



The Wing that Carried a Name

Samrat Sarkar

3 SEPTEMBER 1990, Midnight. A team of scientists from the University of Cambridge, along with some local associates, had been conducting field surveys since last July, deep inside the Nechisar National Park in southwestern Ethiopia. The objective was to study and document the biodiversity of Nechisar National Park, especially its avifauna. The landscape is gently sloping, covered with thick green grass, but is devoid of trees. Ahead lay stretches of undulating plains, though the pitch-black darkness limited visibility. In the parlance of geology, the place is called the Rift Valley. Colloquially, the region is known as the Nechisar plains. Situated at an altitude of 1200 m above sea level, the area is about 250 sq km. What once resembled a road, now worn and muddy, sprawled beneath the feet of the travelling group — the monsoon had left its mark! The accompanying car was of little use, being mired down in the sticky, yellow-black mud and ditches. Forced to abandon the vehicle, they walked, guided only by the beam of a torch.

The woreda nearest to them is called “Arba Minch”. Many city dwellers graze their cattle in this region. And trees vanish silently, lost to the practices of smuggling. As a result, a steady stream of carriages and horses flows through the area. The black mud on the road was pockmarked with winding and sunken wheel ruts. Suddenly, the torchlight revealed something ahead. A bird. Lying still, half-buried in mud. They drew near to scrutinise the body for any sign of life. The bird was