

Silkwinds

APRIL 2018



A JOY TO FLY WITH SILK AIR

Ancient tales on a modern stage

Cloaked in gold and armed with spears, a new generation of Japanese performers is battling to keep the art of kagura in the spotlight



From noodle making to coral planting: sustainable tourism done right

Hypnotic scenes from the rice drying season around Kolkata



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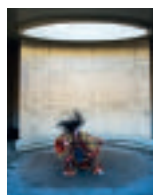
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Flocking to a feast

For over a decade, one dedicated Chennai resident has been preparing meals for some very unusual guests

It's 6am. On one of the busiest sections of Bharathi Salai in Chennai, a frantic flapping of wings heralds the arrival of a wild flock of parakeets. They have come to feed at the rooftop of 62-year-old camera repairman Joseph Sekar's home. Within minutes, thousands of colourful birds crowd the rooftop, pecking furiously at the rice laid out on 14 wooden planks, stretched from one end of Sekar's open-air terrace to the other.

It all started over 10 years ago, when the small-village emigré started feeding the birds outside his home as a way of remembering his rural roots. Soon after, crows, pigeons, sparrows and even squirrels began to visit.

Then, following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, Sekar noticed something unusual. Three bright green parakeets – refugees from the devastating floods – had also joined the diners. Over the next few days, more and more showed up, until hundreds of

parakeets were feeding on the rice. Today, over 1,500 of them feed here every day. During the Chennai floods in 2015, those numbers swelled to almost 8,000.

"It's an incredible sight to see," says 47-year-old Ravi Prasad, who works as a car mechanic on the same street. "I used to arrive at work hours earlier, just to try and catch a glimpse of them."

It's no exaggeration to say Sekar's life now revolves around the birds. He wakes up at 4.30am every day to prepare the rice and lay it over the planks. When the birds are feeding, he leaves them to it and doesn't allow anyone access to the terrace. "The birds need to feel safe so that they keep coming back," he explains. He repeats the ritual every evening from 4pm to 6pm, closing his camera repair shop at 3.30 pm.

As he gets older, Sekar admits it is getting harder for him to prepare the meals. Apart from the labour involved, it's kept him house-



ULTIMATE SACRIFICE

Sekar is currently trying to sell his collection of 4,500 vintage cameras to buy the rented home in which he lives, and establish a trust fund to continue his legacy. Highlight items include a camera once owned by famed wildlife photographer Harry Miller and a 60mm movie camera used to film former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MG Ramachandran.

bound for years. Feeding the birds is also costly – about S\$10 a day (40% of Sekar's monthly income).

"My birds have put me in a cage," Sekar laughs. "It's worth it just to watch them fly free. I feel happy knowing that in 15 years, my feathered friends have never missed a meal."



ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET

A member of the parrot family, these small birds have been extremely successful in adapting to urban environments.

Naturally found across India, many former pets have also established successful colonies in other major cities such as London and New York.

