

# My Bellure... Kokare Bellure...

The noise down below is deafening, it's worse than the racket that we make in our own colony every evening when the whole flock is back home and trying to talk at the same time!

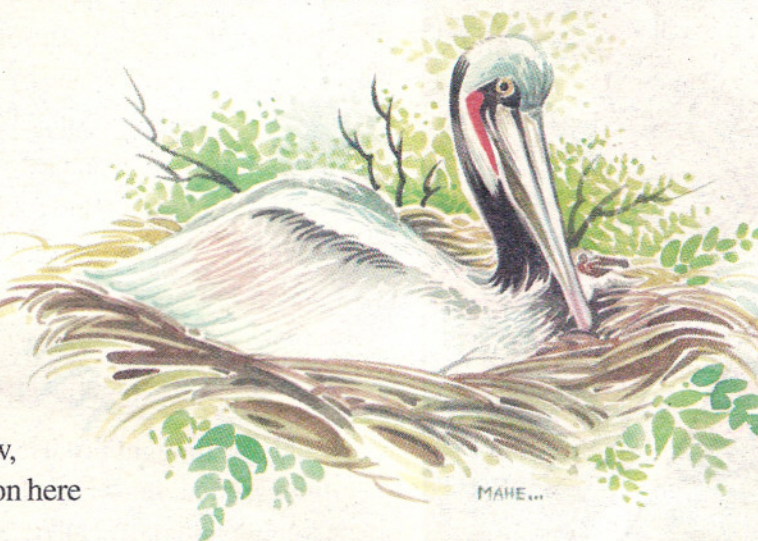
I should have got used to this noise by now, because it is so common here in this season.

In our colony, the deafening noise of pairs trying to attract each other's attention, and down in the village, the wedding bands! Today the racket is worse than ever because there is a wedding taking place just under our tree! My little chicks are becoming restless. What a noisy welcome on their first day in this world!

You must have guessed by now that I am a bird. I've heard Malu, a kind girl and my dearest friend, say once that they call us the Spot-billed Pelicans. Our colony consists of hundreds of pelicans and painted storks. It's in this wonderful village that we love! We call it *our* village - Kokare Bellure. It's close to Mysore - I know, because Malu goes to Mysore very often.

We spend about six months here every year, give birth to our babies, raise them for some time and then fly away to our summer grounds for the next six months. The flight from our summer homes to this place is full of danger, but once we reach Kokare Bellure we feel safe. As if we were in a sanctuary.

There are many huge tamarind and neem trees here. We love to nest on these. Hundreds and hundreds of us occupy these trees. When we arrive, we can sense the joy and happiness of the villagers. They consider us the harbingers of good luck. We know that they would not let anyone harm us or even cut those trees on which we nest. Sometimes they don't even harvest the tamarind



from those trees where we nest. This must be a big loss for these poor villagers, but they don't want to harm our children. They are our greatest friends.

Would you believe it - they even use our droppings! They call it *guano*, and they say it is the best fertilizer for their fields.

Did I say we feel safe here? Well...almost! This crow sitting on the branch opposite mine has been eyeing my babies the whole morning. If I move out even for a split second, he will make them his lunch! I can never forget what happened to my neighbour yesterday. Their chicks are a little older than ours. And like all growing chicks, they were a hungry lot! How can one parent bring home enough food for a hungry growing family?

Yesterday both parents went fishing, leaving the chicks alone. In a flash, Korvus Crow swooped down and carried away one of the chicks. The nest was shaken up in the process and the rest of them fell out. They were devoured by the greedy stray dogs waiting down below. In a few minutes my neighbour's entire family was ruined!

It was an incident like this, many years ago, that brought me close to Malu, my human friend. Dear Malu - did I mention that she is a bride today? It is she who is getting married right under our tree!

Oh! Let me finish telling you what happened when the crow attacked me many years back. I was so small I couldn't even fly. I fell to the ground; I was terrified. I could see big dogs running towards me with drooling mouths and greedy eyes. My heart almost stopped beating, when someone lifted me off the ground!

Before you could say SPOTBILLED PELICAN, I was staring into a pair of kind, tear-filled eyes. It was



Malu! She saved me from the dogs that day. I was frightened and terrified and I missed my parents who were out fishing.

Malu took me to a handsome man whom she called Manu. He had come to the village a few days ago to find out more about this unique relationship between birds and humans. He helped Malu feed me and dress my wounds. I was too weak even to open my eyes. I stayed in Malu's house for many days.

One day, when Malu and her friends were playing with me, Manu told them all about me. He told them that pelicans are threatened birds. That meant there were not many of us left in the world and our numbers were fast decreasing.

"There are several reasons for this," he explained. "In some places people kill and eat pelicans. At other places they cut the trees on which they nest. Elsewhere, there is no food left for pelicans. Sometimes, people cannot stand the noise they make and, therefore, shoo them away!"

He said Kokare Bellure was a very special village, "but this is not the only village where animals and birds are loved. There are many other villages in India where people look after the birds that come to nest in their trees."

Malu looked at me and asked, "What can we do for chicks like this?" There was silence for some time and then Manu said, "Why don't we start an orphanage and a hospital?" Everybody liked the idea and started planning for it very enthusiastically.

That was many years ago. Now there is an orphanage and a hospital in the village for us. It is run by the youth.

Pelicans (Pelecanidae) are large, aquatic, fish-eating birds. Pelicans often fish cooperatively by swimming forward in a semicircular formation. Spot-billed pelicans inhabit large lakes, reservoirs, coastal lagoons and estuaries. In the breeding season (September to April), they build large nests of twigs in trees in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Assam, and Sri Lanka. In the non-breeding season, they are spread over much of the Indian sub-continent, including in wetlands like Bharatpur near Agra. Pelican populations are rapidly declining, and are now considered globally threatened.

Today Malu is getting married and going away, but I know that the orphanage will go on... Her friends and Manu will make sure that it does.

I must go and see how Malu looks as a bride. Yesterday she came to see me. We looked at each other and there were tears in her eyes. She said she was going far away... far away to Agra and she doesn't know when she will be back. I wanted to say so many things to her but I knew she wouldn't understand.

I wanted to say, maybe she could see us sometime, flying overhead.

Hey! Wait a minute... did she say Agra? Hm.. isn't that the place where we go from here?... Isn't that somewhere close to this beautiful wetland called Bharatpur?

Well, Bharatpur is where we go from here when our chicks grow up.

I must tell her... I must tell her that we shall meet again ... very soon!

- By Neema Pathak

Courtesy: The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) and Kalpavriksh

