

Nesting of Indian Black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa* on electricity pylons near Bikaner, Rajasthan

Harkirat Singh Sangha

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Harkirat Singh Sangha, B-27, Gautam Marg, Hanuman Nagar, Jaipur 302021-9. Rajasthan, India. Email: harkirat.sangha@gmail.com
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The Indian Black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa* was, “formerly widespread in the Indian subcontinent through Southeast Asia, in Pakistan, Nepal, India, Burma (Myanmar), western China, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and the Malaysian Peninsula” (Hancock *et al.* 1992). The species is now rather patchily distributed and is found in small populations. It is less rare in Rajasthan, than in other parts of the subcontinent, and in Gujarat it is still quite common. It nests singly, usually high in a tree, nearly always occupying an old nest of bird of prey, a vulture, or a crow. Often the tree is very close to human habitation (Hancock *et al.* 1992). In coastal areas of Gujarat I have seen its nests on palmyra *Borassus flabellifer* palms. In ICRISAT campus, Patancheru, Medak district, Andhra Pradesh, a small colony of Indian Black Ibis nests on palmyra palms, either singly, or even with two pairs occupying the same canopy (Aasheesh Pittie, *in litt.*, email of 30 September 2012).

On 13 March 2010 while driving from Jaipur to Bikaner on NH 11, three nests of Indian Black Ibis were noticed on electricity pylons c. 20 km short of Bikaner. The birds were observed bringing new nesting material and constructing the nests on the pylons. While two nests were being built on one electricity pylon, the third was on a separate pylon. Two nests were c. 11 m above the ground, and one was comparatively lower, c. 10 m above the ground. The nesting material used for all nests comprised, primarily, twigs of phog *Calligonum polygonoides*, and the nests were not close to human habitation.

In August 2011 Gobind Sagar Bhardwaj (*pers. comm.*) photographed a pair of Indian Black Ibis nesting on a transmission tower in the middle of Jakhau town in Gujarat.

The species usually builds a nest in a large tree such as banyan *Ficus benghalensis*, or peepul *F. religiosa*, or amongst the bases of leaf stalks in a palmyra palm *Borassus flabellifer*, 6–12

m up, and it is not in mixed colonies (Ali & Ripley 1978). Often tall leafy trees, considerable distances from water, are chosen for nesting (Roberts 1991). Exceptionally, in ‘Sind Butler and Doig, and, Eates found the birds nesting in small colonies of three to five pairs, all on the same tree’ (Baker 1935), and Hancock *et al.* (1992) saw several nests quite close together, with at least two nests on one large tree in the Nepal terai.

Soni *et al.* (2010) studied the nesting ecology of Indian Black Ibis during the 2003–2006 breeding seasons, in a 400 km² area in and around Churu (Rajasthan, India). 28 nests of the Indian Black Ibis were located within the study area. The more frequently preferred nest was on tallest available tree with highest relative density and canopy cover and the nest height varied from 3.84 to 11.02 m.

Discussion

“Although peepul-trees are evidently a special favourite with the species for nesting it has been recorded nesting on banyan and small sheeshum and tamarind” (Baker 1935). Dookia (2004) reported its nesting on peepul in western Rajasthan, and Nair & Vyas (2003) on banyan in south-eastern Rajasthan. It has been reported nesting on neem *Azadirachta indica* (Soni 2010), and palmyra (Ali & Ripley 1978). In the Thar Desert I have observed nesting mostly on medium-sized trees like khejri *Prosopis cineraria*.

I have noticed that it is not averse to roosting on electricity pylons in the Thar Desert. Dodia & Parasharya (1986) have also reported Indian Black Ibis roosting on ‘tall electric pole’ [electricity pylon] in Gujarat. However, there seems to be no previous record of Indian Black Ibis nesting on electricity pylons.

It seems that in Bikaner district Indian Black Ibis is being driven by human disturbance from the traditional, natural nesting sites to man-made structures. Even khejri trees, which have been used for nesting by the species in western Rajasthan, are now more frequently lopped by farmers for fodder and firewood. Traditionally farmers would lop a khejri tree once in two years. It is a sad fact that such traditional practices are slowly being ignored, and the resulting consequential nesting on electricity pylons is a matter of concern. Without secure nest-sites, the bird has no chance of long-term survival. It appears that the nesting pairs near Bikaner found the tall, fabricated structures safer than trees, with no human disturbance, although they were exposed to the elements.

Earlier, in Bikaner, I had recorded nesting of Long-billed Vulture *Gyps indicus* (Sangha 2011), and Punjab Raven *Corvus c. subcorax* (Sangha 2004) on electricity pylons. There is also a record of nesting of White-eyed Buzzard *Butastur teesa*, “on a telephone post,” from Bikaner (Soni 1994). In April 2010 two active nests of Laggar Falcon *Falco jugger* were noticed on electricity pylons near Bikaner, and two nests of House Crow *C. splendens* were



observed and photographed on 17 July 2011 near Diyatra, Bikaner district, also on electricity pylons. The nests of Long-billed Vulture, House Crow, and Punjab Raven in Bikaner district were about 11 m above the ground and built primarily from the branches of phog.

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Records of Grey-headed Fish-eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*, and Flame-throated Bulbul *Pycnonotus gularis* from the Western Ghats of Maharashtra

Prachi Mehta & Jayant Kulkarni

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Prachi Mehta, Wildlife Research and Conservation Society, RH 1, Ratan Park Phase 2, 127/5, Sus Road, Pashan Pune 411021, Maharashtra, India.

Email: mail.wrcs@gmail.com.

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We report two new records of birds from the Western Ghats of Maharashtra. In March 2009, we were surveying the forests near Chandoli Reservoir (17°29'N, 73°55'E), located in Chandoli Wildlife Sanctuary, Satara District, southern Maharashtra. We spotted two Grey-headed Fish-eagles *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus* circling the lake, and calling out in a manner similar to that of the Common Grey hornbill *Ocyrceros birostris*.

The Grey-headed Fish-eagle is recorded from the terai regions of lower Himalayas to Assam, and southwards from Goa to the foothills of Kerala. It is supposed to be rare but locally common (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett *et al.* 1999; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). In Maharashtra, this species has been recorded from Tadoba Tiger Reserve (Naoroji 2006) but there is no earlier published record of its occurrence from western Maharashtra.

In April 2009, we recorded the Flame-throated Bulbul *Pycnonotus melanicterus gularis* from Sindhudurg district in the Konkan. Two individuals were seen at Amba reserved forests (16°94'N, 74°E; 629 m asl) in semi-evergreen forest near a cliff. Three more individuals were seen at Talkat reserved forests (15°48'N, 73°57'E) near evergreen forests by the roadside at 128 m asl.

The Flame-throated Bulbul was elevated to a full species by Rasmussen & Anderton (2005). The widely distributed *P. fla-*

viventris, with a prominent crest, is recorded from the terai of lower Himalayas, Simla, through Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and the north-eastern Indian states. The crestless *P. gularis*, of the Western Ghats, is recorded from Goa, northern Karnataka, south to Kerala, and Tamil Nadu (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett *et al.* 1999; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). The species is seen in mixed bamboo and evergreen forests and well-regenerated secondary habitats.

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