

IndiaWilds®

Newsletter

Vol 12. Issue XII

December 2020

ISSN 2394 - 6946





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Cover Page Photograph:

Brown Winged Kingfisher
by Sabyasachi Patra

Safety of Humanity Lies in Saving Forests:

As 2020 comes to a close, people who were slowly taking steps to come out of their covid-19 induced incarceration indoors and travel again were jolted back to mother earth by the news of a new deadly strain of corona virus in UK. Several countries immediately stopped flight service to UK. People were ready to forget Covid-19 as a bad dream. They were emboldened by the news of several vaccines showing more than 90% success rate. People were ready to go back to their materialistic ways where they would continue to wage war against mother nature. Covid-19 strain in UK shows that we can't simply move ahead and live our lives without bringing out systemic changes in the way we live. This reinforces the wise saying that you can't hide your waste under your carpet. It will stink and hit back at you.

Broken Edifice:

We have cut open huge swathes of forests converting them to agricultural fields, human habitations, dams, canals and other projects; drained numerous swamps to convert them into cities; killed wildlife, consumed and traded their meat; we have devastated the pillars holding the natural world in balance. The complex web of inter-linkages between various species and natural systems have been broken.

In nature each species has evolved over millions of years to counteract the impact of other species including viruses. Pathogens jump to a species that is more numerous. Today we homo sapiens are more than 7 billion in population. We have virtually swamped the earth and in the process more easily come in contact with pathogens. And we humans don't have defense



Growing Populations

Courtesy - online media



against some of the viruses which are lurking in various wildlife species.

Zoonotic diseases:

Transmission of diseases from animals to humans can occur through various methods. One of the methods of Zoonotic diseases transmission can be from animals to humans via vectors like mosquitos who bite the animal and then humans. With clearing of trees and vegetation, the vector species like rats don't have any biological predators like owls, shikras, eagles and snakes. Similarly, there are many insect species and mosquitos which proliferate and act as vector species for transmission of diseases from animals to humans. Some pathogens also transmit via air or water that has been contaminated by droplets from animals which contain the viruses. Sourcing water from the common pond used by animals or inhaling the air with droplets containing pathogens is another source. Bush meat is also a big source of zoonotic diseases. These days due to the internet bush meat is readily transported thousands of kilometers to different continents and consumed. These diseases can also directly and indirectly get transmitted to humans via touch or through other contaminated soil, vegetation etc.

Ebola virus disease (EVD) - a contagious, severe and often lethal form of hemorrhagic fever - was first recorded in 1976 in Africa. It had several deadly outbreaks and reached different parts of the world. Scientists studying the deadly Ebola virus disease (EVD) outbreak concluded that "there are serious shortcomings in capacity to detect, monitor, and respond to infectious diseases outbreak as they occur. Recent advances in diagnostics, risk mapping, mathematical modeling, pathogen genome sequencing, phylogenetics, and phylogeography have the potential to improve substantially the quantity and quality of information available to guide the public health response to outbreaks of all kinds." (Mark E. J. Woolhouse et. al, Science Translational Medicine, 30 Sep 2015, *Lessons from Ebola: Improving Infectious disease surveillance to inform outbreak management*) <https://stm.sciencemag.org/content/7/307/307rv5.full>

This resulted in scientists now engaged in monitoring the bats and other vector species in various sites in Africa to find out any new virus. Governments are also engaged in serosurvey to conduct disease surveillance to predict and contain any outbreak of disease.

Disease outbreak & Forest clearance:

Unfortunately, Governments, global institutions as well as people haven't focused on the core issue causing zoonotic disease transmission to humans from animal species. In a 2017 study, scientists used remote sensing techniques and favourability modality centred on 27 EVD outbreak sites and 280 comparable control sites to investigate the association between deforesta-

tion in time and space with Ebola outbreaks in Central and West Africa. (Olivero, Jesús et al. “Recent loss of closed forests is associated with Ebola virus disease outbreaks.” *Scientific reports* vol. 7,1 14291. 30 Oct. 2017, doi:10.1038/s41598-017-14727-9). Scientists concluded that “outbreaks located along the limits of the rainforest biome were significantly associated with forest losses within the previous 2 years. This association was strongest for closed forests (>83%), both intact and disturbed, of a range of tree heights (5–>19 m). Our results suggest that the increased probability of an EVD outbreak occurring in a site is linked to recent deforestation events, and that preventing the loss of forests could reduce the likelihood of future outbreaks.”

Given this clear conclusion about Ebola outbreak occurring within two years of significant forest loss observed in rainforest biomes, Governments should be using data to analyse and pinpoint all the areas where forests have been lost either due to legal or illegal means and take actions to monitor the interactions of the locals with the forests and ensure sufficient mitigating steps being taken to reverse the forest loss.



Too often forest loss occurs due to forests being diverted for mining, dams, canals, railways, roads, setting up industrial units and for resettlement of people. Often there is illegal timber logging in forests as demand for wood has skyrocketed. In some cases, vested interests are known to burn down patches of pristine forests so that later they can claim the place to be devoid of wildlife and easily justify diversion for industrial or other non-forest use.

India beware:

In India today our Government appears to be more focused on diverting forests for industrial and other uses. From 1st January 2019 to 6th November 2019, Government had diverted 11467.83 hectares (114.68 square kilometers) of forest land for non forest use. In the month of March, when India was in the midst of a Corona virus induced lockdown, MoEF&CC modified the EIA (Environment Impact Assessment) norms for pharmaceutical companies to waive off the EIA requirement in

the name of increasing our capability to manufacture medicines in view of the corona virus. As many as 100 projects were immediately permitted and many more lined up for permission.

India is ranked 168 out of 180 countries in the Global Environmental Performance Index and shares the 168 rank with Ghana. There are only 11 countries below it. Burundi, Haiti, Chad, Solomon Islands, Madagascar, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Liberia are below India. India is 93 in the Ecosystem Services index which measures tree cover loss, grassland loss and wetland loss. <https://epi.yale.edu/epi-results/2020/component/epi>

In the Terrestrial biome protection (national weights) category, India is ranked 145 out of 180 countries. This clearly shows India has a long way to go in protecting its wilderness areas and can also play host to an outbreak of virus.

As we are getting ready to step on a new year, it is important to reflect and correct the wrongs that we have done so that we can create a society that is more in sync with nature and reap its benefits. Else, we will can't escape from the vagaries of nature in form of climate change induced extreme weather events like landslides, cyclones, flooding, heat waves as well as future pandemics. There is no way we can survive the wrath of Mother Earth if we continue to decimate our forests.

If we want to be safe, then we have to protect our forests.

Conservation News -

CPCB raises concern on Pollution and Frothing in Yamuna

6th December

CPCB has observed froth formation and increase in ammonia levels in river Yamuna because of discharge of untreated sewage, non-operation of existing Sewage Treatment Plants, improper functioning of Effluent Treatment Plants (ETPs) installed by the industries and Common Effluent Treatment Plants (CETPs) located on the banks of river Yamuna.

Monitoring of twenty two drains carried out recently, indicated that fourteen drains (Sonia Vihar, Najafgarh, Shastri Park, Shahdara, etc.) are found untapped, discharging sewage. While five drains are 100% tapped and no flow at downward of interception observed, two drains were found tapped but were overflowing into Yamuna river. One drain (drain no. 14) has no flow at all. Due to partially/untreated discharge of sewage and industrial effluent containing phosphorus, many times, foaming also is observed.

Taking cognizance, CPCB has issued directions to Delhi Jal Board to submit time bound action plan to ensure compliance with norms by STPs and that no untreated sewage is discharged to these drains.

Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) has been directed to take action against non-complying Common Effluent Treatment Plans (CETPs) and industrial units. Similar directions have also been issued to State Pollution Control Boards of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

In view of the importance of the issues, reminders have been issued today to concerned agencies to submit action taken report by 15th December, 2020.

CPCB monitors water quality of River Yamuna and drains discharging into the River. However, it is common knowledge that STPs and CETPs often discharge untreated sewage directly into the river to avoid incurring cost. Most of the times, during night the treatment plants are switched off to cut electricity costs and untreated sewage is discharged. If CPCB takes its role seriously without any compromise then the pollution problem can become much less. However, given the past track record of the state as well as central pollution control boards, the common man doesn't expect much. Lets hope this time CPCB is going to discharge its duties most efficiently and in a proactive manner.

Air Quality Commission directs for 100 percent switching over of industries in Delhi to PNG

The Commission for Air Quality Management in NCR and Adjoining Areas reviewed the progress of switching over of Industries operating in Delhi to Piped Natural Gas with the Government of NCT of Delhi, GAIL and Indraprastha Gas Limited.

Conservation News -

About 1644 of Industrial Units spread across 50 industrial areas in Delhi had been identified to switch over to Piped Natural Gas (PNG). Though sizeable number of Industries are using PNG, the Commission stressed the need to switch over to PNG by all identified Industries in Delhi considering the fact that industrial sector is one of the major contributors to air pollution in Delhi and National Capital Region. Indraprastha Gas Limited (IGL) and Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL) were impressed upon to complete the pipeline network, metering and associated infrastructure.

M/s IGL, Delhi Pollution Control Committee and Government of NCT of Delhi were also asked to work in close coordination with the industrial units so as to target completion of infrastructure works and complete switch over to PNG, by all the identified industrial units in Delhi, by 31st January, 2021. DPCC was also directed to inspect and identify the industries using unapproved fuels and to take stringent penal action in case of non-compliances.

The smog in winter is a major problem in the National Capital region. Especially in view of the Covid-19, the impact of air pollution is going to be more harmful. So a speedy transition to piped natural gas would be better in the short run. In the long term, industries need to be moved away from residential areas and metro cities. The Government needs to do long-term planning of our major big cities and towns and ensure that industries move out into designated corridors. However that unfortunately is likely to remain as a piped dream.

Air Quality Commission directs strict enforcement of dust control measures to curb Air Pollution

Dust emanating from the construction and demolition activities continues to be a major source of air pollution throughout the year. Such activities generate significant amount of dust, adversely impacting the Air quality by raising PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀ levels.

The Commission of Air Quality Management in Delhi-NCR and adjoining areas reviewed the deteriorating air quality situation and has directed strict enforcement of dust control measures to curb air pollution in Delhi-NCR. The Air Quality Commission said that strict action must be taken against violators of construction demolition waste rules and the guidelines. Commission's direction came after it reviewed dust control measures for National Capital Region including NCT of Delhi. The body also issued statutory directions to Central Pollution Control Board and Pollution Control Boards and Delhi Pollution Control Committee to constitute teams for inspection and strict enforcement of dust control measures. The Commission also issued directions to levy environment compensation charge from violators and stoppage of work, prohibition of construction and demolition activities based on extent of violations.

In order to ensure strict compliance of Construction and Demolition Waste Management Rules notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and guidelines on dust mitigation measures for handling Construction and Demolition Wastes, the Commission has directed the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), State Pollution Control Boards

Conservation News -

(SPCBs) of Haryana, Rajasthan, UP and Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) will constitute surprise inspection teams and to furnish fortnightly inspection reports to the Commission regarding compliance of rules with respect to construction and demolition activities in the National Capital Region. We hope that the implementation of the directives of the Air Quality Commission is full proof. Generally due to inefficiency as well as vested interests, the construction lobby continue to illegally carry out demolitions and constructions so the air quality in Delhi and in the National Capital Region remains even worse than Beijing.

Ladakh's Tso Kar Wetland Complex now a Wetland of International Importance

India has added Tso Kar Wetland Complex in Ladakh as its 42nd Ramsar site, which is a second one in the Union Territory (UT) of Ladakh.

The Tso Kar Basin is a high-altitude wetland complex, consisting of two principal waterbodies, Startsapuk Tso, a freshwater lake of about 438 hectares to the south, and Tso Kar itself, a hypersaline lake of 1800 hectares to the north, situated in the Changthang region of Ladakh, India. It is called Tso Kar, meaning white lake, because of the white salt efflorescence found on the margins due to the evaporation of highly saline water.

The Tso Kar Basin is an A1 Category Important Bird Area (IBA) as per Bird Life International and a key staging site in the Central Asian Flyway. The site is also one of the most important breeding areas of the Black-necked Crane (*Grus nigricollis*) in India. This IBA is also the major breeding area for Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*), Bar-headed Geese (*Anser indicus*), Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*), Brown-headed Gull (*Larus brunnicephalus*), Lesser Sand-Plover (*Charadrius mongolus*) and many other species.

The aim of the Ramsar list is “to develop and maintain an international network of wetlands which are important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life through the maintenance of their ecosystem components, processes and benefits”.

Wetlands provide a wide range of important resources and ecosystem services such as food, water, fibre, groundwater recharge, water purification, flood moderation, erosion control and climate regulation. They are, in fact a major source of water and our main supply of freshwater comes from an array of wetlands which help soak rainfall and recharge groundwater. Wetlands hold lot of carbon and those can get released into the atmosphere when they are filled up with mud and debris and reclaimed for human habitations.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change has said that it would be working closely with the UT Wetland Authority to ensure wise use of the Tso Kar wetland complex. We hope MoEF&CC stays true to its words as most of our Ramsar sites are facing lot of neglect and anthropogenic challenges. Recently Sambhar Lake in Rajasthan was in news due to thousands of birds dying. Central Govt. had planned to allow seaplane landing and takeoff in Chilika lake in Odisha which

Conservation News -

would have threatened the ecological fragility of the lake. Fortunately Odisha Government due to public pressure raised its voice against the disastrous project and the seaplane project was withdrawn. Keoladeo Ghana in Rajasthan often faces challenge as the canals supplying water are blocked by the locals and hence birds don't get the fish to survive. In many years the bird nesting is affected due to paucity of water. Sundarbans wetlands is facing huge anthropogenic challenges. People are reclaiming the land and concretising due to population growth. There is also poaching of prey species like wild pigs and deers. Salinity is also increasing. So simply naming a wetland as Ramsar site doesn't automatically protect and resolve the ecological challenges faced by the place. Government has to show the resolve to walk the talk.

Equipment Discussions -

Zoom Am7 Mid-Side Stereo Microphone for Android Devices with USB-C Connector

Often people face problems recording high quality audio in their android devices. There are certain options in the market however, recording M/S stereo is not one of those.

Zoom Am7 M/S Stereo microphone

To fill this niche, Zoom has launched the Am7 M/S stereo microphone to record high-quality M/S stereo recordings straight to Android devices. This microphone directly plugs into the USB-C port of your android phone. This produces a stereo sound which appears to resemble the natural depth of the space. With its naturalistic stereo depth of field, the mic is wonderfully suited to music-video recording, video-based podcasts etc.



Professional sound recordists love the sound of M/S stereo as this technique helps in achieving a realistic recording of the width and depth of the space. One can easily get a mono signal from the M/S recordings. So if a person wants to listen using a single mono headphone or speaker then the M/S recording technique is of help as there is mono-compatibility.

The Am7 records audio at broadcast-quality 48 kHz/16-bit. Having 24 bit recording would have assuaged the nerves of professionals, however, 16 bit is fine for the intended audience. This microphone offers a stereo-width slider to adjust how "wide" you want the resultant recording to feel. The controls are easy to master: a simple gain knob and the stereo-width control. It is a good thing that there is a 3.5mm headphone jack so that one can monitor the output using headphones while recording. Though it is perhaps never going to be used, however, one can use the 3.5mm headphone jack to also get a line out for backup if needed. This technique is more for professionals who want to use every single microphone at their disposal.

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The Am7 mic has a rotating capsule design. So you can rotate the microphone to align the camera with the audio recording. When recording audio without video, simply rotate the mic to the audio position, and point your phone like a mic to the sound you want to record. Keeping with the selfie generation who are more prone to be using this microphone, the Zoom Am7 also offers a selfie mode for recording the audio of the person.

The mic is designed to work with Zoom's free Handy Recorder app, which is now available on Google Play to work with this particular model. You'll be able to monitor audio without latency straight from the app. You can also record, mix, and share your audio right from your Android device. The app can automatically upload to SoundCloud for public sharing or Google Drive for sharing among collaborators.

M/S & Stereo Width Controls

Any M/S stereo microphone would contain two microphones – one which is known as the mid mic and which captures the audio from the front side and the other microphone which is known as side microphone and records the audio from the side or ambient audio.

With this M/S stereo microphone we can set the width of the stereo to 90° or 120°. With the Handy Recorder Android app of Zoom, one can also record the raw signals and adjust the stereo width later during post processing. One can also use this app to collapse the signal and make it mono and record voiceovers or interviews of people.

Easy Controls & Monitoring

There is a big mic gain knob in the front so you can adjust your input levels and LED level meters show up the levels.



Zoom Handy Recorder App

Available on Google Play, the Zoom Handy Recorder App allows you to record, mix, and share audio from your Android.

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You can upload your audio directly to Soundcloud or Google Drive.

Zoom Am7 M/S microphone Specifications:

TYPE:	Mid-side (M-S) stereo mic (90°/120°/M-S)
MAXIMUM INPUT SOUND PRESSURE:	120 dBSPL
INPUT GAIN:	+3 - +43 dB
AUDIO QUALITY:	44.1 kHz/16 bit, 48 kHz/16 bit
POWER:	Powered by the connected device
CONNECTOR:	USB Type-C connector
	Stereo mini jack (combined headphone/line level output)
DIMENSIONS:	54.5 (W) x 57.5 (D) x 28.1 (H) mm
WEIGHT:	31.8 g

Zoom Am7 Price:

The Zoom Am7 M/S Microphone is priced at **\$99.99 US Dollars**.

B&H Link: <https://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/search?N=o&InitialSearch=yes&Ntt=Zoom%20Am7%20Mid-Side%20Stereo%20Microphone%20for%20Android%20Devices%20with%20USB-C%20Connector&BI=19990&KBID=13252&KWID=EZ>

Equipment Discussions -

Leica Introduces SL2-S Mirrorless Hybrid Camera

Leica has announced a fullframe mirrorless camera SL2-S with 24.6 MP BSI CMOS sensor which shoots 4K video at 10 bits and still photos at 9 frames per second. The camera sports Leica L mount. One important aspect of the Leica SL2-S camera is that you can record video for unlimited amount of time unlike other DSLRs or mirrorless cameras which are limited to a maximum of 30 mins. A very important factor for documentaries and other long form video recording projects.



Following are the key Features:

1. Sensor: 24.6MP Full-Frame BSI CMOS Sensor
2. Processor: Maestro III Image Processor
3. Video internal recording: DCI 4K Video (4096 x 2160) at upto 30p at 400 Mb/s in 4:2:2 colour space at 10 bits with Hybrid log gamma (HLG) and L-Log gamma profiles. Full HD recording upto 60p in 4:2:2 10 bits (at 200 Mb/s). Full HD can also be recorded at 180p in 4:2:0 8 bits (20 Mb/s)
4. External video recording: DCI 4K at upto 60p at 4:2:2 10bits HLG & 10-Bit Recording. Full HD recording upto 60p in 4:2:2 10 bits and 180p in 4:2:0 8 bits
5. ISO: There is Auto ISO mode as well as ability to set manually from ISO 100-1000000
6. EVF: 5.76m-Dots with 0.78x-Magnification EyeRes OLED EVF
7. LCD: 3.2" 2.1m-Dot Touchscreen LCD
8. AF System: Contrast-Detect 225 autofocus points
9. Image Stabilization: 5-Axis Sensor-Shift in body image stabilisation
10. Still photography shutter speed: 1/8000 to 500 second in mechanical shutter, bulb mode. In electronic shutter shutter speed is 1/16000 to 60 seconds.

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11. Burst speed: 9fps still photos in mechanical shutter and 25fps in electronic shutter mode.
12. Media: Dual SD UHS-II Slots
13. Connectivity: USB Type C, Full size HDMI port, 3.5mm jack for head phone and 3.5mm microphone jack.
14. Dimensions: 5.7 inch 4.2 in x 3.3 inch
15. Weight: 931 grams

Price: \$4895 US Dollars

B&H Link: <https://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/search?N=0&InitialSearch=yes&Ntt=Leica%20SL2-S%20body%20only&BI=19990&KBID=13252&KWID=EZ>

PRESS RELEASE

LEICA SL2-S: LEICA PRESENTS ITS MOST VERSATILE CAMERA FOR PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEOGRAPHY TO DATE

Wetzlar, December 10, 2020

With the new SL2-S, Leica introduces a perfect solution for anyone seeking outstanding imaging performance – not only in their photographs, but also in their video productions. With its new, 24-megapixel BSI-CMOS sensor and two separate recording modes for photos and videos, the new Leica SL2-S offers the best of both media in one all-metal, state-of-the-art body built for long-term durability.

The Leica SL2-S expands the multi-faceted SL-System with a versatile full-frame camera that serves as an alternative to the Leica SL2. The SL2-S is the perfect choice for customers who favour fast operation over the exceptionally high resolution of the Leica SL2. With its especially high operating speed (which enables continuous shooting rates of up to 25 frames per second at full resolution), and its pro-level video capabilities (facilitating 10-bit 4K video recordings with no video length limits), the SL2-S sets new benchmarks within the SL-System.

High-quality sensor

The core element of the Leica SL2-S is the newly developed BSI-CMOS image sensor with a resolution of 24 megapixels. The data collected by the sensor is processed by the camera's Maestro-III processor in conjunction with the generous, 4-gigabyte buffer memory. This, for the first time, enables virtually open-ended burst recordings at up to 9 frames per second, whereby the burst length in JPEG format is only limited by the storage capacity of the installed memory cards.

Image stabilisation

The Leica SL2-S features a suspended image sensor, which provides a highly efficient, multi-axis image stabilisation in connection with any Leica lens. This sensor-shift technology also facilitates multishot capturing, whereby eight shots are calculated into one image with a fourfold resolution of 96 megapixels. The high sensitivity of up to ISO 100,000 – combined with

Equipment Discussions -

the fast autofocus and in body image stabilisation – enables photographers to capture excellent images in almost all types of light.

Optimal integration

The Leica SL2-S is the first SL model to enable direct tethered shooting with Capture One 21. This gives users the option of full remote control of the camera via the computer. In addition, the SL2-S can also be tethered to Adobe Photoshop Lightroom Classic. A time-limited Adobe Creative Cloud Photography plan is included when purchasing the camera.

With the exception of the image sensor, the Leica SL2-S has the same core attributes as the SL2 (such as the unique operating concept and high-resolution Leica EyeRes® viewfinder), and shares the SL2's entire accessory range. Of course, the all-metal camera also features a dust and water protection rating of IP54, and is produced in Germany to the highest quality standards.

Perfect for creative videographers

The Leica SL2-S provides not just photographers, but also videographers and cinematographers with outstanding possibilities – which are continuously optimised via the firmware updates released for SL-System cameras on an ongoing basis. The Leica SL2-S captures 10-bit 4:2:2 videos with Leica's L-LOG gamma, at frame rates of up to 60 fps. Thanks to the integrated viewing LUTs, the user is able to have full control throughout the recording. Another pro-level trait is the camera's unlimited recording time for videos, which means that the video length is only limited by the respective (internal or external) memory.

In future, the camera will also support the highly efficient HEVC video compression standard for 10-bit recordings up to 4K/60p. This will allow videos to be split into one-minute segments, in order to minimise the risk of data loss. Other enhancing features, such as the integrated waveform monitor and the automatic Follow Focus, will be added with the next firmware update – further enhancing the camera's suitability for professional applications.

Limitless compatibility

Being equipped with the L-Mount makes the Leica SL2-S fully compatible with not just the SL-System's extensive lens portfolio, but also with TL lenses and, via adapter, lenses from the Leica M, R and S-System. The L-Mount Alliance provides SL2-S owners with access to over 40 autofocus lenses. In addition, Leitz Cine lenses – which are highly coveted among filmmakers across the board – can also be adapted to the Leica SL2-S.

Availability:

According to Leica the SL2-S is already on sale at authorised dealers. It is on preorder in B&H

Price: \$4895 US Dollars

Natural History -

COUNTRY NOTEBOOK: Spring in the Air: M.Krishnan:- 12-04-1953

The Sunday Statesman (shared by Shri. Saktipada Panigrahi)

"SUMMER has taken us by surprise in these parts. Usually this advent is both gradual and sudden; it creeps up through February and March with occasional halts during showers, and then in April, leaps in with a formal little pounce. This year, however, the pounce was early and savage. In the last week of March we were congratulating ourselves on a slow summer, in spite of dry weather, when one day the temperature shot up by almost 10 degrees, overwhelming us with a grasping lassitude. The optimistic, their senses enervated and lax, talked of a heat wave- but with the coming of April and little abatement in the heat, it is clear that this is no passing wave, but summer in all its glory.

And, quite possibly, it is also spring, the loveliest and least defined of seasons in our hill-dotted plains. We know when it is the rainy season- it is when the monsoons arrive, and their tardiness or prematurity only changes its timing. There is a brief winter in December; even autumn, if one goes by a certain mellow serenity in the air, is a definite season in many places, about October. But when is it spring?

The vernal season:

Mere botanical knowledge cannot answer this question, and knowledge of the flowering peaks of garden plants is even less helpful since we are not concerned with a horticultural season. Spring has symptoms celebrated in the classics, and it is futile considering it apart from its classical background. The setting of a gentle fragrant southern breeze, a restive amatory urge and blossoming of certain trees and the voice of koel are the accredited tokens of the vernal season. The gentle southern breeze is a reality more refreshing than poetic fancy can ever be, as those who have been out on a sweltering day in April will know, but it is local in its balmy range.



Male Koel
Photographed by - Murugan
Anantharaman

Other trees like 'Asoka', and even shrubs like 'jesmine', are listed in description of spring but undoubtedly the 'mango' is most symptomatic of them. And this year, in places far apart, I found the wild mango in lavish bloom in the middle of February, when the numerous koels of those tracts were resting their voices for a while! Nor are the Hindu festivals more specific in fixing the season- right from Holi (end of February), to the Tamil New Year Day (in the second week of April) each of them has some vernal connotation.

Peak in flowering:

Perhaps this gives us the clue. Spring is an extensive season, marked by a florescent urge in nature. The herbaceous vegeta-

tion is in bloom for many months, but probably December-January marks a peak in their flowering. By March most herbs are drying up, and from February to June a number of forest trees burst into flower with dramatic extravagance. The voice of the koel, also representative of the season, varies with locality as much as the flora, but I have never heard the cock in full voice before mid-April. Spring proper seems to begin before summer, and to coexist with its earlier months.

Not all trees that flower in summer are conspicuous, and some, like the 'neem', commence to bloom in February and go on till April. The chaste, white blossoms of the neem are used in vernal festivals, but it is red flowering of certain forest trees that seems most expressive of sultry, provocative spring. Some of these red-flowered trees are traditionally associated with the season, and quite three of them are known, vaguely and descriptively, as "flame of the forest".

Recently I was in a block of jungle which has its own character, no doubt, but which is so wholly uninfluenced by climatic extremes or any attempt at forestry that one can take its naturalness for granted. The jungle was dry and brown, most of the trees leafless, but there was vivid declarations of spring here and there. All the three trees are called or miscalled "flame of the forest" are found here- and hotter flames as well. Forest fires, unchecked except by the conformation of hills, water courses and prevailing winds, take toll of the under-shrub every year. There was an extensive fire on the night of my arrival here, a magnificent and saddening sight.

The 'Asoka (*Saraca indica*)' is the most delicate of all red proclamations of spring, and is intimately associated with the season traditionally, but the tree is not to be found in the jungle. From early in February the 'Indian Coral tree (*Erythrina indica*)' was in blossom- an ugly tree, to my eyes, too florid and thick-branched, but the pure scarlet of its flowers is probably unmatched for brilliance. The Coral's bloody crown is enhanced by lack of leaf- but then, most trees flowering in the heat are leafless. The true "flame of the forest", 'Butea frondosa' is unforgettable when seen in the jungle. It was later in bloom than the 'Erythrina', but by mid-March it was in full flower and, of course, without leaf. The rounded crown of orange-red flowers, with dark calyces, looks Chinese vermilion against the sun-brown hillsides, seen from afar- somehow, in an avenue, the tree never has scope for its vivid charm. The 'Gul Mohur (*Poinciana regia* or *delonix regia*)' was still in leaf when I left. In May it will be in extravagant bloom, its flat flaming crown spread on outflung branches, blazing fiercely in the forest. This, too, required a wild setting for its flame- I have always thought it a pity that people should plant it along the roadside. Incidentally, the 'Poinciana' has no association with spring in poetry or tradition- but the flamboyant 'Butea' has.

I will mention only one other tree that I saw here. Late in February we were going up a hill-road laboriously. A recent fire has scorched the earth, there were heavy, black rocks on either side, and the sparse jungle was brown and seemed withered beyond redemption. Round a bend in the road we came suddenly upon a group of 'Yellow Silk Cotton' trees- three crooked little trees, with burnt, gnarled trunks and tortured branches, the very tips of which alone were purple and turgid with life, and bore great, opulent yellow flowers of the purest aureolin, with hearts of red-gold stamens. I cannot describe the contrast of gracious, unstinted beauty of those flowers against that ground of charred and twisted desolation- we stopped wordlessly in our tracks to stare, unmindful of all else. To one blessed with greater faith than I, the experience could have been a revelation; surprised by such loveliness, a poet could have found a lasting joy in the sight, in a recollective, Wordsworthian manner.

But after the first glad stare, what came to me was no sense of rapture or thankfulness, but only a sharp memory from a painful past, when I had been at the foot of the systematic botany class. I turned to my comrades in triumph; "Cochlospermum gossypium," I announced to them, with finality. However, they did not hear me, or if they did, they were wholly insensible to the bathos of my remark- they just stood there, staring. There are times when the impercipient of others is merciful."

- M. Krishnan

Wildlife Photography -

Tiger by Sabyasachi Patra



Lion Tailed Macaque by Shyamala Kumar



Wildlife Photography - **Pond Heron by Samrat Sarkar**



Yellow-headed Wagtail by Mrudul Godbole



Wildlife Photography -

Peregrine Falcon by Murugan Anantharaman



Bee Eater by Abhirup Dutta Gupta



Wildlife Photography - Mayfly by Arun Acharjee



Mantis by Prajwal Ullal





With this issue we complete 12 years of uninterrupted publication of IndiaWilds Newsletter. A brown winged kingfisher from Sundarbans adorns the Coverpage of this issue.

There was a time when man used to relax and rejuvenate in the tranquility of wilderness areas and rejoice in the beauty of its denizens like the brown-winged kingfisher which adorns this issue. The beauty of nature also hides an ugly truth that man's relentless assault on our wilderness areas is resulting in pandemics, higher carbon dioxide in air and the consequent climate change. In these last few days of the year 2020 we hope that people spend some time in rethinking our disastrous anti-environment lifestyles and adopting a greener way forward.

I look forward to your inputs and support in preserving the last tracts of wilderness and wildlife of our beautiful country. For other interesting articles and images check - <http://www.indiawilds.com/forums/>

To post in the IndiaWilds forums, you can register free of cost using your Full Name as user id at -

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Regards,

Sabyasachi Patra

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