

## Interesting Minutes of the Indian Board for Wildlife in the 1950's

Editorial note :

With all the passion and politics of Asiatic lions today in New Delhi, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, it is interesting to revert to history and ponder the attitudes and opinions of then wildlife experts and governors of Gujarat and India in meetings of the IBWL. We were given a veritable library of these documents by various friends but primarily Dr. Reuben David — Reuben Bhai — Superintendent of the Kamla Nehru Zoo for many decades. These old documents have proven useful and/or at worst interesting in the past. Today's readers and followers of the Asiatic Lion dilemma may find it enlightening to read what people involved in wildlife thought and wanted half a century ago.

*Editor Emeritus*

MINISTRY OF FOOD & AGRICULTURE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

Proceedings of the IV<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Indian Board for Wild Life held at Sasan Gir (Saurashtra) from 18-20 January 1956.

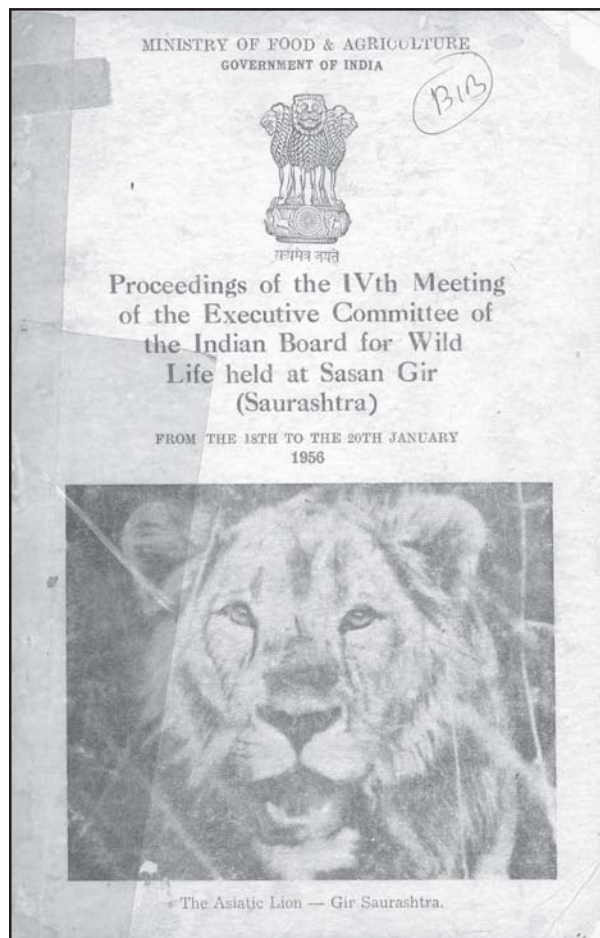
I. P. Mathur, Secretary, Indian Board for Wild Life.

Exerpts concerning the Asiatic lion from the PROCEEDINGS OF THE IVTH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE INDIAN BOARD FOR WILD LIFE HELD AT SASAN GIR (SAURASHTRA) 18 - 20 JANUARY, 1956.

At the invitation of His Highness the Rajpramukh and the Government of Saurashtra, the IV<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Executive Committee of the Indian Board for Wild Life was held, from the 18th to 20th January 1956 in the Gir Forest (Sasan Gir-Saurashtra) the only abode at present of the Asiatic lion.

At the inaugural meeting, there was a distinguished gathering consisting of His Highness the Rajpramukh of Saurashtra, Shri Dayashanker Dave, Minister for Forests, Saurashtra, Secretaries, Agriculture and Revenue Departments, Government of Saurashtra, Conservator of Forests and other officers of the Government of Saurashtra.

*Exerpt from Page Number - 4 Chapter 1. Proceedings of the inaugural meeting, Page Numbers 1 to 10*  
Shri Dayashanker Dave, Forest Minister, Saurashtra, then welcomed the gathering in the following terms: "Chairman and friends: On behalf of our Forest Department, on behalf of myself and on behalf of the Saurashtra Government, I heartily welcome the members of the Indian Board for Wild Life to Sasan and feel thankful to you all for accepting our invitation. I remember that it was at Ooty that His Highness the Jam Saheb, who is Now here, invited the Committee to hold its meeting in Saurashtra. I am not sure whether you are quite comfortable here. We knew that we could not accommodate you all very comfortably at Sasan and therefore, we first



planned to hold this meeting at Junagadh. But His Highness the Jam Saheb pressed us that the meeting should be held at Sasan even if it might mean some inconvenience. So we changed our plans and decided to hold the meeting here. I hope you will Not mind any inconvenience because the invitation is from the heart. I am glad that the meeting is being held in the heart of the Gir Forest, which has become the last refuge of the Indian Lion. Out of the 1000 sq. miles of forests in Saurashtra, we now have 500 sq. miles in the Gir Forest. I would like to know from you the areas and the ways in which the lion can be preserved. Originally the area of the Gir Forest was 1200 sq. miles, but after 1912 it became reduced to 500 sq. miles and the rest of the land was brought under the plough by the administration of that time.

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His Highness the Rajpramukh then delivered his inaugural address:- "Gentlemen: First and foremost let me welcome you to Saurashtra. I give you heartiest welcome on behalf of the 43 lakhs of people of Saurashtra. Now, gentlemen, I have been asked by some members of this knowledgeable board to give my views on some of our animals.

First and foremost, I would like to tell you that the flora and fauna have just as much right to live in India as we have, since they are Indians as well. In fact, they have been Indians for a longer period. We have become Indians by staying here for thousands of years but they are the original inhabitants of India. So they have every right to live.

Let us now take the case of the Lion: It has died out from every part of India except this corner of Saurashtra. I would like you to remember that this is the only spot in the world, outside Africa, where we find lions. Why has this happened? You would rightly say the reason is obvious, because the male lion (being the head of the family) comes out boldly and gets easily shot. Again, lions move in a pack. Incidentally, you should send a whole group if you want to transfer lions from this part to another. Secondly, a combination of high forest and scrub jungle would be an ideal place for the lions to thrive. It is also essential that its prey (sambhur, nilgai etc.) should be found in plenty in the new areas. The States that want to introduce lions into their areas should take note of the conditions for their survival; otherwise (if they take just two), they would not succeed."

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Referring to reasons leading to the reduction in numbers of lions in the area, His Highness pointed out that there was a time when every Viceroy, Governor & Commander-in-Chief wanted to shoot lion. Subsequently, a further reason was the inevitable foot and mouth disease, which killed some of the feed of the lion. Another cause recently was the depletion of forest staff in the area following the political changes in 1947, and the formation of Saurashtra by the integration of 202 small princely States into one single State. In this situation the lion was forgotten. His Highness went on to observe: -"Now it is up to you to find solutions and suggest ways of protecting our lion, which could readily be put into operation. I may suggest that we should add to the available feed of the lion by introducing afresh game like nilgai, sambhur and chital.

There is also the unfortunate belief that lion fat is very useful for treating gout, etc. Further, everybody wanted to kill a male lion. So the number was greatly reduced. Fortunately for the lions and for us, the Viceroy, Lord Curzon, came to Junagadh. He could not see a single lion and believed that there were only 13 animals left and thought that unless they were preserved, the lion would get extinct. He was not only a preserver of lions but of monuments and he issued orders to his A.G.G. not to allow any shooting of lions in excess of 4 in any year.

Next thing I would like to refer to be the item on cattle lifting in your agenda. It is mentioned that cattle lifting by the lions has increased out of all proportion and that it has become a menace to the

cattle-owners. This is the cry of the owners of the cattle.

I would like to make it clear that the lion does not take more than 75 kills in a year. The lion kills an animal and eats it for several days, as he does not know when he will get the next kill. So all this you should take into account."

His Highness concluded his address after emphasizing the urgent need for the Center to put into practice effectively the policy of National Parks, especially as "Our Wild Life preserves the forests and the forests preserve our soil."

The Regional Secretaries then made general observations. Shri Chaturvedi, representing the Northern Region, observed that the Committee came to Sasan to make a study of the lion and that the account given by His Highness would stand them in good stead. In framing any policy of duplicating lions in other parts of the country, his advice would be of much benefit. There was really great danger in having such an important animal confined to one place, in that (for instance) some disease might wipe out the entire species suddenly. To find out a suitable alternative place was not easy, however. At the close of the 18th century, India had about 2,50,000 sq. miles of land under forests and (as rightly stated by the Chairman) the lion was an original inhabitant of India. (The tiger came from outside). The lion was a very brave and bold animal and had majestic habits. As a matter of fact it was for this reason that the lion came to be mentioned in India's religious books. It was a great misfortune that in the 18th century gunpowder came to this country. The lion, an inhabitant of the open country, soon became extinct from most areas of the country. He added that as lions were known in many other parts of India in the past and animals generally had ways of adapting themselves to climate and circumstances, it should be possible to transfer some of the Gir Lions successfully to other centers and that the Committee was grateful to the Chairman for detailing the correct position in this respect.

Shri Dharmakumarsinhji, Secretary of the Western Region, dealing with the question of alternative homes for the Gir Lion, considered that the food question was of great importance. He congratulated H.H. the Jam Saheb for the excellent manner in which the lion had been protected in Saurashtra where the lion today was in a sound position. Its transfer to other areas should not be undertaken until its future in such areas could be assured.

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The Chairman observed that lions in zoos in England or Ireland did not live for more than 12 to 15 years, whereas the average age of a lion in Saurashtra was 28 years. Regarding the census of lions, it should be taken in a year of poor rainfall.

Secondly, there should be enough money to employ sufficient number of recorders for undertaking synchronized work all over the area at a time.

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Shri Ghorpade, representing the Southern Region, then spoke:- "I come from a part of the land where we have got practically every Indian animal except the Rhino and the lion. The Rhino, I saw last year and this year I hope to see the lion. I think the Indian lion is really a national heritage because it has been here even before the Aryans. This Gir Forest should be made into a National Park as early as possible.

In the Vijayanagar Sculptures near Kolhapur, we find lions depicted and the area is just like the Gir Forest. In my opinion this was a lion area formerly. It is for the consideration of the Board if we could not transfer some of the lions there. But before lions are introduced, we should see whether there are proper types of forests and whether feed is available. The Center will have to take more responsibility especially at the present time when India is in the process of reorganization'.

H.H. the Jam Saheb: "I am all for transferring my lions, but before we actually transfer them, we should examine the area where lions are to be released so that the transfer may be successful. If you do something wrong, it would only give them a name that they will not survive. My Government is protecting them very well. They have been the strongest for the preservation of wild life though they are as democratic as other Govt. in India".

Shri Ranganathan (the I.G.F. and Vice-Chairman, IBWL) followed with general remarks in the following terms: "It is already fairly late and I do not want to take more of your valuable time than I can help. I should like to say how conscious we are of the honour and responsibility of meeting in a place, which is the last refuge of the *Simba* (lion); and meeting in a State, which is the custodian of this important animal, which figures so prominently in our national emblem. Saurashtra is a State on which great responsibility has been placed. It may be true that this State will merge into a larger unit but I have no doubt that the local authorities will not allow anything to happen which will land the lion in the slightest degree of danger. We have listened with a great deal of interest to the remarks made by His Highness about the habits and the courage of Indian lions. We have learnt many things of which we were not aware. We have not come with much prior knowledge but with keenness to learn. I would request His Highness kindly to contribute a memoir at his earliest convenience on the lions in Sasan Gir, of which he had such unique information.

A great many things have been said as to the original habitat of the Indian lion. It strikes me that one explanation which to my mind stands out, as any speaker has not offered something noteworthy.

Can you not attribute the driving back of the lion to this corner of Saurashtra to which you may call the multiplication of tiger? I therefore suggest that one of the factors for the displacement of the lion is the spreading of the tiger. It seems to me that is a question worth investigation. Of course, the folly of the lion in stepping out into the open and getting itself shot is also responsible to a great extent. I believe there are other reasons also. In any case, from the point of view of National Policy, it seem to me highly desirable that we should not risk the lion by making it continue in one small corner of India only. We should put it in two or three places, to minimize the risk".

His Highness informed the meeting that it was not correct to think that the lion was weaker than the tiger and that the tiger was responsible for driving out the Indian lion from its larger habitat. He said in Baluchistan there were no tigers. In Baroda hills there were no tigers but the lion had moved from those places. He cited 4 examples within his personal knowledge, in which there were flights between lions and tigers and the lion won in all cases.

*2. Proceedings of the Plenary meeting ... 11 - 13 Page Number - 11*

On the early mornings and the late evenings of the 18th and 19th Jan, members were afforded opportunities to see the lions in the Gir Forest and had the good fortune of watching the 'King of the Forest' for a considerable time. On the afternoon of the 20th January, the members were entertained to Tea at the Hiran dam by the Chief Engineer, Saurashtra. After tea, the plenary session was held at the dam site with H.H. the Rajpramukh in the Chair. Shri Mathur, Secretary of the Board, read the summary of the deliberations of the Committee.

In his concluding address H.H. the Jam Saheb heartily congratulated the members on completing such heavy agenda within the limited time at their disposal. In a sincere appeal on behalf of the Gir lion, he then observed: - "It was a pleasure for me, my Ministers and my officers from top to bottom to try and show you our forests, the nature of our animals and the nature of the problems that we are faced with. As you have noticed, my lion lives in rather strange surroundings, in some parts very high grass with thorny babul trees, in others open country. But above all, I want you to look at the problems of his survival from the lion's point of view only. First and foremost, he is the noblest animal through out the length and breadth of India. I proudly say so and it is the animal of which every Indian should be proud. He has shown his Nobility by his behaviour, he did not loose his temper even when you were a little noisy today. Now, gentlemen, please remember that feeding him can only save the lion and I want you, gentlemen, who represent mighty India to be kind to the lion. I have proved that the number of cattle lifted is not vast

nor would the expenditure on compensation be in crores. Please keep this in mind.

The next thing I want you to keep in mind is my appeal to you to arrange for the species that he eat to become freely available to him. The more of such species you put in this area the less compensation you will have to give for cattle lifting”.

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Shri Ranganathan (the I.G.F. & V.C, I.B.W.L.) brought the proceedings to a close with the following observations: “Your Highness and friends, the time has come to wind up the proceedings of this session of the Executive Committee of the I.B.W.L. and to render thanks to those we have contributed to its success. I thank the Hon’ble Minister for Forests for his unfailing interest in the proceedings of this meeting and for the facilities, which he has placed, at our disposal for holding our meeting here and making our stay here so pleasant. When he asked us to meet here, he showed (if I may say so) considerable wisdom and as a result this meeting in the heart of the lion jungle. Finally, Sir, may I turn my attention to your Highness. I feel bound to refer to your exalted part in the meeting, which has concluded. It is easy enough to make statements of gratitude, which are formal, but this is not our feeling towards you. We are very grateful indeed to Your Highness for the unfailing guidance you have given us. The talk you gave us on the first day was so interesting and so full of information that we thought of requesting you to write a memoir for us on the ‘Indian Lion’. We are grateful to you for the interest, which you showed not only in the proceedings but also in making sure that everyone of us saw this noble beast of which you are so rightly proud. You are very naturally proud of your lions and in fact you are proud of everything in Saurashtra, including the forests and the hospitality of the people. As regards the hospitality, there can be no question, as each one of us will testify. As regards the lion, it is indeed a noble beast and he lives in a very befitting state. As regards the forests, I do not think the same claim could be made. Forests have still a long way to go.

APPENDIX III

IVTH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE INDIAN BOARD FOR WILD LIFE HELD AT SASAN GIR (SAURASHTRA) FROM THE 18TH TO 20TH JANUARY, 1956 – AGENDA ITEMS – EXPLANATORY NOTES

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*ITEM NO. 9. – Alternative home for lions in the Chakia Forest of U.P.*

The Government of U.P. is very anxious to provide a second home for the Gir Lion in the State Forest.

The Chief Minister of U.P. himself is interested in this project. The State Government has selected the Chakia Forest lying in the South-East of Banaras for

the purpose. This is a well-preserved compact forest reserve. The proximity of this tract to Banaras and the Sarnath is likely to provide an added attraction from the viewpoint of foreign tourists.

In view of the fact that lions once inhabited, the whole of North and Central India we may agree to the State Government’s proposal and request the Saurashtra Government to supply to the Government of U.P. the requisite number of lions and lionesses for releasing in the U.P. Forests.

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*ITEM NO. 17. – Shooting of Lions in the Gir Forest.*  
The shooting of lions in the Gir Forest should be regularized in respect of (i) the exact quota which may be shot each year (ii) the number of lions of each sex which may be shot, (iii) the individual lions which may be shot, viz., only the old, diseased or inferior animals should be shot, and the younger and more vigorous stock should be preserved, especially the more vigorous manned male lions should be preserved in order to improve the stock. It is reported that V.I.P.s. come to shoot lions, and the *shikaries* get busy searching out the finest manned lions. These best specimens are regularly shot, with resultant deterioration of the stock. Obviously if the stock is to be maintained, the best lions should be preserved and only the older and weaker animals should be shot.

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*ITEM NO. 22. – Census of lions.*

The lion census, organized by Shri. M.A. Wynter-Blyth in the Gir Forest on the 28th and the 29th April 1950, was sponsored by the Government of Saurashtra. I was associated in this work, with the assistance of the Yuvraj Shri Pratapsinhji of Wankaner. Both of us were in charge of the Sasan-Visavadar Sector, whereas Jamwala-Jasadhar Sector was in the hands of Shri Wynter-Byth and Major Dubois. The Baroda Gir was managed by Shri Shah, the Sub-Divisional Forest Officer, Amreli.

The census method was based on the following three factors:

1. Lions must drink at least once in 24 hours.
2. Lions travel, by preference, on paths and roads.
3. The pug-measurements of two lions are seldom identical.

The first factor was not applied, as water conditions in the forest area were good and the animals were able to drink, in the streams, at any place, without being seen and without leaving signs of their having done so.

The organizer, Shri Wynter-Blyth, had studied the foot-prints of individual lions and had come to the conclusion that the pug-marks, while constant of an individual lion, were remarkably variable between different lions, i.e. to say the least, the pugmarks of an individual lion, if accurately measured, were

sufficiently characteristic so as to be identified from the pug-marks of any other lion. It was on this basis that the lion census was done (See Volume 49, 3rd issue of the Bombay Natural History Society's Journal.)

All the lions, which were counted, must, therefore, have had their respective individual measurements of the front-foot pugmarks taken by the enumerators. In the official report, it has not been clearly shown as to what was the difference in the sizes of the pugmarks of the two sexes. The pug-measurements of young lions, which were between the ages of two and four years, and their respective ratios, have also not been clearly given.

The census results were, as tabulated below:

Division.	Grown lions	Young lions	Total
Jamwala	39	6	45
Visavadar	19	5	24
Sasan			
(a) Alawani Circle.	12	4	16
(b) Sasan Circle	14	4	18
(c) A.D.T. Circle	24	10	34
Total for Sasan -	50	18	68

Area	Males	Females	Young lions	Total
Baroda	19	5	3	27
Jasdhar	23	14	8	45
Mytiala	1	-	-	1

	Grown	Young	Total
Total counted	170	40	210
Girnar.	3(lions)	-	3
Hill of Sana	6-14 (lions)	-	6-14
<b>Final Total</b>	<b>-219 to 277 lions</b>		

The number of eliminations of pug-measurements of doubtful evidence, the cross checking as well as any evidence considered as suspected have Not been specified in detail in the report, which is of much scientific importance. In fact, an entire appendix to the report, showing in detail, the measurements taken of the pugmarks of all the lions counted, inclusive of the sexes, would have been of much interest. The recent census of lions, held in and around Gir Forest, between the 11th and the 14th April 1955, organized by Shri Wynter-Blyth with the help of others, is of much interested. The report of this census, brought out by the agriculture, co-operation and Health Department, Government of Saurashtra, gives the following information:

Area	Lions	Lioness	Young (Say under 18 months)	Total (1955) (1950 census)	Fig. (1950 census)
Sasan Range	52	43	19	114	68
Visavadar Range	11	9	4	24	24
Jamwala Range	42	24	14	80	45
Jasadhar Range	34	22	9	65	45
Mytiala	-	1	1	2	1
Girnar	2	1	2	5	3
Other areas	-	-	-	-	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>186</b>

In the 1955 census also, the pug-measurements of all the lions counted are not given. These details are of much scientific importance, especially when compared with the earlier censuses. Without such information, the report would appear to be incomplete.

A clear indication of how one lion's pugmark differs from that of another lion should be explained in detail. In the age groups from two to four years, when the pug-measurements of both the sexes are inclined to be alike at various stages, how is it possible, then, to distinguish the sexes should be explained. Then again, the density of the dust on the roads and the paths must be considerably varying at various places, causing the pug-marks of a lion to vary, in size, considerably, thus giving rise to more confusion in the sorting out of the pug-measurements.

The data of the pugmarks of young lion cubs, when not accompanied by grown lions, was eliminated, on the suspicion of that being of panthers, during the 1950 census. However, amongst certain experts, there is a view that it is possible to differentiate the pugmarks of lion cubs from those of panther cubs. However, this is a point, which has to be proved by experts. What are required are the actual measurements of individual lions of both the sexes and of various age groups, as measured by the organizer of the lion censuses.

If the additional information, of the type mentioned, is not given, the entire lion census scheme would be under suspicion, as the basis of the lion census depends upon individual identification of the lion's pug-marks.

In view of the above, the Government of Saurashtra may be approached to ask the organizer of the censuses to supply the very useful information, which would greatly assist in the work of future censuses.

*ITEM NO. 23. - Cattle lifting by lions.* The reports that a good number of lions have taken to cattle lifting need a detailed scrutiny. It should therefore be investigated if a cattle lifting is really serious or

merely occasional. If serious, the cause is evidently lack of game and can be remedied by capturing blue bulls which are considered to be vermin's and letting them loose in numbers. If this is done, cattle lifting will be reduced to a very great extent.

*ITEM NO. 24. - Breeding lions in the Banaskantha Region.* Tigers are not serious enemies of lions. In the area inhabited by tigers, lions have a chance of survival because they generally move about in groups whereas the tiger is an individualist. This experiment can be carried out in the beginning in areas like Hathidhara and Vijayanagar (Vireshwar) surroundings in the Banaskantha Region where there are very few tigers.

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*ITEM No. 48. – Indian Lions for Zoos.* Quite a number of lions are required for the zoos in the country. It is for consideration whether it would not be preferable to breed the species in two or three zoos selected for the purpose and to supply the offspring to Zoological Gardens in India as and when required.

*ITEM No. 49. – Sanctuary for lions in the South.* It is for consideration whether a home for lions could not be made in suitable area set apart for the purpose around the newly constructed Tungabhadra Anicut (Bellary District). Some species of antelope could also be introduced here to provide prey for the lions.

### Call of Indian Birds Vol. 1-4 --- Review by Suresh Kumar\*



The reason birds have attracted so much interest in them other than for their beautiful coloration is because of their vocalizations. Indeed, even common people relate to bird calls for various reasons, and the primary reason being indicator of the season. The calls of geese and ducks and their appearance in an area relate to the onset or start of winter, while the call of cuckoos to the onset of spring, and that of Koel to the approaching rains, and many more. **Call of Indian Birds** brought out by Nature Club Surat appears to be targeted towards a local audience with each bird name also mentioned in Gujarati along with English. This is a good effort to introduce people with interest in birds or nature lovers as a whole to the different calls and songs of birds. The collection contains a total of 224 bird calls covering a wide range of species put together in a CD format and in four volumes (four bird calls missing; two each in volume 1 and 2). The calls of the birds are all however jumbled up, and I do not understand why the producers have adopted this. For example: Common Hawk Cuckoo is in Vol. 1 while Large Hawk Cuckoo is in Vol. 3. For a person to understand how the two species differ in their calls he or she has to change the CDs and this is not of any help. This is the case with most other groups in the collection. Few of the bird calls require further sound editing in order to remove noise. The Bombay Natural History Society had earlier brought out a collection of bird calls, and in recent years several bird enthusiasts have made such efforts. Also, bird images along with their calls have been used in recent years to make it more attractive and informative. Also, there is no introduction to the CDs or any other information on birds such as why birds call, different types of call and some other facts. The present form of Call of Indian Birds needs to be improved in order to make it a valuable collection and thereby have a better reach.

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