



Bird ringing around Hyderabad city, Andhra Pradesh, India

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The Birdwatcher's Society of Andhra Pradesh (BSAP), in conjunction with the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), has been conducting bird ringing activities around Hyderabad city (Andhra Pradesh, India) for five years (from 1998 through 2002). Most of the birds so far ringed have been raptors, particularly Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, with one Red-headed Falcon *Falco chiquera*, three Shikras *Accipiter badius*, one Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*, one Western Marsh-Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* and one Barn Owl *Tyto alba*. In addition to these, we have also ringed, at various times, two Pied Crested Cuckoos *Clamator jacobinus*, two Indian Pittas *Pitta brachyura* and one Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*, plus a few Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus*. Some of the birds which we have ringed from time to time are given in Table 1.

Below is given a brief account of ringing activities, with specific reference to raptorial birds (Table 1). All the data collected from the birds so far ringed is not presented. This will form the subject matter of a future article. The non-raptorial birds that were ringed were mostly acquired from the illegal bird market near Charminar, in the 'Old City'. Most of the raptors were trapped by us for

the express purpose of ringing.

Bearing in mind that, with the exception of *Falco tinnunculus*, none of the other smaller raptors found around the city were migratory, we confined our activities to the Common Kestrel. The other birds of prey (*Falco chiquera*, *Accipiter badius*, *Elanus caeruleus*, *Tyto alba* and *Circus aeruginosus*) that we ringed, had either been purchased or inadvertently caught, as we were rather new to ringing at that stage and tended to become a trifle over-enthusiastic.

Ringing was mostly conducted in the areas around Nadergul, Jalpally, Mamidipally, Tukkuguda and Balapur, (all in Rangareddi district), within a 10-15km radius, east of Hyderabad. This area has suitable habitat for small raptors, particularly Common Kestrel, because of the open grass areas and an abundance of locusts and other small prey species that form the staple diet of this falcon. As a result, there is always a sizeable population of this species in the area during the season when the birds migrate to south India.

Unfortunately, none of the ringed birds has been recovered from outside India. However, a few interesting aspects have emerged from our ringing activities, which we describe below:

1. One of the main things that we have noticed is that Common Kestrels are highly territorial birds, and this territoriality is seen in successive years. The territoriality has also apparently given rise to a strong homing instinct. These observations are based on our trapping and re-trapping records. We have only twice managed to actually re-trap an earlier ringed bird (see below), but we have seen the ringed birds in the area from where they had originally been trapped. For example, a first year male Common Kestrel which was trapped and ringed (ring no. 44920) in Balapur on 5.xii.1999, was seen later in the same area for over three months from that date. Our last sighting of the bird was on 23.iii.2000. Another Common Kestrel bearing ring number C-44909 was caught near Nadergul on 11.i.1999, ringed and released. It was again trapped in the same locality on 21.xi.1999. This indicates that the birds return each season to the same locality.

2. Territoriality also appears to have developed a good homing instinct in this species. On one occasion, an adult male, which had been trapped in Nadergul on 28.xi.1998, was brought to the city and released near the Kasu Brahmananda Reddy (K.B.R.) National Park in Jubilee Hills.

Subsequent to this, the bird was re-trapped on 5.xii.1999 in Nadergul, in fact from the same electricity pylon from which we had affected the first capture! (Ring No. C-56009).

3. In the winter of 1999-2000 we recorded (saw) a Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanii* near Nadergul. Despite several attempts, we were unable to catch that bird and so cannot confirm its sex. However, the many sight records that we have of it seem to indicate that it was an immature bird.

4. The Indian Pitta and the Pied Crested Cuckoo were acquired by one of us (HJ) from the Charminar bird market in Hyderabad.

5. The Common Quail was acquired by

chance at the house of one of the authors (HT) on the night of 3.iv.2001. The bird was seen sitting on the veranda of a second floor in an apartment block. Using a towel and a powerful torch, we were able to secure the bird and keep it for the night. It was ringed and released the next morning at the Kasu Brahmananda Reddy National Park in Jubilee Hills (Hyderabad city).

6. Baya Weavers were ringed by BSAP member Suhel Quader who was at that time involved with studies on the breeding of this species at the ICRISAT Centre. The birds were ringed in the course of his studies, and the details have been communicated to the BNHS, as part of the BSAP bird ringing data.

Discussion

The area near Nadergul is rich in raptorial birds and deserves to be protected. At various times we have seen several species of raptorial birds here, including, at one time, a sighting of over fifty Indian White-backed Vultures *Gyps bengalensis* (14.iv.2000). Some of these sightings are extremely interesting and of uncommon / rare species – of particular interest are the Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus*, Booted Eagle *H. pennatus*, Lesser Kestrel, Laggar *Falco jugger*, Eurasian Eagle-Owl *Bubo bubo* and Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*. This is one of the few areas around Hyderabad where we have seen three species of mammals: chinkara *Gazella bennettii*, jackal *Canis aureus* and striped hyena *Hyaena hyaena*.

Details of the ringing activities are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Ringing data.

Ring.No.	Species	Sex	Age	Moult	Plu.	Brd.Ptch.	Wing	Bill	Tars.	Tail	Wt.	Locality	Habitat	Date	Remarks	Recaptured
56001	<i>Falco chiquera</i>	M	5	4	4	1	200	20	40	160	170			15.04.98	Jalpally	
56002	<i>Accipiter badius</i>	M	5	1	4	1	180	20	55	140	170			26.04.98	Balapur	
56003	<i>Accipiter badius</i>	M	5	1	4	1	185	20	55	140	175			26.04.98	Jalpally	
56004	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	F	2	1	2	1	233	20	40	175	200			19.10.98	Nadergul	
56005	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	F	5	1	4	1	243	10	40	159	200	A	X	22.10.98	H. Sagar	
56006	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	F	5	1	4	1	245	12	40	165	210	B	X	22.10.98	Mamidipally	
56007	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	F	5	1	4	1	245	12	40	164	200			24.11.98	Nadergul	
56008	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	F	4	1	2	1	249	12	40	170	215			24.11.98	Nadergul	
56009	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	M	5	1	4	1	250	22	33	182	220			28.11.98	Nadergul	05.12.99
56010	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	F	3	6	3	1	243	22	40	180	215			31.01.99	Nadergul	
44903	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	M	2	4	2	1	356	30	81	160	550	A	X	23.11.90	B.Hills (c.f.m.)	
44904	<i>Accipiter badius</i>	F	6	4	8	1	196	18	52	149	175	A	X	22.01.91	B.Hills (c.f.m.)	
44905	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	M	5	8	4	1	256	19	43	178	155	A	X	22.03.92	B.Hills (c.f.m.)	
44906	<i>Tyto alba</i>	F	6	1	5	1	300	43	80	138	300	A	X	13.02.93	B.Hills (c.f.m.)	
44909	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	M	5	1	4	1	247	20	40	176	205			11.01.99	Nadergul	21.11.99
44910	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	F	5	1	4	1	260	20	40	180	250			10.02.99	B. Hills	
44911	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	F	2	1	2	1	243	20	40	173	220			24.03.99	Nadergul	
44912	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	M	5	1	4	1	238	20	40	170	210			29.03.99	Nadergul	
44913	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	M	4	1	3	1	245	20	40	184	190			06.11.99	Nadergul	
44914	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	F	5	1	4	1	265	20	40	179	250			06.11.99	Nadergul	
44915	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	F	3	7	3	1	250	20	36	170	200			21.11.99	Nadergul	
44916	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	F	5	1	4	1	257	20	40	175	275			05.12.99	Nadergul	
44917	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	M	5	4	4	1	247	21	40	180	180			05.12.99	Balapur	
44918	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	F	2	7	2	1	250	22	40	190	250			05.12.99	Balapur	
44920	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	M	2	7	2	1	240	20	40	166	180			05.12.99	Balapur	
44921	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	M	5	1	4	1	245	20	40	165	200			09.01.00	Nadergul	
44922	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	M	2	7	2	1	250	20	41	185	275			15.01.00	Nadergul	
44923	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	M	3	1	3	1	240	20	40	170	250			10.04.00	Tukkguda	
44924	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	M	3	4	3	1	252	20	40	170	250			12.02.00	Nadergul	
44925	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	M	2	1	2	1	245	22	36	180	260			14.04.00	Tukkguda	
44926	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	M	5	1	4	1	240	22	37	190	180			13.12.01	Keesaragutta	
44927	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	M	3	1	3	1	235	22	38	190	185			02.01.02	Nadergul	
44928	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	F	2	1	2	1	245	22	40	193	200			12.01.02	Badangpet	
44929	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	M	3	1	3	1	240	22	38	192	180			12.01.02	Badangpet	
56017	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	F	2	1	3	1	261	15	46	173	205			31.12.01	Balapur	
AB-147510	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	F	5	1	4	1	105	29	12	41				3.04.01	B. Hills	
Z-27901	<i>Ploceus benghalensis</i>	M	5	1	4	1	73	12.1	21.5	45	22			21.06.97	Icrisat	
Z-27902	<i>Ploceus benghalensis</i>	M	5	1	4	1	72	12.6	21	41	22.5			21.06.97	Icrisat	
AB-147501	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>	?	6	1	4	1	108	26	39	27	40			08.10.98	B. Hills (c.f.m.)	
B-44501	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>	F	6	1	4	1	144	25	32	158	60			03.07.98	B. Hills (c.f.m.)	

Abbreviation	4=Immature - stage unknown.	7=Head & body.	Brood patch
Brd. Ptch. = Brood patch.	5=Adult.	8=General moult.	1=Absent.
c.f.m = Captive from market.	6=Full grown but stage unknown.	Plumage	2=Present but details not recorded.
Plu = Plumage.		1=Down.	3=Skin smooth, glossy, free of feathers.
Tars. = Tarsus.	Moult	2=First year (Juvenile).	4=Skin smooth, network of blood vessels noticeable.
Wt. = Weight in grams.	1=No moult.	3=Intermediate.	5=Skin thickened, blood vessels not seen, fluid layer under epidermis, brood patch resembles second degree burn.
Key to table	2=Wing.	4=Adult.	6=Skin wrinkled, dried up, begins to form scales.
Age	3=Tail.	5=Eclipse.	7=Skin becomes smooth, feather calami formed, brood patch begins to be covered up.
1=Nestling.	4=Wing & tail.	6=Breeding.	
2=Juvenile (First Year).	5=Head.	7=Partial breeding.	
3=Subadult.	6=Body.	8=Stage unknown.	

Distribution of White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* in India and a new record from Andhra Pradesh

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The White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* has been described as a winter visitor to “Assam, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, irregularly in the rest of the Indian peninsula and in the Maldive and Andaman Is.” (Ripley 1982). Ali and Ripley (2001) give a few additional references of sightings from Pakistan. Surprisingly, without any supporting evidence, Baker (1929) stated, “In India...common all down the East coast.” This, despite Blanford’s (1898) statement, “This Tern has not been clearly identified from any part of India west of Tipperah [=Tripura]...”. Whistler and Kinnear (1937) also emphasised this discrepancy. When Abdulali and others spotted it on Mahim Causeway, Bombay city (=Mumbai) on 26.iii.1950, he wrote, “...has not been recorded before from anywhere in peninsular India,” (1950).

Since Abdulali’s observation, several records of this square-tailed marsh tern have been published from India and we summarize these here, placing them roughly into three zones: western coast, eastern coast and inland records.

Western Coast

Gujarat: On 12.v.1955, it was spotted at Jasdan, purportedly the second such record from the area (Shivraj Kumar 1955). Mundkur (1987) saw it on 14.v.1985 at Jamnagar. Parasharya and Mukherjee (2001) spotted three birds at Porbander on 27.iv.1997. On 6.vi.2004, Varu (2004) reported it from Devisar Tank, Bhuj.

Maharashtra: Twenty-seven years after Abdulali’s record, it was reported once again from Bombay (Mumbai), this time from Colaba Point by Sinclair (1977). Prasad (2004) gives a summary of records from western Maharashtra.

Goa: Lainer (2004) reports sightings between August-September 1998.

Kerala: On 27.iv.1997, Ravindran (2001) saw up to three birds on different occasions between 12-15.ix.1998 at Kole wetlands, Thrissur. On 25.iv.2003, Mathew (2003) saw one at Thattekkad. Ravindran (2004) reports sightings from Kole wetlands in March, April and September 1998-2000.

Eastern Coast

Eastern Coast: Perennou and Santharam (1990) recorded it as “a regular and common passage migrant along the Coromandel (i.e., East) coast,” including “a large roost of c. 50,000 migrant terns in Kaliveli (Tamil Nadu) (which) held over 2,000 whitewinged black terns.” [“During late 1989 and 1991, the Whiskered Tern congregation at Kaliveli was not more than 5,000 birds,” (*in litt.* S. Balachandran).]

Orissa: Rao et al. (1994) include it in their checklist of birds for Chilika Lake. [“Occurs regularly in small numbers of 100-200. Seen throughout the year except May-June. In July-August 10-30 birds would be seen in breeding plumage. Was difficult to differentiate from September onwards, from Whiskered Terns, due to its wintering plumage,” (*in litt.* S. Balachandran).]

Tamil Nadu: Melliush (1966) saw it on 30.iv.1966 at Pulicat Lake, Chennai and described it as “...something extraordinary and entirely unfamiliar”. Fifty birds were ringed in December 1970 at Point Calimere (Raju and Shekar 1971). Sugathan (1983) lists it as a common migrant at Point Calimere Sanctuary. Kannan (1986) recorded about “a hundred” on 17.iv.1983 at Adyar Estuary in Chennai. See Perennou and Satharam’s (1990) record, below. [“Present in Point Calimere, but none have been ringed even

though 500 Whiskered Terns have, between 1980-2000,” (*in litt.* S. Balachandran).]

Inland

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K): Pfister (2001) records one on 23.vi.1995 in Ladakh. Naoroji and Sangha (2004) saw two birds on 3.ix.2000, at Trishul Tso, Ladakh, one of which was in breeding plumage and the other a juvenile. They did not see any other terns.

Punjab: Undeland also recorded three and four birds on 10.v.1998 and 26.vii.1998 at Harike Bird Sanctuary (Robson 1998a).

Rajasthan: On 9.iv.1996, a male in breeding dress was seen at Phulera Lake, Jaipur by Sangha and Vardhan (1998). Craig Robson spotted a single bird at Suriwal Lake near Ranthambhor Tiger Reserve on 6.xii.2001 (Robson 2002).

Jharkhand: Baillie (1946) reported a single bird on “Lakes” from 6-11.v.1945, Hazaribagh town.

Delhi: Jackson (1969) reported it from Najafgarh Jheel on 5.v.1968. Vyas (1996) saw one bird in breeding plumage on 9.vi.1986 at Okhla Barrage. He also saw one in first winter plumage on 20.x.1996, again at Okhla and three on 30.viii.1997, at Madanpur village (Vyas 2002). Undeland reported (Robson 1998a) four birds at Okhla on 25.viii.1997 and one on 9.viii.1998 (Robson 1998b).

Karnataka: Thejaswi (2005) observed six birds in September 1999, at Kunthur Lake (Chamarajanagar district, Karnataka) amidst a “huge flock of over 2,500 Whiskered Terns *Chlidonias hybridus*, all in flight...”

On 9.v.2005, we had gone birdwatching (06:30-08:30hrs) to Osman Sagar (17°22’N, 78°18’E; a.k.a. Gandipet), one of the lakes that supply water to Hyderabad city (Andhra