

Thick-billed Green-Pigeon *Treron curvirostra* in Similipal Hills, Orissa: an addition to the avifauna of peninsular India

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Thick-billed Green-Pigeon *Treron curvirostra* is a resident bird in the Himalaya—from western Nepal eastward to Sikkim, north Bengal duars and Bhutan, to extreme eastern Arunachal Pradesh—as also in the hills of north-eastern India, south of the Brahmaputra River. It affects well-wooded areas and forests from plains to at least 1,500 m a.s.l. (Ali & Ripley 1987). Its occurrence in peninsular India has not been recorded (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett *et al.* 1998; Kazmierczak 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). Here, I report its presence in Similipal hills, north-eastern Orissa.

The Similipal Hills (21°55'52"N 85°59'40"E) in Mayurbhanj district of Orissa border the states of Jharkhand and West Bengal, and harbour within their limits both a tiger reserve (with an area of 2,750 km²), and a biosphere reserve (5,569 km²). The terrain is undulating, the altitude ranges from 300 to 1,200 m a.s.l., and forest types include dry deciduous, moist deciduous, and semi-evergreen. Some authorities consider Similipal a part of the Eastern Ghats (Sinha 1971), while others treat it as the south-eastern extension of the Chota Nagpur Plateau (Ray 2005). The area falls under the province of 'Chhotanagpur' in the Deccan Peninsula biogeographic zone of Rodgers & Panwar (1988). Despite being an Important Bird Area (IBA Code IN-OR-06), its birdlife is not well documented (Islam & Rahmani 2004).

On 18 October 2006, at 0917 hrs, a flock of six birds were fleetingly sighted on a fruiting *Ficus* sp. tree at Badamakabadi in Pithabata range, as all of them flushed on approach, evading confirmation. Subsequently, during the course of the next one-and-a-half years of active birding in Similipal, I had five more confirmed sightings, all from dense semi-evergreen, and mixed moist-deciduous forests. The broad blue-green orbital skin, and heavy bill with its red base were diagnostic pointers. Specific locality records and details are as follows:

2 March 2007, Jenabil: a solitary bird seen perched on a leafless emerging branch of a *Shorea robusta* tree in dense semi-evergreen forest adjoining the fields of Jenabil village.

11 March 2007, Upper Barakamura: six birds on a flowering *Bombax ceiba*, along with a mixed species flock gorging on nectar. Despite observations for about 20 minutes, the pigeons were not seen feeding on nectar.

7 November 2007, Bhanjabasa: Loose flock of about 20 birds feeding on a *Ficus* sp. in moist-deciduous sal forest interspersed with semi-evergreen patches, along with Yellow-footed Green-Pigeon *T. phoenicopterus*, and a flock of four Pale-capped Woodpigeons *Columba punicea*.

5 January 2008, Nokedanocha: A pair seen perched on the branch of a *Mesua ferrea*, in dense evergreen forest, along the Nageswarkocha streambed.

26 May 2008, Gurguria: A courting pair, with five Yellow-legged Green-Pigeons, on a leafless fruiting *Ficus mysorensis*, in the mixed moist-deciduous forests surrounding the orchidarium. Confiding, and allowing close approach; the male could be photographed as it sat basking on an exposed branch (Fig. 1).

These observations, which spread throughout the year, seem to indicate that the species is most likely a rare resident in the hills of Similipal, and constitute the first records of the species' presence in peninsular India. This also supports the putative role of the Similipal Hills as a link between the forests of north-eastern India, and those of the Western Ghats. The northern Eastern Ghats are still relatively unexplored, and intensive investigations along the unexplored patches of these ranges might reveal more occurrences of unrecorded birds from north-eastern India.

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Fig. 1. Male Thick-billed Green-Pigeon *Treron curvirostra* in Gurguria, Similipal, Orissa.

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Editor's note:

Kulasekhara C. S., posted a photograph of a Thick-billed Green-Pigeon on the India Nature Watch website ([http://](http://www.indianaturewatch.net/displayimage.php?id=24809)

www.indianaturewatch.net/displayimage.php?id=24809) on 20 September 2007, which was photographed at Lingambudhi lake, Mysore (Karnataka, India). He said that the bird looked tired, and flew away after 15 minutes of observation. Ornithologists (Kumar Ghorpadé, Bill Harvey, and Aasheesh Pittie) felt it could have been an escapee. This was never proved, nor disproved.

Status of Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indicus* in Pratapgarh district, Rajasthan, India

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Introduction

The Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indicus* is the smallest bustard (Otididae) in the world (Fig. 1). It is endemic to the Indian Subcontinent, and listed as Critically Endangered (Collar & Andrews 1994), and is a Schedule I species under the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Its breeding range is confined to India (Ali & Ripley 1983). It is commonly seen during the monsoon in eastern Rajasthan, and Gujarat. It inhabits tall grasslands, with scattered bushes, and standing crops of cotton, and millet (Ali & Ripley 1983). Its estimated population in India, in 1999 was 3,530 birds (Sankaran 2000). Sankaran (1996) listed Pratapgarh as the most important area for Lesser Florican in southern Rajasthan. However, detailed information is not available regarding the status, and distribution of this species from here (Sankaran 2000). This study presents the current status, and distribution of Lesser Florican in Pratapgarh district.

Study area

The present study was conducted in the Kariawad area of Pratapgarh district, Rajasthan (24°08'N 74°47'E), which is an extension of the Malwa Plateau in Rajasthan. Other areas of Pratapgarh, including Sidhpura, Bajrangarh, and Mowdikhera were also surveyed for Lesser Florican. Tree cover in this region is negligible except for scattered growth of *Butea monosperma*

and *Acacia nilotica*. The entire landscape is a mosaic of cultivated fields interspersed with isolated patches of grasslands. These grasslands extend up to the boundaries of individual plots of agriculture land.

Methods

Observations were carried out in the morning, and evening, in the months of July–September 2006, 2007, and 2008. Birds were counted following Sankaran (2000), by visually searching for birds all over the grasslands and agriculture landscapes through a pair of binoculars, and an SLR camera. GPS coordinates (with a Garmin 72) of the observation points, and sightings of birds were taken. Villagers were also interviewed about the presence of Lesser Floricans in the past and present. On seven different occasions, the jumping display by the male Lesser Florican was observed.

Results & discussion

Status and distribution of Lesser Florican in Pratapgarh region

Sankaran (2000) estimated a population of 28 Lesser Floricans from this region in 1999. Of these, all but two birds were sighted either in cultivated land or grassland converted into agriculture lands (Sankaran 2000). I was able to count eight birds in 2006, and just four individuals during 2007–2008 (Table 1).

In 1999 Sankaran (2000) reported seven, and eight birds from Sidhpura, and Bajrangarh areas of Pratapgarh respectively. But between 2006 and 2008 I did not spot Lesser Floricans around these two villages. However, floricans were sighted around two other villages—Ratniyakheri and Bori grass bir (Table 1). Sankaran (1996) stated that Pratapgarh attracts at least 30–50 male floricans during a good monsoon. The drastic decline in numbers of Lesser Florican in 2008 in Pratapgarh, as compared to their population in 1999 might be due to changes in the land use pattern, and an increase in the disturbances prevailing in the landscape.

Observation of Lesser Florican in Pratapgarh

The presence of Lesser Florican is invariably recorded only when a displaying male is sighted. On 23 July 2006 one male was seen in grassland c. 2 km from Kariabad, on the way to Khoriya village.



Fig. 1. Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indicus* in agricultural fields.