

Pakshi Jala by Shubha Navakanta Bhat, IISc Press 2022.

## Foreword

Dear Reader, what you hold in your hands or see on your screen is the labour of love of one of the most remarkable residents of the IISc campus, Shubha Navakanta Bhat. Shubha is a multi-talented individual excelling in *Yakshagana*, which is a unique theatre and dance form of Karnataka, painting, papercraft, and, above all, natural history and birding. Growing up in the Western Ghats of Karnataka, Shubha first learnt about the beauty of nature and especially of birds as a natural and integral part of her everyday environment. Only later did she begin to look at birds through the lens of a scientist. Little wonder that her worldview of birds is more organic and holistic than that of many of us who have experienced birds in the opposite sequence.

For many years, Shubha has been a familiar sight on the campus, going around with her cameras and binoculars, watching and photographing birds. She has published many articles on birds of the campus and produced many fascinating bird videos available on YouTube. Her book is as much a field guide to the birds of the IISc campus as it is a manual for organizing bird-related activities for all age groups. Early in the book, she describes eight bird hotspots on the campus, each with its own unique habitat and dominant bird fauna. Shubha also documents the history of birdwatching as an activity undertaken by residents, mostly school kids, and professionals, over many decades. In a truly unique twist, Shubha focuses on water as a way to connect our lives to those of birds, calling the book *Pakshi Jala*—the Web of Birds and Water.

The book lists 202 bird species that she spotted on the campus over her 20,000 hours of birdwatching between 2009 and 2021, with information on the status of each species and beautiful photographs of many of them, also taken by her. I particularly enjoyed this section of the book as my son Vikram spent much of his childhood similarly making lists of his bird sightings on the campus and describing some of their unusual behaviours.

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The most interesting and creative section of the book is the description of how Shubha converted the 200 square feet of her home garden into a bird paradise by placing birdbaths and making birds feel welcome. The description of her garden as a bird paradise is not a static description of a finished product. Instead, it is an almost daily record of which birds visited at what time and why and what they did. This section reads like a captivating story and makes it evident that any resident of the campus can replicate her experiments and experience the same joy. Indeed, each such experiment would be unique in the sequence and combination of bird visitations. I also particularly cherished this section of the book because my family and I were the previous occupants of the house and the garden that Shubha has now transformed.

I am delighted that IISc has published this marvellous book. It should encourage a new generation of birders among the residents of the campus. I recommend that a copy of *Pakshi Jala* be presented to every student admitted to the institute as part of a welcome package. It will open their eyes and minds to the unique beauty of the campus and the amazing ability of nature to educate, inspire, entertain, and heal.

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