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The humble bao has stood the test of time
page 2



The joys of eating momos
page 3

Meet the stars of the film Sonata
page 4

The big deal about the small grains

While millets are filled with nutrition, choose the one that suits you

By SREEDEVI LAKSHMI KUTTY

Our serious engagement with millets began three years back when we moved to Coimbatore. We were already into traditional varieties of rice and strains of wheat; but I jumped onto the millet bandwagon with gusto.

To the dismay of my spouse, millets appeared on the table at almost every meal. He stoically ate through my millet experiments, which were neither appetising nor creative. But there was no stopping me, since I was convinced that eating millets was essential to living an environmentally friendly life.

Initially, we were thrilled with our low ecological footprint and the weight loss both of us experienced; then things became problematic when my better half, already slim, couldn't stop losing weight.

For all seasons

Experimenting with millets revealed some interesting facts. These small grains are the ultimate survival food, as they can



grow in the harshest of climates and the poorest of soils with a meagre supply of water.

Years back, during a meeting of millet growers, we listened open-mouthed to a millet grower from a tribal community in Madhya Pradesh, as he explained that the storehouse of millets that he inherited from his father, collected over bountiful harvests, was his primary wealth.

The storehouse, made with mud, cow dung and grass, carrying tonnes of millets, was built near the house and zealously guarded. It was a revelation that whole millets can be stored for years.

More than mere material wealth, these gluten-free grains are also packed with nutrition, fibre, contain an array of minerals and are rich in calcium, magnesium, iron and other nutrients.

Each millet is different, with its own unique properties and benefits. We would be best served if we experiment and figure out which of them work for us.

We may derive benefits from some, while others may not suit us. Interestingly, the way millets are prepared also changes the properties. For example, in Western India, pearl millet is consumed in winter as a warming food (in the form of *bhakri*, a hard

roti), whereas in the South, it is cooked, fermented and consumed along with buttermilk (*kambu kuzhu*) as a cooling summer food.

At home, it dawned on us after many consultations with an Ayurveda physician friend and others that so many millet meals a week did not work for one of us. It also reinforced the oft-repeated, but forgotten lesson: listen to the body and don't jump into the latest food fad.

The writer is the co-founder of Bio Basics, a social venture retailing organic food; and is a consultant to the Save Our Rice Campaign

MILLET KNOW-HOW

The eight common millets of South India are: Little millet (*samai*), foxtail millet (*thinai*), barnyard millet (*kuthiraivali*), kodo millet (*varagu*), proso millet (*pani varagu*), finger millet (*ragi*), sorghum (*cholam*) and pearl millet (*kambu*).

Little millet and barnyard millet raw rice cook very easily (need water in the ratio of 1:2 cups). Foxtail, kodo and proso millet take longer to cook and require 1:3 glasses of water.

The par-boiled millet rice needs more cooking time and water compared to raw millet rice.

The raw millet rice is good for *saadham*, curd rice, *sambar* rice, etc. The par-boiled millet rice is good for preparing *idlis* and *dosas* and also suitable for making *pulav*, lemon rice, etc.

Millet flours can be used to prepare *appams*, *idiyappams* (string hoppers), *puttu*, *kolukattai* (dumplings), *paniyaram* and also sweets such as *laddoos*, *kheer*, *barfi*, etc.

Millets generally expand more on cooking, and one cup of cooked millet rice can stretch to three people instead of two with paddy rice.

Millet rices are best eaten warm/hot for the soft mouth-feel and tend to become a little dry and unappetising when cold.



FOOD OF YORE

Millet has been cultivated for some 8,000 years, and is one of the oldest foods known to man. Millet is mentioned in the Bible, and was used during those times to make bread.



Creating a buzz

The long-legged Buzzard was spotted for the first time near Coimbatore

By K. JESHI

Balaji.P.B made over 50 trips over three months to a location somewhere in Puliampatti village near Palladam (37 kms off Coimbatore). He was determined that in time he would be able to spot the rare bird that he had missed a few months ago. "I missed the chance when a team of bird watchers spotted the Long-legged Buzzard in Puliampatti in December. I kept going back to the location hoping to see it again," says Balaji. March 12 turned out to be D day as he spotted the bird roosting on an Acacia tree along a mud road.

The Long-legged Buzzard has never been sighted in Tamil Nadu before! "It was around noon when I was driving past the area when I spotted the bird. I followed the bird as it flitted from tree to tree and took a lot of photographs," he says.

Stopping by

Two groups of bird watchers in the city sighted this extremely rare bird of prey in Tamil Nadu. The first team included Chetankumar H Joshi, G. Parameswaran, Gajamohanraj, Kishore Kumaran, Sivashankar Ramachandran and Vridhi. Balaji says the first team visited Puliampatti to look for the Eurasian cuckoo, Tree pipit, Indian Spotted eagle & European Roller. They accidentally spotted the raptor sitting on a fencing stone. "They told me that the bird rested for a while. But, soon flew away after it was mobbed by house crows. We don't know if it was the same bird that showed up again," he says.

There are no historical records on sighting of this bird in Tamil Nadu. "We checked ebirds, bird for-



First-time visitor Long-legged buzzard •BALAJI.P.B

MORE ON BUZZARDS

The Long-legged Buzzard is a winter migrant. It is sighted in dry open plains in North and central India.

The bird inhabits dry open plains of northern Africa, south-eastern Europe, west and central Asia and Eastern China

Open, uncultivated areas, with high bushes, trees, cliffs or hillocks are its nesting areas. It feeds mostly on small rodents, and lizards, snakes, small birds, and large insects

This bird is different from the Oriental honey Buzzard and White-eyed Buzzard which are resident birds

ums and lists of Bombay Natural History Society including the comprehensive list put out by the Tamil Birds forum on historical sightings of birds in Tamil Nadu. The Long-legged Buzzard shares features with another winter mi-

grant, Common Buzzard. After I photographed the bird, I posted it on several bird forums and cross checked with bird experts to ensure that it was indeed a Long-legged buzzard."

Now the bird is an important new addition to the

Birds of Tamil Nadu list. India has about 1400 birds, of which roughly about 800 are resident birds and 600 are cross border migrants (they only visit India for part of a year like summer or winter).

Balaji reiterates the importance of recording bird sightings.

"It becomes a reference tool that helps the scientific community to track bird populations and changes over time. There are several online forums and app-based platforms like 'ebird' that are available for sharing records among the bird watching community. The data also helps to draw conservation plans for endangered species and their habitats."

THE HINDU GROUP

PLAYWRIGHT AWARD

IS BACK

Applications invited for *The Hindu Playwright Award 2017*. The award initiated in 2008, carries a cash prize of ₹2 lakh, for the best new theatre script in English

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