

## Some significant records of birds from the central Indian highlands of Madhya Pradesh

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### Introduction

The central Indian highlands in the state of Madhya Pradesh comprise the Satpura and Vindhya Ranges which are separated by River Narmada. They are ornithologically little explored, with just a handful of papers published on local avifauna: Moss King (1911) from Damoh and Sagar, Whitehead (1911) from Sehore, D'Abreu (1912) from Balaghat, Osmaston (1922) from Pachmarhi, Briggs (1931) from Mhow, Hewetson (1939) from Betul, Newton et al. (1986) from Kanha, Tyabji (1994) from Bandhavgarh, Mehta (1998) from Bori and, more recently, Pasha et al. (2004) from Pench. Extensive surveys were however carried out in western and northern Madhya Pradesh, mostly north of the Vindhyas (Edwin-Barnes 1886; Ali and Whistler 1939, and 1940). Hewetson's (1956) comprehensive account of all his bird observations across the region was another major document on central Indian avifauna. The only published scientific collections from the central highlands were by D'Abreu (1912, and 1935) for Nagpur Museum. The other collection, by Dr Walter Koelz (1929-1950), currently housed at University of Michigan Museum of Zoology, remained largely unknown till Rasmussen and Anderton (2005) catalogued it.

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) undertook a survey of breeding land birds of the central highlands in Madhya Pradesh as part of an ongoing project on the Protected Area network in central India. The survey was conducted between February and July from 2002 to 2004, with its base-camp at Pench Tiger Reserve (Madhya Pradesh), where we carried out year-round observations. We divided the region into eleven areas and surveyed them as per the following itinerary [Note that the coverage of districts under each subregion may be whole or in part]:

- Malwa Plateau (Jhabua, Dhar, Indore, and Dewas districts): 25-27.v.2004.
- Nimar Hills (Barwani, West Nimar, and East Nimar districts): 22-30.v.2004.
- Lower Narmada Valley (West Nimar, Dewas, Harda, Sehore, and Hoshangabad districts): 24-26.ii.2002; 22-30.v.2004.
- Sagar-Damoh Plateau (Sagar and Damoh districts): 14-21.vi.2004.
- Betul Plateau (Betul district): 26.iv-5.v.2004.

- Satpura Range (Hoshangabad, Betul, and Chhindwara districts): 6-13.v.2004.
- Seoni-Chhindwara Plateau (Chhindwara, Narsimhapur, and Seoni districts): Most part of the study period.
- South Maikal Range (Mandla, Balaghat, and Dindori districts): 10-21.vi.2002.
- East Maikal Range (Shahdol, Umaria, and Katni districts): 18-26.vi.2003.
- Kaimur Hills (Jabalpur, Katni, Satna, and Rewa districts): 18-26.vi.2003.
- Vindhya scarplands (Chhatarpur, Panna, and Satna districts): 27-30.vi.2003.

We took great care in species identification, supporting each record with meticulous observations on field characters, including vocalizations. All the doubtful observations were treated as unconfirmed records. This survey is, however, neither exhaustive nor complete, as several localities (e.g., Panna Tiger Reserve and Nimar Hills) were under sampled due to logistic and time-constraints. We hope further intensive studies in the field will yield more accurate information on distribution and status of central Indian birds.

Several significant records and breeding range extensions noticed during our surveys are reported below.

**Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus*** In Kanha Tiger Reserve a pair was seen near Kisli on 15.vi.2002 and another pair at Salghat on 18.vi.2002. Probably a scarce resident in and around Kanha (south Maikal Range). D'Abreu (1935) collected one specimen (*A. t. indicus*) from this locality.

We also have two more disjunct records from Satpura Plateau: From Bori Wildlife Sanctuary, a male at Churna on 9.v.2004 and a female (?) near Dhain on 13.v.2004. Also a couple of winter records at Pench Tiger Reserve (a male on 11.i.1997 and a pair on 26.ii.2004).

**Red Spurfowl *Galloperdix spadicea*** Found all along the forested hills from Indore district in the west (one record at Simrole, 24.v.2004) to south Maikal in the east (Kanha Tiger Reserve, common) through Nimar Hills (Ashapur / Aulia, uncommon), Betul Plateau (Bhainsdehi Range, fairly common and Rampur, common), Satpura Range (Bori Wildlife Sanctuary, common), and Seoni-Chhindwara Plateau (Pench Tiger Reserve, common). Absent north of Narmada, in eastern Madhya Pradesh, where only

Painted Spurfowl is found (see below).

**Painted Spurfowl *G. lunulata*** Found in similar habitat as Red Spurfowl but mainly in eastern and central Madhya Pradesh. Quite frequent north of Narmada (Sagar-Damoh Plateau, Vindhya scarplands around Panna Tiger Reserve, Rewa Plateau, and east Maikal Range (Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve). South of Narmada River, found in sympatry with Red Spurfowl in Bori-Pachmarhi Plateau and Pench Tiger Reserve, often in the same locality. However, its apparent absence from Kanha Tiger Reserve (south Maikal Range) is intriguing and requires further investigation. Hewetson (1956) had recorded it from Balaghat district.

**Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus*** Occurs in the sal *Shorea robusta* forests of eastern Madhya Pradesh from east Maikal through south Maikal Range south to the teak-*Tectona grandis* dominant Pench Tiger Reserve in Seoni district.

**Grey Junglefowl *G. sonneratii*** Found in southern Madhya Pradesh from East Nimar Hills (Aulia Range, very scarce) through Betul Hills (Bhainsdehi Range and north Betul division, fairly common) up to Satpura Range (Bori Wildlife Sanctuary, very common). Ali and Whistler (1940) had a doubtful record of a female, further west from Manpur, Indore district. Apparently, River Pench, running north-south, forms a barrier between *G. gallus* and *G. sonneratii* in central India. But the reported (Dhange and Banubakode 2000) occurrence of Grey Junglefowl in Pench Tiger Reserve (Maharashtra) west of River Pench requires confirmation, as we did not encounter either of the *Gallus* species during our four visits to the Maharashtra section of Pench Tiger Reserve.

Not seen in western Madhya Pradesh, i.e., west Nimar Hills and Malwa Plateau, from where there are historical records (Ali and Whistler 1940). We speculate that the current central Indian population might have now become separated from the Western Ghats population.

**Oriental Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*** The peninsular population (*S. o. erythrocephala*) is found along the hills of southern and eastern Madhya Pradesh, breeding commonly at c.600m a.s.l., and higher (Betul Plateau, Satpura Range, Mahadeo Hills and south and east Maikal

Range including Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve). Not seen west of Betul (e.g. Nimar Hills). In winter, it spreads widely over well-wooded parts of the entire region, along with the Himalayan migratory form *S. o. meena*. Both are often seen together in the same locality.

**Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica*** Occurs in moist deciduous forests of central and eastern Madhya Pradesh from Satpura Range (Bori Wildlife Sanctuary-Pachmarhi) east through Pench and Kanha Tiger Reserves up to east Maikal Range in the north-east (e.g. Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve). Absent from Vindhya (e.g. Panna and Sagar-Damoh Plateau). Frequent in bamboo forests of the sal biome but less so in teak forests.

**Indian Cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus* and Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*** Both cuckoos are commonly heard in summer and early monsoon throughout well-wooded areas of the entire region. *C. micropterus* was, however, not heard or seen west of Simrole (Indore district).

**Drongo Cuckoo *Surniculus lugubris*** Song commonly heard between June and September throughout the forested tracts of central and eastern Madhya Pradesh (including East Nimar Hills, Betul Plateau, Satpura Range, Seoni-Chhindwara Plateau, east and south Maikal Ranges, Vindhya scarplands, and Sagar-Damoh Plateau). Not seen west of Khandwa. Surprisingly few records from central India in the past (e.g. Tyabji 1994, Bandhavgarh). Host species imperfectly known, though twice seen chased aggressively by nesting Ashy Drongos *Dicrurus leucophaeus* (near Karmajhiri, Pench Tiger Reserve on 15.vi.2003 and at Mukki, Kanha Tiger Reserve on 19.vi.2002).

The local movements of this population are, however, unclear. It is most probably a summer / monsoon breeding visitor to central India. We had no winter records in Pench Tiger Reserve, during our stay in 1996-1997, 2002-2003, and 2003-2004. But the possibility of birds having been overlooked when they were not calling cannot be ruled out.

**Oriental Scops-Owl *Otus sunia*** Found along the hill-forests of southern and eastern Madhya Pradesh from Betul Plateau east through Satpura Range, Mahadeo hills, Seoni Plateau, south and east Maikal. The distribution range in the region almost identical to that of Oriental Turtle-Dove (further spatial analyses planned). Not heard west of Betul. Very vocal from early

March to late May. Surprisingly few historical records from central India (Osmaston 1922 from Pachmarhi,; Hewetson 1939 from Betul).

**Forest Eagle-Owl *Bubo nipalensis*** Rare resident in Pench Tiger Reserve, Seoni district. Seen one adult roosting on a huge *Terminalia arjuna* tree along the banks of River Pench in Cheetaghat area on 18.iv.2004. Another bird was photographed at Raiyagazza (date unknown) (Sen and Dungriyal 2004). Apparently an addition to the central Indian avifauna.

We also suspect seeing one bird near Churna, Bori Wildlife Sanctuary on 9.v.2004. Interestingly, Mehta (1998) has recorded it as a rare resident in Bori Wildlife Sanctuary.

Further field surveys are required to determine its status in central India.

**Brown Hawk-Owl *Ninox scutulata*** A scarce resident in central and eastern Madhya Pradesh confined to the dense forests of Satpura Range, Mahadeo Hills, Seoni Plateau, south and east Maikal Ranges, and also in and around Panna Tiger Reserve in the Vindhya (calls heard near Hinauta barrier on 27.vi.2003 and one pair was observed being mobbed by other birds near Pawai on Panna-Katni route on 29.vi.2003).

**White-rumped Needletail-Swift *Zoonavena sylvatica*** Occurs from Chorbahuli on Nagpur-Seoni Highway (26.vii.2002, 7.iv.2003; 2.vi.2003) north through Mahadeo Hills, Seoni Plateau, and south Maikal Range till east Maikal Range in Umari district (Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve). Not seen west of Chhindwara town.

**Blue-bearded Bee-eater *Nyctornis athertoni*** Two small disjunct populations exist in Madhya Pradesh. One in the Satpura Range (Bori Wildlife Sanctuary and Pachmarhi) and another in and around Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve. Possibly also in Deogarh hills in Shahdol district, not far from Bandhavgarh where calls were heard in a dense sal patch near Kumerhin on 19.vi.2003. Not seen anywhere else. Our observations largely agree with the distribution map in Kazmierczak (2000). However, the range in Rasmussen and Anderton (2005) includes the entire stretch of central Indian highlands.

**Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthracoeros coronatus*** Distributed in central, southern, and eastern Madhya Pradesh. Our survey yielded four disjunct populations: 1) North Betul Division (Rampur) and Satpura Range (Bori Wildlife Sanctuary-Pachmarhi), 2) Seoni Plateau (Pench Tiger Reserve) and

south Maikal Range (Kanha Tiger Reserve), 3) East Maikal Range (Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve), and 4) Deogarh hills in Shahdol district (Kumerhin Reserve).

**Rufous Woodpecker *Celeus brachyurus*** Central and eastern Madhya Pradesh including Satpura Range, Seoni-Chhindwara Plateau, and south and east Maikal Range. Distribution limits in the region remarkably identical to that of Emerald Dove (further spatial analyses planned). More frequent in sal biome than teak forests.

**Small Yellow-naped Woodpecker *Picus chlorolophus*** Fairly common in less-disturbed forests in Satpura Range (Bori Wildlife Sanctuary and Mahadeo Hills), Seoni Plateau (Pench Tiger Reserve), and south Maikal Range (Kanha Tiger Reserve east to Amarkantak). Not found north of Narmada. Our observations agree with the range map in Kazmierczak (2000), but not with Grimmett et al. (1998) or Rasmussen and Anderton (2005).

**Little Scaly-bellied Green Woodpecker *Picus xanthopygaeus*** Commonly found in a wide variety of forest types in central and eastern Madhya Pradesh, from north Betul Division through Satpura Range, Mahadeo Hills, Seoni-Chhindwara Plateau, and south and east Maikal Ranges. One unconfirmed sighting around Panna Tiger Reserve (a bird in flight near Akola on Panna-Amanganj road on 29.vi.2003). Contrary to existing literature (Grimmett et al. 1998; Kazmierczak 2000), we did not come across it in western Madhya Pradesh including Malwa Plateau and Nimar Hills (Shahpur in Betul district is our westernmost record) nor in Sagar-Damoh Plateau.

**Singing Bush-Lark *Mirafra cantillans*** Locally distributed in western and southern Madhya Pradesh. Absent from most of central and eastern Madhya Pradesh especially north of Narmada River.

**Red-winged Bush-Lark *Mirafra erythroptera*** Widespread in the region except sal-dominant eastern Madhya Pradesh (Maikal and Kaimur Hills). Also absent in Satpura Range. Very common on Malwa Plateau (Simrole-Mhow road) and Sagar-Damoh Plateau (Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary). Generally scarcer elsewhere.

**Indian Short-toed Lark *Calandrella raytal*** Very few historical records from the region (Hewetson 1956 from Narmada). Certainly, more widely distributed in the region than past records indicate. All our sightings were invariably along sandy river banks, as follows: Along Narmada River: Near Jabalpur (21.vi.2004), near Hoshangabad

(26.ii.2002; 2.xii.2002) and, several between Omkareshwar and Mandleshwar (26.v.2004). Along Ken River: Near Rajgarh, Panna district (29.vi.2003). Along Bearma River: Near Kudpura, Damoh district (21.vi.2004). Along Kanhan River: One pair near Pandhurna, Chhindwara district (22.v.2004). **Sykes's Crested Lark *Galerida deva*** Quite common in western and northern Madhya Pradesh. Absent from higher hills (above c.500m a.s.l.) of Satpura Range and the eastern sal country. Ken River in the north and River Pench in the south probably form the distribution limits, east of which we have no records. Our easternmost record in the north is near Rajgarh, Panna district (29.vi.2003), and in the south near Kumbhapani, Chhindwara district (26.iv.2004).

**Scarlet Minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus*** Occurs in two disjunct breeding populations. One in north Betul Division (Rampur) and Satpura Range (Bori Wildlife Sanctuary-Pachmarhi) but not Mahadeo Hills. Another in south Maikal Range (Kanha Tiger Reserve east to Amarkantak). Not seen anywhere else.

Reports of its occurrence (Tyabji 1994; Pasha et al. 2004) in other parts of the region is probably owing to confusion with the similar-looking Long-tailed Minivet *P. ethologus*, which is a common winter migrant to central India.

**Pied Flycatcher-Shrike *Hemipus picatus*** We recorded this species in three disjunct localities: 1) South Betul Division (Bhainsdehi Range), 2) North Betul division – Satpura Range (Bori Wildlife Sanctuary), and 3) South Maikal Range (Kanha Tiger Reserve east to Amarkantak). There is an old record from Sagar-Damoh district (Moss King 1911), but we do not have any records from north of Narmada River.

The birds in central India are seemingly more withdrawn and less confiding than northern population in the Himalayas.

**Black-crested Bulbul *Pycnonotus melanicterus*** We have only two records of this species and both are restricted to north Betul Division - Satpura Range. A pair near Rampur, Betul (27.iv.2004) and a small flock of four near Tamia, Chhindwara district (22.v.2004). Not seen elsewhere, including Bori Wildlife Sanctuary, which lies between these two localities. Apparently, there are old records from Pench Tiger Reserve (Sterndale 1887), but this population is not seen anymore.

**Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*** Recorded only in Betul Plateau (both south

Betul and north Betul divisions) and Satpura Range (Bori Wildlife Sanctuary – Pachmarhi extending down to Mahadeo Hills, Tamia in Chhindwara district). Despite its very restricted range in the region, it is curiously abundant wherever it occurs. Apparently there is another disjunct population in Kanha Tiger Reserve (Newton et al. 1986), but we could not locate it.

**White-browed Bulbul *Pycnonotus luteolus*** Occurs only in Seoni-Chhindwara Plateau, the northern limit of its distribution in central India. Very scarce, though reportedly locally common in Nagpur city. Our records include two pairs near Pandhurna in Chhindwara district (22.v.2004) and birds sighted on three different occasions in Pench Tiger Reserve, Seoni district (a pair at Karmajhiri in 1996 and on 6.ix.2003, and another pair near Turia gate on 18.ii.2004).

**Malabar Whistling-Thrush *Myophonus horsfieldii*** We have four records: South Betul Division (Kukru, Bhainsdehi Range: fairly common), north Betul Division-Satpura Range (also frequent in the adjacent Mahadeo Hills, Tamia, Chhindwara district), near Shahpura in Dindori district (two sightings on 18.vi.2003), and in Deogarh hills near Kumerhin in Shahdol district (one sighting on 19.vi.2003).

**Orange-headed Thrush *Zoothera citrina cyanotus*** Found commonly in the forests of southern and eastern Madhya Pradesh from East Nimar Hills (our western-most record: Ashapur, Aulia Range on 23.v.2004) east through Betul Plateau, Satpura Range, Seoni-Chhindwara Plateau, and south and east Maikal Range north to Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve. Apparently occurs in Vindhya scarplands (Panna Tiger Reserve, K. Yoganand, verbally). Absent from western Madhya Pradesh (Malwa Plateau and West Nimar Hills?), and north-central Madhya Pradesh (Sagar-Damoh Plateau).

**Indian Blackbird *Turdus simillimus*** Seen all along the southern hills from Malwa Plateau (Mandu, 26.v.2004; Simrole, 24.v.2004), Nimar Hills (Ashapur, Aulia Range, 23.v.2004), Betul Plateau (Kukru, Bhainsdehi Range, 27.iv.2004-5.v.2004), Satpura Range (Mahadeo hills, Tamia, Chhindwara district, 22.v.2004), Seoni Plateau (Rukhad and Kurai, Pench Tiger Reserve), and south Maikal east to Amarkantak and also Deogarh hills, Kumerhin, Shahdol district (19.vi.2003). We have, however, no records from east Maikal Range (e.g. Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve).

Only a summer / monsoon visitor to Pench Tiger Reserve (from early May to September), and presumably so in other parts of the region.

**White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus*** All our records confined to south-eastern Madhya Pradesh. From Pench Tiger Reserve (Very rare. Only three sightings: one male near Bodanalla tank on 25.xii.1996, another in a bamboo thicket along Kadasi Nalla on 17.ix.2003 and, a pair near Bodanalla on 27.ii.2004) to south Maikal Range (Kanha Tiger Reserve: quite common) east to Amarkantak south of Narmada River.

**Indian Chat *Cercomela fusca*** Occurs west of a diagonal line from Panna to Khargon along the Narmada River. Our easternmost records along this line from north-east to south-west in the region are as follows: Panna-Amanganj road (29.vi.2003), Bilayatkalani on Katni-Umaria road (17.vi.2003), Jabalpur city (30.vi.2003; 22.vi.2004), Suatala on Narasimhapur-Sagar road (13.vi.2004), near Hoshangabad (26.ii.2002), between Omkareshwar and Mandleshwar (26.v.2004), and Khargon town (28.v.2004).

Our observations largely agree with the range map in Kazmierczak (2000). Curiously, we have one doubtful sighting far from this line near Mansar on Nagpur-Seoni Highway on 29.v.2004.

**Spotted Babbler *Pellorneum ruficeps*** Recorded from central and eastern Madhya Pradesh: South Betul (Kukru, Bhainsdehi Range), north Betul (Rampur), Satpura Range (Bori Wildlife Sanctuary-Pachmarhi, but not found in the adjacent Mahadeo Hills), south and east Maikal Ranges north to Bandhavgarh. Not seen west of Betul.

**Indian Scimitar-Babbler *Pomatorhinus horsfieldii*** Range nearly identical to that of Spotted Babbler, often found together in the same locality. In addition, also recorded from Mahadeo Hills, near Tamia in Chhindwara district (22.v.2004), Pench Tiger Reserve (a pair at Kadasi Nalla on 17.ix.2003; also see D'Abreau 1935), and Vindhya scarplands (Panna Tiger Reserve: K. Yoganand verbally; also distinct dueting calls heard from a dense bamboo forest near Shikarpura, Panna district on 29.vi.2003).

**Common Babbler *Turdoides caudatus*** Widespread but generally less common. We did not have any records from most parts of south and east Maikal Ranges (except one flock at Manpur near Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve on 25.vi.2003); probably absent from south-eastern Madhya Pradesh.

**Quaker Tit-Babbler *Alcippe poiocephala***

A bird of the hill-forests. Its range nearly overlaps with that of Spotted Babbler. However, we have one record from west of Betul, near Dhulkot, West Nimar district (28.v.2004).

Both, this species and Spotted Babbler are curiously absent from several localities where seemingly suitable habitats are present (Aulia in East Nimar Hills, Mahadeo Hills in Chhindwara district, and Kurai hills in Pench Tiger Reserve).

**Rufous-fronted Prinia *Prinia buchanani***

Mainly found in western Madhya Pradesh extending east to Rukhad (in Pench Tiger Reserve, very scarce) in the south and Satna in the north (a pair seen near Satna River bridge between Nagod and Satna on 26.vi.2003). No records [absent?] from central (Satpura Range and Mahadeo Hills) and eastern Madhya Pradesh (Maikal Ranges).

**Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis*** Recorded almost throughout the region except north-eastern Madhya Pradesh including Bandhavgarh (Absent from east Maikal Range north of Narmada River?). See Tyabji (1994) for his comments on its reported absence from Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve.

**Striated Marsh-Warbler *Megalurus palustris*** Very few historical records (D'Abreu 1935). Possibly more widespread than old records indicate (Rasmussen and Anderton 2005). We have recorded from three localities: Along Narmada River: several between Omkareshwar and Mandleshwar (26.v.2004). Along Ken River: One individual near the bridge between Rajgarh and Panna (29.vi.2003). Along River Pench: One pair close to Tikari village, Pench Tiger Reserve on 15.viii.2003.

**Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*** Earlier known to breed only around the hills of Malwa Plateau (Briggs 1931; Ali and Ripley 1982). We discovered another disjunct breeding population in south Betul Division (Kukru, Bhainsdehi Range, scarce) and also possibly in the adjacent Gawilgarh hills, Melghat Tiger Reserve, Maharashtra. Hewetson (1956) recorded it from Melghat as a probable breeder, but not from Betul. Our westernmost record is from the hills of Simrole (24.v.2004), where it is not uncommon.

Rasmussen and Anderton (2005) show that the species breeds extensively across the central Indian highlands east to Maikal Ranges. Though we did not come across this species east of Betul, intensive searches

may yield further breeding records. Mehta (1998) recorded it as an uncommon resident in Bori Wildlife Sanctuary. Incidentally, we have three winter records from Pench Tiger Reserve, Seoni district (16.xi.2003, 23.xii.2003, 2.ii.2004; see also Pasha et al. 2004).

**White-throated Fantail *Rhipidura albicollis*** Recorded from three disjunct areas, all south of Narmada River: 1) South Betul Division (Bhainsdehi Range, Kukru), 2) North Betul Division-Satpura Range (Bori Wildlife Sanctuary-Pachmarhi) both these populations belong to the race *R. a. albogularis*, and 3) South Maikal Range (Kanha east to Amarkantak), belonging to *R. a. orissae*. There is one unconfirmed sighting (apparently *R. a. albogularis*) from Pench Tiger Reserve, Seoni district (Sayantan Biswas, verbally.).

Curiously, some individuals observed in Bori Wildlife Sanctuary and Kukru Reserve, Betul district, looked very similar to *R. a. orissae*.

**Spotted Creeper *Salpornis spilonotus*** Only two sightings during the survey, both from Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary, Sagar district. One pair near Mohali on 19.vi.2004, an individual near Chevla Talab on 20.vi.2004. Apparently not uncommon in Panna Tiger Reserve (K. Yoganand, verbally.).

**Purple-rumped Sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica*** All our records are from south-central Madhya Pradesh. Uncommon in Bhainsdehi Range, south Betul Division and one pair near Pandhurna, Chhindwara district on 22.v.2004. Reportedly occurs in the adjacent Satpura Range as well (Mehta 1998, from Bori Wildlife Sanctuary), though we did not see any there.

**Grey-headed Starling *Sturnus malabaricus*** Recorded from forested tracts of central and eastern Madhya Pradesh from Satpura Plateau (Bori Wildlife Sanctuary-Pachmarhi) east to Maikal Ranges (Kanha and Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve) through Seoni-Chhindwara Plateau (Pench Tiger Reserve), Sagar-Damoh Plateau (Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary) and Vindhya scarplands (Panna Tiger Reserve) in the north. All the records were between April and July, indicating a breeding population, and presence of juveniles further confirms their breeding status in the region. Not recorded west of Bori (including Betul Plateau?). Probably widespread in winter across the entire region.

**Jungle Myna *Acridotheres fuscus*** Observed only from south Maikal Range in south-eastern Madhya Pradesh. Is quite

common in and around Kanha but very scarce east to Amarkantak. Distribution intriguingly very local and patchy. Records from other parts of the region are questionable (Pasha et al. 1998, from Pench Tiger Reserve).

**Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*** The most surprising finding of the survey. Widely thought to be a winter visitor from the Himalaya Range (Ali and Ripley 1983). We found several breeding birds during our survey, mostly in central, southern, and eastern Madhya Pradesh from the Satpura Range (Bori Wildlife Sanctuary-Pachmarhi), Mahadeo Hills (Tamia, Chhindwara district), Seoni Plateau (Pench Tiger Reserve), south Maikal Range (Kanha Tiger Reserve east to Amarkantak), and up to east Maikal Range (Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve) in the north-east. Not found west (including Betul Plateau) or north of Bori. Quite common wherever found. Territorial fights and courtship behaviour are rather prolonged, beginning in the second week of April, while nest construction starts around the first week of June. The fledglings are usually seen in the first week of July.

The only breeding record from the region, in the past, was from Bandhavgarh (Tyabji 1994). Poor coverage during the south-west monsoon (when most parts of the region become inaccessible) and similarity to the commoner Black Drongo *D. macrocerus* might explain why the bird has been consistently under-reported from the region. Interestingly, Rasmussen and Anderton (2005) have shown a small resident population in southern Madhya Pradesh, citing Walter Koelz's unpublished collections from central India.

Widespread in winter throughout the well-wooded parts of the region, when the local population is probably augmented by wintering birds from the Himalayas.

We strongly recommend further intensive surveys between May and July in other peninsular hills as well (e.g. Eastern Ghats) for further breeding records.

**Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus*** We identified four disjunct populations: 1) Satpura Range: common in Bori Wildlife Sanctuary-Pachmarhi, (but not found in Mahadeo Hills), 2) Seoni Plateau: very rare in Kurai Valley, Pench Tiger Reserve (only two sightings: one pair on 3.v.2002, and another nesting pair on 7.vii.2003), 3) South Maikal Range (common in Kanha Tiger Reserve and scarce east to Amarkantak), and 4) East Maikal Range (fairly common in Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve east to Deogarh

Hills). Probably spreads in winter.

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Fig. 1. Central Indian highlands of Madhya Pradesh.