

Valparai town (Coimbatore district, Tamil Nadu) in the Anamalai Hills (Western Ghats). Walking up a narrow path into a clearing by a stream-bed between 13:00 and 14:00hrs, my field assistant and I flushed a Forest Eagle-Owl from the ground to our left. It had a small animal in its talons that it dropped as it flew across the stream ahead of us. On closer inspection, we saw it was a freshly killed young mouse deer, whose body was still warm. Its head had been completely torn off and was missing and the first few drops of blood began to flow as it lay on the ground.

The mouse deer occurs in Sri Lanka, peninsular India and possibly in Nepal (Corbett and Hill 1992). It is one of the smallest Artiodactyls in the world and weighs up to 4kg (Menon 2003). Mouse deer live in undergrowth on the edges of heavy lowland forests and are seldom found far from water (Nowak 1999). They are thought to be solitary, and females give birth to one or two young, usually by the beginning of winter (Prater 1971). Mouse deer are prey of Indian wild dogs *Cuon alpinus*, tigers and Leopards *Panthera pardus* (Easa 1995, Schaller 1972).

Mammals form an important component of the diet of other eagle-owls in different parts of the world (Serrano 2000). Eagle-owls are also opportunistic feeders, taking birds and mammals weighing up to 1.5kg (Frikke and Tofft 1997*). Predation studies have also examined differential predation by owls, and it was observed that owls preferred juveniles and sub-adult individuals, and that they killed more often in open areas than in closed areas (Vaseallo et al. 1994, Rohner and Krebs 1996).

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Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* robbing the eggs of a nightjar *Caprimulgus* sp.

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The Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* is one of the most common and familiar birds of India. An accomplished omnivore and opportunist in feeding habits (Krishnan 1954, Murthy 1954, Narang & Lamba 1984, Ali & Ripley 1987) the birds are mostly seen feeding on ground pecking at fallen fruits or leap-frogging in associations with cattle in agriculture fields. They are known to occur in family parties except during the breeding season (Narang & Lamba 1984) and often congregate in large numbers for roosting.

On 14.v.2003, during a regular scanning survey, I was observing otters (*Lutra perspicillata*) at one of the vantage points at Khinnanauli in Corbett Tiger Reserve along the Ramganga River. It was close to dusk (18:20hrs) when I suddenly heard some loud repertoires of shrieking calls c.25m away. To my astonishment a group of three Common Mynas had attacked a nightjar (Caprimulgidae: unidentified species), which had been incubating in sand in the short grasslands. Incidentally, my attention was

diverted to the scene and I made the following observations:

The nightjar immediately ducked and turned its face nearly upside down to look at the attackers. These mynas wheeled around making frequent attempts to mob the nightjar, which ducked out of danger and made loud squawks of protests. Despite mobbing by mynas observed for about 10 minutes, the nightjar constantly defended its clutch. A few minutes later, four more mynas joined the group and all started mobbing the nightjar. With little choice left, the nightjar flew off reluctantly when the attacks became unbearable. Five mynas devoured the eggs while two kept the nightjar at bay. Meanwhile, the nightjar had made several futile attempts to drive away the mynas from the nest by flying close to it and calling out loudly. On close examination, I found that the egg contents were eaten while the eggshells remained scattered. The observations suggest an unusual opportunistic behavior of Common Mynas preying on eggs, so far unreported

and hence worthy of placing on record.

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Indian Blackbird *Turdus simillimus* breeding in Mt. Abu

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Indian Blackbird *Turdus simillimus nigropileus** is a common visitor to the hills of Mt. Abu (24°34'N, 72°39'E; 1,219m a.s.l.), Rajasthan, India. It arrives as early as 10.iii. However, it is common from May to September. No breeding record of this species exists from Gujarat and Rajasthan. We report here a first nesting record of the Indian Blackbird from Mt. Abu on 11.vii.2004. Males were heard singing from June to September from the top of the canopy of tall trees.

The most common areas for observing Indian Blackbirds in Mt. Abu are AVM School premises, St. Mary School area, Anil Mathur's garden, Honeymoon Point area, Achalgarh, Sunset road, etc.

Indian Blackbirds have four races in the Indian Subcontinent (Rasmussen and Anderton 2005). Butler (1875) mentions the Indian Blackbird as a breeding visitor to Mt. Abu, but confesses that he "was never fortunate enough to find a nest." In a footnote to that statement, A. O. Hume states, "This is quite the most northerly point attained by this species; it is unknown throughout the whole region with which we are dealing [Gujarat and Rajasthan] No one has yet taken the nest." Prakash and Singh (1995) did not come across Indian Blackbirds in Mt. Abu during their survey from January

1993 to August 1994. Devarshi and Trigunayat (1989) mention the occurrence of Indian Blackbird in Mt. Abu (1983-1988) but do not comment on nesting.

On 11.vii.2004, one nest of Indian Blackbird was seen in Anil Mathur's garden (Rising Sun retreat) at Mt. Abu. There were two chicks inside the nest. On 26.vii two chicks left the nest. A second brood was raised in the same nest after about 15 days, but this time the nesting was not successful. The nest was built in a Rubber tree plant at a height of 3m in a fork of the tree and the nesting tree was close to human habitation. The birds tolerated human presence and kept bringing food to the young even when there were people around the nesting tree.

Both the parents took part in raising the chicks, feeding them mostly with insects and caterpillars. On several occasions they were seen carrying food in their beak at Kodara dam and AVM area in August 2004 but nests (?) could not be located.

This species is absent from Mt. Abu during winter. Indian Blackbirds were even not seen at the foothills of Mt. Abu. They are breeding visitors to Mt. Abu where they are common above 1,219m from May to early September.

This note is to document the breeding of Indian Blackbirds in Mt. Abu.

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*Rasmussen and Anderton (2005) have split this taxon from the earlier conspecific taxon *Turdus merula*, and have grouped the following forms under *T. simillimus*: *T. s. nigropileus*, *T. s. simillimus*, *T. s. bourdilloni*, *T. s. kinnisii*. They state that, "All forms grouped herein differ markedly and in the same ways in plumage, proportions, wing formula, vocalisations, and egg colour from northern forms previously treated under *T. merula*. Despite their heterogeneity in plumage, they undoubtedly form a monophyletic group. While the *nigropileus* group (including *mahrattensis* and *spencei*) is the most divergent in terms of plumage colouratio, the Sri Lankan *kinnisii* is the most distinct in other ways, including its small size, plumage texture, near lack of sexual dimorphism, and vocalisations, and is probably better treated as a distinct species. A formal taxonomic revision is underway by P. Alström and co-workers," (p. 364).

Recoveries from the Newsletter for Birdwatchers – 8

Zafar Futehally

Although the *Newsletter* had started appearing in 1960 as a smudgy cyclostyled sheet, it was only in 1962 that it was formally "born" and acquired a proper identity. On 16.xii.1961, at the Annual General Meeting held traditionally under the mango tree in the editor's garden, there were 23 persons present (quite a record), while suggestions for the formation of an Indian Ornithological Society were also received from several who were unable to attend. These included Dr J. C. George and Dr R. M. Naik (both from Washington), Mrs Jamal Ara (Ranchi), Mrs Desiree Proud (British Embassy, Nepal), Major W. W. A. Phillips

(England), Dr J. P. Joshua (Liberia), Mr Yusuf Patel (West Africa), and a telegram from R. A. Stewart Melliush, one of our strongest supporters from Madras. It was heartening that this amateur effort had so many well-wishers in different parts of the world. There was much discussion about the desirability of forming an Indian Ornithological Society. As I have said earlier in this column the BNHS was then opposed to this move as they believed that it might further erode their already limited membership. The meeting discussed the option of creating a Bird Wing in the BNHS rather than creating a new Society. The

Chairman, Dr Sálím Ali, summed up the views expressed and concluded that, "the contention was that a little more spade work should be done before an ornithological society was formed... For the time being the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* would be kept going..."

One constructive decision at the meeting was the establishment of an editorial board, whose members covered the various regions of the country, and the following members were chosen: Dr Salim Ali (Bombay), K. S. Lavkumar (Rajkot), Y. S. Shivraj Kumar (Jasdan), Dr R. M. Naik (then at Michigan State University) Mrs Usha