

## Pipit in the Dark Night

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Me & my younger brother, Rahul, we were birding in the out skirts of Solapur. which is a famous spot for grassland lovers, photographers, and researchers. It was a windy evening in mid-June of 2022. We had just spotted a busy pair of Paddyfield Pipits (*Anthus rufulus*), buff coloured, spotted chest, pinkish leg and with a prominent yellow supercilium. They were preoccupied with feeding their young ones. Their nest was camouflaged to the extent that it was difficult to locate them even with our binoculars. We could not find the entrance till we actually saw them entering or leaving the nest. It was so well hidden among the grass rushes, almost invisible in the yellow carpeting of grass. The unceasing hunger of three chicks takes up a tremendous amount of parental energy. It isn't enough to pass your genes to next generation, you must feed and protect the hatchlings constantly. The threats were all around, as thick as the surrounding grass; and to find a way took tremendous courage and intelligence. As the parent bird approached the nest, a grasshopper or grub in its beak, the chicks set up a loud and attractive welcoming chirp... chirp... chirp..., eager for their share. One forage per beneficiary at a time – that was the rule. And so ended a memorable day, Rahul and I returning to our home, just as the pipits returned to theirs. That night came the rain, heavy and thundering. We were worried about our Pipit family. What would happen to the grounded nest and the young chicks it held? Next morning, we returned to the same site, as anxious as we were curious. The picture had completely changed. The tall grass was wet, the trail was muddy, and half the meadow, submerged. Water ran everywhere – the Pipit nest had been flooded. We spotted a lone parent in the vicinity, a motionless chick, still stuck among the

reeds, even as a second chick struggled to breath in the water, desperate for a solid place to keep dry and alive. There was no sign of the third. Everything had changed overnight. The lush grassland lay silent. What had the Pipit parents done to save their chicks? Was there anyway they could have protected the nest in the heavy rain? Some way for them to escape? The night had been long and dark for the Pipit family. All the odds had been stacked against them.

Every season has its own joys and tragedies. The rains nourish the seeds, that feed the birds, that care for their chicks and bring new life. But the rains can also take lives without mercy. In the life of a bird, there are crests and troughs. But the joy of simply watching birds remains.

