

First nesting record of Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher *Hypothymis azurea* in Rajasthan, India

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An Oriental species, Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher *Hypothymis azurea* is found from south-east China, through Taiwan, the Phillipines and in India and Sri Lanka. It is practically absent from the dry north-western parts of the Indian subcontinent (Roberts 1992) although stray individuals have been occasionally recorded. C. B. Ticehurst collected a single specimen in Karachi, Sind, Pakistan on 18 February 1919 (Ticehurst 1922) and described it as a 'merest vagrant'. In Gujarat (India) the species has been collected from Kathiawar (Abdulali 1985) and recorded in Kachchh (Himmatsinhji 1964). Occasionally single birds have been sighted in Keoladeo Ghana Bird Sanctuary (Bharatpur, Rajasthan) during winter (Robson 1993, 1994).

An active nest of Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher was discovered on the bank of a stream, at Sitabari /Valmiki Ashram (24°15'N 74°30'E), Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajasthan. The sanctuary, at the confluence of three major geological formations—the Aravallis, the Vindhya and the Malwa plateau, has type II dry tropical forest (Champion & Seth 1968).

When the nest was discovered on 1st July 2007 it appeared to be complete. However, both the parents were observed bringing small grass stalks/twigs to the nest continuously and giving finishing touches.

The cone-shaped nest was placed in the fork of two branches, c.6 m above ground level in the canopy of a mango tree *Mangifera indica*. It was made of grass stems and well covered with cobwebs and spider egg cases.

On 15th July 2007 the flycatchers were found incubating. They rarely interacted with other species during this period. However, when an Orange-headed Thrush *Zoothera citrina caynotus* came near the nest both sexes attacked the intruder. Similarly the nesting birds attacked a Stork-billed Kingfisher *Halcyon capensis* when it perched on the same tree.

On 30th July 2007 both the parents were observed feeding the nestlings at approximately equal frequency and with variety of prey items, which appeared to include a large proportion of spiders.

In the available literature breeding of the species in the dry north-western parts of the Indian subcontinent is not mentioned except a nesting record at Malir (Pakistan) in April 1971 but the nest was robbed shortly thereafter (Roberts 1981).

Therefore, the above observations at Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary constitute not only the first successful breeding of the Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher in Rajasthan but also the north-western parts of the Indian subcontinent.

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Fig. 1. Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher, Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajasthan.