

# AN INTRODUCTION TO BIRDS AND BIRDWATCHING



Illustration: Rohan Chakravarty

**Bird Count India**  
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PART- I  
ABOUT INDIAN BIRDS

# From small to large



Photos: Garima Bhatia / Rajiv Lather

# From common to rare



# From nondescript to magnificent



Photos: Mohanram Kemparaju / Rajiv Lather

# And from deserts to dense forests



# India is home to over 1200 species of birds!



# Birds in Indian Culture and Mythology



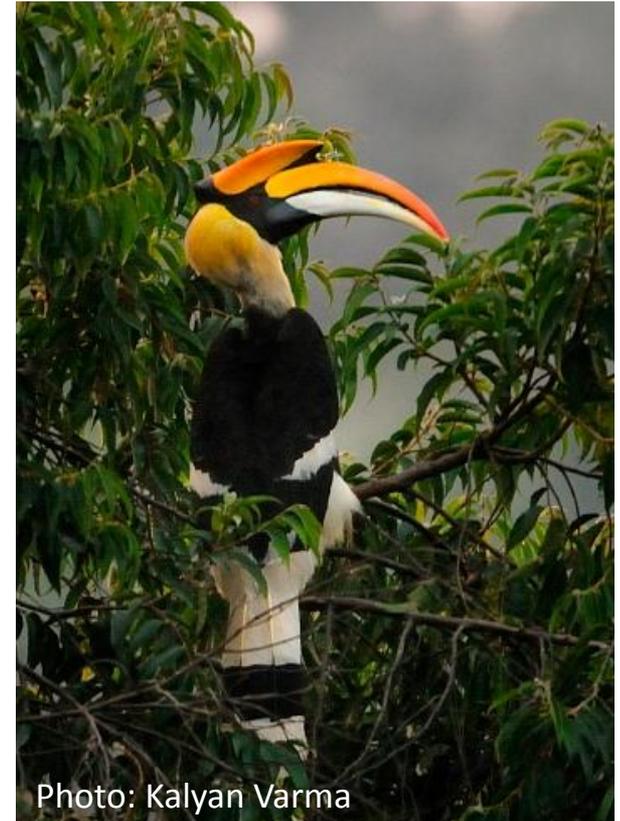
Garuda, the *vahana* of Lord Vishnu is thought to be a Brahminy Kite

# Birds in Indian Culture and Mythology



Jatayu, sacrificed himself to rescue Sita from being kidnapped by Ravana. He was thought to be a vulture.

# Birds in Indian Culture and Mythology



Sarus Cranes have a strong cultural significance in North India for their fidelity while hornbills find mention in the traditional folklore of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

# Bird behaviour: Foraging



Generalist



Insect catching



Probing



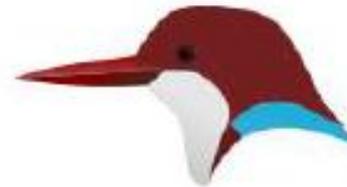
Filter feeding



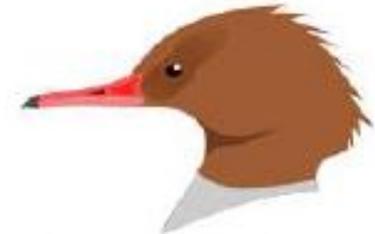
Grain eating



Coniferous-seed eating



Aerial fishing



Pursuit fishing



Nectar feeding



Fruit eating



Chiseling



Dip netting



Scavenging



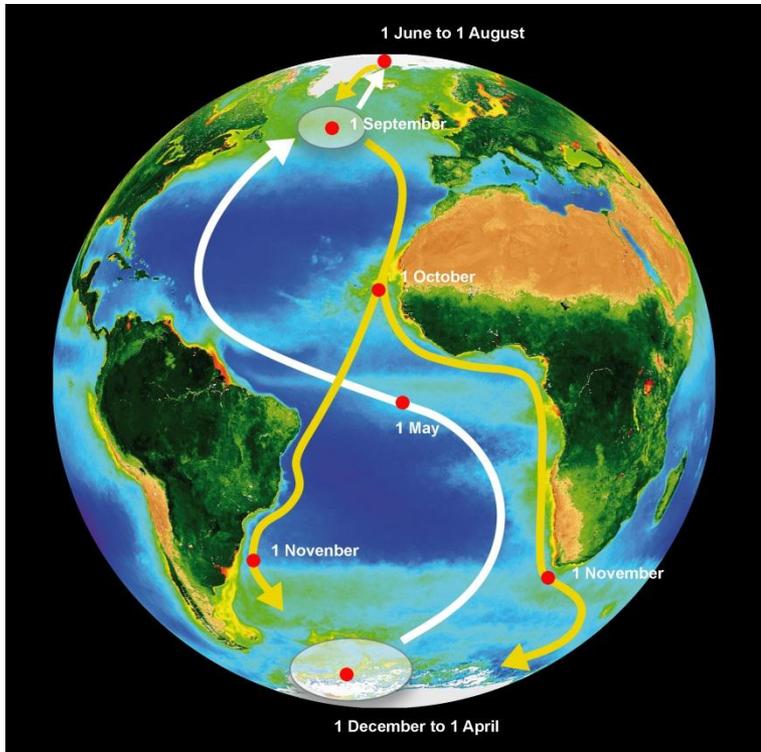
Raptorial

# Bird behaviour: Foraging



Photos: Mike Ross, Josep del Hoyo, Pat Bonish, Shreeram M.V

# Bird behaviour: Migration



# Bird behaviour: Songs



Recordings: Pronoy Baidya / Neils Poul Dreyer

# Threats to birds



Photos: [www.conservationindia.org](http://www.conservationindia.org)

Cartoon: Rohan Chakravarty

# What is birdwatching?

- Recreational activity involving the observation of birds
- Formal scientific study of birds is called ‘Ornithology’

*“ Birdwatching: your lifetime ticket to the theatre of Nature!”*

[www.birdwatching.com](http://www.birdwatching.com)

# Why watch birds?

- Colourful and lively creatures- chirp, whistle and sing
- All around us, even in cities!
- No specialised equipment required- only binoculars and a notebook

Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher



Caricatures by Rohan Chakravarty

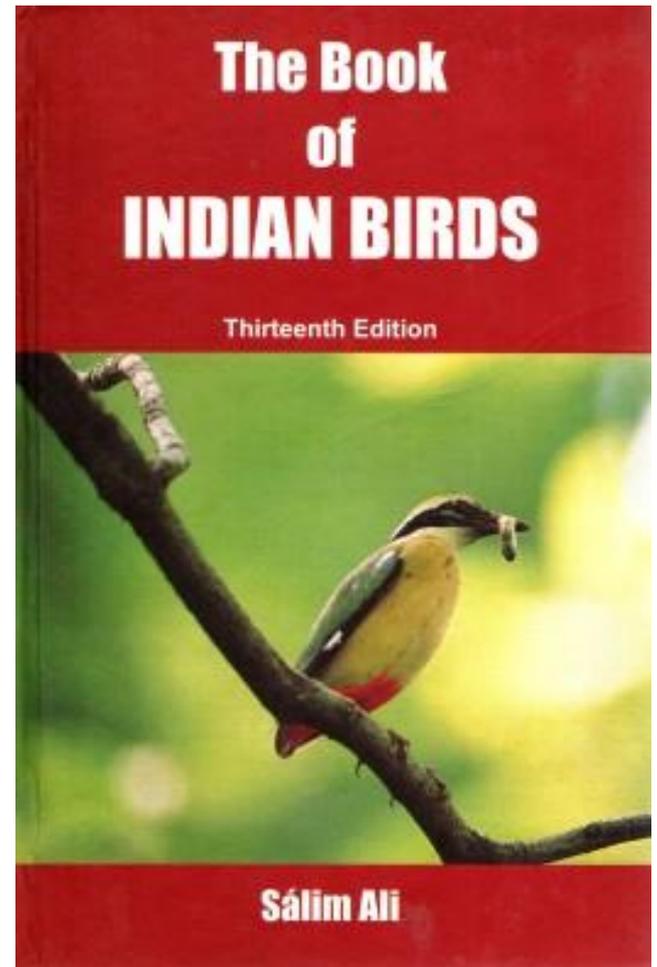
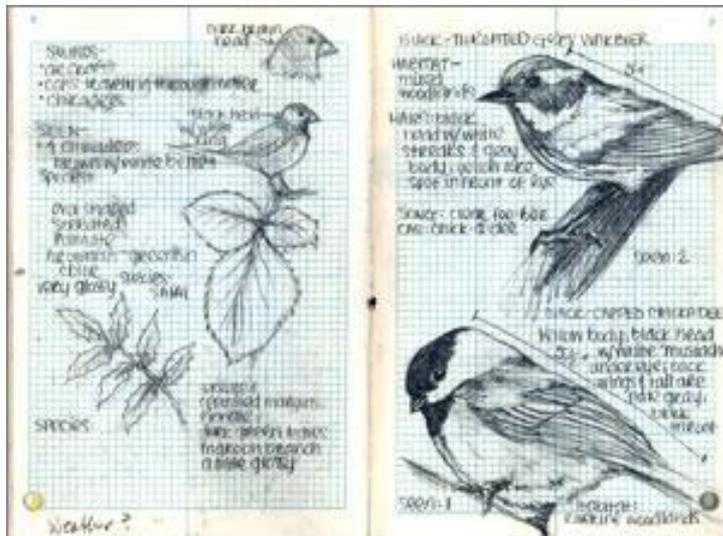
Sarus Crane



Malabar Trogon



# Essentials of birding



# Where to watch birds: Forests



Photo: Kalyan Varma

# Where to watch birds: Scrublands



# Where to watch birds: Mountains



Photo: Sumit Sen

# Where to watch birds: Wetlands



# Where to watch birds: Sea and seashore



PART- II  
SOME COMMON INDIAN BIRDS

# BACKYARD BIRDS

# House Sparrow



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Widespread resident in villages and towns

# Red-vented Bulbul



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Commonly found in gardens

# Red-whiskered Bulbul



Photo: Rajneesh Suvarna

Habits: Commonly found in gardens

# Common Myna



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Common in villages, towns, cities and lightly wooded areas.

# House Crow



Photo: Rajneesh Suvarna

Habits: A scavenger, commonly seen around human habitation

# Black Kite



Photo: Sumit Sen

Habits: A scavenger like the crow; common around human habitation

# Ashy Prinia



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: A dainty, vocal bird found in gardens.

# Common Tailorbird



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Dainty bird of gardens and forests; stitches leaves together to make its nest

# Purple Sunbird



Photo: Sumit Sen

Habits: Our version of the hummingbird; visit gardens in search of nectar and insects

# Purple-rumped Sunbird



Photo: Sumit Sen

Habits: Our version of the hummingbird; visit gardens in search of nectar and insects

# Asian Koel



Photo: Sumit Sen

Habits: Feeds on fruits; lays eggs in Crow's nests. Sings continuously during summer

# Greenish Warbler



Photo: Nitin S.

Habits: Tiny, migratory bird. Very active and flits about in foliage. Whistles faintly.

# Blyth's Reed-warbler



Photo: Nikhil Devasar

Habits: Tiny, migratory bird. Very active and flits about in bushes. Harsh *chuck* call.

# WATER BIRDS

# Indian Pond-heron



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Commonly seen hunting fish, crabs, frogs *etc.* in lakes, ponds and nullahs

# Cattle Egret



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Follow cattle in fields and fallows, feeding on insects disturbed by cattle

# Little Egret



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Found around water bodies; skillful fisher! Identified by yellow 'socks'

# Little Cormorant



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Dive and follow fish underwater; dry themselves by stretching their wings out

# Eurasian Coot



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Not a duck, though it looks like one! Seen dabbling in flocks in lakes and ponds

# Little Grebe



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Found in shallow ponds; also dives in pursuit of fish

# Purple Heron



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: A long-necked heron capable of catching bigger prey than the Pond-heron

# Purple Swamphen



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Walks along the edges of water bodies; rather shy and darts into vegetation

# Red-wattled Lapwing



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Noisy bird with a characteristic 'did-he-do-it' call. Also found in fields.

# Bronze-winged Jacana



Photo: Sumit Sen

Habits: Feet specialized for walking on floating vegetation- hence called 'Lily trotter'

# Spot-billed Duck



Photo: Rajneesh Suvarna

Habits: Common resident duck in most ponds and lakes, often in large flocks

# Cotton Pygmy-goose (Cotton Teal)



Photo: Dr. Tarique Sani

Habits: A resident duck found in shallow ponds with floating vegetation.

# Lesser Whistling-duck (Lesser Whistling-teal)



Photo: Dr. Tarique Sani

Habits: Common resident duck. Doesn't quack but whistles while flying.

# Northern Pintail



Photo: Sunil Singhal

Habits: A migratory duck. Found in large numbers in jheels in winters.

# Northern Shoveler

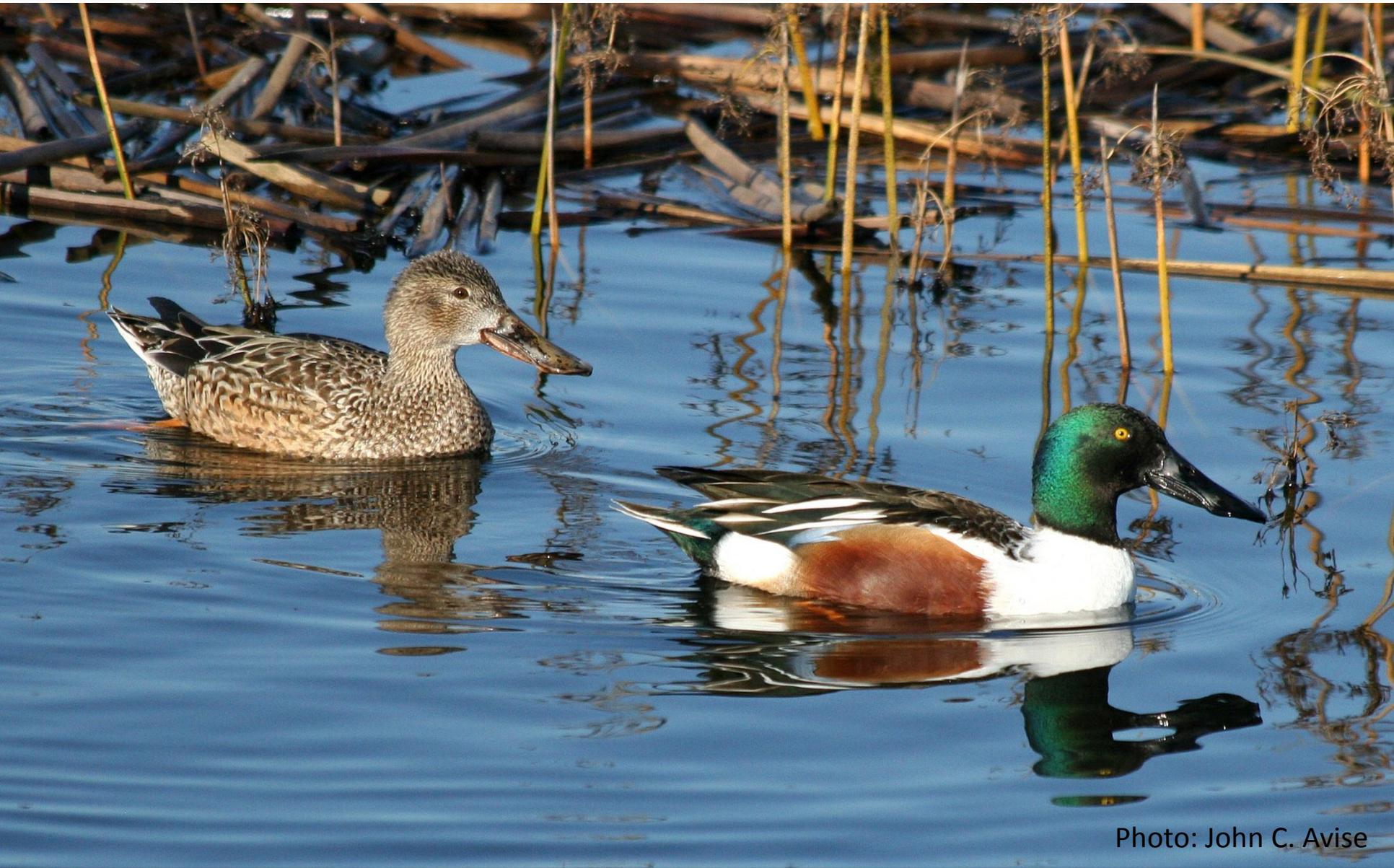


Photo: John C. Avise

Habits: Migratory duck. Dabbles and swings its shovel-like beak to sieve food.

# White-throated Kingfisher



Photo: Rajneesh Suvarna

Habits: Versatile; not restricted to water bodies. Eats anything it can capture!

# Wood Sandpiper



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Migratory bird. Walks along water bodies and gives a ringing call when alarmed

# Barn Swallow



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Migrates in winter. Flocks of thousands keep gliding around water bodies.

# BIRDS OF SCRUBLANDS

# Grey Francolin



Photo: Kalyan Varma

Habits: A shy and cryptic bird; moves about in flocks. More easily heard than seen.

# Eurasian Hoopoe



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Handsome bird; probes in the ground for prey. Erects crest when alarmed.

# Indian Peafowl



Photo: Kalyan Varma

Habits: Needs no mention!

# Indian Roller



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Common around fields and fallows. Flies high up and rolls down in courtship.

# Laughing Dove



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: A docile bird with a laughing call. Common in some towns, otherwise in scrub

# Pied Bushchat



Photo: Garima Bhatia



Habits: Tiny bird found in semi-arid, open areas.

# Baya Weaver



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Common during monsoons when many males make nests at the same place.

# Yellow-wattled Lapwing



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Found in semi-arid, open areas, often far from water.

# Black Drongo



Photo: K.S. Gopi Sundar

Habits: A bold bird which scares away birds much larger than itself. A good mimic.

# Indian Bushlark (Red-winged Bushlark)



Photo: Siddharth Hardikar

Habits: Flies up and comes circling down with wings spread out.

# Paddyfield Pipit



Photo: Saptagirish Oleti

Habits: A cryptic bird, found in grassy fields and fallows.

# Eurasian (Common) Kestrel



Photo: Anup Dutt

Habits: Small bird of prey. Mostly migratory. Hovers and dives swiftly after prey.

# Booted Warbler



©Daniele Occhiato 2008

Habits: Tiny migratory bird found in dry scrub. Often feeds on the ground.

# BIRDS OF WOODLANDS

# Asian Paradise-flycatcher



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Found in light forest and groves. Seasonally occurs in various parts.

# Taiga (Red-throated) Flycatcher



Photo: Jason Loghry

Habits: Tiny migratory bird. Mostly stays in the understorey and launches sallies.

# Jungle Babbler



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Noisy and raucous, often come in flocks of up to 7 hence called 'Seven Sisters'

# Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Common in gardens and groves. Its loud, cheerful trilling call is often heard.

# Rose-ringed Parakeet



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Found in light forests, fields and orchards. Illegally caged and sold as pets.

# Plum-headed Parakeet



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Found in light forests, fields and orchards. Illegally caged and sold as pets.

# Rufous Treepie



Photo: Rajneesh Suvarna

Habits: Noisy bird found in light forest. Often bullies and mobs other birds.

# Oriental Magpie-robin



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Found in gardens and light forest. Sings beautifully during dawn and dusk.

# Spotted Dove



Photo: Garima Bhatia

Habits: Found in light forest or scrub. Has a resonant call.

# Common Iora



Photo: Rajneesh Suvarna

Habits: Found in gardens and forest. Has a wide variety of mellifluous whistles.

# Spotted Owlet



Photo: Gaythri & Mansur

Habits: Often lives in crevices in buildings. Feeds mainly on insects. Cackles loudly.

## Common Hawk-cuckoo (Brainfever bird)



© Raghavendra M 2012

Habits: Loud *pee-pee-ah* call interpreted as *brain-fever*. Lays eggs in others' nests.

PART III  
BEYOND BIRDING

# Gaps in our knowledge

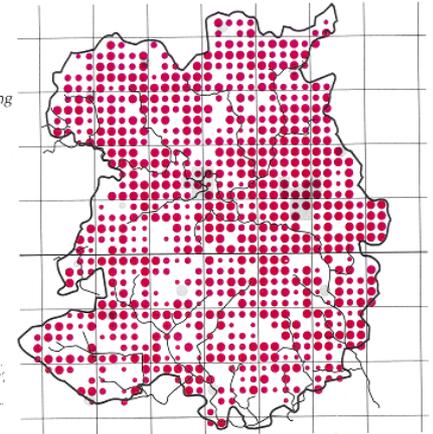
- Geographical distribution of birds
- Migratory routes and seasonality of different species
- Impacts of a changing, human-modified environment

# Citizen Science- the solution



**LAPWING**  
*Vanellus vanellus*  
Status: **Resident**  
Tetrads with evidence of breeding

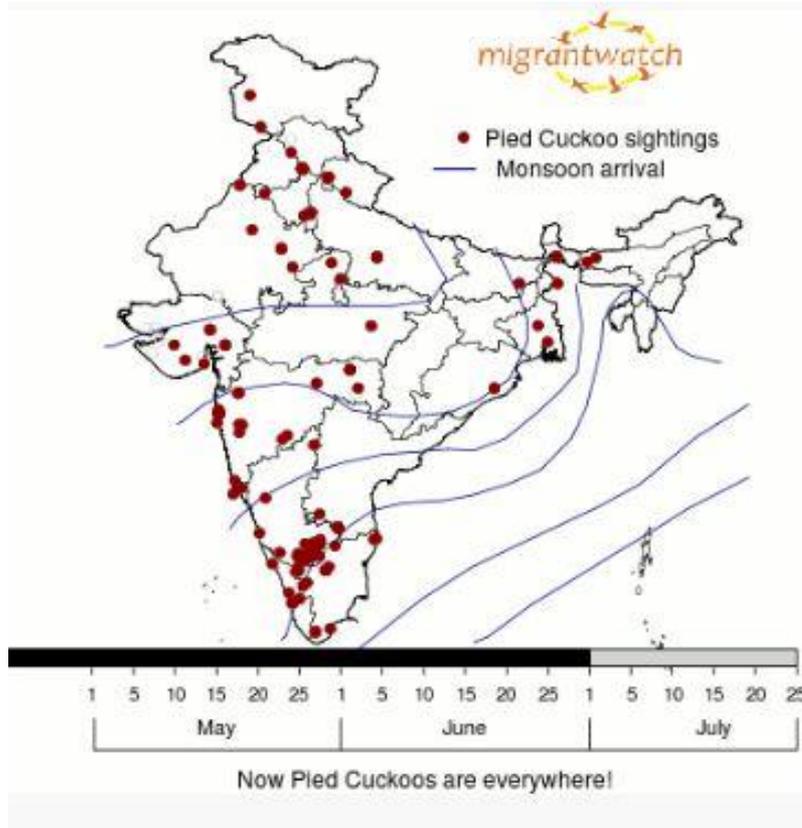
Confirmed	411 (47%)
Probable	249 (29%)
Possible	83 (10%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>743 (85%)</b>



A lot of what we know about birds comes from birdwatchers, not only scientists!

# Citizen Science- the solution

## Migrant Watch



- Over 30,000 records on migratory birds in India
- Pied Cuckoo Campaign helped track the migration of the cuckoo in association with monsoon

A global, internet-based checklist program

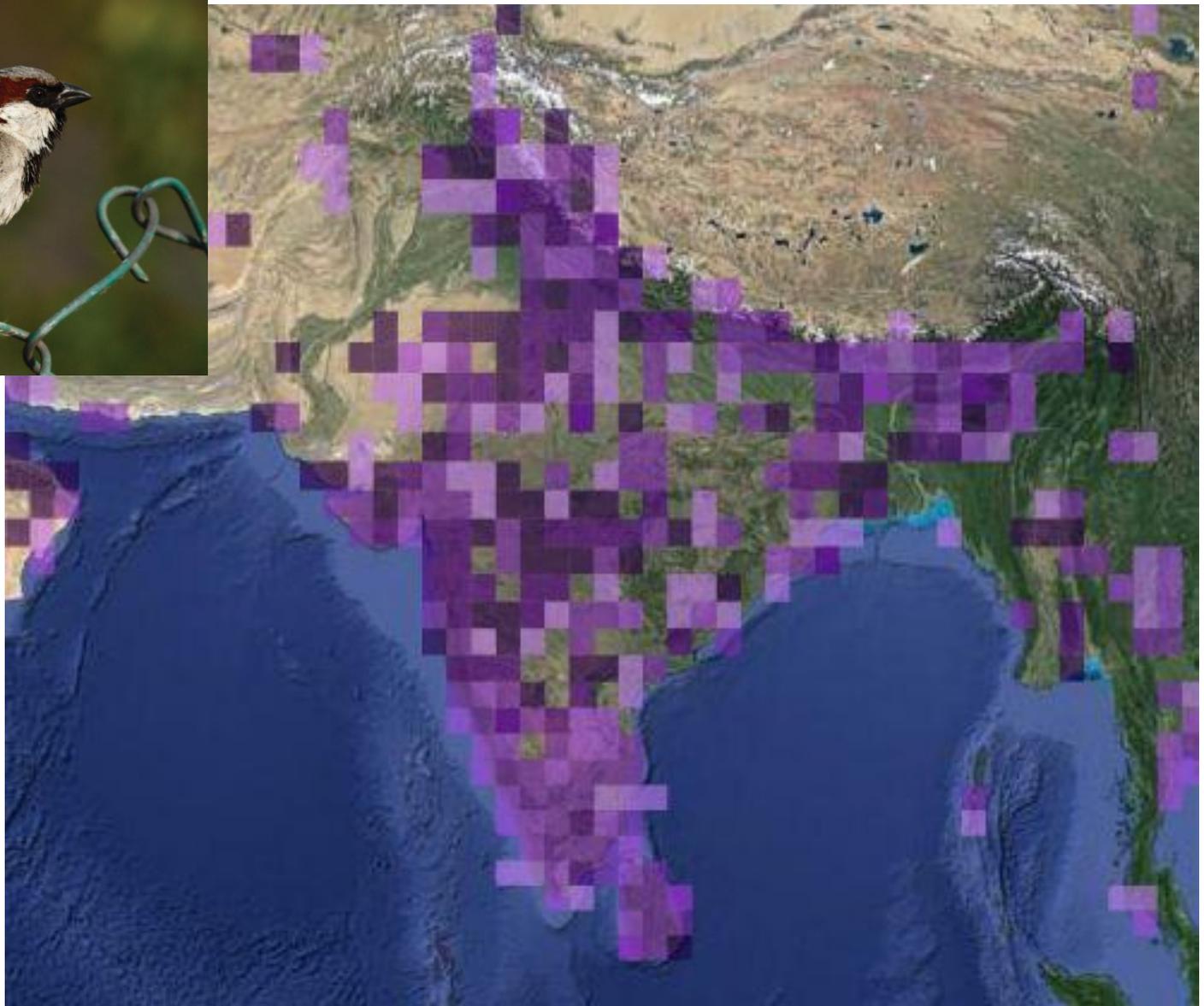
- for gathering observations of birds
- for birders to maintain their personal records.

In this way, eBird

- gathers baseline data on bird distribution and abundance
- disseminates information for public and scientific use



# eBird- freely available maps



# The Great Backyard Bird Count



Art by Charley Harper

## GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

- An annual, global bird count from 13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> Feb.
- Gives an annual snapshot of bird diversity and populations
- In 2014, 135 countries participated and documented 4000 species!
- India ranked # 1 in no. of species with over 800 species!

# The Great Backyard Bird Count



Art by Charley Harper

## PARTICIPATE IN GBBC- INDIA 2015

- Go birding anywhere- backyard, school, campus, lake, nearby forest *etc.*
- List all species and count each bird for at least 15 mins
- Upload as many lists of 15 min or more on *eBird*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Photographs:** Garima Bhatia, Rajiv Lather, Nirav Bhatt, Navendu Lad, Mohanram Kemparaju, Clement Francis, Ramki Sreenivasan, Dr. Asad Rahmani, Nikhil Devasar, Dhritiman Mukherjee, Ramana Athreya, Judd Patterson, Alex Loinaz, Nayan Khanolkar, Kalyan Varma, Mike Ross, Josep del Hoyo, Pat Bonish, Shreeram M.V., Arthur Morris, Dubi Shapiro, Sumit Sen, Rajneesh Suvarna, Dr. Tarique Sani, Sunil Singhal, John C. Avise, K.S. Gopi Sundar, Siddharth Hardikar, Saptagirish Oleti, Anup Dutt, Daniel Occhiato, Jason Loghry, Gaythri & Mansur, Raghavendra M.

**Recordings:** Pronoy Baidya and Neils Poul Dreyer

**Illustrations and caricatures:** Rohan Chakravarty and Aranya Pathak Broome

**Concept:** Suhel Quader, Raman Kumar, Praveen J., Garima Bhatia, P. Jeganathan, Rohit Chakravarty, Ashish Kothari, Dhananjai Mohan and Malvika Onial

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# Other useful resources

Birdwatching and monitoring: [www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org)

[www.birdcount.in](http://www.birdcount.in)

[www.kolkatabirds.com](http://www.kolkatabirds.com)

Reference images of birds: [www.orientalbirdimages.org](http://www.orientalbirdimages.org)

Call library: [www.xeno-canto.org](http://www.xeno-canto.org)