

# Adyar Newsletter

NOVEMBER 2008



A Spotted Owlet peeps out of a hole in a Banyan tree

QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY, ADYAR, CHENNAI, INDIA

## OLCOTT MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL

### International Awards for Young People

Olcott Memorial High School, run by the Theosophical Society, is a free Tamil (vernacular) medium school for children from the less privileged sections of society in the urban setting of the city of Chennai. The school is in Besant Nagar (near the Theosophical Society Headquarters). This is a suburb of Chennai where the underprivileged live in close proximity to the rich and upwardly mobile upper middle class sections of society. On the one hand, outside their homes, our children are in close contact with great affluence in their neighbourhood, inside their homes, they are always facing abject poverty, violence and abusive behaviour. Added to this dichotomy are the inappropriate influences of television – the main source of entertainment in their homes, and the advertisement hoardings that constantly divert these young minds into unproductive and negative ways. Especially are the adolescent minds diverted into craving for unsustainable lifestyles. So, there is an evergrowing need to provide newer and innovative opportunities for engagement and exposure of adolescent children to interesting and fruitful engagement of their minds.

As a response to this need for empowering our children with inner strength to face these challenges, The International Awards for Young People (IAYP), earlier called the Duke of Edinburgh Awards was introduced in school. The programme was formally inaugurated on 27 July 2002 by Smt. Radha Burnier, President of the Theosophical Society, with alumni teachers as Award leaders. It is a special project (for the disadvantaged urban youth) under the South Zone Awards authority of the IAYP in India.

To know more about the special projects visit: [http://www.iaypdukeaward.in/special\\_india\\_projects.htm](http://www.iaypdukeaward.in/special_india_projects.htm)

'The International Award is an exciting self-development programme available to all 14 to 25 year olds. Launched in the UK in 1956 as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, the Programme has now spread to 126 countries. Over 6 million young people worldwide have taken up the Award challenge. The Award is tough and about individual challenge, not about reaching specific standards set by someone else. Young people design their own Award Programme, set their own goals, and record their own progress. The only person they compete against is themselves, by challenging their own beliefs about what they can achieve.' For more details about IAYP visit: [www.intaward.org/](http://www.intaward.org/)

The awards are in three levels: Bronze for children 14+; the minimum period of participation to gain this Award is 6 months; Silver for the 15+; the minimum period of participation to gain this Award is 12 months; Gold for the 16+; the minimum period of participation to gain this Award is 18 months. In each of these levels, the students



Help for the Elderly

Discover what they are made of – through physical fitness by showing improvement in games and athletics, and long runs including participation in minimarathons. The school's vast playground provides the space for training in such activity.

Make an impact on their community – through beach cleaning, service at an old age home, tree planting and working at the Theosophical Society nursery.

Develop a set of life skills – learning a new skill in the school's craft section, on the use of computers, spoken English....

Most of all, they have fun – through adventure trips – rock climbing, trekking and long treks being part of their adventure trips.

Our children have been rock climbing doing day and night treks in the forests and cave areas near Ramnagar (Karnataka), and Senji forts. They have been learning about soil conservation and tree plantations at Tiruvannamalai. This kind of exposure has widened their understanding of the world around them. As the awardees share their experiences with the rest of the school, children in lower classes plan and save up as they look forward to such participation in classes 9 and 10 of their school years. Such exposure has become possible only because



Rappelling (Rope Skills)

the IAYP has been able to provide training and guidance on the treks as well a large part of the expenses.

The important outcomes of such participation for our children are: exposure to the outside world of students from other schools, and a positive influence of the gold awardees of the IAYP organization that motivate our children to set themselves challenging goals, building great self-confidence and self-worth which are the key to their moving in the right path, and recognition for the award in higher education and in areas of employment, thus opening up wider opportunities for OMHS children.

Since 2002, many students have completed the Bronze and Silver. Three students, Sujendran (SSLC 2003), Chiranjeevi (SSLC 2005) and Radha (SSLC 2006) have been specially identified as having great potential. The three continue to associate with the school to work towards the Gold Award. More young alumni have enrolled for these



Computer Skills

Awards. The school is proud that it is one of the very few special projects in the country and has been identified by the Awards Authority as 'a very successful project' praising the commitment, dedication, stamina and

determination of the participating students and Award Leaders. The school hopes that our children will carry on the essence of such exposure and grow to be strong, committed and wise beings of humankind.

## VICE-PRESIDENT (from 20 October 2008)



We are happy to welcome Mrs Linda Oliveira as International Vice-President of The Theosophical Society. A member for 37 years (and always a serving member) she has many Theosophical accomplishments to her credit.

Among them are: lecturing at home and abroad; coordinating educational resources – website, involvement of courses at centres etc., legal work; finance; editorial responsibilities; General Council membership; and National Presidency for over six years.

Her calm demeanour and ability to handle problems of a large-scale nature are a wonderful asset. We look forward to having her with us (her husband also – another worker), on the International scene.

## KEITH FISHER – INTERNATIONAL SECRETARY

Keith first joined the Manchester Lodge of the Society in England. Emigrating to Australia he joined the Perth Lodge in Western Australia in 1983 where he served as Secretary and Property Manager. He also assisted in running and maintaining the Retreat Centre at Mt Helena. Next he moved to Sydney, in 1990 to work in the Australian Section Headquarters as the Membership Secretary where he developed a database application programme for membership records.

He served at the International Headquarters at Adyar in 1992 – 3 where he continued to computerize the membership records from around the world.

Though he returned to the National Headquarters in Sydney in 1993 to take up accounts, he instead, became the National

Secretary of the Section.

Returning to Perth in 1997, he served as Secretary, President, Treasurer and

Auditor at various times, and for two years as the State representative on the National Council.

He arrived at Adyar in September 2008 to take up the position of International Secretary.

We recall Keith's contribution from the past and welcome him most heartily to Adyar. We welcome too, his integrity, his cheerfulness and sense of humour which we know will never die.



## BIRDS OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY, ADYAR

Poor indeed is the garden in which birds find no homes.

Abram L. Urban

A bird does not sing because it has an answer. It sings because it has a song.

Chinese Proverb

The TS campus at Adyar covers 250 acres of woodland and scrub jungle, with the Adyar river flowing by on the northern boundary. So we are fortunate in being able to see both land and water birds on the estate. A number of migratory, water and land birds come here and add to the excitement in birder circles! Around 109 species of birds have been recorded here – 67 resident all the year round, 25 migrants from other parts of the world and 17 local migrants, that is, from other parts of India, like the Himalayas.

Some lesser mammals also have their home here – jackals, jungle cats, palm civets, mongooses, flying foxes (India's largest fruit-eating bat) and a number of reptiles, including monitor lizards. The black-naped hare was also found here, but it has not been spotted for a long time.

The city of Chennai is fast becoming a concrete jungle. There is such a hunger for

land that all our green spaces and wilderness areas are disappearing. At times like these, such campuses are especially important because they represent the last few remaining refuges for wildlife.

A resident or even a casual visitor to the TS campus cannot help but notice the wealth of birdlife here present. All along the shady, winding paths, shy, brown, Yellow-billed Babblers, in groups of sixes and sevens, forage among the fallen leaves for insects and grubs, trilling shrilly. The Koel's high-



Coppersmith Barbet



Asian Koel (Male)



Asian Koel (Female)



Yellow-billed Babbler

pitched call echoes through the trees, while the Common Hawk Cuckoo's double note, brain-fever, brain-fever, rises to a crescendo, to abruptly die away into silence. The Coppersmith Barbet, on its lookout perch on the top of a tree, calls tonk, tonk, with metallic regularity. One of our most notable songsters is the natty Magpie Robin, clad in a shiny suit of black and white, serenading us from the tree-tops, beginning very early in the morning, sometimes as early as 3 a.m. Walking down the riverside path, one invariably hears the lovely, melodious whistling call of the brilliant yellow and black

Common lora, often joined by a mate calling in tandem from another tree.

Frugivorous (or largely fruit-eating) birds, (the barbets, koels, and rose-ringed parakeets) are attracted to fruit trees



Rose-ringed Parakeet



White-browed Bulbul

(sapotas, mangoes, jackfruit, papayas, jamun, and guavas) growing on the estate, not to mention the wild growth of lantana and other plants which produce a wealth of berries to tempt the birds! A number of banyan trees also attract birds when they are laden with red, juicy, figs. Omnivorous birds (that

eat both plant and animal food) the Red Vented Bulbuls, White-browed Bulbuls, Common Mynahs, Golden Orioles, Tree pies, and Warblers are also attracted to these fruiting trees, and flock there in large numbers, until the air resounds with their cacophony. Incidentally, these omnivorous birds are the main agents of seed dispersal. Once eaten, the fleshy part of the fruit is digested in the bird's gut, but the seed remains intact, and is excreted. By virtue of their mobility and habitat adaptations, these birds are excellent at helping to disperse the



Small Bee-eater



Common Hawk Cuckoo (Brainfever Bird)

seeds of the fruits they eat, to distant places.

The majority of our bird population comprises the insectivorous birds whose main food are insects of every description and include the Small Green Bee-eater, Black Drongo, Tickels Blue Flycatcher, the gorgeous Paradise Flycatcher, Common Nightjar, Indian Roller, Hoopoe, the dainty little Tailor Bird, and the Lesser Flameback Woodpecker. Among the Nectarinivores (birds whose main diet is nectar from the flowers), three species of sunbirds – the purple, purple-rumped, and Lotens sunbird and flowerpeckers, are found here; but birds like mynahs, magpie robins and tree pies are also included in this category, since they too are partial to the sweet nectar, and thus help in cross-pollination. The majestic, red silk



Lesser Flame Back Woodpecker



Hoopoe

cotton tree (*Bombax malabaricum*), brings forth a profuse bounty of crimson flowers, full of tempting nectar for the birds, which find this irresistible!

There are a number of raptors found here as well, the Common Kite, Brahminy Kite, and Shikra are commonly seen. There have also been exciting sightings reported of the rare White-bellied Sea Eagle and the Pied Crested Baza, on the riverside. Three species of owls reside here – the diminutive Spotted Owlet, the Scops Owl and the huge Barn Owl with its oriental slanting eyes and heart-shaped face.

Many migratory birds arrive here with



Indian Pitta



Purple Sunbird

clockwork precision. The first to arrive (in early October) is the Indian Pitta whose fluting double whistle alerts one to its arrival. Next, come the Orange-Headed Ground Thrush and Forest Wagtail, closely followed by the Asian Brown Flycatcher.

No record of the birds of the campus would be complete without detailing the waterbirds which can be spotted from the beautiful, winding path abutting the Adyar estuary. All the year round, one can see flocks of Black Winged Stilts, Little Egrets, Cattle

here. Among them are the Avocets, Greater Flamingoes, Bar Tailed Godwits, Garganey Teals, Chestnut Bitterns, Curlews, and Whimbrels – to name just a few. Rare sightings of Oystercatchers and Crab Plovers have also been recorded. Huge flocks of Golden Plovers, Little Ringed Plovers, Kentish Plovers, Temnick’s Stints and Little Stints rise like brown clouds into the air, to skim over the waters, and to settle down once again



Pond Heron



Cattle Egret



White-breasted Kingfisher



Spotted Owlet

Egrets, Common Sandpipers, Pond herons, Night herons, Red Shanks, Green Shanks, and little Cormorants. The White Breasted Kingfisher, Small Blue Kingfisher and the Pied Kingfisher are often found perching on low branches, overhanging the river, and suddenly dive down to spear a fish with lightning swiftness as it swims past unsuspectingly.

From November on, many migrant waterbirds take refuge

on the mudflats. The river presents an extremely busy appearance at this time of the year, with Gulls and River Terns patrolling the waters from above.

The Pond opposite the Editorial Department has a colony of extremely shy sub-adult Night Herons, a couple of resident White-Breasted Water Hens, and a family of White-Breasted Kingfishers. Sitting there quietly on a Sunday morning affords a wonderful opportunity to photograph the birds from close quarters.

Birdwatching is a very rewarding and fulfilling hobby, which combines the joy of the outdoors with the thrill of watching our feathered friends getting on with the serious business of their lives, bringing with it a sense of peace and contentment, of being one with the whole of creation.



Red Wattled Lapwing

*The bird photographs were contributed by Dr T P Alaganandam and Dr Arun Kumar.*

## FAREWELL

Miss Mary Anderson, who is now 79 years left Adyar and retired to live in Britain.

She has resided in Adyar for 13 years, serving for 6 of these as International Vice-President and having left that post at her own request for that of International Secretary.

She resigned as Secretary at the end of August 2008, and was succeeded on 1 September by Mr Keith Fisher from Australia.

Other information on our recent Secretary has been published several times in Adyar Newsletters e.g., Feb-2002, and there have been delightful photographs featured in various issues.

We wish Mary all happiness in her retirement.

On October 17, demonstrating Universal Brotherhood in action, Theosophists in Adyar joined a United Nations led campaign to show solidarity with brothers and sisters worldwide in over 100 countries demanding reduction in poverty and meeting Millennium Development Goals by 2015. The Headmistress, Olcott Memorial High School explained the campaign objectives to school children and teachers during the event. Over 400 students, teachers and members participated in the event. Worldwide, nearly 117 million people attended in over 8000 events making it a record for a single event.

## DONATIONS TO THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

(1 July to 30 September 2008)

ADYAR DAY CONTRIBUTIONS		Rs.	GENERAL DONATIONS		Rs.
Gouthama Lodge, India		1900	TS in Israel	US\$ 170	7223
TS in Costa Rica	US\$ 470	19917	Mr Chioma Chukuemeka Amos	US\$ 20	828
TS in Finland	US\$ 451.31	18832	Sri Sudhakar.S.Titare, India		500
		<u>40649</u>			<u>8551</u>
GARDEN DEVELOPMENT FUND			ANIMAL WELFARE FUND		
Apeetha Arunagiri, India		<u>500</u>	Mr P.V. Radhakrishnan, India		<u>400</u>
SCHOOL OF WISDOM FUND			EDUCATION ENDOWMENT FUND		
TS in Costa Rica	US\$ 20	<u>821</u>	A.R.R Charitable Trust, India		<u>100000</u>

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