ASSAM,
April 7, 1966

K. K. GUPTA

[The author informs us that the owls occupied the roost till the first week of July, when they were driven away by some children who had been attacked by the aggressive owl.—EDS.]

9. OCCURRENCE OF THE WIRE-TAILED SWALLOW (*HIRUNDO SMITHII* LEACH) IN NORTHERN CEYLON : A FIRST RECORD

While out looking at birds with Mrs. Nugawella, Miss A. Perera, and Dr. Somasunderam, on the afternoon of 26 February this year, we were motoring slowly along the coast road from Pooneryn to Mannar on the north-western coast of Ceylon ; near Illupaikkadavai, some 15 miles from Mannar, we noticed a party of about 10 swallows sitting on the telegraph wires that skirted the roadside.

As we approached we saw that all but one of the birds were the Swallow (*Hirundo rustica* Linnaeus), and our attention immediately focussed upon the single bird, sitting with the others, which was obviously of a different species. This bird, which was not more than 10 ft. away, had two long wiry tail feathers and pure white underparts including throat, steely blue wings and back, and chestnut cap. We were all able to observe it closely and were unanimous in our identification of it as a Wire-tailed Swallow (*Hirundo smithii* Leach).

This swallow, although not recorded from Ceylon, is reported to



Gupta, K K. 1967. "Aggressive Behaviour of a Spotted Owlet [Athene Brahma (Temminck)]." *The journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 63, 441–442.

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