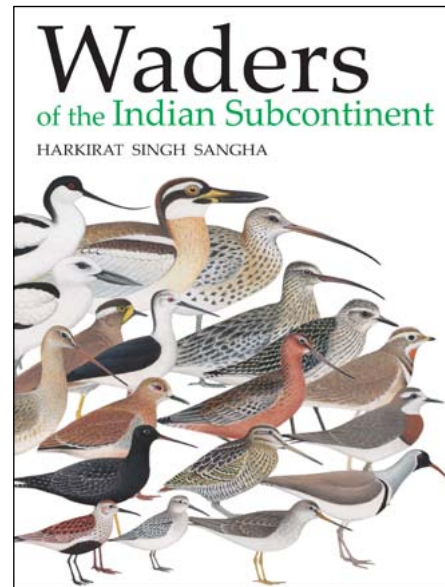


BOOK REVIEWS

With improved technology and a much greater appetite among the young for books to remind them of the wonderful biosphere in which they live, it is heartening to see how many new, high-quality publications are emerging from within India. Here are three books that *Sanctuary* believes should be in every public library and in the homes of all those whose hearts beat to nature's drum.



WADERS OF THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

By Harkirat Singh Sangha
Published in association with World Wide Fund for Nature
Hardback, 520 pages

The pandemic has been a terrible time for all of us, with many major books, including some of my own being either cancelled or postponed. Therefore, when the courier arrived one bleak morning, my joy knew no bounds, for it contained a huge tome on Indian waders written by my friend Harkirat Singh Sangha, the quiet and extremely busy Rajasthani bureaucrat. I knew that he was working on one such project, but more than 20 years had passed and I had lost track of its progress. He has travelled the length and breadth of this vast country in his unending quest to create a lifetime's work. At first glance, the book instantly recalled Rishad Naoroji's *Birds of Prey of the Indian Subcontinent*, first published by Helm and later, rather badly, by OM Books. This book made a huge impact on Indian ornithology, but was later

largely forgotten and I sincerely hope that Harkirat's book will have a longer and better run.

In the past, many books have been written on waders. This is because they were often shot for food with Godwits, with several varieties of snipes including woodcock leading the preference. Among books written were *Game, Shore and Water Birds of India* by Col. A. Le Messurier, *The Edible Game Birds of British India* by James A. Murray and *Indian Sporting Birds* by Frank Finn, which were primarily for hunters for identification. Harkirat's much more academic book has been written with much more honourable intent and covers all the species found in the subcontinent. India's vast eastern and western coasts, deltas, rivers and lakes offer unlimited scope for wader watching.

This extremely comprehensive study covers all the waders found in India, including some obscure ones such as the Long-billed Plover, Far Eastern Curlew, Caspian Plover and the Eurasian Dotterel. It is lavishly photographed (over 450 images) with as many plumages by a plethora of photographers (who are individually credited), which in itself is a huge and improbable task. These photographs are further complemented by 540 original illustrations by the highly talented contemporary Rajasthani artist Damodar Singh Gurjar, who works in watercolour, oil, gouache and tempera. Primarily known for his botanical subjects, his work was shown in 2001 in a solo exhibition, *Enduring Perfection: Paintings by Damodar Lal Gurjar*, at the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation Carnegie, Mellon University, and his work is included in *A Passion for Plants: Contemporary Botanical Masterworks*, a collection by Dr. Shirley Sherwood, in 2001. While this is his first major work on birds, I sincerely hope that it is only the beginning of his documentation of Indian birds.

Harkirat's vast knowledge is reflected in the way he has assiduously detailed each species, describing interalia, its taxonomy, range, distribution, field characteristics, vocalisation and habitat. He has also covered the different plumages from juvenile to breeding. Importantly, confusable species have also been listed, which is a great asset for both amateurs as well as professionals. The status and conservation status of each species is categorised as Least Concern, Nearly Threatened, Vulnerable, Endangered, Critically Endangered and Data Deficient.

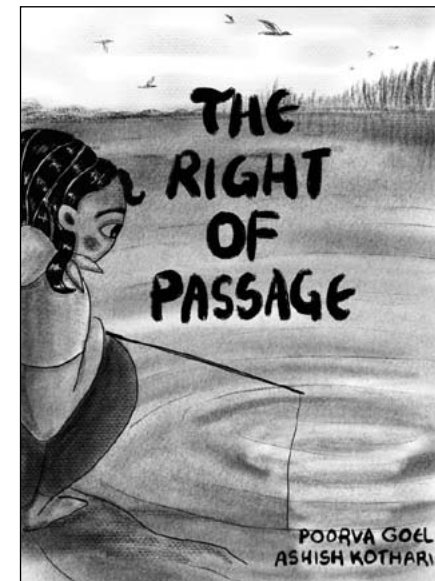
The images that accompany each include: breeding and non-breeding birds, the juvenile and flight views of breeding and non-breeding birds. Often, particular and defining features of the species are highlighted in details such as head-patterning and beak types.

Worth mention are the detailed and legible, colour-coded maps based on verified information that accompany each species and show details of whether it is a resident, migratory, summer or winter visitor. Passage migrants and occasional records are also depicted. A map of bird topography is also given for ready reference.

The introduction makes for fascinating reading, covering diverse subjects such as earlier studies on waders, migration, habitats and threats to waders. As a hands-on field person, Harkirat's insights into habitat losses, decline in wader populations, the effects of damming and mining of riverbeds, pollution, disturbances and global warming are note-worthy.

Scrumptiously produced with an attractive cover and printed on glossy paper, this is a handsome volume that makes it an invaluable asset for all bird lovers. Unfortunately, this book is not available at bookstores and traditional outlets, but is available online.

Reviewed by **Bikram Grewal**



THE RIGHT OF PASSAGE

By Ashish Kothari
Illustrated by Poorva Goel
Published by Kalpavriksh and Right of Rivers South Asia
Available for free download at www.kalpavriksh.org

The Right of Passage is a short comic about a village called Tama, rising up to protest the damming of their river by a government agency. One day, Deepu, a young girl from the village, falls into the river while fishing with her family. At the river's bottom, she encounters the spirit of the river, who tells her that her million year journey, which shaped the land's topography and nourished countless beings, will come to a halt if Deepu doesn't take action against the dam soon.

When Deepu returns to consciousness, she speaks with urgency about the need to save their river and village from being submerged. At first, the villagers dismiss and ridicule her for speaking against the great promise of 'Vikas'. But then, she finds an ally.

The story is a straightforward one, with simple artwork in black and white. Due to the simplicity of the message, the story at first may seem implausible. Can a young girl really become the consciousness of an entire village, inspiring its people out of their apathy to protect their true wealth? Those who have been a part of people's movements will confirm that it does really take a few voices speaking truth to power to bring about change.

A striking line in the story is when a village elder says, 'We must support this girl in her fight.' One might ask why older and more seasoned community leaders could have not taken up the fight, given the enormity of what was at stake. But there is wisdom in entrusting leadership to young people, and power in the intergenerational solidarity that emerges when they are supported by their elders.

The writer-artist duo say that this story has been partly inspired by the Uttarakhand High Court's judgement, in 2017, that declared the Ganga and Yamuna rivers as 'legal persons' with all corresponding rights, duties and liabilities of a living person. The story is also based on real-life anti-dam and other grassroots resistance movements across India.

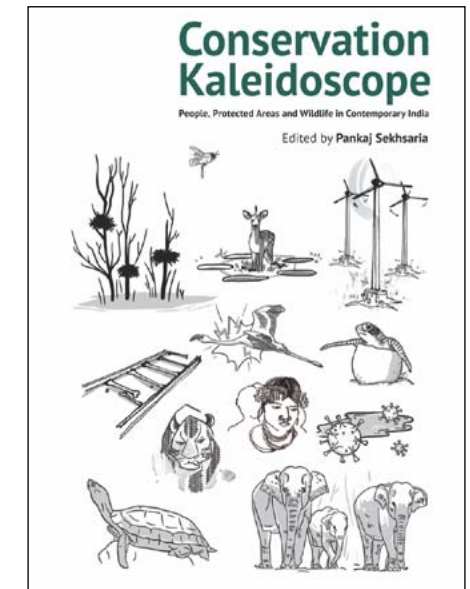
In this age of the commons steadily being privatised by a few for large profits, stories about how people's movements come to be need to be more widespread. The work of activism needs to be demystified for the public, which is why it would have been nice if the few lines on the *National Alliance of People's Movements* and *Vikalp Sangalm* at the end could have been expanded on in the comic form instead of appearing as a mere footnote.

Reviewed by **Francesca Cotta**

CONSERVATION KALEIDOSCOPE: PEOPLE, PROTECTED AREAS AND WILDLIFE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

Edited by Pankaj Sekhsaria
Published by Kalpavriksh, Duleep Matthai Nature Conservation Trust and Authors Upfront
Paperback, 432 pages
Print edition available on: Amazon India, Flipkart, AuthorsUpFront
eBook available globally on Amazon Kindle stores

Since 1999, the *Protected Area Update* has reached subscribers worldwide every other month, appearing in their inboxes or mail boxes. Its 24 pages are full of the latest news, developments and perspectives on wildlife and environmental conservation across the country. The newsletters' loyal readers will be delighted that a collection of more than 100 of this newsletter's



editorials have been compiled into the *Conservation Kaleidoscope*.

Over 14 broadly themed chapters, these editorials are accompanied by select news pieces on relevant issues, painting a linear, theme-based timeline of events. The chapter 'Law, Policy and Governance', for instance, provides an overview of the landmark events under this topic, such as the passing of the amended *Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2002* (December 2002 newsletter); the constitution of the National Board of Wildlife (October 2003); the popular Godavarman case that prompted the Supreme Court to reinterpret the definition of 'forest' in the *Forest Conservation Act* (June 2004).

Readers can, as pointed out in the Editor's Note by Pankaj Sekhsaria, discern interesting trends in wildlife conservation over the years – that otherwise might have been missed – such as the growing incursions of linear infrastructure and religious structures in Protected Areas and the neglect of frontline forest staff.

No doubt *Conservation Kaleidoscope* is a rich resource. For young people in the conservation field, this a reliable resource, a one-stop read on the history and timeline of wildlife conservation over the past two decades. And for older conservationists, it serves as a reminder of the paths that have been crossed, lessons learned and successes achieved that have led us to this moment in the conservation movement.

Reviewed by **Abinaya Kalyanasundaram**