

## Conservation

# A Bird In Hand...

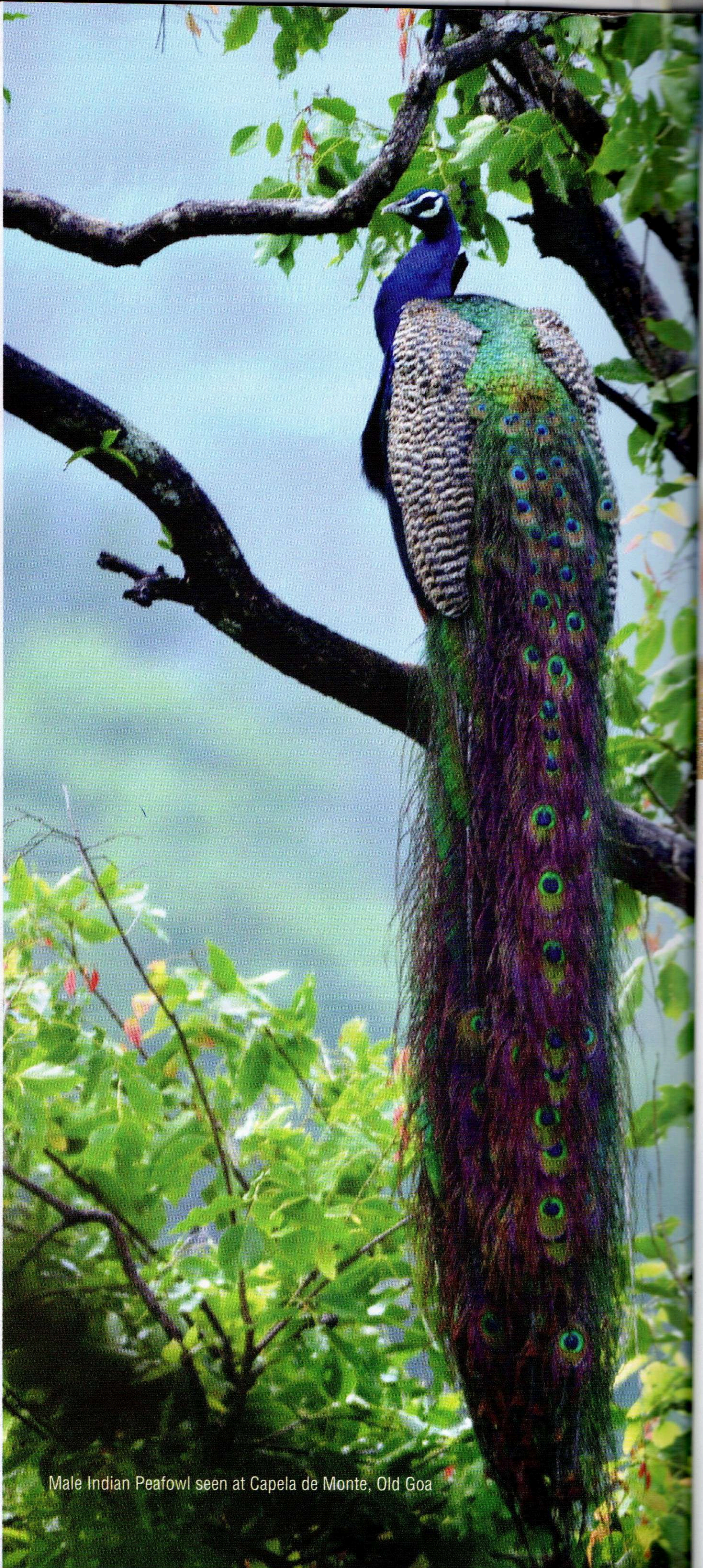
BIRD INSTITUTE OF GOA  
is set to take flight

By *MEENAL BALE*

**D**id you know that there are about 11,000 species of birds and 8 biological hotspots in Goa, including the great stretch of the Western Ghats? The whistling duck, racket tailed drongo, orange headed thrush, white bellied blue flycatcher, Malabar grey hornbill, yellow billed babbler, the black capped kingfisher -these are a few of the avian species found in Goa.

"Goa has proven to be a prime destination for birders. Over the last two years on the occasion of Big Bird Day, an event where enthusiastic bird watchers spot and log in the maximum number of bird species possible from dusk to dawn, Goa has consecutively bagged the second place for the highest number of species recorded," says St. Inez resident Savio Fonseca, CEO at Keystone by profession but an enthusiastic birder by passion.

Founded in October 2014, the Bird Institute of Goa (BIG) is an initiative by Savio Fonseca, Dr. Deepa Kamat and Anand Thali to give something useful back to society. It is clearly focussed on the conservation of species via scientific research. "We are rational and realistic in our approach. Goa is slowly becoming a concrete jungle and several species are



Male Indian Peafowl seen at Capela de Monte, Old Goa



Brown Headed Gull seen at Arrossim beach

**'Tomorrow if we are successful in getting back even one vulture, that would be a cause to celebrate.'**

threatened as their habitats are being consumed by development. Our belief is that it is the duty not only of the Forest Department to maintain conservation but for all of us to adapt a proactive approach," says Savio.

Poaching is no more a sport only amongst the elite to showcase a bird in their living rooms, but has become a culture among locals. "We need to involve the local villagers as guides. It can serve as an avenue of employment and, more importantly, create awareness," adds Dr Deepa Kamat. "Several species are set for extinction by 2028, The time to act is now with a methodical system."

In an attempt to reach out to the maximum audience, BIG has its presence on social media with 'Birds Of Goa', an active and public Facebook group for visitors to contribute their sightings and experiences. Besides Savio and Dr

Kamat, this group also includes Rahul Sharma, a botany student from Delhi who helps on the technical front and Anne Ketteringham, a British national and former aircraft engineer who together strive to bring birdwatchers under one roof via the virtual world. Today, the group has more than 3,000 members across various locations.

BIG will also be launching a book, 'Birds Of Goa', co-written by Savio Fonseca and Bikram Grewal, a leading wildlife specialist and conservationist from Delhi. The book is a compilation of 400 birds found in Goa, with about 460 photographs contributed by 17 renowned wildlife photographers across 35 different locations, from Carambolim and Cotigao to Corlim, and many other places. It is a massive project which has taken two years to come to fruition and will be launched in mid-August by the Chief Minister and made available through various bookshops.

Says Savio, "We have many projects lined up. Getting back the vultures, the flamingos, developing an avian tourism circuit, developing bird

specific residencies and much more. Tomorrow if we are successful in getting back even one vulture, that would be a cause to celebrate."



Osprey seen at Cumbharjua Canal