

SHORT COMMUNICATION

BHAROANA, A RELIGIOUS SANCTUARY OF WATER  
BIRDS IN PANJAB

A judicious conservation of environment is highly essential for maintaining the balance of nature. Invariably, this balance is disturbed causing serious environmental problems. In the vast arena of the Indian environment, one important unit comprises the migratory birds visiting this subcontinent from as far off a place as Siberia in U. S. S. R. These birds are winter visitors and settle down in and around large water bodies and very congenially reside here during the winter in close association with many other resident water birds of India. These winter visiting migratory water birds act very precisely as an index of environmental pollution and disturbance ; they settle down in flocks only at such places where environmental pollution or disturbance is negligible or absent. In India, many such wetlands have been recognised where winter migratory birds annually visit and because of this reason, they are being looked after and protected under the laws specially enacted for this purpose. Apart from these officially declared bird sanctuaries, there are at many places animal sanctuaries created out of religious fervour, prominent among them being the Blackbucks conserved around Bishnoi villages in Rajasthan, Panjab and Haryana, Mahseer and other fishes protected at Harki Pauri at Hardwar and near many other temples etc. Similarly a bird sanctuary around Rababsir gurdwara in the village Bharoana, Kapurthala district, Panjab, has been recently spotted and the authors consider it important to mention here the observations made at that spot.

During a recent visit to Harike bird sanctuary, the authors visited Bharoana, a small village situated neatly 30 kms south-east of Harike in Kapurthala district, Panjab. In this village, there is a historic gurdwara, Rababsir, which is encircled on

three sides by a big pond. In this pond, huge flocks of ducks were observed on 4.12.1985 in the afternoon. Most of the ducks were basking in the sun on the sides of the pond, some of them even ventured into the nearby wheat fields. At this spot, the ducks enjoy complete protection because shooting and even fishing in the pond is completely prohibited, the rule being strictly enforced by the sewadars (attendants) of the gurdwara. As a result the ducks of Bharoana pond are not as shy as those the nearby Harike lake. The local people easily approach and walk around the area even at the distance of 10-12 metric from the sitting birds, though this concession was not given to the authors who could watch them from a distance of not less than 30 metric. Ten species of ducks, eight of them migratory, were observed in the pond. The Pintail (*Anas acuta* Linnaeus) was the dominant species followed by the Eastern Greylag Goose (*Anser anser rubrirostris* Swinhoe).

The following species of ducks were observed in the pond :

1. Eastern Greylag Goose, *Anser anser rubrirostris* Swinhoe
2. Barheaded Goose, *Anser indicus* (Latham)
3. Rudy Shelduck, *Tadorna ferruginea* (Pallas)
4. Pintail, *Anas acuta* Linnaeus
5. Common Teal, *Anas crecca crecca* Linnaeus
6. Spotbill Duck, *Anas poecilorhyncha poecilorhyncha* J. R. Forster
7. Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos* Linnaeus
8. Wigeon, *Anas penelope* Linnaeus
9. Shoveller, *Anas clypeata* Linnaeus
10. Cotton Teal, *Nettapus coromandelianus coromandelianus* (Gmelin)

Three species of rails were also recorded in the pond though in very small numbers. These were :

1. Indian Moorhen, *Gallinula chloropus* Blyth
2. Indian Purple Moorhen, *Porphyrio porphyrio polioccephalus* (Latham)
3. Coot, *Fulica atra atra* Linnaeus

Another striking feature recorded was the complete absence of diving ducks in the pond, although three species of diving ducks viz. Redcrested Pochard, *Netta rufina* (Pallas) ; Common Pochard, *Aythya ferina* (Linnaeus) and Tufted Duck, *Aythya fuligula* (Linnaeus) were seen in large numbers in the nearby Harike lake.

The protection accorded to these water birds by the attendants of the gurdwara is a commendable job and should be supported by the Government in the interests of the environmental protection. The religious bodies discharging such noble duties at other places in India should also be enlisted and recognised so that religious sanctuaries of animals and birds are placed on official record.

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