

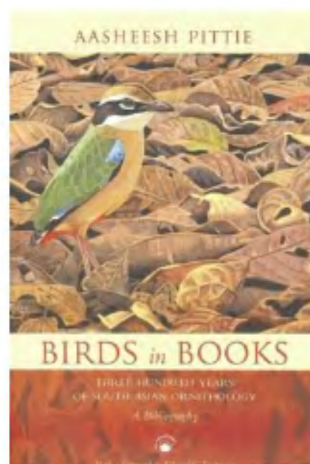
the field) for laboratory testing. Information about the role of dry density/moisture content/soil structure on permeability coefficients of soils or sample preparation technique for disturbed/representative soil samples for permeability testing by falling head test is not elucidated. Wealth of information on the importance of these parameters in influencing the permeability coefficient values and sample preparation techniques for representative soils is available in geotechnical engineering literature (for example, refs 7 and 5) that could have been made use of in this book.

*Physical and Chemical Methods in Soil Analysis* appears to be a popular book for undergraduate and postgraduate students of agricultural universities as it is currently in its second edition. According to the information provided by the authors, the second edition is strengthened by including topics in environmental soil/water chemistry. Perhaps, the third edition could consider culling information from geotechnical engineering literature to bolster the soil physics section.

1. Brady, N. C., *The Nature and Properties of Soils*, Macmillan Publishing Co., New York, 1984, 9th edn.
2. Lemenih, M., Karlton, E. and Olsson, M., *Agric. Ecosys. Environ.*, 2005, **105**, 373–386.
3. Gardner, R., *Soil Sci.*, 1937, **43**, 277–283.
4. BIS 2720, Method of test for soils: laboratory determination of permeability of granular soils (constant head), Bureau of Indian Standards, New Delhi, part 36-1987.
5. BIS 2720, Method of test for soils: laboratory determination of permeability, Bureau of Indian Standards, New Delhi, part 17-1986.
6. Casagrande, A., Notes on Soil Mechanics – First Semester, Harvard University (unpublished), 1938, p. 129 (referred in Holtz and Kovacs 1981).
7. Holtz, R. D. and Kovacs, W. D., *An Introduction to Geotechnical Engineering*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1981.

SUDHAKAR M. RAO

Department of Civil Engineering,  
Indian Institute of Science,  
Bangalore 560 012, India  
e-mail: msrao@civil.iisc.ernet.in



**Birds in Books: Three Hundred Years of South Asian Ornithology – A Bibliography.** Aasheesh Pittie. Permanent Black, 'Himalayan', Mall Road, Ranikhet Contt, Ranikhet 263 645. 2010. xxi + 845 pp. Price: Rs 795.

Birds belong to the second most diverse class of vertebrate animals. The nine thousand species of extant birds are spread across continents in a way that there is practically no place on earth without birds. The great range of sizes, shapes, colours, calls and habits of birds have undoubtedly made them the most fascinating of animals.

Human fascination for birds is age old. Traditionally, people adorned themselves with feathers, performed ritualistic bird dances, caged some as pets, domesticated others like the chicken, duck, turkey and pigeon and also carried them far and wide. The long time human–bird association has not only influenced culture but also science and technology. Interestingly, despite the great strides that ornithology has made as a specialized branch of animal sciences, it continues to accommodate amateur wisdom. Major contributions to the study of birds have come from bird watchers not trained in animal sciences. The book under review is an excellent example of how amateur ornithology can complement serious and dedicated scientific research.

*Birds in Books* by Aasheesh Pittie is indeed an 'eye-opener' to the wealth of publications in the field of South Asian ornithology. The author has meticulously compiled titles of 1715 books on birds of South Asia published during the past 300 years. For every book that he has collected or seen, he has written brief abstracts of the contents and the quality

of presentation. The timeline of books dealt with span a period between 1713 and 2009 (pp. xviii–xxi).

Eighteenth century authors listed are John Ray, George Edwards, Carl von Linné (Linnaeus), Thomas Pennant, Johann Reinhold Forster, P. Sonnerat, J. F. Gmelin, John Latham and David Hugh, some of whom I know only by their Latinized names incorporated in the binomials of birds (for example, *Gallus sonneratii*, the Grey Jungle Fowl). Names of more familiar ornithologists begin to appear in the 19th century literature; John Gould, A. O. Hume, T. C. Jerdon and E. W. Oates, for instance. South Asian ornithology got its greatest boost in the 20th century with the arrival of stalwarts like Salim Ali that it is only appropriate that this 'greatest-of-all' Indian ornithologist's contribution, by way of books alone, covers 44 pages of Pittie's compilation (pp. 36–79). The cover is well-designed. The solitary Indian Pitta portrayed on the jacket quite symbolizes a curious student!

While Pittie's compilation has certainly made finding reference books simpler for students of South Asian ornithology, it is not without omissions, some of which in my opinion are quite blatant. Given the freedom that a reviewer enjoys, I wish to first draw the readers' attention to the gaps in the regional language ornithological publications included in the book and the evident bias in favour of the more publicized titles. The book lists K. K. Neelakantan's *Keralathile Pakshikal*, a book relentlessly publicized as 'the' landmark regional language ornithological treatise. The book also includes the Kannada language *Field Guide to the Birds of Dakshina Kannada* by K. Prabhakar Achar and K. Geetha Nayak published by the Bhuvanendra Nature Club in 2000. The Kannada field guide to birds, although not as highly rated as Neelakantan's Malayalam book, did attract considerable publicity as it was released by Madhav Gadgil in the presence of ornithologists like S. A. Husain. I even remember having reviewed the book for *Resonance*.

The more recent series of regional language translations of the bird guides by Richard Grimmett and colleagues do find a place in the bibliography section of the book. Is there no other meritorious regional language book on Indian birds? Of the handful that I am aware of, V. M. Tiwari's well-illustrated book titled *Joy*

## BOOK REVIEWS

*of Bird Watching* deserves attention. This book that was first published in Hindi in 1998 has an English edition published in 2002 by the Book Trust of India. Born in 1935, V. M. Tiwari retired as an Air Vice Marshall of the Indian Air Force!

Yet another commendable ornithological publication that is omitted is *Pakshi Prapancha*. This book published in 2006 by Asima Prathishthana (Bangalore) authored by Harish R. Bhat and Pramod Subbarao is the finest regional language (Kannada) guide to birds that I have seen. Harish R. Bhat is a botanist and Pramod Subbarao, in all probability, a software professional.

Next, even amongst the English language publications the listing is rather weak as there is a 'selective' absence of some of the significant contributions; the monographs published by Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON), for instance. There is also a gross under-representation of the ornithological contributions made by the Zoological Survey of India. Further, on more detailed scrutiny, it seems as though the author has overrated some of the obscure literature that hardly merit treatment as publications. For example, Pittie has listed one title *Birds of Madurai* under my name. There is no such publication. What is intended is probably *Bird Life on the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University Campus, Madurai*. This is a manuscript that I had prepared in 1982 (while a student of agriculture) with the hope of publishing it as my first self-illustrated book on birds. However, as I did not have the means, it remained a handwritten draft along with the line drawings of all the species described in the text. It was in 1983 during my brief stint with Raghavendra Gadagkar at the Centre for Ecological Sciences that the manuscript got typed, photocopied and bound into five or ten copies. I have a copy with me and I remember having sent one to the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University library and another to Salim Ali. I have no clue as to where the others are and how such an obscure piece of work had caught Pittie's attention. Many other titles listed by the author as 'not seen' may well belong to this category of books.

The third major weakness is that the timeline of books and the introduction have failed to highlight the valuable contributions of Indian ornithologists, other than Salim Ali. Similarly, the section

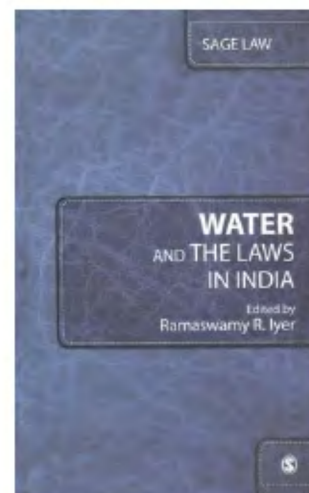
'Brief biographies of authors' (pp. 765–827), is merely an alphabetic listing of 'obituaries'. Even here, Ravi Sankaran, former Director of SACON, is not included, although authors who died later have found a place in the book. In fact, throughout the book, there is not one of this committed Indian ornithologist's contribution mentioned. Ravi Sankaran's monographs on the florican, edible-nest swiftlet, Nicobar Megapode, and others should have found a place in the bibliography, the main content of the book.

Finally, the index is totally useless as it serves no purpose the way it has been organized. There is no author index, whereas there is a 'co-author' and 'co-editor' index. If I had gone by the index, I would not have found my books listed in the bibliography. The index of 'new names' is actually misleading as the names are basically old synonyms and not recent changes and there is no index of all the scientific names found in the book. Elsewhere, gleaning the index that says 'acronyms', one cannot find any.

Despite the shortcomings, the book by Aasheesh Pittie is worth possessing and I will certainly recommend it to individuals and institutions focused on ornithological research. It is a reasonably priced book. The rather critical comments are meant to help the author and the publisher to see and rectify the flaws as they update and enlarge the text for future editions.

R. J. RANJIT DANIELS

Care Earth Trust, No. 5, 21st Street,  
Thillaiganganagar  
Chennai 600 061, India  
e-mail: [ranjit.daniels@gmail.com](mailto:ranjit.daniels@gmail.com)



**Water and the Laws in India.** Ramaswamy R. Iyer (ed.). SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd, B1/I-1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area, Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044. 2009. 676 pp. Price: Rs 995.

Many people in this country equate law with litigation in courts rather than look at it as an instrument for good governance and sustainable development. Admittedly, there is over-judicialization in many areas of governance particularly in matters of common property resources like water and forests. Instead of seeking negotiated settlements based on technical data or legislative solutions through democratic processes, inter-state water disputes have been adjudicated *ad infinitum* accentuating the problem and turning the exercise into a 'nightmare' for all concerned! In this context, the volume under review analysing legal dimensions of water resources and its intelligent management is a welcome addition to the scarce literature now existing on the subject.

No law school in the country teaches water law as an independent subject in the curriculum partly because of lack of reading material and teaching expertise. An attempt was made to introduce the subject as an optional seminar course in the National University of Juridical Sciences (NUJS), Kolkata in 2001 which has resulted in the publication of a special issue of the NUJS journal on water law. Law relating to water is normally looked at in the course on environmental law, though in a very limited way. It is therefore ironical that water disputes have occupied disproportionately large space in litigation in the country and have pro-