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NAME : RIHAAN SHAKOOR.

DATE OF BIRTH - [REDACTED]

SCHOOL AND ADDRESS - TRINITY COLLEGE, KANDY.
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This is to certify that this is Rihaan Shakoors own composition. English is not his first language

[Signature]
Principal
TRINITY COLLEGE

CERTIFIED BY -

*Cleverly turns a non-existent activity into a requirement.
Forward-looking, constructive, concise.*

Bird Watching in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka, along with other tropical countries is abundantly rich in bird-life. According to G.M. Henry's "A Guide to the Birds of Ceylon," there are 400 species of birds in Sri Lanka. Birds fall into two categories (1) the endemic birds like the crow, the mynah and the coucal, and (2) the migrant birds like the Indian pitta and the paradise fly-catcher which fly into Sri Lanka during the northern-winter and may be seen from late October to March or April. Further subdivisions of the two groups is also possible, as for instance the forest-haunting birds and the garden and scrub birds. This only shows that bird-life in the country is worthy of serious study.

Unfortunately, bird watching is not a popular past-time in Sri Lanka and very few people are knowledgeable about the variety of bird-life in the country. The lack of interest in birds is reflected by the fact that some birds like the Sanderling (*Crocethia alba*) and the

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✓ bar-tailed godwit (*limosa lapponica lapponica*) have no names in our local languages; Sinhala^{and} Tamil and that eleven varieties of birds[^] belonging to the 'tern' family are simply lumped together as "Muhudu lihiniya" (sea-swallow) in Sinhala and "kadal kuruvi" (sea-bird) in Tamil. Each of these varieties however, has its own peculiar characteristics, the 'eastern roseate tern' differing as much from the "sooty-tern" as the 'brown-winged tern' from the "little tern".

✓ The lack of enthusiasm for birds lies in the fact that birds are so common a sight in our environment that they are taken for granted. Even in crowded cities like Colombo, the dawn is heralded by the call of the koel and the crow; and as the day advances, the air is filled with the songs of the magpies and mynabs.

The attitude of indifference is likely to be disastrous to the bird-population of Sri Lanka in the long run, and must change. The extension of roads, the expansion of towns and cities and the need to industrialise is steadily reducing the forest cover of the island and if this trend continues unabated, many kinds of birds, (and other forms of wild-life) will be exterminated. The 'Wild-Life Conservation Society of Sri Lanka' and the "Fauna and Flora Protection Society" are aware of the danger, but since they are not concerned with bird-watching as a source of information and pleasure, schools and other institutions must take the initiative and start bird-watching clubs and societies. At school level, the "Nature Study Society" can widen its scope of activity to include bird-watching. What the young bird watcher needs is a note book, preferably with

loose-leaves, so that refills can be inserted when ever necessary. For the advanced bird-watcher a good pair of binoculars is important and schools must be in a position to lend such instruments to needy students on the payment of a nominal fee.

School-leavers must also be encouraged to organise themselves into clubs for the purpose. These clubs must afford its members the facility of a library with books on "birds" and "bird-watching" and lectures by bird-enthusiasts, film-shows and excursions to our remaining forest reserves must be regular features. At national level, "The Society of Bird-Watchers of Sri-Lanka," headed by prominent ornithologists must co-ordinate the work of local clubs, maintaining a register of all clubs and serving as a meeting place for clubs to exchange views and information. The sighting of "new" birds must be reported to the national body to be investigated and recorded. The publication of a journal at regular intervals will be useful and will serve as a means of information and education.

The national body must also be a link between the Sri-Lankan clubs and clubs in other parts of the world, especially in those countries from where our migrant birds are supposed to come. The "ringing" of birds can then be undertaken and the migratory pattern of various birds be studied. This will prove or disprove the theories we now hold about bird migration to our country. Such studies will be of international interest and will make a significant contribution to Ornithology.

Therefore bird-watching as a past-time must be encouraged in the interests

of our country. It will not only increase our knowledge of birds in a pleasurable way, but it will also make people aware of the need to preserve one of Nature's gifts for future generations to enjoy.

Reference

- 1) A Guide to the Birds of Ceylon.
by G.M. Henry (O.U.P.) 1971.