

Avifaunal survey of South- and Middle-Andamans, November 2009

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Introduction

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are located in the Bay of Bengal (06°45'N–13°30'N, 92°20'E–93°56'E). The Andaman group comprises islands of North-, Middle- and South Andamans, Baratang, Rutland, and other smaller islands and also Little Andaman, the latter being 65 km south of South Andaman (Fig. 1). In our earlier survey of this archipelago (Pande *et al.* 2007) we had not visited the Middle Andaman group of islands. In this paper we present a report of our survey encompassing South and Middle Andaman Islands during 15–20 November 2009. For a detailed bibliography of the ornithology of Andaman and Nicobar Islands see Pittie (2007).

Methodology

We surveyed Port Blair town and surroundings, Chidiyatapu, garbage dump and Mt. Harriet in South Andaman on 15 and 16 November 2009 by road. Further, the survey was continued in Middle Andaman. The visual survey of birds coming to Parrot Island, Middle Andaman was done on 17 November in the evening, from a boat anchored in the creek at a distance of about 50 m from the island. The survey of Baratang, including the region around Mud Volcano and the area around India Gate cave in Middle Andaman was done by road on 17 and 18 November. We returned to South Andaman and surveyed Ross Island, Manjiri, and Wandoor on 19 and 20 November. All the surveys, except on Parrot Island, were carried out by the non-intersecting line transect method.

Observations

At least 2,493+ birds belonging to 95 species in 72 genera and 38 families were recorded during this survey. 90 spp., were recorded in South Andaman, and 57 in Middle Andaman. The overall higher abundance in Middle Andaman (1,800+) is due to the roost of parakeets (1,402+) on Parrot Island.

A total of 18 spp., that were recorded in our previous survey (Pande *et al.* 2007) were not observed in the present survey (Table 1); however, 17 spp., recorded during the present survey in South and Middle Andaman Islands were not observed in South Andaman in 2007. Other noteworthy observations during the present survey were Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*, Andaman Nightjar *Caprimulgus andamanicus*, and Great Thick-knee *Esacus recurvirostris*, observed in the mangroves at Wandoor. We did not observe any terns or gulls during the survey. During the present survey we recorded 13 Andaman endemics, marked with an asterisk (*) against the common name of the species (Jathar & Rahmani 2007); and eight Near-threatened

spp., marked with a double asterisk (**) against the scientific names of species (Threatened Birds of India, IUCN/Bird Life International, 2010).

Ecological notes

At least 1,402 parakeets, particularly Red-breasted- *Psittacula a. abbotti*, Red-cheeked- *P. longicauda*, and Alexandrine- *P. eupatria* arrived to the roost site of Parrot Island within a span of 25 minutes between 1700 and 1725 hrs on 17 November. Blue-tailed Bee-eaters *Merops philippinus* were also roosting with the parakeets on this island. Parrot Island is an important traditional roosting site of the parakeets and Blue-tailed Bee-eaters.

We saw a mixed flock of Asian Fairy Bluebirds, Hill Mynas *Gracula religiosa*, Andaman Wood Pigeons *Columba palumboides*, and Andaman Green Pigeons *Treron chloropterus* feeding on ripe figs of a large *Ficus* tree close to the sea at Wandoor. The Andaman Serpent Eagle *Spilornis elgini* was seen feeding on crabs and prawns on the ground. The endemic Hume's Hawk Owls *Ninox obsolete* were seen hawking insects at night in the light of street lamps on roads running through paddies. The activity was significant between 2000 and 2300 hrs. The Andaman Woodpecker *Dendrocopos hodgei* and Spot-breasted Pied Woodpecker *D. analis* were seen to execute the same beat together while pecking at wood and eating insects. The presence of the Andaman Woodpecker was betrayed by its resonant 'wood-pecking'. Andaman Flowerpeckers *Dicaeum vincens* were seen in pairs in the canopies of trees, looking for insects under leaves. White-headed Starlings *Sturnus erythropygia* were seen clinging vertically to trunks of trees, dislodging loose bark, and eating the exposed insects. We observed a pair of Andaman Nightjar in the mangroves and when disturbed they flew in a slow flight and alighted under the thorny bushes. The plumage of the birds was particularly noticeable since it was dark brown.

The Greater Racket-tailed Drongos *Dicrurus paradiseus* gave vociferous warning signals in the form of harsh calls for over ten minutes when a Changeable Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus limnaeetus* came and perched on the ground and the drongos subsequently mobbed the eagle. The raptor did not pay any attention to this mobbing. We noted two White-bellied Sea Eagles *Haliaeetus leucogaster* carrying nesting material in their talons, and also noted a few birds eating fish perching on snags of palms submerged in salt water marshes that were created due to the tsunami of 2004. At least five immature White-bellied Sea Eagles were seen and we observed one young bird uttering begging calls.

A pair of Collared Kingfishers *Todiramphus chloris* was seen in breeding display with one of the birds displaying while

Table 1. Birds recorded on South and Middle Andaman Islands during 15–20 November 2009. (Abbreviations: MA=Middle Andamans; SA=South Andamans.)

Species	Nov. 2009		Jan. 2007	Species	Nov. 2009		Jan. 2007
	SA	MA	SA		SA	MA	SA
ARDEIDAE				ALCEDINIDAE			
Little Egret <i>Egretta garzetta</i>	8	2	12	Small Blue Kingfisher <i>Alcedo a. bengalensis</i>	2	-	12
Pacific Reef Egret <i>E. sacra</i>	2	-	7	Stork-billed Kingfisher <i>Pelargopsis c. osmastonii</i>	1	2	2
Intermediate Egret <i>Mesophoyx intermedia</i>	20+	2	6	White-breasted Kingfisher <i>Halcyon s. saturator</i>	20+	20	14
Indian Pond Heron <i>Ardeola g. grayii</i>	15+	6	24	Black-capped Kingfisher <i>H. pileata</i>	1	-	6
Little Green Heron <i>Butorides s. podiagaster</i>	1	1	2	Collared Kingfisher <i>Todirhamphus c. davisoni</i>	4	3	12
Yellow Bittern <i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i>	2	-	2	MEROPIDAE			
Chestnut Bittern <i>I. cinnamomeus</i>	2	-	-	Blue-tailed Bee-eater <i>Merops philippinus</i>	12	6	10
Black Bittern <i>Dupetor flavicollis</i>	2	-	-	CORACIIDAE			
ANATIDAE				Oriental Broad-billed Roller <i>Eurystomus o. gigas</i>	1	-	2
Lesser Whistling-Duck <i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>	50+	-	-	PICIDAE			
ACCIPITRIDAE				Spot-breasted Pied Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos analis</i>			
Brahminy Kite <i>Haliastur indus</i>	2	5	4	[<i>D. m. andamanensis</i>]	2	4	2
White-bellied Sea-Eagle <i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	12	6	16	Andaman Woodpecker* <i>D. hodgei</i> **	1	4	-
Crested Serpent-Eagle <i>Spilornis c. davisoni</i>	2	-	1	HIRUNDINIDAE			
Andaman Serpent-Eagle* <i>S. elgini</i> **	2	2	-	Pacific Swallow <i>Hirundo tahitica</i>	6	-	-
Changeable Hawk-Eagle <i>Spizaetus l. andamanensis</i>	1	1	1	Barn Swallow <i>H. rustica</i>	20		40
PHASIANIDAE				MOTACILLIDAE			
Grey Francolin <i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>	1	-	1	Grey Wagtail <i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	12	-	16
Indian Pea Fowl <i>Pavo cristatus</i>	1	1	-	Yellow Wagtail <i>M. flava</i>	2	-	-
RALLIDAE				CAMPEPHAGIDAE			
Andaman Crake* <i>Rallina canningi</i> **	1	-	-	Large Cuckoo-shrike <i>Coracina macei</i>	2	1	-
White-breasted Waterhen <i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>	2	-	1	Andaman Cuckoo-shrike* <i>C. s. dobsoni</i>	1	1	4
Common Moorhen <i>Gallinula chloropus (orientalis?)</i>	6	6	14	Small Minivet <i>Pericrocotus c. vividus</i>	6	4	8
JACANIDAE				Scarlet Minivet <i>P. speciosus (P. f. andamanensis)</i>	2	16	4
Pheasant-tailed Jacana <i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>	2	-	-	MONARCHIDAE			
CHARADRIIDAE				Black-naped Monarch <i>Hypothymis a. tyleri</i>	2	-	4
Pacific Golden Plover <i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	3	-	26	PYCNONOTIDAE			
Kentish Plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	-	-	6	Andaman Bulbul* <i>Pycnonotus fuscoflavescens</i>	3	-	16
Lesser Sand Plover <i>C. m. atrifrons</i>	2	2	13	Red-whiskered Bulbul <i>P. j. whistleri</i>	30	14	70+
SCOLOPACIDAE				LANIIDAE			
Pintail Snipe <i>Gallinago stenura</i>	1	-	12	Philippine Shrike <i>Lanius c. lucionensis</i>	2	2	13
Eurasian Curlew <i>Numenius arquata</i> **	5	-	-	Isabelline Shrike <i>L. isabellinus</i>	1	-	-
Whimbrel <i>N. phaeopus</i>	2	3	10	Brown Shrike <i>L. cristatus</i>	6	-	-
Spotted Redshank <i>Tringa erythropus</i>	25+	4	-	TURDIDAE			
Green Sandpiper <i>T. ochropus</i>	5	-	2	Orange-headed Thrush <i>Zoothera c. andamanensis</i>	1	-	2
Wood Sandpiper <i>T. glareola</i>	-	1	2	Oriental Magpie-Robin <i>Copsychus s. andamanensis</i>	2	1	7
Common Sandpiper <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	5	2	4	Andaman Shama* <i>C. albiventris</i>	1	-	4
Little Stint <i>Calidris minuta</i>	2	-	6	MUSCICAPIDAE			
BURHINIDAE				Asian Brown Flycatcher <i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>	2	2	14
Great Thick Knee <i>Esacus recurvirostris</i>	1	-	-	SYLVIIDAE			
COLUMBIDAE				Arctic Warbler <i>Phylloscopus borealis</i>	1	-	-
Blue Rock Pigeon <i>Columba livia</i>	65+	20	100	DICAEIDAE			
Andaman Wood Pigeon* <i>C. palumboides</i> **	5	8+	4	Andaman Flowerpecker* <i>Dicaeum vincens</i>	4	6	18
Red Collared-Dove <i>Streptopelia t. humilis</i>	10+	2	12	NECTARINIIDAE			
Emerald Dove <i>Chalcophaps i. maxima</i>	-	2	2	Olive-backed Sunbird <i>Cinnyris j. andamanica</i>	20+	16	50+
Andaman Green-Pigeon* <i>Treron chloropterus</i>	15	15+	18	ESTRILIDAE			
Imperial Green-Pigeon <i>Ducula a. andamanica</i>	25+	10+	16	White-rumped Munia <i>Lonchura s. fumigata</i>	20+	-	4
PSITTACIDAE				PASSERIDAE			
Indian Hanging Parrot <i>Loriculus vernalis</i>	3	2	8	House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>	20	6	20
Alexandrine Parakeet <i>Psittacula e. magnirostris</i>		140+	6	STURNIDAE			
Red-breasted Parakeet <i>P. a. abbotti</i>	6	840+	30	White-headed Starling <i>Sturnus erythropygia</i>	2	7	4
Red-cheeked Parakeet <i>P. longicauda</i> **	2	422+	-	Common Hill-Myna <i>Gracula r. andamanensis</i>	20+	2	8
CUCULIDAE				Common Myna <i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	2	-	-
Oriental Cuckoo <i>Cuculus saturatus</i>	2	-	4	ORIOIIDAE			
Asian Koel <i>Eudynamis scolopacea</i>	6	4	14	Indian Golden Oriole <i>Oriolus kundoo</i>	4	-	4
Brainfever Bird <i>Hierococcyx varius</i>	1	10	-	Black-naped Oriole <i>O. chinensis andamanensis</i>	2	3	6
Andaman Coucal* <i>Centropus andamanensis</i>	6	1	6	IRENIDAE			
STRIGIDAE				Asian Fairy-Bluebird <i>Irene puella puella</i>	10+	100+	6
Hume's Hawk Owl* <i>Ninox obsoleta</i>	6	-	-	ARTAMIDAE			
Andaman Scops-Owl* <i>Otus balli</i> **	1	2	3	White-breasted Wood-swallow <i>Artamus leucorhynchus</i>	-	16	-
Oriental Scops Owl <i>O. s. modesta</i>	5	-	-	DICRURIDAE			
CAPRIMULGIDAE				Andaman Drongo* <i>Dicrurus andamanensis</i> **	15+	2	30+
Andaman Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus andamanicus</i>	2	-	-	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo <i>D. p. otiosus</i>	4	10+	15+
APODIDAE				CORVIDAE			
White-bellied Swiftlet <i>Collocalia e. affinis</i>	35	14	70+	Common Crow <i>Corvus splendens</i>	2	-	-
Common Edible-nest Swiftlet <i>Aerodramus f. inexpectata</i>	-	4	20+	Jungle Crow <i>C. macrorhynchus</i>	30	10	50+
Brown-throated Needletail Swift <i>Hirundapus g. indica</i>	12	10	12+	Total	693+	1800+	974+

perching on a snag with partially extended wings and uttering calls incessantly for more than an hour. Its mate remained at a distance and seemed not to pay any attention to the displaying bird. The display eventually culminated in offering food by the displaying bird to the other bird when the attention of the latter was successfully drawn by the prolonged display of the former. Both the birds then flew to a mud bank and started excavating a tunnel. After some time they again took their previous perches and the display resumed.

One endemic Andaman Coucal *Centropus andamanensis* was found dead on the road due to collision with road traffic. The India Gate cave in Middle Andaman was found to be devoid of any Common Edible-nest Swiftlet *Aerodramus fuciphaga*. However in the India Gate cave, we recorded a small colony of about 20 intermediate horseshoe bats *Rhinolophus affinis*. We learnt from the local people that poaching of Common Edible-nest Swiftlet nests was ongoing.

First Report of Pheasant-tailed Jacana

We recorded the Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* during this survey, which is a first record for the Andaman Islands. Two birds were seen at the waterbody behind the aerodrome at Port Blair. They were seen with Pond Herons *Ardeola grayii*, Lesser Whistling Ducks *Dendrocygna javanica*, Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis* and Common Moorhens *Gallinula chloropus*.

Avifaunal survey of Netrani Island, Karnataka, and importance of offshore islands for bird life

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Introduction

Netrani Island (14°59'N, 74°19'E) is an offshore island in the Arabian Sea, in Uttar Kannada district, and is about 19.6 km from the coastal town of Murudeshwar in Karnataka (Fig. 1). The island has an area of about 4.2 km² and the altitude ranges from seashore to a maximum of 77 m above msl. It is covered with dense evergreen vegetation and *Ficus* sp., are dominant. There is no wetland on Netrani. The island is uninhabited, but there is an annual religious pilgrimage when thousands of, mainly fishermen, devotees visit it and worship the local deities of several religions. Earlier the Indian Navy controlled Netrani, when bombing practice from ships used to be conducted with the island as the target, and therefore the island was out of bounds for civilians. We found a few empty bombshell cases on the island.

Results

The birds observed in the avifaunal survey in South and Middle Andaman during November 2009 are given in Table 1. Observations from our previous survey in January 2007 are also incorporated for comparison the same table.

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There is no landing jetty on Netrani, and its coast is rocky with coral shingles and boulders. We recorded reptiles like calotes and skinks, crustaceans like crabs, and also spiders and butterflies on the island. Marine life in the clear waters around the island is rich, and we observed various species of corals, crustaceans, squids, molluscs, fishes, sea snakes, and mammals, particularly dolphins. This rich marine life has attracted eco-tourism, and we saw Indian and foreign tourists snorkeling and scuba diving near the island.

Methodology

We reached Netrani Island on motorized boats hired at Murudeshwar, and conducted the avifaunal survey during 22 and 23 November 2008. We explored the entire island and conducted a visual survey for birds and any nests, by walking.