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## A large congregation of Northern House-Martins *Delichon urbica* near Pune, India

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I was at the Sahyadri School (Krishnamurti Foundation India) near Rajgurunagar, Pune (Maharashtra, India) from 12th to 16th January 2008 to conduct a birdwatching workshop for the students. This was my fourth visit to the school and I have now recorded over 135 bird species from the campus and immediate neighbourhood.

An interesting observation during this visit was the sighting of a large congregation of swallows (Hirundinidae) seen in the campus on the morning of 15th January 2008. I estimated their numbers at 3,500 and a closer study revealed two species: Redrumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica*—approximately 1,500 birds and Northern House-Martin *Delichon urbica*—approximately 2,000 birds. They were perched on telegraph wires and posts that spanned at least 250 m in three or four rows. Besides, a number of them were hawking flying insects. I watched them for over 30

minutes until they were chased by a Eurasian Sparrow-hawk *Accipiter nisus*. The next morning I again tried to locate the birds. They were flying over the reservoir below the hill and since I was leaving early that morning, I could not spend much time.

Prasad (2004) mentions that this species is a rare winter visitor to this region but may possibly be more common than supposed. The largest number on record is 100+ seen in November 1880 at Prakasha on the Tapti River, Dhule district by Davidson (1882).

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## Breeding notes on the Rufous-bellied Babbler *Dumetia hyperythra*

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The Rufous-bellied Babbler *Dumetia hyperythra* is represented by four subspecies on the Indian Subcontinent—*hyperythra*, *albogularis*, *abuensis* and *phillipsi*. The first three inhabit mainland India whereas the last is endemic to Sri Lanka. The nominate race and *D. h. albogularis* are found in eastern and southern India respectively. *D. h. abuensis* is found from southern Rajasthan, through Gujarat (excluding Kachchh), eastwards onto the Satpuras and southwards to the northern parts of the Western Ghats (Ali & Ripley 1983).

During the last decade I have been regularly observing a few pairs of Rufous-bellied Babblers along the Vishawamitri River at Sayaji Baug Garden, Vadodara, Gujarat from June till withdrawal of the monsoon by mid-October. They frequent undisturbed areas of the garden with low bushes on either side of the river. Every year I found a nest in a corner of the zoo office garden. I surmise it is the same pair using the same location year after year.

In the second week of June 2003, I first observed this pair in the zoo office garden. Both birds were very active and vocal.

On 16th June 2003, the pair was seen among potted plants overhung by climbers and vines. Next day both the birds were observed carrying long grass blades and other nesting materials. The nest building activity was observed between 10:00 hrs and 15:00 hrs. Within a week a globular nest was found in the corner. This nest was constructed about 85 cm above the ground. It was a little higher than nests constructed at the same location in previous years. Later, when either bird did not visit the nest site, I feared they had been disturbed and abandoned the nest. On 24th June 2003, I took a closer look at the nest thinking it had been abandoned, but to my surprise, I found it contained two eggs. On 26th June, at noon, I carefully checked the nest and found four eggs.

On the morning of 27th June, both birds were sighted around the nest till 13:00 hrs., when one entered the nest while the other flew away. When one of the pair came near the nest it gave a distinctive call that was immediately answered by the incubating bird, which would come out to be replaced by its mate. Both birds participated in incubation. Once incubation had started, the nest was never left unattended.

On the evening of 9th July, I hear the call of chicks and see the parents changing duties. The same evening I inspected the nest when both parents were away and found three pink-coloured nestlings and one un-hatched egg. Both parents fed the chicks during the day, with one of them settling in to brood

them at night. On 12th July only two nestlings and an egg were noted in the nest (loss of one chick from the nest is a mystery because if it had been predated, then the nest would have been damaged and its contents devoured). On 18th July 2003, the two chicks left the nest. For the next ten days both chicks grew fast and almost looked like the parents except for a darker body colour and their yellow gape.

On 20th July 2003, I took down the nest for inspection. The un-hatched egg was pale grey with reddish brown spots and blotches. It measured 15.60 x 12.92 mm and weighed 1.5 gm. It was infertile.

The globular nest measured 16 x 15 cm with a 4 cm entrance hole. The material used was 20–25 cm long grass, and palm leaf blades, with its outer layers comprising bamboo leaves. The innermost lining was of finer grass and palm leaf strips intermingled with very fine fibres and similar soft material.

Ali & Ripley (1983) have very little on the nesting biology of this species. The Vadodara egg is smaller than their published average of 17.4 x 14.1 cm. The incubation period lasted twelve days.

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## Jungle Myna *Acridotheres fuscus* usurping the nest hole of Grey-headed Starling *Sturnus malabaricus*

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Nath, N. K. 2009. Jungle Myna *Acridotheres fuscus* usurping the nest hole of Grey-headed Starling *Sturnus malabaricus*. *Indian Birds* 4 (3): 115 (2008).

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**G**rey-headed Starling *Sturnus malabaricus* and Jungle Myna *Acridotheres fuscus* are both common and familiar birds in India. Their breeding seasons coincide in April–July (Ali & Ripley 1987).

While observing a breeding pair of Grey-headed Starlings in the Bansbari range office campus in Manas National Park (Assam, India), I witnessed an instance of usurpation of its nest by a pair of Jungle Mynas. Here is the sequence of events.

8th April 2007: I discover a nest hole occupied by a pair of Grey-headed Starlings at a height c. 7 m from the ground, in a dead Persian lilac tree *Melia azedarach*. Both birds of the pair were observed bringing nest material to the hole.

18th April 2007: In the morning, a commotion attracted my attention towards the nesting tree. I saw a pair of Jungle Mynas fighting with the Grey-headed Starlings.

22 April 2007: In the morning, a pair (the same?) of Jungle Mynas reappeared near the nest hole and engaged the Grey-headed Starlings in a fight—finally evicting the latter and forcibly occupying their nest. In the afternoon, the usurpers were seen throwing the nesting material collected by Grey-

headed Starlings, out of the nest hole—even as the hapless erstwhile owners watched helplessly from the top canopy of the same tree!

24th April 2007: The Jungle Myna pair was seen carrying nesting material in to the nest hole.

10th May 2007: Brooding feathers were noticed on one of the Jungle Mynas—incubation might have begun.

9th June 2007: Calls of chicks were heard when parents approached the nest hole with food—indicating successful fledging.

Though the usurpation of a nest hole is a common phenomenon among hole-nesting birds, competition for nest sites being higher than that for non-hole-nesters, this episode was interesting as its perpetrators were different species of the same family—Sturnidae.

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