First ever breeding record of Black-necked Stork
Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus from Bihar

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Introduction
Black-necked Stork Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus (henceforth BNS) is a globally near-threatened stork species (Ciconiidae; BirdLife International 2001). It is mainly found near lakes, pools, freshwater marshes, rivers, agricultural fields (rice, wheat, and inundated fallow fields), irrigation canals, occasionally mangroves, and rarely coastal mudflats (Grimmett et al. 1998; Robson 2000; Sundar 2004). The combined population of BNS in South- and Southeast- Asia is thought to be between 400 and 1,000 individuals (BirdLife International 2001; Wetlands International 2002). Considering the invariableness of, as well as its declining trend, the BNS has recently been upgraded to Schedule I, from Schedule IV, of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (Anon. 1972) by the Government of India (BirdLife International 2001).

During our regular bird watching trips to the diara1 land of Bhagalpur, we located a nest of BNS on the top of a silk-cotton tree Salmalia malabarica in Tintanga village. Tintanga, a diara village (25°18.290’N 87°11.561’E) is situated at about 42 km from Bhagalpur across the river Ganga in Bhagalpur district. It is a flood prone area and is surrounded by few small and large wetlands, providing a favourable roosting and feeding ground for a large number of resident as well as migratory birds. Crops grown in this area are wheat, rice, and maize.

On the information of Sri Jai Nandan Mandal, a field activist of Mandan Nature Club (an NGO working for the conservation of environment and wildlife), Bhagalpur, Bihar, we visited this village in the first week of November 2006, at around 0900 hrs. The nesting site was situated on the roadside within the compound of a farmer’s house. The nest was found on a treetop approximately 15–16 m from the ground. Near the site only few shrubs were present, and there was no large trees around. The nearest large trees were at a distance of about 60–70 m. The nesting site was surrounded by paddy fields.

One BNS was found incubating on the nest. According to the farmer, a pair of BNS had been nesting on that particular tree for the last three–four years, and successfully raising chicks. He also informed us that nest building starts from the first or second week of October. The farmer, and other villagers, also told us about another nesting site on a peepal tree Ficus religiosa, which is situated about one kilometer away from this site. We immediately rushed to the second site, and found few remains of the abandoned nest, but no birds were present. As per the villagers’ report about a dozen of these storks are seen in this area round the year in the cultivated fields and nearby wetlands.

Around 1115 hrs we noticed another bird sitting on a branch near the nest. We made further enquiries about the birds and their nesting. After observing we gave few instructions to the tree owner, returned back, and decided to visit the site regularly.

On our next visit, on 19 November 2006, we reached the site at 1030 hrs. We observed three chicks on the nest along with one parent bird. We took few photographs with much difficulty due to the height and foliage around the nest. The bird left its nest, leaving the three chicks alone for about three–four minutes, and returned with some muddy materials in its beak. This activity was being repeated at intervals. A Brown Kite Milvus migrans, and a House Crow Corvus splendens were present on

1 Area covered by floodwaters of a river.
In the last week of October 2007 we again visited the same site on the information report of the tree owner. We could see the nest of BNS at the same location at the top of the same *semul* tree. One bird was incubating on the nest.

On our second visit, in the last week of November 2007, we located three chicks on the nest with one parent bird at 1100 hrs. Feeding was in progress. Further, in the last week of February 2008, no birds (neither chicks nor adults) could be located there.

Thus our regular observation in two successive seasons from November 2006 to February 2008 on the nesting behaviour of BNS revealed the following facts.

a. BNS lays eggs in September–October in Bihar, just after the main monsoon season has ended. This is similar to BNS breeding behavior recorded in the few detailed studies of its breeding biology in the country (Sundar 2003; Ishtiaq et al. 2004).

b. The BNS has been observed to use *Acacia nilotica*, *Mitragyna parvifolia*, *Prosopis cineraria*, *Adina cordifolia*, *Anacopala cadamba*, *Bombax ceiba*, *Dalbergia sissoo*, *Ficus indica*, *Ficus religiosa*, and *Tamarindus indica* for nesting (see Sundar 2003). BNS has not been previously observed nesting on silk-cotton (*semul*) *S. malabarica*.

c. The location of the nest clearly shows that BNS prefers to build its nest near human habitats, perhaps for security. This is similar to observations in western Uttar Pradesh (Sundar 2003).

d. Both the adults were found to share nest building and feeding activities. One bird was always found roosting on or near the nest perhaps to protect the chicks from the predators.

e. This is similar to nesting activity observed elsewhere in the species (Maheswaran 1998; Ishtiaq et al. 2004).

Acknowledgements

We are thankful to Dr Sunil Kumar Agrawal (Secretary, Mandar Nature Club), Mr Rahul Rohitashwa, Dr T. K. Pan, and Dr G. R. Dutta of Mandar Nature Club, Bhagalpur for their encouragement during our fieldwork. We are also thankful to the villagers of Tintanga village for their positive support.

References


Baldness in Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* and Rose-ringed Parakeets *Psittacula krameri* in India

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Mss. received on 3 August 2008.

Records of bald Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* from Maharashtra

**Nagpur**

On 24 April 2008, two of us (RK & AJ) had gone to the cantonment of Kamptee in Nagpur district, Maharashtra. On our way through the cantonment we sighted a bald Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* (Fig. 1). It was totally bald and had no feathers on its head and neck, up to the shoulders. Normally, only the sub-orbital yellow skin of a normal Common Myna is featherless. But this Myna had no feathers over all of its head and neck. The head and shoulders of this bald bird were bright yellow, and the ear openings were exposed. The remaining plumage looked normal. The bird was continuously begging for food, and hence could have been a fledgling foraging with few ‘normal’ Common Mynas.

On 12 April 2009, when RK was traveling to Pench Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra, he spotted a bald Common Myna near Mansar village in Nagpur district, which is on the Jabalpur highway. This bird had no feathers on its head and neck, and was foraging with a flock of 4-5 normal-looking Common Mynas.

**Amravati**

On 1 June 2003, RK was in Amravati, Maharashtra, when spotted a strange looking Common Myna, which somehow looked like a “tiny vulture”. He stopped, noted down the features, and prepared a rough sketch of the bird. It was a bald bird, which had no feathers on its head and neck, as described above.

JW and GW sighted a bald Common Myna at Paratwada in Amravati district on 30 July 2009. It had similar plumage, or the lack of it, as described above.