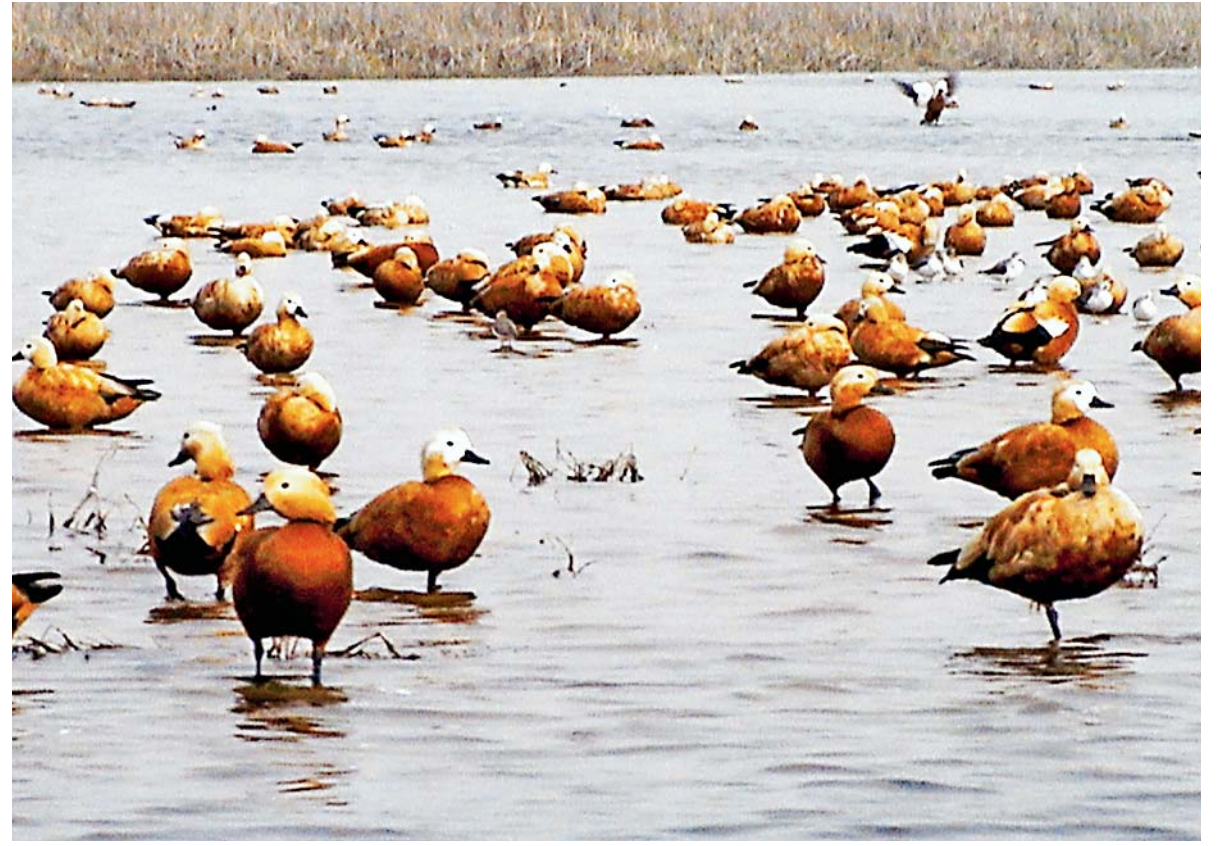


Birds of different feathers flock together



>> Winter season has set in and birds have started migrating to India from far away places like Europe. Asan barrage, which is close to Ponta Sahib, has also come alive with the migratory birds like Ruddy Shelduck, storks and geese. Reader Dr. Dushyant Singh Gaur of Himalayan Institute Hospital, Jolly Grant, captures the flock of egrets and rudd shelducks



A forest by the river

THE BEAUTY OF RAJAJI NATIONAL PARK HAS BEEN WELL CAPTURED BY FILMMAKER PRAVEEN SINGH IN HIS DOCUMENTARY

Neha Bhatia

The beautiful landscape and amazing diversity of natural life of Uttarakhand have been the theme of many photographers and wildlife filmmakers. One such story has been narrated by young filmmaker Praveen Singh in his docu-

Forest Department. Singh took almost two years to shoot this film amidst the natural beauty and splendour of the park. Sharing some interesting incidents, he says, "I spent 170-180 days in the park over almost two years but had only three sightings of tigers in the day time and all fleeting

crossed the track!" One of the most abiding memories for him was shooting the termite mounds. "One morning, when it had just rained, like magic, thousands of termites emerged from the ground and from termite mounds. I got some beautiful shots of that which you see in the film. I don't

ily in the night, the vehicle would get swept away as the water gushes down with a lot of force from the hills," he recalls.

Praveen Singh has been into wildlife filmmaking since 1998. "I always had an interest in wildlife films and after doing my MA in Mass Communication from AJK Mass Communication Research Centre, Jamia Millia Islamia, I joined Earthcare Films which was into production of wildlife and environment documentaries and television programming. After that I joined the Wildlife Institute of India as a faculty with the purpose of documenting their research projects. Unfortunately there was paucity of resources. So with no cameras or editing equipment, there was little I could do. But I did start a wildlife and environment quiz which remained an annual feature for sometime (not sure if it is still conducted); ensured that a small module on photography was incorporated in the M.Sc. (Wildlife Sciences) curriculum so that students could better document their research. After that I went onto to pursue a Master of Fine Arts in Science and Natural History Filmmaking from Montana State University, USA. It was the only course of its kind then," he says. Interestingly his student film, 'Indian Leopards - The Killing Fields' went on to win a number of awards, nationally and internationally, including the 'Student Emmy' for Best Documentary at the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences College TV award and the Best Film Award at Vatavaran in 2005. The film was aired on NGC, Discovery Channel, ARTE in France, NDR in Germany, etc.



>> A still from the documentary; (inset) Praveen Singh

mentary 'Rajaji: A Forest by the Ganges'. The documentary explores the biodiversity of the little known Rajaji National Park situated in Dehradun and Haridwar districts of this hill state. The film seeks to bring to viewers the amazing biodiversity of Rajaji National Park, the challenges that the park faces while protecting its wildlife and forest corridors and the urgent need to conserve this haven of a unique and rich eco-system, vital for people living in the plains of northern India. The film was made for the Rajaji National Park, Uttarakhand

glimpses! So each of these were exciting! Once we heard about a tusker being gored to death by another; we just missed it as it happened on the main road leading to the park while we were staying inside at a forest guard's post. By the time we got the information, the fight was over and one lay dead! A few leopard sightings, or walking on the railway track near Kansrao for three weeks, every evening from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. trying to get a shot of elephants crossing the tracks. Finally one morning we got the shot. In two minutes, 31 elephants

think anyone else has filmed that kind of termite gathering here in our parks. And of course, many a time we were close to elephants as we had to walk to most places. We also filmed in the monsoons to show how the park is transformed by the rains and how crucial the park is to people downstream as water is absorbed here by the earth and slowly seeps down forming a vital aquifer. So many times our Gypsy was stuck in mud and once we had to leave the vehicle in the river overnight. I couldn't sleep that night because I feared that if it rained heav-

Winged Guests

P.S. Chauhan

Mother nature, which has endowed Devbhoomi Uttarakhand with luxuriant forests, inhabited with a large population of wildlife, has also blessed her with many ideal wetlands which play host to migratory avifauna from long and short distances. Asan barrage near Dehradun, Bheemgoda reservoir at Haridwar, Solani river at Roorkee, Jhilmil Jheel near Lakshar and Pashulok barrage near Rishikesh are some of the very good wetlands which lure a large number of winged guests every year during winter.

These wetlands provide a splendid spectacle, with large number of species of aquatic fowls of different hues, frisking on water and charging the atmosphere with melodies of different notes. These birds are natives to overseas cold places. During winter, when there is no germination in nature in cold Palaearctic region of Europe and Siberia, these birds migrate to warmer places of South East Asia including India in search of food and shelter. With the onset of winter in October-November these migratory birds, travelling thousands of miles and flying over the Himalayas, descend on the wetlands such as Bheemgoda barrage, Jhilmil jheel, Solani river and Pashulok barrage which are ideal birding destinations due to slow flow of water, luxuriant growth of vegetation and abundance of feeding material for them. In March, as the days get longer

and warmer, these seasonal migratory birds, guided by their in-built biological clock and their sure sense of direction, bid adieu to their wintry abodes and depart for their native habitats.

Dr. Dinesh Bhatt, a noted ornithologist of the country and professor of environmental sciences in Gurukul Kangri University who has done extensive research work on avian biology, has identified 32 species of migratory fowls, such as ruddy shelduck, northern pintail, teal, mallard, gadwall, red crested pochard and black headed gull, which come in the region for their wintry sojourn. During recent years these migratory birds have started coming late and their number is also decreasing. Dr. Bhatt attributes the depletion in the number of the migratory birds and their late arrival mainly to global climatic fluctuations. Besides the aquatic fowls coming from the Palaearctic region, Bheemgoda barrage and other wetlands also play host to the local Himalayan birds, such as wagtails, herons, cormorants and egrets, which come down below for wintering.

During recent years Bheemgoda barrage, situated between the Neeldhara and the other tributaries of the Ganga, adjacent to the Rajaji National Park in the backdrop of the Shivalik ranges, used to be a virtual paradise of the migratory avifauna. However, this year their number has considerably declined at this wetland. Dr. Vijay Sethi, a bird expert, says that the decline in the number

of these birds at this barrage appears due to the extensive erosion of a green island during the flood last year. "The island served as an excellent roosting, sheltering and feeding ground for these winged guests during previous years", says Sethi. Moreover, heavy traffic on the Haridwar-Dehradun national highway near the barrage and increasing human intervention are also contributing to the decreasing number of these migratory birds at this water reservoir.

During the last two years Missarpur Ghat, about 5 km. from Haridwar, has emerged as the new haven for the migratory avifauna. "At present Missarpur Ghat is really a wonderful spot for the bird watchers and I am delighted to see these birds at a new location", says Vikas Saini, a bird lover. Missarpur ghats are providing ideal foraging conditions to these birds due to shallow water and the intermixing of treated sewage water with that of the Ganga. However, since Missarpur Ghat is not protected from hunting point of view, big flocks of water birds may attract the attention of hunters also. The bird lovers say that there is urgent need to develop this area for the protection of the birds by erecting watch towers and taking such other measures.

"The state and the central governments are doing a lot for the conservation of wildlife in the state. The same type of efforts are required for the protection of aquatic avifauna, both local and trans Himalayan", demands Dr. Amit Kumar, a

During the last two years Missarpur Ghat, about 5 km. from Haridwar, has emerged as the new haven for the migratory avifauna. and Ghat is really a wonderful spot for the bird watchers



bird expert. Some of the wetlands in the region provide safe nutritious shelter sites for some globally threatened bird species like oriental darter, painted stork, osprey and pallas's fishing eagle, the conservation of these wetlands becomes all the more necessary for the safe and regular arrival of many ecologically important migratory birds and also to enhance the aesthetic charm and recreational value of these spots.

SPEAKING TREE

Are we aware?

Swami Swaropanand Saraswati

In front of our open eyes, as we are speaking, reading or listening, whatever moment has passed will never come back. Bhagavadgita says, "Pratidinam yadikshayam yaunam" which means youth is waxing and waning off every day. A day once gone will never come back. My life tenure is getting reduced every moment. Are we aware of this? Do we realize this with every passing moment?

The mumukshu (seeker) wants to know form the Lord in Bhagavadgita that what is the fate of those who remain oblivious of the transitory nature of this world. The

seeker says, "Those who constantly live under the pressure of desire, greed in mind and consider the world as mortal and God as immortal and consequently have no dispassion for this world, what happens to such people in the end?" To this the lord replies that such people are living in a great illusion and they are doomed to fall. It seems to such people that they are going into a luminous world, striving hard for material wealth, career, prosperity and fortune in the form of family, career and other things, but actually it is all darkness.

The sole cause of their dark world is that they have turned their gaze away from the lord which is righteousness.

People are following religious practices, but do not have pure devotion to the lord. They do not develop dispassion for this world which should actually begin right from childhood. They never develop inner and outer moderation. Bhagavadgita categorically defines about time. "Kala jagat bhakshikah", means that time is the devourer of the entire world. Whatever fortune (children, wealth, comforts)

we have earned, it is just like a bubble floating on the wave of life. The only recourse is to cultivate devotion to the Lord. So let us not become dispassionate only in the old age. With each passing day of our lives, these pronouncements of the holy scriptures are to be followed in our lives; since we are witnessing the decay with every inhalation and exhalation of our breath. None of you should become prey to downfall. Whenever you get an opportunity to hear some sang, do not lose it. Seek it with the whole heart, spare time to know the truth, don't wait for 'kala' (time) to send you signals that now you must realize the truth. (As told to Geeta Anandi)



>> Another image of Rajaji National Park

PNB DONATES AMBULANCE TO SHRIVEDMATA GYATRI TRUST

B.P. Ray, general manager (Field) PNB, after assuming his office in Meerut, arrived in Haridwar on Thursday to mark his maiden visit to Haridwar Circle. He headed a review meeting with the branch incumbents of selected branches. P.K. Gupta, circle head, in his welcome address gave de-

tailed information of the geographical hardships as well as business potentials available in the Circle. He also detailed out parameter wise position of the Circle and assured of leading position of Haridwar Circle in the quarters to come. Later PNB announced that it would be given one ambulance to Shri

Vedmata Gyatri Trust. Trustees of Shri Vedmata Gyatri Trust conveyed thanks to PNB for being so generous and expressed their confidence of strong mutual ties with the bank to carry out more such human welfare activities in future as well.