

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



Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* on nest.

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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 importance 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 *diara*¹ land of Bhagalpur, we located a nest of BNS on the top of a silk-cotton tree *Salmaalina 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 Mandar 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

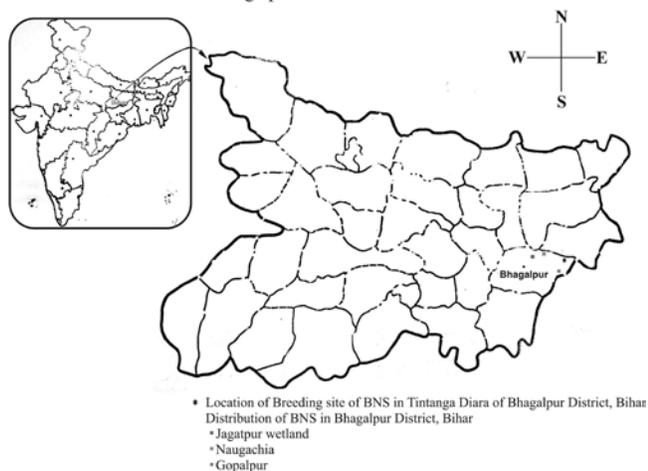
hrs. The nesting site was situated on the roadside within the compound of a farmer's house. The nest was found on a treetop approximately 15–16 m from the ground. Near the site only few shrubs were present, and there was no large trees around. The nearest large trees were at a distance of about 60–70 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.

Map showing location of breeding and distribution of Black Necked Stork in Bhagalpur District of Bihar



the tree throughout, but never approached the nest. Another parent bird came to the nest after some time, carrying some unidentified food materials. After feeding the chicks it again flew away. One bird was always found sitting on the nest with the chicks, perhaps to provide protection from predators. This feeding process was repeated for a certain period by one parent and after they changed their shift, with the other parent bird taking charge of feeding while the first one preferred to sit on the nest.

Our third visit was on 27 December 2006. The chicks were slightly larger in size, had developed feathers on certain parts of the body, except on the head, and the neck. Sometimes they would raise their heads up, and lower them, which provided us a clear view from the ground.

On 20 February 2007 during our fourth visit to Tintanga village, we observed the three chicks with a parent bird on the tree. Out of the three, two juveniles were found trying to take off from the nest, as if practicing flight. Feeding process was also going on as observed in earlier trips, and both the partners were sharing this responsibility alternately.

On our fifth, and last, visit on 23 March 2007, we noticed that there were no BNS on the nest. But a pair of Brown Kite occupied the nest. On that very day we observed the activity of a pair of Brown Kite frequently coming and sitting on the nest.

While returning from Tintanga, we spotted three adult BNS with two juveniles at Pachgachia dhar wetland (2.5 km NW of Tintanga village). They were foraging in close association. Perhaps these juvenile birds were the same that had grown from the nest at Tintanga. We tried to locate the third juvenile but could not do so.

In addition to this, other sightings of BNS are as below:

Two adult BNS were recorded near Mirzapur diara at the bank of river Ganga under Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary (VGDS), in the last week of August 2006. One bird was eating a water snake (species known). Two BNS were also spotted at Jagatpur Lake (25°20'N 87°2.595'E) in the month of September 2006 near Bhagalpur. The Jagatpur Lake is a large perennial water body situated just beside NH31, between Bhagalpur, and Naugachia.

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*, *Anthocephalus 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).

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

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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

Fig 1. A bald Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*.



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.