Will it next be a ‘Madras Season’?

(By Sriram V., Associate Editor, Madras Musings)

And so, the 375th birthday of Madras that is Chennai has come and gone. What remains is a wonderful memory, a happy recollection of a great week gone by, when several sections of society celebrated the birthday with unprecedented enthusiasm. Truly, Chennai has notched up another first – the only city in the country to celebrate its birthday each year and commemorate its 375th in a most befitting manner. The team of coordinators is no longer small. This year, we saw the coming of age of the Madras Week celebrations – there were scores of volunteers from every part of the city. Yes, even North Chennai that usually remains aloof organised an event or two. More importantly, each and every event was well attended, thereby encouraging the organisers and presenters even more. The number of heritage walks in the city and events of a similar nature was a mind-boggling 38, all of them with full participation.

There were three factors that made a key difference to this year’s celebration. The first was the participation of the youth. For the first time, Madras Week was not something that attracted only the middle-aged and above. It had gennext in full force, organising, conducting and participating in events exclusively meant for them. It was a spontaneous expression of love for the city. The young also took Madras Week into the world of social media – there were Facebook posts, tweets, blogs and Instagram/flickr updates that kept the internet world buzzing. Madras Week clearly is becoming younger each year and that is a very healthy sign. The presence of the young also ensured that IT companies sat up and took notice.

The second was the way the electronic media took an interest in the celebrations. This has never happened in past years. True, the English media did report on it in the past, but the Tamil TV channels had largely dismissed the event as elitist and being celebrated by a minority of people. This year that was not the case. It was in fact the Tamil channels that took the lead. On August 22nd, most of them had flashing messages on the ticker tape indicating that it was Madras Day. They also had special programmes. The radio channels too took the lead. On August 22nd, almost all of them had flashing messages indicating that it was Madras Day.

(Continued on page 5)

Madras Week – a people’s celebration

(By The Editor)

Over 150 events spread across several locations and organisations of the city have just come to an end. All of these were to commemorate the 375th birthday of our city. The events witnessed full houses and were held with the enthusiastic support of the hospitality industry and the media. If this was not a sure shot success, then what was it? Certainly it was NOT what a Tourism Department official apparently dismissed as a celebration of the ‘colonial’ in a display of a mindset out of tune with the times.

Consider the facts – much of what went into celebrating Madras Week this year concerned the here and now. There were discussions on business leadership, security of the peninsula, civic conservancy and the economy. There were views expressed on the city’s role in its journey to becoming a world-class metropolis. There were presentations on the lives of several noble residents of the city who went on to make powerful contributions to the world. The current generation, to which the British Raj is something that is only in text books, came out in full strength to participate. Are these expressions of a ‘colonial hangover’? What we did was celebrate our city, warts and all.

The same official apparently also said that his department is only mandated to celebrate the ancient Dravidian age, the Sangam era, and the glories of the Pallava, Chola, Pandya and Chera kingdoms. If that is so, why was this opportunity not taken to highlight the relics of that glorious past, of which there are several in the city itself? Why were special trips not organised to the Pallava cave at Pallavaram, perhaps the first instance of a temple being hewn out of a rock in India? Could not events focussing on the grand temples that dot the city’s coastline have been planned? Could the Museum not have been asked to showcase its Bronze Gallery and its magnificent collections of inscriptions? By merely dismissing Madras Week as a Brown Sahib event, the Department of Tourism clearly has missed as a celebration of the Tamil spirit.

(Continued on page 2)

Madras Landmarks – 50 years ago

A nd so, the 375th birthday of Madras that is Chennai has come and gone. What remains is a wonderful memory, a happy recollection of a great week gone by, when several sections of society celebrated the birthday with unprecedented enthusiasm. Truly, Chennai has notched up another first – the only city in the country to celebrate its birthday each year and commemorate its 375th in a most befitting manner. The team of coordinators is no longer small. This year, we saw the coming of age of the Madras Week celebrations – there were scores of volunteers from every part of the city. Yes, even North Chennai that usually remains aloof organised an event or two. More importantly, each and every event was well attended, thereby encouraging the organisers and presenters even more. The number of heritage walks in the city and events of a similar nature was a mind-boggling 38, all of them with full participation.

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(Continued on page 5)
Karnataka plans to protect heritage sites

The Deccan Herald, Bangalore, recently reported the following:

The Archaeology, Museums and Heritage Department, Karnataka, has proposed to bring heritage sites in the State under the Karnataka Town and Country Planning Act (KTCPA) for their protection and conservation.

The proposals, if accepted, will be in line with the Karnataka Ancient and Historical Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1961.

A people’s celebration

(Continued from page 1)

ism has passed up a great op-portunity. It could have participated, attracted tourists and ensured that everyone recognized that Chennai could be a destination by itself and not a mere gateway to other locations in South India. In fact, all those wishing celebrations of the Dravidian and anything else, why don’t we have monoe- milestones on our contribu-tions on a voluntary basis?

Approaching the matter from another angle, can we divert the city itself as a colo-nial creation? The seat of the Government is still in what was the first British possession in the whole of India. Several institutions such as the Corporation, the Legislature, the University, the General Hospital and the transport services, to name a few, are all colonial creations. Should we not be abandoning them all and reverting to ancient prac-tices if the pre-British period is all that deserves to be commemorated? Why not shift the capital itself to some ancient town and when setting it up en-sure that no vestige of overseas elements is reflected in it? To face it, Madras has been the capital for 67 years after independence as well. There is enough and more to celebrate from that period also.

Madras Week, as we said, is a celebration of our city. It is the time when we, as a society, educate our children and plan our future. It deserves to be rejoiced in and its achievements need to be highlighted to the world. At an age when the smallest of matters are tweeted and broadcast across the globe, why cannot Chennai with its vast record of achievements not stand up and speak of its glories? Why should even an official stamp, as some celebrations in the past, have had, that the people have spoken loud and clear for the celebrations is all that matters. After all, another great Chennai success, the December Music Season, has survived and grown over 87 years without official support. May Madras Week follow suit.

Still, the people were there in full strength. The sleeveless wonder is, of course, a regular now. He is no longer a rarity for no particular reason and, of course, surreptitiously records every one of the done and so he could not eat them.

Yet another event was at a bookshop-cum-boutique-cum-restaurant. One of the honour-ed guests was the chief from the display and walk away. He was fortunately appointed after the event and the book retrieved from him. Crime is raising its ugly head during Madras Week, Chief, and if that is not a sure sign of success, then MMM does not know what is.

Tales we hear!

Madras Week also saw occasional sidekicks of the Chief making it big on the small screen. The actor, the writer/entrepreneur (as he calls him-self), and the photographer were all there, rather in the manner of the butcher, the baker, the candle and the muse. One of these programs also had a former Member of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly holding forth on the history of the city. The man, who rejoices in the name of the powerful God who wielded the plough, had apparently represented Park Town at one time and so, considers himself quite an authority. He made his speech in song. The Mun-Nal Poet was whether, after making a beautiful lute, it could be cast into the mud to destroy it. MMM could not help wondering if the song ought not to be adopted by the Corporation as its anthem, for it appeared to be doing to the city exactly what the poet had written about the stringed instrument.

And that brings MMM to another event. A heritage walk in the vicinity of the Sacred Tank of Lilies was about to begin. One of the Chief’s chief bounces out saying he was about to lead the tour when a clear voice of the participant asked if the roads to be traversed were ‘mucky’. MMM wondered if any thoroughfare in the city was anything else but that.

A week after Madras Week

It is done, Chief! Exactly as you had predicted it would be a celebration worthy of 375 years. Old Mother Madras has never had it so good before. Cakes, books, talks, walks, film screenings, exhibitions, quizzes, rides, sails, TV features, news reports, tweets, fb posts, blogs, photo sessions... you name it, we had it. Even if it does not have it in part and stand on end like events, though for what earthly purpose MMM does not know. May he plans a parallel event in the underbelly. Then there is he of bouncer-build who feeds on everything that is on offer including, in MMM’s view, the paper plates and the polystyrene cups. At one event, MMM, not having much else to do, was amidst creaking hun-dred savouries, fifteen cups of sweets, twelve plates of fritters and six cups of coffee. He kept soundly during the panel discussion that followed (after six cups of coffee) and so at the next panel discussion on food when, during question time, up bounced bouncer and spoke of how he had seen cockroaches and stones in his food in restaurants and had to complain about them. MMM was not sure why because they were not well to the periphery and there they eked out a precarious living in areas such as Royapuram, Wall Tax Road and Park Town. All this was said with a breezy insouciance that only a politician can bring to a subject that he knows nothing about. If MMM had been on the spot he could have asked them how it was then that most of the streets of George Town were named after free city-mus梓.

MMM also wanted to know as to the veracity of the newspaper archives the ex-MLA had made on in 1911 that Black Town had been renamed George Town that year. But he had no chance, for, by then, the former MLA had moved on to wax eloquent on the Cooum which, he said, is one of the longest rivers in the country, becoming Buckingham Canal.
Memories kindled

When I saw and read about the Madras landmarks in MM, August 16th, I remembered the days I worked in the Madras Public Service Commission in the early 1950s. The office functioned in the Bosotto Hotel buildings just after shifting from the Victory House.

My colleagues used to tell about the office at Victory House. The tram to Parry’s from Mysoreprabha to run on Mount Road, stopping at Swadesamitram (Victory House), Round Tana, Elphinstone theatre, etc. My colleagues used to tell about the office at Victory House. The tram to Parry’s from Mysoreprabha to run on Mount Road, stopping at Swadesamitram (Victory House), Round Tana, Elphinstone theatre, etc. my colleagues used to tell about the office at Victory House. The tram to Parry’s from Mysoreprabha to run on Mount Road, stopping at Swadesamitram (Victory House), Round Tana, Elphinstone theatre, etc.

In the same vein, since toilets are in the news now, highlight by PM and down, shouldn’t organisations of big events such as political parties meet, as well as assemblies at large religious functions, where lakhs gather, be mandatorily made to provide an adequate number of toilets, even temporary chemical ones? You can’t only blame the citizenry for lack of civic sense, if adequate and quickly accessible facilities are not available.

Thousands of Dalit houses across the State have no provision for toilets.

Economists have quantified that India loses billions of dollars each year due to the lack of sanitary facilities, resulting in illnesses, water-borne diseases, loss of workdays etc., not counting our global image.

In 1956 when I moved into this ancestral house of mine (built in 1931), both sides of the street used to be lined with excrement. Over the years, the heads of the Corporation and our local councillors have ensured that the street is clean and litter-free. But I wish the old ‘Kuppa thotties’ come back so that many people dump their rubbish into them and not on the street.

Dr. Prem Chandran John
prem.john@vsnl.net

Brew & litter

I simply loved Srimam V’s boxed item, ‘What’s brewing for Madras Week?’ (MM, July 16th). Easily. Nothing of note is brewing here. In neighbouring Bangalore, a father and his sons have brewed a single malt whisky called Amruth which has been rated above the best Scotch brands of Scotland! In Chennai, you can away only with some sub-standard tipples from Tasmac outlets.

Sriman further says, “We still don’t find any excitement in North Chennai.” But I do. Every time I step on C.S. Mudali Street, I am pleased and excited at the relative cleanliness.

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Right tree, right name

In my article on the Gangadheeshwar temple (MM, June 1st), I had mentioned that the ‘Purasai’ tree is the sacred tree of this temple.

Dr. Raman has responded that he is aware about this and mentions that it could be the ‘Vasantakala Mallikai’. The booklet about this temple sold at the office in the temple premises clearly states that the ‘Purasai’ is the sacred tree. I verified this with the priest of the temple too.

Regarding the name of the temple, Dr. Raman and reader P.S. Ramamurti (MM, July 16th) have mentioned that it should be Gangadhreswar and not Gangadheeshwar. While Gangadhreswara is the correct Sanskrit name, it is called by the locals, and known to most in Chennai, as the Gangadeeswar temple, which is the name I chose to use in the article as it is the more familiar one.

Dr. Chithra Madhavan  
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For matters regarding subscriptions, donations, non-receipt of receipts etc.: CHENNAI HERITAGE, 5, Bhattad Tower, 30, Westcott Road, Royapettah, Chennai 14.

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– THE EDITOR

Chennai Heritage

No. 5, Bhattad Tower, 30, Westcott Road, Royapettah, Chennai 600 014

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The Editor

late – for an online edition.

They say that the best way to

MADRAS MUSINGS ON THE WEB

channels too participated with

Tales of Old and

discovered

Madras Re-

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home. AVR’s son V.P. Raman,Mohan Raman’s father, was a

As this story goes to press,

MGR his first house in the city.

Modern India, he was on his way

Muthiah retains his fondness

Valli who had chided him for not doing something with all the ma-

and over again by his late wife

P.V. Krishnamoorthy, a retired Director from All India Radio and

The stories that

Lloyd’s Road tells

Lloyd’s Road, named after E.C. Lloyd, Commissioner of the Madras Corporation from 1891 to 1905 and then a Secretary to the Government of Ma-

It is certainly not a season to drool at just colonial buildings and

It is also certainly a Day to laugh at our foibles and weaknesses,

Gidhul Ramachandran is a doctorate student at IIT Madras. We can introduce people to the variety of special interest communities and hobby groups in one place and make it a physical thing.

A Tamil Nadu Tourism officer was quoted as saying that people

Nowadays, a Tamil Nadu Tourism officer was quoted as saying that people

Chettiar agents would meet everyday in the Dhandayuthapani Temple and agree on interest rates.
What if Lally had won in 1761?

That's a famous thought in spirited by S. Mathivah, who had once wondered as to what if the temperamental Frenchman of Irish origin, Comte de Lally, had succeeded in defeating the English in 1761 with his number of men in the siege of Pondicherry. If only he had succeeded on that fateful day, this article would have been telling you, in French, that France was France's greatest general!

Who then was this fascinating character who has his name inscribed on the Arc de Triomphe in Paris and has his name remembered in a street in Pondicherry?

Thomas-Arthur de Lally, Baron de Tollendal, a general in the French army, was sent to India during the Seven Years War that broke out in 1756 between England and France. He belonged to a distinguished family, the O'Mullallys, one of the old noble families of Ireland. His father, Gerard Lally, fled to France following the Treaty of Limerick, together with his de-throned Catholic king, James II. In time he became the colonel of the regiment of Dillon. Later, he married Anne de Bressac, who was from an aristocratic French family, to them was born Thomas-Arthur in 1702. Following the French military custom of the time, he joined his father's regiment as a private. When he was seven years old, his father brought him a Captain's uniform of Dillon's Regiment – and a commission! "The boy loved to parade wearing his uniform, but his father was determined that he should not hold his commission with out being given a taste of actual service. Lally, therefore, started spending his holidays with his father in the French camp. At one time, he was present at the siege and capture of Grenosso – to "smell the gun powder," as his father said. Three years later, he mounted guard in the trenches at Barcelona. He was then packed off to college after this "holiday recreation". And there he proved a good student. His father's influence having inspired in Thomas-Arthur an intense hatred of the English, he joined the Irish Brigade in 1710 but, when made Captain, moved to the regiment of Dillon. There he planned a Jacobite uprising, to restore the Stuart Kings to their throne and challenge the House of Hanover. His plans never materialised, but he made a name for himself on the battlefields of Europe. By 1749 he was a Major-General and a Hero of France.

For seven years after the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1749) that concluded the last war, Europe remained at peace. But soon hostilities ensued again between France and England over their rival claims in North America. In June 1756 war was finally declared and France announced war on Britain to the East. Despite differences of opinion over giving Lally independent charge, Lally was set sail in May 1757 and, after a long and tedious voyage, disembarked in Pondicherry at the end of April 1758. The voyage had taken almost a year thanks to d'Aché's doubts and capriciousness. The English squadron which had sailed three months later reached the Coromandel Coast at the same time. The authorities in Pondicherry ordered a gun salute in Lally's honour. By some strange mishance, the guns set apart for firing the salute were loaded with live ammunition. Five shots went through the Comte de Provence with Lally on board and this was immediately regarded as a bad omen by the sailors who were by nature extremely superstitious.

The news on the ground was also not encouraging. Chander Nagore and Mahé had fallen to the English. Nevertheless, Lally, eager for action after months of enforced inactivity, ignored the fact that de Leyritz, the Governor of Pondicherry, could give him neither information nor any financial assistance, and marched to Cuddalore where he invested Fort St. David and took it on June 2nd without d'Aché's support.

Though this first expedition had been successful, Lally, with his hasty temper and sharp tongue, had managed to antagonise everyone. Impatient with the practice of the caste system – for him it was just an excuse to escape from doing work and he had Brahmins carry on their heads loads of materials that then were forbidden to touch. They were also berated by the men of the lower castes. For the lack of money, he kept castigating the Pondicherry officials. He refused to hide his feelings and expressed himself freely in words that people did not forget or forget. He was, thus, detested by the natives and the Englishmen alike in Pondicherry.

Madras was ideally the next target and Lally would have probably succeeded if it had not been for the lack of finance and the unwillingness of d'Aché to launch an attack on the English fleet stationed between Madras and Pondicherry. So, Lally decided to attack Tanjore on the advice of a Jesuit priest. He marched south with a large force, short of transport, ammunition and food. With the men starving, they plundered a temple but found only paddy. Then, at Kaveri, he mistook six Brahmins for spies and had them attached to cannons and blown. Then when he was ready for a final assault, news arrived that Karikal was in danger from the English. Lally changed course to take on the besiegers. In Karikal, he resolved to besiege Madras. But once again he was let down by d'Aché. When the French fleet was worsted in a skirmish with the English, d'Aché sailed for Mauritius in early September.

Undaunted by being left without sea power, Lally continued to make plans to attack Madras. He recalled the Marquis of Bussy from the Deccan, advanced money from his own pocket to meet the expenses of the army, and set off for Madras. Lally and his troops arrived on the outskirts of Madras on December 14th and quickly occupied Black Town, but after that things went from bad to worse. Desertions multiplied because the soldiers were not paid. There was hardly any food and Lally, instead of being a hero to his men, became a hated

(Continued on page 9)
Celebrating Madras Week – in colour

A wish for the City

August 16th was a pleasant Saturday evening and those who frequent the Natesan Park in T’Nagar were in for a pleasant experience! The members of the Madras Youth Choir had gathered there to celebrate the 375th year of the founding of Madras in a unique manner. The children’s choir and the senior choir presented songs of social relevance, human values, civic sense, environmental awareness and patriotism and enthralled the audience with their music and the strong messages the songs conveyed.

– Rajashree Bhaskaran

Singing for the City

A small, experimental stall behind the Gandhi statue on the Marina was put up by volunteers. People were invited to tie a wish for the city on its birthday. This is an idea should multiply next year; let’s say, similar stalls at 10 or 12 locations across the city. Contact: www.themadrasday.in

Discovering Anna Nagar

Thirupura Sundari Sevvel, an architect-planner by profession initiated a project to study and map the history of the first planned layout of Madras City. Although Anna Nagar may not have a centuries-old heritage like Madras, it is certain that a few decades from now Anna Nagar too will have heritage to cherish.

Some little-known facts about Anna Nagar

• The area was a barren land and was chosen to hold the India International Trade and Industries Fair (IITIF) in 1968.
• Various pavilions were erected as complete concrete structures and semi-permanent ones.
• The parking lot for vehicles was where Kandasamy Naidu College is situated now.
• Shuttle buses were operated to the fair pavilions from the parking lot.
• The Tower Club is located in the building that was the Kerala Pavilion (with lots of modifications).
• The Tower inaugurated in 1968 gave a panoramic view of Madras city; the Tower has a cycle track which was later closed for cycle movement (as scooters were going up and down as pleasure rides).
• The Park around the Tower was developed in stages in later times.
• Residential plots were sold at Rs 2000-3000 with a 75 per cent Government subsidy to build houses to promote the layout initially, since very few takers were there for this area that was without facilities like schools, hospitals, markets, etc.
• Government officials being the first to be allotted plots, the area is populated largely by government officials.
• The first blocks of houses were built opposite Tower Park (which is now W-Block).

The T-shirt of the Anna Nagar Social History Group which organised contests for the young and old to help them ‘discover’ their locality.

• The Ayyanar Statue in W-Block, just past the Dr. Visvesvaraya Tower Park Arch, was built during the second World Tamil Conference during the Chief Ministership of C.N. Annadurai.
• The Blue Star bus stop in 2nd Avenue is just an incidental name without any history/landmarks behind it as buses stopped here and there was a small shop by it with the name Blue Star.

– D. Mohandas

Connemara creates nooks of its history

The lobby of Vivanta by Taj Connemara had a surprise for people who were not frequent visitors to the place. In a corner, the wall has been turned into a gallery of historical photos of the hotel and people associated with it. Alongside is a set of two colonial-styled chairs and centre table, with a marble top. There is also a book with a few pages tracing the hotel’s history. A smart executive then led me to another part of the lobby where a set of 12 photos of the halls and rooms of the vintage hotel are displayed. More is being planned – a walkthrough for interested guests who will be offered some wine and given a quick history of the Connemara. Other institutions, a century and more old, would do well to emulate this.

– Vincent D’ Souza
A laugh a day in our MADras!

The centrepiece at Biswaajit Balasubramaniam’s exhibition, MADras, where the cartoons on this page were among those on display.

“Appa, how come Madras gets to celebrate its birthday for one full month and I only for one day?”

“It’s wise to look before you leap, especially at this time of water scarcity!”

“Because hot idli with sambar is available for a rupee, all my regular benefactors are giving me one rupee instead of the usual five rupees!”

“Actually, nothing to worry about Arvind’s eye sight, all he needs is a good haircut!”

“Like my son Karthik, Jimmy is a keen follower of cricket!”
Etched in copper

Inscriptions etched on stone seen on the walls and pillars of temples are well-known. Similar epigraphs etched on sheets of copper are not that well known. Even bigger than the Thiruvithaungal copper plate inscription, comprising 85 rectangular plates, each plate uniformly 44 cm in length and 21 cm in breadth, was discovered accidentally in May 2010 at a depth of twelve feet in a trench along with many ancient bronze images when the Kailasanatha temple in Thiruvan- dalur village (near Mayiladuthurai) was being renovated. Needless to say, the plates too are bound by a copper ring with Chola seal, which are intact after nearly 1000 years. The weight is an unbelievable 150 kg.

Copper plates of the Chera dynasty (11th-12th century CE), Krishnadeva Raya of Vijayanagar (16th century CE), Pandy (16th century CE), Nayak rulers of Madurai (17th century CE), Setupati Raja of Ramnag (17th century CE) and even one of the British period of the 19th century can be seen here. The last mentioned records a settlement made by a

What if Lally had won in 1761?

(Continued from page 6)
A bird that changed a canal’s course

In 1836, T.C. Jerdon, a 25-year-old surgeon, arrived in the Madras Presidency. After training at the General Hospital, he was sent to treat troops battling insurgency in a district nearly half-way to the Calcutta Presidency. Once that was quelled, he joined his cavalry regiment as medical officer and served in various parts of India in a three decade long career. But why do we care about yet another employee of the East India Company, even if he had died insolvent at the end of his life? Here’s a reason: At least a few species of plants, animals and birds of the Indian subcontinent are named in his honour. Among them are the Indian violet (Jerdonia indica), the Palm Civet (Paradoxurus jerdoni) and the Anchor Catfish (Puntata jerdoni). But one cryptic bird, endemic to the Eastern Ghats, popularly known as Jerdon’s Curser, has to be the most famous of creatures named after him.

For a quiet bird, it has seen plenty of drama. In 1848, the curator of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Edward Blyth, declared Rhinoptilus jerdonii, a species new to science based on Jerdon’s specimens. By the turn of the 19th century, this bird was declared extinct. So, when it was unexpectedly sighted in 1896 there was much rejoicing. The Indian government promptly put its image on a Re 1 postage stamp. It was also given a place to call home, the Sri Lankanamalleshwara Sanctuary in Andhra Pradesh, but its travails didn’t end there.

A threat loomed over the bird’s habitat in the form of the Telugu Ganga project under which interlinked canals would carry water from a reservoir in Anudhra Pradesh to our ever-parched city. This would have passed through the curser’s home, so that route was avoided. Researchers then showed that the bird’s range, though narrow, extended well beyond the sanctuary. So, in 2008, the Supreme Court ordered the drawing up of an alternative route for the canal and this was a victory for the conservationists. Grazing, logging, and quarreling are persistent threats to the bird’s habitat. There are less than four hundred Jerdon’s CURSERS left on the planet. The last time someone officially sighted one was in 2009.

In the early 19th Century, this curser was not critically endangered like it is now, but the bird must’ve been elusive just the same. The nocturnal bird hides in the shade of the trees during the day, but Jerdon procured the bird, and described its call for posterity. As a student at the University of Edinburgh, he had belonged to the Pllman Society (Charles Darwin himself had been a member), an association of young naturalists, a students-only club that met weekly, critiqued papers, took trips to the countryside, collected and identified specimens using rules of taxonomy. That training paid off, when Jerdon came to a conclusion most of whose flora and fauna had not been documented systematically. Since there was no single collective account of the birds, he began recording the ones he saw and heard in the Eastern Ghats and the Deccan. This formed the basis of his first book A Catalogue of the Birds of the Peninsula of India. After four years of such fieldwork, plus official duties, he went on leave of absence to Nilgiris, where he got married at the age of thirty to Flora Macleod, who had an interest in botanical art.

His next stop was Nellore, where he served as Civil Surgeon. Here, Jerdon drew on the knowledge of the aboriginal Yanadis to catalogue reptiles and more avifauna. Later, ants and fish were objects of his study, but he never lost sight of birds. In 1857, the amateur naturalist’s fame had spread. By then, the amateur naturalist’s fame had spread. When the Government of India on special duty to prepare major works on Indian natural history. In Birds of India, he described 1,088 species spread over the length and breadth of the country, which he traversed and re-traversed during the course of this work. On one of his excursions into the jungles of Assam, he caught fever. After convalescing, he returned to England in 1870, where he died two years later leaving a wealth of drawings and specimens of tropical plants, birds and animals.

Jerdon laid the groundwork for other naturalists in India. For zoologists going out into the field, his reasonably priced books served as the starting point. A.O. Hume, ‘Father of Indian Ornithology’ and a founder of the Indian National Congress, too acknowledges this debt in My Scrapbook or Rough Notes on Indian Zoology and Ornithology, which he dedicates to Edward Blyth and Dr. T.C. Jerdon, and calls himself their pupil. He hoped that this book published in 1869 would form a “nucleus round which future observations may crystallise” and also that others would help him “fill in many of the woeful blanks remaining in the record.” They did. They still do.

And so science marches on. – Vijayasree Venkatraman

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(Continued from page 9)

committee of three members, namely Andrew Scott, Collector of Gunjur, John Read, Collector of Masulipatnam, and I.L. Caldwell, Superintendent of Tank Repairs, regarding distribution of water from some channels of the River Kistna (Krishna) to the villages of Bapatla and Chukur (Cherukuru). The copper plates are secured by a ring, the ends of which, interestingly, have a figure of Ganesha!

Such an array of ancient copper plate inscriptions is rare to see. Here’s a reason: At least a thousand years ago, the Telugu Ganga project under was much rejoicing. The Indian government promptly put its image on a Re 1 postage stamp. It was also given a place to call home, the Sri Lankanamalleshwara Sanctuary in Andhra Pradesh, but its travails didn’t end there.

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