

**MADRAS NATURALISTS' SOCIETY**  
**BULLETIN**  
Vol.33 No.5, May 2010

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Programme: Monthly Meeting

Date: May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010, 9.00 am

Venue: Olcott Memorial School, Besant Nagar (Opposite Rajaji Bhavan)

Topic: The Ranthambore Experience—a discussion

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**1. Change in Venue of the Monthly Meeting:** Please note the change in the monthly meeting venue. All monthly meetings will be henceforth held at the above mentioned venue.

**2. Ranthambore Trip:** The annual MNS trip was an astounding success. It appears as if the tigers were waiting to sight the MNS members and made best use of the opportunity. Our members too had their fill sighting the tigers. On an average each member spotted 5 tigers. Also seen were other mammals like the leopard, jackal, Ruddy Mongoose, Sambhar, Chital, Nilgai, Chinkara. Crocodiles were very many. So were birds - Vultures, Raptors, Starlings, Flycatchers, Waders, et al - over a 100 species.

A detailed and very well written report of the trip and a list of birds spotted there have been posted on the group and uploaded to the group

Photographs taken by our members



The Tiger and the Tourists



T 28, a 4-year old Male Tiger - the first of the 6 that we collectively saw during our 7 Safaris.



Lady with a Treepie

**3. Two Bitterns and a Crake:** Setting out on a warm and humid summer morning in Chennai, you do not hope to have a great day of birding. However, this April morning turned out to be different. Pallikaranai marshes were drying up and the sun was strong. Driving down from Velachery side, the sight of massive development works rapidly swallowing up the marsh, did not portend good birding. As we turned into the road bisecting the marsh, an Openbill stork was in flight A good omen. Further down, Spotbill ducks were lazily swimming in the water. Another swift-flying flock of these ducks landed

across the road in the southern portion of the marsh. Ashy Prinias were hopping about on the *Parthenium* bushes—also known as Congress weed. They were busy feeding. Were there some small insects on these plants that we could not see through our binoculars? The distinctive call of the Indian Great Reed Warbler sounding more like a frog than a bird attracted our attention now. The 'Great' Reed Warbler is but a small drab bird, which used to be very common in these marshes years ago and we wondered how long they will survive in the fast-disappearing wetlands. The elegant Blackwinged Stilts were active in the water and a couple of birds were just hunched over a mound. Were they incubating the eggs in a nest? Anyway, a frisky mongoose leapt out of the grass in the foreground making us fear for the safety of the chicks when the eggs hatched.

The most important birds of the day however were the bitterns. The bitterns are the unmistakable cousins of the paddy bird. The Chestnut Bittern is a rufous and black bird with some streaks on the under parts. This bittern flew across and settled down among the reeds. Before long, another bittern, this time a Yellow Bittern glided and disappeared from view behind the reed beds. The yellowish body with the flash of black in the wings confirmed its identity. The bitterns are solitary birds with vivid colours, but they are crepuscular and shy; seldom noticed when they sit motionless among the grass, blending so well with the background. Having seen two bitterns, we were sure we had exhausted this particular place of surprises as well as our luck! But another chestnut-coloured bird with bright red legs and distinctive black and white under body markings was the next 'catch' of the day. The Ruddy-breasted Crake in full sun presented a spectacular view. It scuttled to cover, when it realized that some nosy bird watchers were pointing fingers and worse, some glinting binoculars at it.

What is there to add, we 'also' saw another thirty species—Brown Shrike, Watercock or Kora, Pied Crested Cuckoos, Spotbilled Pelicans, Grey and Purple Herons, Cattle and Little Egrets, Pheasant-tailed Jaçanas, Glossy and White Ibis, Indian and Purple Moorhen, Ashy and Plain Prinias, Large Pied and Yellow Wagtails, Common and Wood Sandpipers and other such birds!

K.V. Sudhakar

**4. Ban the Catapults:** The persecution of birds and small mammals with catapults has been a problem for a long time. Now with the increased availability of these catapults due to mass production in newer materials, the problem will increase manifold. The need to ban catapult has to be addressed at the earliest before we have nothing left to save. A letter campaign is on. Please check the groups for more discussion on this topic

**5. International Climate Champions 2010:** British Council India invites applications for the 2010 International Climate Champions programme.

Seventy International Climate Champions in India and Srilanka with a passion for the environment and interest to work against the effects of climate change are making a difference. Join them and explore the gamut of opportunities to make a difference in the war against Climate Change. For further details: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/india-projects-lcf-climatechampions.htm?gclid=COC2vM7Qo6ECFcxR6wodF1L-wQ>

**6. WWF India Small Grants Program:** With the aim of encouraging young Indians to respond innovatively and independently to the conservation issues which affect the country, WWF-India is offering eligible individuals a one-time grant of up to Rs. 200,000 for carrying out conservation research or undertaking a conservation project. The primary objective of this grant is to provide financial capacity to individuals based in India, who have developed and wish to implement short-term conservation research or initiatives that can contribute to larger conservation goals.

**7. TS through the Lens:** An illustrated talk (*TS through the Lens*) on the TS, its flora and fauna was given by our member Dr T.P. Alaganandam at the Headquarters Hall of the Theosophical Society on Wednesday, the 28th April 2010.

**8. Asiatic Lion Census 2010:** Increased numbers, improved sex ratio and more areas conquered — the lion king is healthy and prospering in Gujarat. Chief Minister Narendra Modi declared the lion census figures of 2010 on Sunday which showed that there were 411 of the big cats in Gir sanctuary and surrounding areas. This was a jump of 52 over the previous census in 2005. In fact, the lion is reclaiming territory much further away from the Gir sanctuary than originally thought. As many as 33 big cats were counted 250 km from Gir National Park in semi-forest areas of Mahuva and Palitana in Bhavnagar. Wildlife experts are excited about a number of findings. For instance, there are 97 males and 162 females. The rest are cubs. Youth power seems to be on the rise as there were 77 lions aged less than one year. Another 75 of them are categorised as sub-adult cubs — in the age group of 1-3 years. Modi said the maximum number of lions — 297 — were found in Gir National Park and adjoining areas. The sex ratio too has improved. While there were 1.2 females for every male in 2005, the 2010 census put the number at 1.67 females for every male. Among their new dens, the lions have shown a special liking for Girnar sanctuary. Established in 2007, the new abode has 24 lions. In the 2005 census Girnar was not a sanctuary.

**9. A request to the members:** We welcome suggestions and contributions for new features in our bulletin. Please send via e-mail.

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