

Behind the Obvious: Reading a Living Agricultural Ecosystem

A bird, a green field, and the biological relationships that agricultural production depends upon

Field and photographs: Vasudha Sardar | Ecological interpretation: Madhuri Paranjape | 14 October 2026



Photographs taken by Vasudha Sardar in her PQNK field: a small bird perched on a crop plant amid green vegetation, with taller vegetation beyond.

How the exchange began

Vasudha Sardar photographed a small bird in her own field and shared the pictures with her customer groups under the playful caption “A bird watching.” She subsequently forwarded to the PQNK community a response written by her friend Madhuri Paranjape, who is also a member of Vasudha’s small “PQNK Training” group. Madhuri had seen the photographs after they were shared in another group of farmers learning PQNK. Her response, moving from the visible bird and greenery to the life supporting them, was framed as looking “behind the obvious.”

Madhuri described the pleasant field atmosphere and read the deep green vegetation as a sign of the sugars the plants are producing, and of the partnership that links roots, soil microorganisms and the minerals they make available. She identified the bird as a shrike, called “खाटीक” (khatik) in Marathi, a small predator whose presence points to a wider food

web above the ground. And she reminded the group that creatures often labelled pests also belong to that system, one that farmers do not always see.

What the green leaves tell us

A deep, healthy green is the visible face of a plant working at full capacity. Its leaves capture sunlight and turn carbon dioxide and water into sugars. The plant uses part of those sugars to grow and sends a large share below ground, 20 to 40 percent depending on plant type and growth stage, through its roots, root exudates and residues.

That carbon feeds the soil community: bacteria, fungi and the many small organisms that live on them. In return, they make minerals available to the roots, build the soil's structure and protect the plant. Leaf and root, plant and microbe, are two halves of one system, and the green of the field is the part of it we can see.

What the bird tells us

A predator, even a small one like the shrike, lives only where there is food for it: insects, and the small animals that feed on them. A shrike on a crop plant shows a field that carries a food chain several links long, from the soil and the plants to the insects, and up to the predators that keep them in balance.

In a field that is tilled, flooded and sprayed, that chain is broken at its base. On PQNK beds, where the soil is never tilled and never left bare, it is whole again, and the bird is one visible sign of it.

The PQNK interpretation

PQNK manages agricultural land as a living ecosystem: soil left undisturbed, never inundated, always covered and full of life. Under these conditions roots, microorganisms, insects, birds and other organisms live together while the crop is produced. Vasudha's photographs show exactly that: a productive field that is also a habitat.

Organisms that farmers call "pests" have their place in that ecosystem too. In a balanced field their numbers are held in check by their natural enemies, the shrike among them, and by healthy plants that defend themselves, so the crop is protected without sprays.

A message for farmers

Look beyond the crop. Notice the soil surface and its cover, the colour of the leaves, the insects and the birds, and how the field changes from season to season. A field is more than its harvest: it is a living system, and its biological relationships are what produce the harvest.

"Behind the obvious" — Madhuri Paranjape, responding to photographs taken and shared by Vasudha Sardar

Editorial note: Field, photographs and the original "A bird watching" caption: Vasudha Sardar. Ecological interpretation: Madhuri Paranjape. PQNK commentary: Pedaver.