

district), to the way to Hyderabad. This big vulture dwarfed the eagle and as they passed over the road they came right above me. Through binoculars, I could see a feathered head and a relatively short neck apart from the huge size and black colour; all these features confirmed that this was indeed a Cinereous Vulture.

I saw the Cinereous Vulture again on 28.i.2001 (16:45hrs), perched on the upper branches of a medium-sized *Ficus* sp., tree in a fallow field next to the Star-chick poultry. It allowed me to approach very close and I was able to get some good photographs. At that proximity, I could clearly see the massive bill and the head covered with down like feathers on the occiput, cheek and lores. This was a juvenile (adults are sooty-brown, juveniles, jet black – hence the name, ‘European Black Vulture’ (American Zoo and Aquarium Association 1998). The reason it stuck around in this area was obvious: the offal dumped by the poultry farm was an attraction not only for the vulture but also for Tawny Eagles. I have seen Tawny Eagles near the poultry farm quite often, squabbling and chasing each

other for scraps of chicken carcasses. On later visits, I noticed that the *Ficus* sp., tree on which the bird was seen had been cut down.

The Cinereous Vulture is a scarce and uncommon winter visitor to south India and sighting one near Chevella was totally unexpected. Other reports of this species from south India include: Karimnagar district, Andhra Pradesh (Choudhury 1990); Nelapattu Wildlife Sanctuary, Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh (Perennou & Santharam 1990); Kerala (Kumar 1991); Coorg district, Karnataka (Subramanya 2001); Mysore, Karnataka (Shivanand 2002).

Based on the above reports, it is possible that the Cinereous Vulture spreads to peninsular and southern India more than we are aware. Birdwatchers from these regions would do well to keep a lookout for this species.

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## The Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica* in Mainpuri, Uttar Pradesh, India

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The Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica* is a globally endangered species with a small and declining population due to degradation and shrinkage of preferred grassland habitats (Sankaran 2000). Most records of this species in India are from Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. In Uttar Pradesh, in recent times, the species has been sighted only in Dudwa National Park (Javed & Rahmani 1998), while other records from the state are from the 1880s (BirdLife International 2001). In this note I report a sighting of this species in Mainpuri district, Uttar Pradesh.

During a routine road transect to record large waterbirds in the area bordering Etawah and Mainpuri districts on 15.vi.2005, one male and one female Lesser Floricans were sighted foraging in an uncultivated agriculture field with low grass. The male could be photographed and was in partial moult. The field was previously part of the Kudaiyya wetland but was drained for agriculture by a wasteland reclamation project in 2001 (personal observation). Rainfall during 2004-2005 had been poor and the area was reeling under a dry spell. On

second visit to the area (5.viii.2005) we saw that the field was being cultivated with rice paddy after a good spell of showers in July in August. There was no sign of the floricans. During earlier, regular field visits to the same site and other sites in the two districts, from December 1999 to July 2002, I had never sighted the species.

There is one past record of this species from the area; a male was collected from the neighbouring Etawah district in August 1869 (BirdLife International 2001). The Lesser Florican therefore appears to be an infrequent vagrant to Etawah and Mainpuri districts when conditions are right, occurring in small and scattered populations. Males of this species are known to moult into breeding plumage in June and July (Sankaran & Rahmani 1986). It is likely that the individuals seen in Mainpuri were on their way to breeding grounds.

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