

Nesting of Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* in Kerala

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The Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* is considered a rare bird in Kerala. Ali (1969) did not record the nesting of the Common Moorhen from Kerala. Fergusson and Bourdillon (1904) stated that it was uncommon in Travancore.

On 1.vi.2003, around 15:30hrs, I was birdwatching at Enamavu Kole wetlands in Thrissur District, Kerala. There I observed a nest of the Common Moorhen in a waterlogged, reed-covered part of the swamp. The nest was at least 10-15m away from the bund. It was a mass of aquatic plants placed on a small heap of mud and sodden aquatic vegetation a few inches above the water level.

A Common Moorhen was incubating on the nest when I approached the spot. Its

mate was always seen feeding and / or swimming quite near the nest. Sometimes the mate carried nesting material and just dumped it on the nesting site. The incubating bird always glanced behind when its mate deposited the nesting material.

Once the mate uttered a rather high pitched double call note, “kek-kek”.

On 8.vi.2003 (the monsoon had not commenced), I went to look for the nest. The bird in the nest was a close sitter. It left the nest only when I stood near it. After a few minutes the bird returned to the nest and resumed incubation. The bird always re-arranged all the eggs with its beak before sitting on them. Thus, I had a number of glimpses of the eggs through binoculars. The eggs were of a dull whitish or pale stone

colour, with small blotches of dark reddish-brown all over. The incubating bird frequently jerked its tail while it sat in the nest.

It seemed that both parents incubated. Once I saw the birds exchanging places to incubate.

References

- ALI, Salim. 1969. *Birds of Kerala*. 2nd ed. (1st ed. published as *The Birds of Travancore and Cochin*.) Bombay: Oxford University Press.
- FERGUSSON, H. S., and T. F. Bourdillon. 1904. The birds of Travancore, with notes on their nidification. Part III. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* XVI (1) (17 December): 1-18.

Recoveries from *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* – 5.

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I started this series on ‘Recoveries’ to give readers an idea about how and why the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* was started in December 1960, the type of articles initially received, the limited interest in birdwatching at the time, the dependence for articles on a few stalwarts, the mainstays being Salim Ali and S. K. Lavkumar. Joseph George, Capt. N. S. Tyabji and a few others, helped to give the initial push. Slowly, very slowly the circle widened.

It would help me to proceed with this series if readers would let me know whether the sort of reporting I have done – quoting from articles and comments chronologically is of interest, or is this progress too slow and boring to the modern well-informed reader. If so, I could leap frog over the years and reproduce only sections of the more noteworthy contributions.

It is interesting to note how seemingly minor items led to significant results in the study of bird migration. The two innovations which proved indispensable were the numbered aluminium rings with the legend “inform BNHS” supplied by Sweden, and the mist nets sent from Japan. In his autobiography (p. 65), Salim Ali says, “...after using them (mist nets) in the last few years, I am convinced that no field collecting can be regarded as thorough

where mist nets have not been employed to supplement shooting and visual observation. The unsuspected presence of many shy and skulking birds of dense shrubbery, specially of tropical jungle, as in the East Himalayan foothills, has revealed only when they fall into nest suitably deployed...” He continues to say that the lack of these earlier, “have somewhat shaken my confidence in the comprehensiveness of my collecting (e.g., Hyderabad Survey) before that time.”

For the June 1961 issue, Salim Ali wrote on Bird Migration Study in India. I quote him at some length because though some sporadic ringing of birds had been done in the past, the effort was too limited to come to any definite conclusions.

“...Organised bird ringing and the study of migration began for the first time about two years ago. The opportunity to do so came as an unexpected windfall. The discovery that the virus of the Kyasanur Forest Disease of Mysore was a member of a group of viruses whose known focus was in parts of the U.S.S.R., suggested that its presence in India may have something to do with the migratory birds coming from that area. Thus the W.H.O. became interested in investigating the problem, and made a monetary grant to the Bombay Natural

History Society for conducting the necessary fieldwork. The Virus Research Centre in Poona, maintained jointly by the Indian Council of Medical Research and the Rockefeller Foundation, which is directly interested in the KFD problem, was expected to cooperate in the project from the virological angle.

“The first field session, held in Kutch in autumn of 1955, was more in the nature of a training camp. Dr A. Schifferli, Director of the Swiss Bird Migration Centre at Sempach, was invited to...train local personnel in the use of Japanese mist nets and in the techniques employed in modern bird migration study. The VRC, Poona, deputed some of their technicians to work with the BNHS field party in order to collect ticks and other relevant data from the netted birds...”

“Since the session of September 1960, there have been three more field sessions in Kutch and Saurashtra, of 3 or 4 weeks’ duration each – in March 1960, September 1960, and March 1961. In these four sessions over 7,500 birds were caught and ringed, of which about 20% were migrant, the rest resident. From the viewpoint of the study of bird movements, the ringing of even the so-called ‘resident’ birds is not without importance. Many resident birds are subject