**My Journey into Birding**

**Interview: Angeline Mano, Salem Ornithological Foundation**

*Better than all measures,*

*Better than all treasures,*

*Those in books are found.*

**Seeds of feathers**

My mother was the one who sowed the seeds of birding in me during my school days. She used to show me birds around us, tell their names and some behaviour. Another reason for my interest toward birds was because of my mum’s habit of feeding them by placing water and grains at the backyard. Crows, mynas and few other species visited and used to feed on grains and sometimes watching those feeding their young made me to think more about it.

Since childhood, I have always had great love for nature. My grandmother's place is a village near *Tamirabarani River* and I used to watch the black waterbirds (later I knew them as **Cormorants**) with delight. As days passed, enjoying the sounds of birds was becoming a habit. On January 12, 2018, my parents bought me a camera and I started photographing birds.

**First step into birding**

As I didn’t have proper guidance to birding, finding the names of birds was a task on its own. One day I just simply captured a colourful bird on camera (see photo) and sent the picture to one of my college seniors who had immense love for birding. **Tamil Selvan** told me that it was a **Coppersmith Barbet** (*Psilopogon haemacephalus)* and got the name as coppersmith because of its metallic call. He further gave me an introduction to birding, taught me bird names, interesting behaviours and suggested some books. I was in awe of the fact that there’s plenty to know about birds and there started my journey into birding. After this, my love for birding grew exponentially as I began to watch more and videographing their beauty. Few weeks later, Tamil Selvan explained me about ***eBird***, an international platform to document and monitor birds. I registered at once and I regularly contribute data and upload images as well.

**Budding days of birding**

One day from my balcony, I was so thrilled to see a **Purple Sunbird** (*Cinnyris asiaticus*) going near the nest of **Scaly-breasted Munia** (*Lonchura punctulata*) and they became noisy. Mommy Scaly-breasted Munia and Daddy Scaly-breasted Munia were guarding their nest. Later I found that there were juveniles in the nest.

On October 2018, I visited **Kannankurichi (Mookaneri) Lake** with Tamil Selvan. I saw many species including **Little Cormorants** (*Microcarbo niger),* **White-breasted Waterhen** (*Amaurornis phoenicurus),* **Little Grebe** (*Tachybaptus ruficollis),* **Indian Pond Heron** (*Ardeola grayii),* **Asian Koel** (*Eudynamys scolopaceus),* **Striated Heron** (*Butorides striata),* **Tricolored Munia** (*Lonchura malacca*; see photo)*.* That was a great new experience for me and glad I took my best companion *Nikon D3400* camera to click those birds.

**From disappointment to delight**

As I became so passionate in birding, even the small call of birds was so sharp to my ears. One day as I returned home from college, I heard a different call which I hadn’t heard before. So, I took my camera and went searching for the bird but couldn’t find it. I returned disappointed and few minutes later I heard the same call from my backyard. This time, I just got a glimpse of its tail. To get a good view, I literally climbed the wall and clicked the bird and referred the book to know its name. It was a **Rufous Treepie** (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*; see photo)*.* That was an awesome and thrilling moment! These days, every time when I just hear the calls, I am unable to ignore it and I start to bird.

I'm so thankful to my parents and my uncle **Shenbaharaman** for motivating me in birding. My uncle said that it is better to do birding, enter the field of ornithology and live along with birds and show people their beauty and importance rather than doing other profession. These words penetrated deep into my heart and mind and made me to continue birding with more vigour.

**Love for birding**

Birding is a feeling that cannot be expressed in words. When I am birding, I just forget myself and never take my eyes from it. Watching them doing cute things gives a great relaxation and bliss to mind and heart. What I love about birds is—how they behave, because just by observing them we can understand lot of things in life. Birds connect us to nature. In future, I will show people how to conserve the natural world and I really hope that birding and birds will help me to do this. I also strongly recommend everyone irrespective of their age, to take birding as a hobby and fly with them!