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Oil on canvasboard | 40 x 70cm | 2015

Artist: Kokay Szabolcs

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Decadal changes and additions to birds of Pondicherry University, Puducherry, India

Pronoy Baidya, Hanuman Gawas, Shubhadeep Mukherjee & Sandesh Gawas

Baidya, P., Gawas, H., Mukherjee, S., & Gawas, S., 2016. Decadal changes and additions to birds of Pondicherry University, Puducherry, India. *Indian BIRDS* 11 (2): 29–34.

Pronoy Baidya, Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore 560012, Karnataka, India. E-mail: *pronoybaidya@ces.iisc.ernet.in* (Corresponding author)
Hanuman Gawas, Marine Corrosion and Material Research Division, CSIR- National Institute of Oceanography, Dona Paula 403004, Goa, India. E-mail: *hanumangawas91@gmail.com*
Shubhadeep Mukherjee, Flat No. 5/13, Angana Abasan, 490 M. B. Road, Birati, Kolkata 700051, West Bengal, India. E-mail: *shubha.biltu55@gmail.com*
Sandesh Gawas, National Bureau of Agricultural Insect Resources, Post Bag No. 2491, H. A. Farm Post, Bellary Road, Hebbal, Bangalore 560024, Karnataka, India. E-mail: *sandeshgawas92@gmail.com*
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Abstract

Species richness, and seasonal variation of birds were studied in Pondicherry University campus between February 2014 and February 2015. The data from the fall migration season of 2014 were compared with data from 2004 to understand the decadal changes in the bird diversity of the campus. A total of 96 species were recorded during the course of the study, of which 23 are new records for the university campus. Species richness varied considerably across the sampling duration, was highest during the fall migration season (78 species), and lowest during breeding season (54 species). Comparison of data, to understand the decadal changes in avifauna, revealed that 20 species, which were reported earlier from the campus, were not recorded during the present study.

Introduction

Pondicherry University (30.07°N, 80.23°E), established in 1987, comprising a 319 ha campus, has transformed over the years from a degraded scrubland to a highly managed habitat. Located between Kaliveli Lake, an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area, and the afforested lands of Auroville, the campus, which has witnessed a continuous stream of developmental activities, including afforestation activities by the horticulture department of the university, now supports many resident, and migratory species of birds in its mosaic of habitats: degraded scrub jungle, grasslands, eroded ravines, plantations, and a waste water pond (Fig. 1).The tradition of bird-watching in Pondicherry University has a long history, with roots going back to 1988 when the first batch of the erstwhile Sàlim Ali School of Ecology took up a rigorous

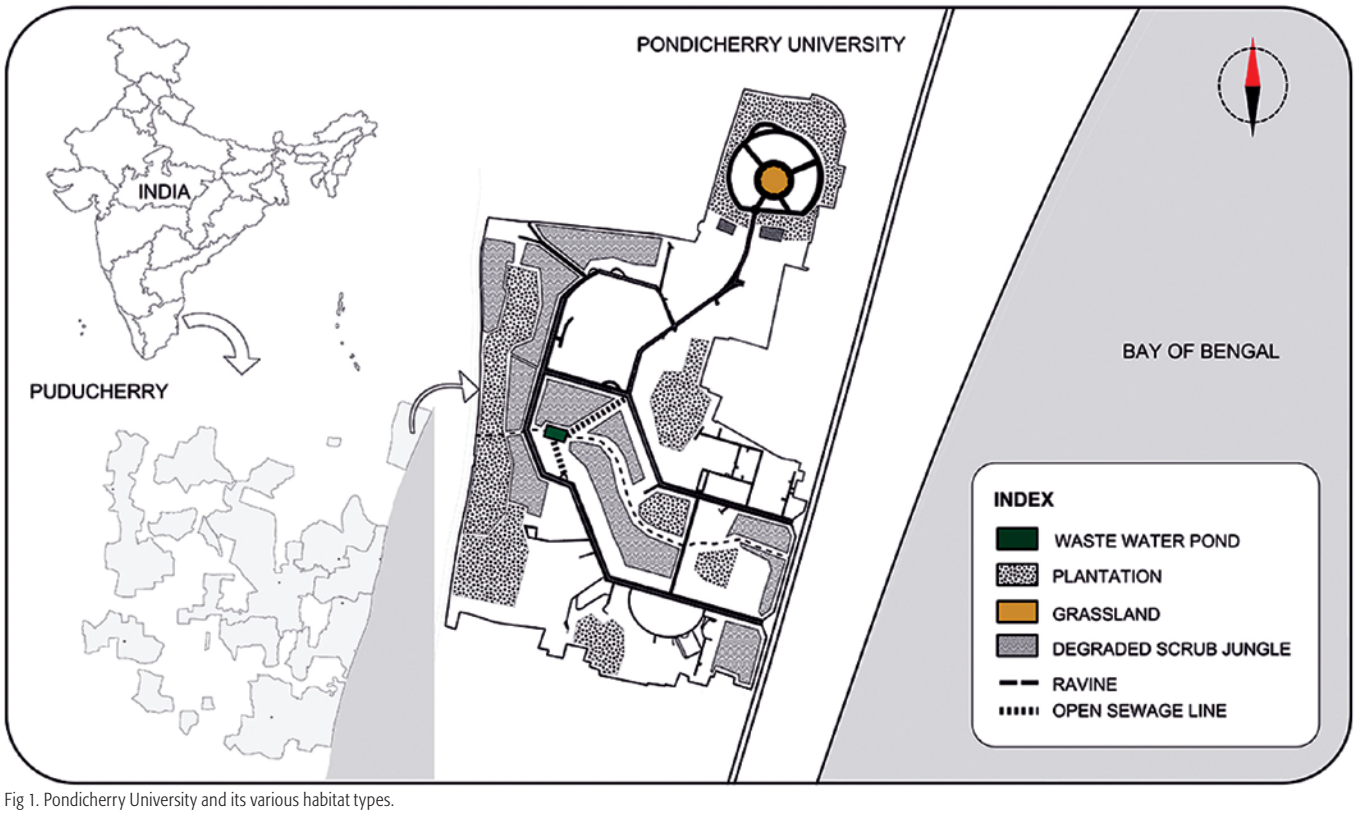

Fig 1. Pondicherry University and its various habitat types.

bird monitoring project between September and November 1988 (Santharam *et al.* 1988). Since then, bird monitoring projects have been a part of the curriculum of the Department of Ecology and Environmental Sciences, which was primarily under the supervision of Prof. Priya Davidar. Subramanean & Davidar (2004) published a report on the changes in the avifauna of the university campus over a period of 15 years.

In this study, we present results of a year-long monitoring programme of bird diversity in the Pondicherry University's campus, and record decadal changes in bird species richness, comparing it with the data of Subramanean & Davidar (2004). By this comparative evaluation, we also identified species, which have either disappeared, or colonised the campus over 25 years, and attempt to assess the seasonal variation of species. We have also attempted to present a comprehensive checklist of birds of the university's campus by including all observations over the past 25 years.

Methodology

Sampling of birds was carried out at monthly intervals from February 2014 to February 2015, during morning, and evening, using 12 line transects of 150 m each laid across the campus. During the survey, lists of species were maintained while walking the transect, which included species recorded in flight, and species detected and identified by their calls. Data so acquired were periodically uploaded on eBird (http://ebird.org) under a single hotspot for Pondicherry University (http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L1889373). The entire sampling period was divided into four seasons,namely, spring migration (March–May), breeding season (June–July), fall migration (August–November), and winter (December–February). Seasonal variation in the number of species observed throughout the year was derived from the data obtained. Checklists from the present study were compared with those from Santharam *et al.* (1988), and Subramanean & Davidar (2004) to identify species that were either not recorded,

Table 1. Additions to birds of Pondicherry University Campus compared with Subramanean & Davidar (2004)

Sl. No	Species	Notes
1	Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*	07 September 2014, a single adult male was observed at the north-western end of the horticulture plantation.
2	Rain Quail *Coturnix coromandelica*	13 March 2014, a pair was observed emerging out of the scrub in the horticulture plantation. The species was identified based on the male's plumage, which had typical black breast patch and black streaking on the sides, broad and white supercilium, and dark brown back.
3	Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*	21 July 2014, four adults were observed in the waste-water pond.
4	Indian House Swift *Apus affinis*	09 October 2014, a flock of 16 was observed in the horticulture plantation. The species was identified by its characteristic white throat and rump. Single record during the study period.
5	Blue-faced Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*	26 February 2014, a single individual was observed in the scrub jungle adjoining the horticulture plantation. Species recorded every month throughout the study period.
6	Chestnut-winged Cuckoo *Clamator coromandus*	13 March 2014, two individuals observed in the horticulture plantation. 27 October 2014, one individual was observed feeding on a caterpillar. The sightings are from the spring, and fall migration seasons respectively. Previous unreported photographic record by Dr. S. Murali on 16 February 2011.
7	White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*	21 July 2014, two individuals were observed foraging on the banks of the waste-water pond.
8	Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*	21 July 2014, a single individual observed wading in the waste-water pond. 08 September 2014 six birds observed along with nest building activity.
9	Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans*	08 April 2014, two individuals observed roosting on a dry *Delonix regia* tree in the scrub jungle. Previously reported by Santharam *et al.* (1988) in an unpublished report.
10	Indian Pond-Heron *Ardeola grayii*	08 April 2014, a single individual was observed roosting on an *Accacia auriculiformis* tree in the horticulture plantation. Previously reported by Santharam et al. (1988).
11	Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*	13 March 2014, a single individual observed in the scrub jungle adjoining the horticulture plantation. Previously reported by Santharam *et al.* (1988).
12	Intermediate Egret *Ardea intermedia*	18 October 2014, a single individual was observed foraging at the banks of the waste-water pond
13	Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*	08 April 2014, single individual was observed foraging at the banks of the waste-water. Previously reported by Santharam *et al.* (1988).
14	Little Cormorant *Microcarbo niger*	13 March 2014, a single individual observed flying above the horticulture garden. 08 September 2014, two individuals observed in the waste-water pond.
15	Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela*	12 February 2014, a single individual was observed soaring above the Thiruvalluvar Stadium, identified by its prominent dark trailing edge to the wings behind broad white band, two distinct broad black tail bands, and characteristic call. 13 March 2014, a single individual observed perching on an abandoned electricity pole.
16	White-bellied Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*	23 February 2015, a single individual was observed soaring towards the eastern end of the campus.
17	Common Barn Owl *Tyto alba*	02 May 2014, a single individual incidentally observed perching on the water tank of Valmiki Boy's Hostel at 2345 hrs.
18	Collared Scops Owl *Otus bakkamoena*	15 March 2014, two individuals observed roosting in a thorny bush. Well established resident in the campus and seems to maintain territories, since most of the individuals were observed at the same general locations throughout the year. Previous unreported record by Seshadri K S, who photographed a single individual on 16 October 2009.
19	White-rumped Munia *Lonchura striata*	12 July 2014, two individuals observed in the scrub jungle adjoining the horticulture plantation.
20	Black-headed Munia *L. malacca*	14 November 2014, two individuals observed on transect along the main campus road. Previous unreported record by Dr. S. Murali in 2011.
22	Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*	21 March 2014, a single individual observed among the grasses in the scrub jungle adjoining the horticulture plantation. The individual was detected by its call. Its crown had black streaks, indicating that it was a non-breeding bird.
22	Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*	22 September 2014, observed three individuals at different locations along the transect in the horticulture garden. Previously reported by Santharam *et al.* (1988).
23	Orange-headed Thrush *Geokichla citrina*	15 March 2014, a single individual observed sulking within a dense thorny bush. 02 May 2014, a single individual observed perching on the stump of a chopped *Acacia* sp. tree. Both of these observations fell within the spring migration season. The next sighting of this species was on 25 October 2014 which falls in the fall migration season.

or added by the present study to the university campus' list. Field identifications of birds were based on (Grimmett *et al.* 2011); nomenclature follows Praveen *et al.* (2014).

Results

Addition to birds of Pondicherry University campus

A total of 94 species were recorded during the course of the study (February 2014 to February 2015) during which we documented 23 species, which were not recorded from the university campus by Subramanean & Davidar (2004) (Table 1). With this study the total number of species recorded from Pondicherry university campus in the past 25 years stands at 126 (Appendix).

Seasonal variation of species richness

Species richness varied considerably across the sampling duration (Fig. 2). It was higher during spring-, and fall migration in comparison to the breeding season, and winter, as expected. Many winter, and passage migrants like Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura*, Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*, Blyth's Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*, Greenish Warbler *Seicercus trochiloides*, Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus*, and Orange-headed Thrush were observed during the spring migration. During breeding season, nesting, and breeding of Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus*, Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus*, Red-wattled Lapwing *V. indicus*, and Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis* were recorded. Two migrants, Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* (last sighting on 23 July 2014) and Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba* (last sighting on 2 August 2014), which presumably left late, were recorded in the breeding season. Species richness in fall migration was boosted by the arrival of various winter, and passage migrants like Alpine Swift, Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*, Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*, Indian Pitta, Brown Shrike, Forest Wagtail *Dendronanthus indicus*, Greenish Warbler, Asian Brown Flycatcher, and Orange-headed Thrush; the nomadic Black-headed Cuckooshrike *Coracina melanoptera* was also recorded. On 14 October 2014 a high count of 14 Indian Paradise-flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi* was made. We observed individuals of this species entering into the campus from the western end at multiple locations throughout the transect in the horticulture plantation. Upon completing collection of data for the day, a wider search led us to record 33 individuals of this species. We observed both, the white and brown morph males, males with no tail streamers, and females. Surprisingly, on the next day, only six individuals were noted at the same area. The nominate peninsular race of Indian Paradise-flycatcher is known to migrate to Sri Lanka in winter (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005), and this observation probably captures the passage migration of this species. Some of these migrant species observed during fall migration, like Brown Shrike, Greenish Warbler, and Asian Brown Flycatcher, stayed back in the campus, and were also reported during winter. Other migrant species of birds which arrived during winter were Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*, and Blyth's Reed-Warbler.

Decadal changes in the avifauna of Pondicherry University campus

92 species had been reported from the campus till 2003, with the highest number of species recorded in 1988, when 77 species were documented during the fall migration season, which

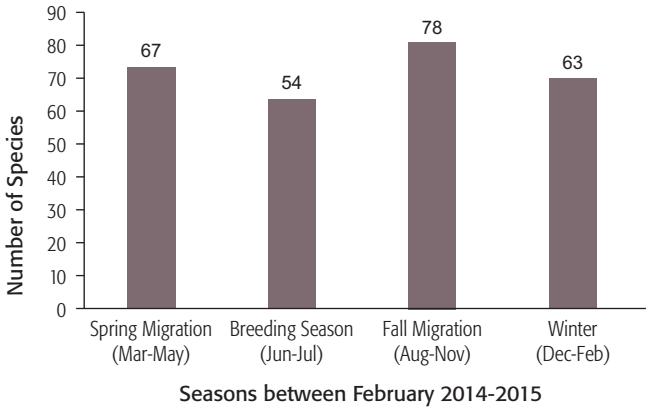

Fig. 2. Seasonal variation in bird species richness in Pondicherry University between February 2014 and February 2015.

Table 2. List of species reported by Subramanean & Davidar (2004) not observed in present study

Sl. No	Species	Last Record
1	Pied Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus*	1992
2	Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*	1989
3	Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*	2002
4	Brown Hawk Owl *Ninox scutulata*	1988
5	Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus*	1998
6	Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*	1992
7	Eurasian Hobby *F. subbuteo*	1988
8	Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*	1989
9	White-bellied Drongo *Dicrurus caerulescens*	1989
10	Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*	2003
11	Great Grey Shrike *L. excubitor*	1989
12	Indian Silverbill *Euodice malabarica*	2003
13	Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata*	1988
14	Yellow-throated Sparrow *Gymnoris xanthocollis*	2003
15	Indian Bushlark *Mirafra erythroptera*	1998
16	Grey-breasted Prinia *Prinia hodgsonii*	1998
17	Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*	1992
18	Lesser Whitethroat *Curruca curruca*	1989
19	Taiga Flycatcher *Ficedula albicilla*	1989
20	Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*	1988

was considered the high point of avian species richness prior to development of the university campus (Subramanean & Davidar 2004). Santharam *et al.* (1988) had documented 92 species between February and November 1988. In the present study we have recorded a total of 96 species between February 2014 and February 2015, while 78 species were documented during the fall migration season. Twenty species, which were reported earlier by Subramanean & Davidar (2004), were not recorded during the present study (Table 2). It would be important to note that each year, for the past 25 years, birds have been recorded by observers with different levels of expertise, and hence the accuracy and coverage may not be consistent.

Discussion

As per the gazette records of the eighteenth century French administration, the region where the campus of Pondicherry University is presently located was once thickly forested with shrubs (Yamunan 2010). This would have been part of the now rare forest type known as the Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest, which is at present patchily distributed along the Coromandel–Circar (East Coast of India) region (Parthasarathy & Karthikeyan 1997). Remnants of this forest type exist as sacred groves, the nearest to the university being Puthupet sacred grove in Villupuram District (12.12°N, 71.85°E), 05 km away. As per the gazette, after the

Anglo-Carnatic War in 1781 the French cut down many trees from the forested regions of Kalapet to rebuild Puducherry town, which degraded the ecosystem of this region, converting it into an overgrazed scrubland over the years (Yamunan 2010). With the establishment of the university the pressures of grazing, and other human activities like collection of firewood, decreased over time. However, the development of the campus, and the reforestation programmes taken up by the horticulture department led to modification of the ecosystem, resulting in a mosaic of habitats forming within the campus. This may have reduced the area available for the erstwhile resident species, leading to a decrease in their numbers, while the existence of other habitat types led to other species colonising the campus. The best example of such colonisation is the establishment of the waste-water pond situated at the centre of the campus behind the current women's hostel. Out of the 21 new records, seven are from this waste-water pond. The establishment of the Silver Jubilee Campus has given rise to a vast grassland, which has become a breeding ground for Yellow-wattled Lapwing, and Jerdon's Bushlark.

On the other hand, active management of plantations, including repeated ploughing of soil by tractors, and applications of weedicides, seem to have negatively affected species like the Grey Francolin, Eurasian Thick-knee *Burhinus oedicnemus*, Barred Buttonquail *Turnix suscitator*, and Indian Nightjar *Caprimulgus asiaticus*. Perhaps the most affected species in the campus has been the Indian Eagle Owl *Bubo bengalensis*. The development activities on the campus have caused the once intact ravines, which carried clear flowing water being converted into eroded nullas carrying sewage and waste water from the student's hostels and mess towards the waste-water pond, and then out into the Bay of Bengal. This was once an active breeding ground of the Indian Eagle Owl. Since the early 1990s students of the Department of Ecology and Environmental Sciences have documented its breeding; last documented, perhaps, in 2010 (Seshadri 2013). Now the Indian Eagle Owl does not breed at this location any more. During the present study we sighted it only twice, near the western boundary of the campus.

Even though the university has a rich tradition of bird-watching, and monitoring, with data from over 25 years, this has not been able to influence the direction of campus development activity, the plantation programs, nor the plantation maintenance techniques of the horticulture department. The present rate of unplanned development in Pondicherry University will only lead to the disappearance of the remaining patches of scrub jungle, grasslands, and ravines. This will be detrimental to avifaunal richness by leading to local disappearance of species dependent on those habitats. The best way forward would be for the university management to consult, and implement recommendations of experts from the Department of Ecology and Environmental Sciences before carrying out any developmental activity. A solution has to be found to address the issue of waste water being pumped into the ravines, which are an unique habitat for many faunal species. The horticulture department should limit, and ultimately stop using weedicides in existing plantations and gardens. It should plant indigenous trees, specific to this habitat, in place of monocultures of *Acacia*, *Eucalyptus* and cashew *Anacardium occidentale.* It is also recommended that the horticulture department stop clearing existing patches of scrub jungle, which are excellent habitats for many species of birds.

Long term bird monitoring programs are strong tools that help capture changes in bird populations in response to natural and anthropogenic change in the landscape. Campuses of educational institutions, and other organizations, are the best laboratories for such studies. As more and more individuals, or groups, take up long term bird monitoring projects it will become easier to understand the response of bird populations to human-induced changes in the environment, and this will help in devising management strategies for protecting bio-diverse areas within urban environments in the future.

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We would like to express our gratitude to all the teaching-, and non-teaching staff of the Department of Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Pondicherry University for motivating us to undertake this project. We would like to specially thank Prof. Priya Davidar who persuaded us to be more field-oriented in our approach to studying ecology, and motivated us to take up small projects in ornithology as a part of Behavioural Ecology course. We are also indebted to Dr. S. Jayakumar for training us in Environmental Informatics which helped us in setting up transects. We would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. S. Murali, Professor of English, Pondicherry University who allowed us to cite, and use his bird observations documented on his blog, Fallen Feathers(https://smuralis.wordpress.com/). Special thanks to Seshadri K. S., and Praveen J. for providing us vital inputs during the preparation of an earlier version of this manuscript, and to our anonymous reviewer. Dr. V. Santharam was the true inspiration behind our work. It is his record of 1988, which motivated us in the first place to take up this project.

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Ibisbill in Ladakh by Kokay Szabolcs (see inside front cover for details).

Appendix: Birds recorded over 25 years at Pondicherry University

Sl. No	Species	Present Study (February 2014–2015)	Santharam *et al.* 1988	Fall Migration (August–November) Subramanean & Davidar (2004)							Present study 2014
				1988	1989	1991	1992	1998	2002	2003	
1	Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
3	Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
4	Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
5	Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	-	+
6	Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*	+	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	+
7	Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
8	Orange-breasted Green Pigeon *Treron bicinctus*	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
9	Indian Nightjar *Caprimulgus asiaticus*	-	+	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	+
10	Asian Palm-Swift *Cypsiurus balasiensis*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
11	Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
12	Indian House Swift *Apus affinis*	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
13	Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis*	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+
14	Blue-faced Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
15	Pied Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus*	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-
16	Chestnut-winged Cuckoo *Clamator coromandus*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
17	Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopaceus*	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+
18	Grey-bellied Cuckoo *Cacomantis passerinus*	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	+
19	Common Hawk-Cuckoo *Hieroccycx varius*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
20	Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
21	White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
22	Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
23	Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans*	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
24	Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
25	Indian Pond-Heron *Ardeola grayii*	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
26	Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
27	Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
28	Great Egret *Ardea alba*	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
29	Intermediate Egret *Ardea intermedia*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
30	Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
31	Little Cormorant *Microcarbo niger*	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
32	Eurasian Thick-knee *Burhinus oedicnemus*	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	+
33	Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
34	Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
35	Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
36	Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus*	-	+	+	+	-	-	+	-	+	+
37	Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
38	Barred Buttonquail *Turnix suscitator*	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	+
39	Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
40	Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
41	Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	+
42	Oriental Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
43	Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela*	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
44	Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
45	Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
46	Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*	-	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
47	Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
48	Shikra *Accipiter badius*	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
49	Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
50	Black Kite *Milvus migrans*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
51	White-eyed Buzzard *Butastur teesa*	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
52	Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-
53	Common Barn Owl *Tyto alba*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
54	Brown Hawk Owl *Ninox scutulata*	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
55	Spotted Owlet *Athene brama*	-	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	+	+
56	Collared Scops Owl *Otus bakkamoena*	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
57	Indian Eagle Owl *Bubo bengalensis*	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	-	+
58	Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
59	Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker *Dinopium benghalense*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+
60	Coppersmith Barbet *Psilopogon haemacephalus*	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	-	+	+
61	Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
62	Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus*	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	-
63	Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis*	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
64	Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+
65	White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
66	Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
67	Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
68	Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-

Appendix: Birds recorded over 25 years at Pondicherry University

Sl. No	Species	Present Study (February 2014–2015)	Santharam *et al.* 1988	Fall Migration (August–November) Subramanean & Davidar (2004) 1988	1989	1991	1992	1998	2002	2003	Present study 2014
69	Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
70	Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura*	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	+
71	Small Minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	+
72	Black-headed Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina melanoptera*	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	+
73	Indian Golden Oriole *Oriolus kundoo*	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	-	+	+
74	Ashy Woodswallow *Artamus fuscus*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
75	Common Woodshrike *Tephrodornis pondicerianus*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	+
76	Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+
77	Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
78	Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
79	White-bellied Drongo *Dicrurus caerulescens*	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	-
80	Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*	-	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	-	+
81	Bay-backed Shrike Lanius vittatus	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
82	Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*	+	-	-	+	+	-	+	-	+	-
83	Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
84	Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
85	House Crow *Corvus splendens*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
86	Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
87	Indian Paradise-flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
88	Pale-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	+	+
89	Purple-rumped Sunbird *Leptocoma zeylonica*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
90	Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus*	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	-	+	+
91	Loten's Sunbird *Cinnyris lotenius*	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	+
92	Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+
93	Indian Silverbill *Euodice malabarica*	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	+	-
94	White-rumped *Munia Lonchura striata*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
95	Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata*	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
96	Black-headed Munia *Lonchura malacca*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
97	Yellow-throated Sparrow *Gymnoris xanthocollis*	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	+	-
98	Forest Wagtail *Dendronanthus indicus*	-	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	+
99	Paddy-field Pipit *Anthus rufulus*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-
100	White-browed Wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
101	Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark *Eremopterix griseus*	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	-
102	Indian Bushlark *Mirafra erythroptera*	+	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-
103	Jerdon's Bushlark *Mirafra affinis*	-	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	+
104	Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
105	Grey-breasted Prinia *Prinia hodgsonii*	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-
106	Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis*	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
107	Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata*	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-
108	Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+
109	Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
110	Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*	+	+	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-
111	Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+
112	Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
113	White-browed Bulbul *Pycnonotus luteolus*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
114	Greenish Leaf Warbler *Seicercus trochiloides*	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	+
115	Lesser Whitethroat *Curruca curruca*	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
116	Common Babbler *Argya caudata*+	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-
117	Yellow-billed Babbler *Turdoides affinis*	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
118	Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus*	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-
119	Brahminy Starling *Sturnia pagodarum*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
120	Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
121	Indian Robin *Saxicoloides fulicatus*	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
122	Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis*	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	+
123	Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
124	Taiga Flycatcher *Ficedula albicilla*	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
125	Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
126	Orange-headed Thrush *Geokichla citrina*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
	Total	94	92	77	59	48	46	59	39	49	78

A new breeding location of Indian Skimmer *Rynchops albicollis*, and notes on other birds in Son Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary, Madhya Pradesh, India

Mohammed Dilawar & Varun Sharma

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Mohammed E. Dilawar, Nature Forever Society, Row House No. 17, Gayatri Nagar, Nashik–Pune Road, Nashik 422011, Nashik District, Maharashtra, India. E-mail: *dilawarmohammed@gmail.com*.

Varun Sharma, Nature Forever Society, Row House No. 17, Gayatri Nagar, Nashik–Pune Road, Nashik 422011, Nashik District, Maharashtra, India.

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Abstract

Here we report of a new breeding population of Indian Skimmer *Rynchops albicollis*, in the Son Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary. Breeding of Indian Skimmers indicates that the sanctuary could be a potential Important Bird Area (IBA), and provides opportunities for locating other breeding sites of the birds, on Son River, and its tributaries–Banas, and Gopad. We also present notes on some common, and rare birds found in the sanctuary, and a bird list of 111 species, compiled from earlier published reports and our own opportunistic observations, adding 24 species to the sanctuary's checklist. We feel that detailed scientific bird surveys are needed in the Son Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary to comprehensively document its avifaunal diversity.

Introduction

Son Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary (hereafter Son) is situated in Sidhi District of Madhya Pradesh. It begins from Bansagar Dam (24.18°N, 81.28°E), and ends at Piparjhar village (24.60°N, 82.77°E), bordering Mirzapur District, Uttar Pradesh (Fig. 1). The sanctuary extends southward to the Eastern Vindhya Range, or the Kaimur Range of eastern Madhya Pradesh. It is 209 km long, and has 200 m wide riverbanks on either sides of the Son River (a major tributary of River Ganges) (Rao 1992).

In the past two decades the avifauna of the sanctuary has been studied, either in detail (Sharma & Sharma 1997; Singh *et al.,* 2015), or through rapid assessments (Sharma *et al*., 1999; Sharma *et al.,* 2011; Nair & Katdare 2013). In the present study, we try to review the existing state of knowledge on the avifauna of the area, and augment it with our own observations.

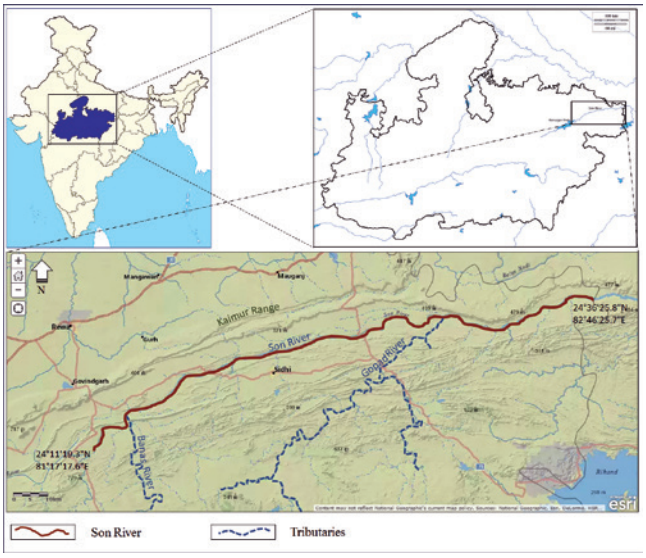

Fig. 1. The Son Wildlife Sanctuary

Study area

Son is a shallow, meandering sand-bed river with an extensive floodplain, comprising midstream sandbars. The river flows between cliff-like banks characterized by terraced accumulations of early Middle- to Late Pleistocene sediments (Gatti 2010). The river flows in shallow streams that get divided into two types of riverbeds: one comprising rocky beds with multiple pools, present at four locations along the entire stretch of the sanctuary, two, comprising sandy islands, and riverbanks. The vegetation around the Son River is mainly composed of two forest types: tropical moist deciduous forests, and tropical dry deciduous forests (Champion & Seth 1968). The Son was declared as a wildlife sanctuary in 1981 by the government of Madhya Pradesh to protect, and preserve the faunal diversity of the river, specifically the critically endangered gharial *Gavialis gangeticus*, and the vulnerable marsh crocodile *Crocodylus palustris* (Singh *et al.,* 2015).

Methodology

Over a period of one year, three visits (13 April 2011, 28 January, and 15 April 2012, respectively) were made to Son. The visits were predominantly made to the gharial-spotting site of Jogdeha Ghat, passing through Bansagar Dam Shikargang, to an unnamed spot (24.40°N, 81.68°E). Birds were recorded randomly. Our observations revealed that Jogdeha Ghat sustains a larger number of wetland birds than any other sites visited along the Son River.

Results

Based on our recent observations, and from previously published works, we drew up a bird list of 111 species, of which 24 were additions from our recent visits (Appendix). Under The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (http://www.iucnredlist.org/), 94 of these species were categorised as, of Least Concern, seven as Near Threatened, and ten as Threatened.

A significant outcome of our observations was the discovery of a hitherto unrecorded breeding site of Indian Skimmer, besides recording the Common Pochard at Son, and other riverine bird species like Black-necked Stork, Black-headed Ibis, Great Thick Knee, and River Lapwing.

Indian Skimmer *Rynchops albicollis* VU

Fourteen individuals were recorded nesting on a small sand-island near the southern bank of the river, at Jogdeha, on 15 April 2012 **[47]**. This is a new breeding colony, and falls within Son, unrecorded earlier (Sharma & Sharma 1997; Sharma *et al*. 1999; Sharma *et al.* 2011; Nair & Katdare 2013; Singh *et al.* 2015). Though prior studies did not indicate skimmers breeding in the sanctuary, all of them have recorded it during the breeding season (Table 1) and hence this proves a virtual breeding population in the sanctuary in recent years.

Photo: Varun Sharma

47. Indian Skimmers *Rynchops albicollis* at Jogdeha Ghat.

Table 1. Site locations representing *R. albicolis* population studied by earlier workers

S. No.	Site location	Number recorded	Reference
1.	Terideh near Bhaversen Ghat	2	Nair & Katdare (2013)
2.	Jogdeha	17	Singh *et al* (2015)
3.	Jogdeha	14	Nair & Katdare (2013)
4.	Kultideha	18-21	Nair & Katdare (2013)
5.	Kherpur/Bichheri Ghat	≈80	Srivastava (2014)
6.	Kheraini Ghat		

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* VU

A flock of 47 birds was recorded mid-river at Shikargang, near Terideh, on 28 January at 1505 hrs. This is a first record from Son, and in 2015 this species has been up-listed to Vulnerable by IUCN.

Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* NT

Recorded in two different seasons, an adult was spotted at an unnamed location on 28 January 2012, at 0920 hrs, while it foraged along the riverbank, and four juveniles were spotted at Jogdeha on 15 April 2012 at 1335 hrs, while they basked, and waded along the southern sandy bank.

Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* NT

About 11 birds were recorded basking on the southern bank of the river on 28 January 2012. Six birds were recorded on 15 April 2012 on rocky islands mid-river at Jogdeha Ghat.

Great Thick Knee *Esacus recurvirostris* NT

Six birds were recorded on mid-river rocky beds on 28 January, and five on 15 April 2012 at Jogdeha Ghat.

River Lapwing *Vanellus duvaucelii* NT

Two birds were spotted on rocky river banks at an unnamed location (24.41°N, 81.69°E) at 0900 hrs, and two birds were later recorded from Jogdeha Ghat at 1335 hrs on 28 January 2012.

Discussions

A potential breeding site for Indian Skimmers

The Indian Skimmer occurs on sandy rivers, and lakes of various sizes, and is principally adapted to feeding while flying over rivers. It breeds on sandy spits, or river islands. It frequently feeds near the edges of river channels, and lagoons—sometimes where the water depth is only three to four centimeters (BirdLife International 2001). The geography of Son River, and its tributaries, the Banas, and Gopad rivers, provides an ideal habitat for this bird (Fig. 2). The river has shallow channels and sandy islands throughout its length in Son, with the exception of four rocky beds, with large and deep pools and sparse vegetation at the beginning of sanctuary, mainly at Shikargang, Kuldeha Bridge, and Jogdeha Bridge. The confluence of the Banas, and Gopad rivers also provides nesting opportunities by opening-up large sandy banks and shallow channels. In the earlier studies (Sharma & Sharma 1997; Sharma *et al*. 1999; Sharma *et al.* 2011; Nair & Katdare 2013; Singh *et al.* 2015), apart from Jogdeha Ghat, the existence of this bird during its breeding season has been reported from sites that are only at confluence points of tributaries, and not from the interiors. However, we still do not know much about the pattern of movements of the species. Although flooding regimes could be critical, breeding can only occur when water levels are low (BirdLife International 2001).

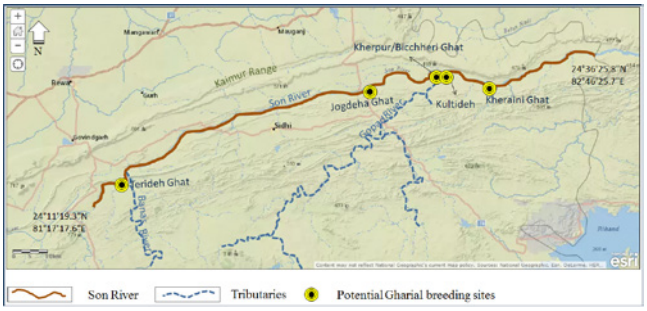

Fig. 2. Sites representing potential Gharial breeding sites where Indian Skimmers have been recorded.

We observed that the Son River offers sandy banks, and mid-river islands, ideal for nesting of the species, along the whole stretch of the sanctuary (>100 km). Earlier studies seem to have restricted most of their activities to gharial breeding sites at Terideh Ghat, Jogdeha Ghat, Kherpur/Bicchheri Ghat, Kultideh, and Kheraini Ghat (Table 1).

With a record of more than 80 birds at confluence of Gopad, and Son rivers in 2014 (Srivastava 2014), there is a possibility of identifying more breeding sites of Indian Skimmers on the Son River; a clear need for more intensive surveys during the bird's breeding season, which is highly dependent on riverine water levels (in turn dependent upon regional rainfall). The breeding season of the species is predominantly from March to May (BirdLife International 2001).

Considering that the current estimate of Indian Skimmer population is 6,000–10,000 individuals, of which, roughly 4,000-6,700 are mature birds (BirdLife International 2015a), the Son

population of 80 individuals is >1% of the global population level (Wetlands International 2015), qualifying it to be listed under the Global IBA criteria (BirdLife International 2015b).

India has always been the most important country for the species. It has now become crucial in any strategy to preserve it (BirdLife International 2015c). IBAs are part of a wider, integrated approach to conservation that embrace sites, species, and habitat protection, and are used to reinforce existing protected areas networks (BirdLife International 2015b).

Our study reveals that Son supports ten species under the IUCN Red List categories (IUCN 2015.3). Besides this, we strongly feel that Son holds great potential for the commoner avifauna as well. However, it is difficult to assess the avifaunal diversity of Son, based merely on earlier studies in a sanctuary that stretches over 209 km. The Son River has two big tributaries originating from thick forests, and they also have similar geography, flowing patterns, and run through the forested areas, scrubs, undulating rocky cliffs, farmlands, and human habitation. This could very well contribute to a great diversity in avifauna in the sanctuary, but it needs to be validated by further detailed studies and scientific surveys in future.

Alarming threats

Though most of the bird species are legally protected under The Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, their habitats are under heavy anthropogenic pressures. One of the major threats to the ecology, and habitat of birds along the river is anthropogenic disturbance. Increase in human populations in surrounding villages, and towns has resulted in the increase and expansion of new settlements, modern agricultural practices with the use of toxic pesticides, illegal encroachment for temporary cultivation along river banks, and river beds, and increased livestock grazing (Sharma & Sharma 1997; Singh *et al*. 2015). These pressures could have potential impacts on the degradation of nesting and basking habitats of skimmers along the Son River. We also found that due to habitations along the river, there is a great deal of movement of cattle, and stray dogs, which could pose a threat to the eggs, and nestlings of Indian Skimmers.

Sharma & Sharma (1997), and Singh *et al*. (2015) indicate that the Son River has become shallower due to the construction of the Bansagar Dam, which has resulted in drastic water flow instability, with low flow conditions in the river, which in turn has enhanced siltation, and reduced water depths. During summer, the water level plummets; while during the monsoon, due to sudden discharge, the river is in spate, causing potential flood situations.

Industrial developments in the district have resulted in higher dependency on the river for sand, and thus, sand mining from riverbanks has increased (Singh *et al*. 2015). Also, the denotification of large sections of the river areas of the sanctuary for sand mining (Singh *et al.* 2015) could result in a detrimental loss of critical habitat for Indian Skimmers in the sanctuary in future.

The inhabitants, or the local communities, are completely dependent on the river for their livelihood, which urges a dependency upon the fishes and turtles as food. Often this is coupled with certain unsustainable practices of fishing, such as the use of explosives, and netting (Sharma *et al.* 2011). Dumping of non-biodegradable waste, and garbage **[48]**, by the local communities, who celebrate most of their religious ceremonies, festivals, and *melas* along the river, has resulted in littering of the habitat with cutlery, and disposable polystyrene and plastic materials.

Photo: Mohammed Dilawar

48. Discarded non-biodegradable waste near the most important Gharial breeding site at Jogdeha Ghat.

Conservation

Son was established to protect the gharial. Thus, most of the conservation policies for, and research at Son are primarily centered on the gharial. But one should not forget that Son also supports great avifaunal diversity along the river, and adjoining areas. The occurrence of such significant bird species throughout the area highlights the importance of landscape level conservation of avifauna and their habitats along the Son River. Conservation of an area can be achievable, if there is a reduction in anthropological pressures.

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Appendix. Compiled avifauna of Son Wildlife Sanctuary

Common Name(s)	Scientific Name	Conservation Status (BLI 2015)	Observations recorded
Fulvous Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna bicolor*	LC	A, B
Lesser Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna javanica*	LC	E, F
Bar-headed Goose	*Anser indicus*	LC	A, F
Greylag Goose	*Anser anser*	LC	F
Common Merganser	*Mergus merganser*	LC	A, E
Ruddy Shelduck	*Tadorna ferruginea*	LC	A, E, F
Red-crested Pochard	*Netta rufina*	LC	F
Common Pochard	*Aythya ferina*	VU	F
Gadwall	*Mareca strepera*	LC	A
Indian Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	LC	A, E, F
Northern Pintail	*Anas acuta*	LC	A
Common Teal	*Anas crecca*	LC	A
Comb Duck	*Sarkidiornis melanotos*	LC	A, E, F
Cotton Teal	*Nettapus coromandelianus*	LC	F
Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	LC	A
Grey Francolin	*Francolinus pondicerianus*	LC	F
Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*	LC	F
Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	LC	A
Eurasian Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*	LC	A
Red Collared Dove	*Streptopelia tranquebarica*	LC	A
Laughing Dove	*Spilopelia senegalensis*	LC	F
Greater Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*	LC	A, F
Common Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*	LC	F
Common Coot	*Fulica atra*	LC	A, E, F
Sarus Crane	*Antigone antigone*	VU	A
Painted Stork	*Mycteria leucocephala*	NT	A
Asian Openbill	*Anastomus oscitans*	LC	A, E
Woolly-necked Stork	*Ciconia episcopus*	VU	A, E
Black-necked Stork	*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*	NT	A, E, F
Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*	LC	A, E, F
Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*	LC	A, F
Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*	LC	A, E, F
Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*	LC	E, F
Great Egret	*Ardea alba*	LC	A
Intermediate Egret	*Egretta intermedia*	LC	E, F
Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*	LC	A, F
Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*	NT	A, E, F
Eurasian Spoonbill	*Platalea leucorodia*	LC	A, E, F
Indian Black Ibis	*Pseudibis papillosa*	LC	A, E, F
Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*	LC	A, E, F
Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*	LC	A, E
Indian Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*	LC	A, F
Oriental Darter	*Anhinga melanogaster*	NT	A
Great Thick Knee	*Esacus recurvirostris*	NT	A, E, F
Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	LC	A, F
Little Ringed Plover	*Charadrius dubius*	LC	A
Kentish Plover	*Charadrius alexandrinus*	LC	A
River Lapwing	*Vanellus duvaucelii*	NT	A, F
Yellow-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus malabaricus*	LC	A
Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	LC	A, F
Bronze-winged Jacana	*Metopidius indicus*	LC	E, F
Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*	LC	A
Common Redshank	*Tringa totanus*	LC	A
Small Pratincole	*Glareola lactea*	LC	A
Indian Skimmer	*Rynchops albicollis*	VU	A, C, D, E, F
Brown-headed Gull	*Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus*	LC	E
River Tern	*Sterna aurantia*	NT	A, E
Black-bellied Tern	*Sterna acuticauda*	EN	A, E
Osprey	*Pandion haliaetus*	LC	F

Appendix. Compiled avifauna of Son Wildlife Sanctuary

Common Name(s)	Scientific Name	Conservation Status (BLI 2015)	Observations recorded
Black-winged Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*	LC	A
Egyptian Vulture	*Neophron percnopterus*	EN	A, E
Red-headed Vulture	*Sarcogyps calvus*	CR	A
White-rumped Vulture	*Gyps bengalensis*	CR	A
Indian Vulture	*Gyps indicus*	CR	F
Pallas's Fish-eagle	*Haliaeetus leucoryphus*	VU	A
Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*	LC	F
White-eyed Buzzard	*Butastur teesa*	LC	F
Spotted Owlet	*Athene brama*	LC	A, F
Indian Grey Hornbill	*Ocyceros birostris*	LC	E, F
Common Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*	LC	A, F
Coppersmith Barbet	*Psilopogon haemacephalus*	LC	A, E
Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*	LC	A, F
Blue-tailed Bee-eater	*Merops philippinus*	LC	A
Indian Roller	*Coracias benghalensis*	LC	A, F
Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*	LC	A, F
Pied Kingfisher	*Ceryle rudis*	LC	A, F
White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*	LC	A, E, F
Common Kestrel	*Falco tinnunculus*	LC	F
Plum-headed Parakeet	*Psittacula cyanocephala*	LC	F
Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*	LC	F
Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*	LC	A, F
Long-tailed Shrike	*Lanius schach*	LC	A
Great Grey Shrike	*Lanius excubitor*	LC	A
Rufous Treepie	*Dendrocitta vagabunda*	LC	A
House Crow	*Corvus splendens*	LC	F
Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*	LC	A, F
House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*	LC	A
Yellow-throated Sparrow	*Gymnoris xanthocollis*	LC	F
Western Yellow Wagtail	*Motacilla flava*	LC	A
Grey Wagtail	*Motacilla cinerea*	LC	A
White Wagtail	*Motacilla alba*	LC	F
Crested Bunting	*Melophus lathami*	LC	A
Rufous-tailed Lark	*Ammomanes phoenicura*	LC	A
Indian Bush Lark	*Mirafra erythroptera*	LC	A
Grey-breasted Prinia	*Prinia hodgsonii*	LC	F
Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*	LC	F
Streak-throated Swallow	*Petrochelidon fluvicola*	LC	F
Red-rumped Swallow	*Hirundo daurica*	LC	A
Wire-tailed Swallow	*Hirundo smithii*	LC	A
Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	LC	A
Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*	LC	A, E, F
Yellow-eyed Babbler	*Chrysomma sinense*	LC	F
Common Babbler	*Argya caudata*	LC	A, F
Jungle Babbler	*Turdoides striata*	LC	F
Asian Pied Starling	*Gracupica contra*	LC	A
Brahminy Starling	*Sturnia pagodarum*	LC	A
Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*	LC	A, F
Bank Myna	*Acridotheres ginginianus*	LC	A, F
Indian Robin	*Saxicoloides fulicatus*	LC	A
Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*	LC	A
Brown Rock Chat	*Oenanthe fusca*	LC	F

Observations recorded - A: Sharma & Sharma 1997; B: Bharos 2008; C: Nair & Katdare 2013, D: Srivastava 2013, 2014a,b; E: Singh *et al.* 2015; F: Our observations.

CR – Critically Endangered; EN – Endangered; LC – Least Concern; NT – Near Threatened; VU – Vulnerable

Nocturnal birds in the Eastern Ghats of Tamil Nadu

J. Patrick David & B. Vinoth

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J. Patrick David, 59/12, State Bank Staff First Colony, By-Pass Road, Madurai625010, Tamil Nadu, India. E-mail: *patdavid28@gmail.com*
B. Vinoth, Project Assistant, CareEarth Trust,No.3, 6th Street, Thillaiganga Nagar, Chennai61, Tamil Nadu, India. E-mail: *b.vinoth.ktm@gmail.com*
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Abstract

We recorded nocturnal bird species, as part of a larger project to document avian diversity, in the Eastern Ghats of Tamil Nadu, from March 2012 to February 2015. This region has not been surveyed intensively before, except for the Vernay Survey in the late 1920's. We recorded nocturnal bird species at their roosting sites during the day, and in the night we identified them by their calls. In total, we recorded 12 species of nocturnal birds. This included nine species of owls, and three of nightjars.Most number of records were of the Spotted Owlet, Jungle Owlet, Indian Nightjar, and Jerdon's Nightjar. The Savanna Nightjar is reported for the first time from this area. These species were recorded from five types of habitat. Habitat loss due to expanding cultivation, wood cutting, cattle grazing, construction of resorts, and direct impacts, such as road kills, are threats to these species. Creation of awareness,and protecting existing habitats is essential for securing the long term survival of these enigmatic species.

Introduction

Forty-three species of nocturnal birds have been recorded in India, of which 32 are owls (Tytonidae, and Strigidae).The remaining are nightjars (Caprimulgidae), and frogmouths (Podargidae) (Grimmett *et al*. 2011). In peninsular India, 22 species have been recorded (Grimmett *et al*. 2011), of which, some species live close to human habitation, and play an important role in controlling agricultural pests, and insects (Neelnarayanan *et al*. 1999; Pande & Dahanukar 2011).

Understanding the distribution of, and habitat useage by these nocturnal species is essential to decipher their habitat requirements, and plan conservation strategies. This has been done to a certain extent for the forest owls in the Western Ghats of Kerala, and Tamil Nadu (Jayson & Sivaram 2009). As a first step towards such an exercise in the Eastern Ghats of Tamil Nadu (hereafter EGTN) we documented nocturnal bird species, and their habitats, in EGTN, and the adjoining plains. Nocturnal bird records from EGTN are either old (Whistler & Kinnear 1935a,b), or are simply a part of a bird checklist, without any further information on their habitats (Vasanth 1990; Karthikeyan 1996; Daniels & Saravanan 1998; Kalaimani 2011; Tom & Praveen 2014; Chandrasekaran & Kumaraguru, *undated*). Nocturnal birds are not usually given the same attention as diurnal birds. This might be, primarily, due to our inability to see in the dark, or we feel threatened at night by wild animals in the wilderness, or a general bias towards diurnal species, or a lack of familiarity with nocturnal species' calls (which is now changing). Our survey too was initially focussed on diurnal birds, but sighting nocturnal birds during the day encouraged us to attempt a full-fledged documentation of nocturnal species as well.

This documentation was part of a larger project to assess avian species diversity, and distribution in EGTN, funded by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. The survey was staggered over three years, from March 2012 to February 2015. In this short paper we provide a checklist of nocturnal species, compare them with past records, identify their habitats, and discuss conservation issues.

Study area

The Eastern Ghats in Tamil Nadu are disjointed hills in the north, north-eastern, north-western, and central parts of the state (Fig.1). The disjointed hills include the Yelagiri, Javvadu, Gingee, Chitheri, Kalrayan, Shevroy, Kolli, and Pachamalai hills, and the hills of Vellore, and Villupuram districts. These hills lie to the east of Stanley Reservoir (Mettur Dam), and are known here as the 'Eastern Cluster'. The Melagiris, in Krishnagiri District, and the forests of Dharmapuri, Erode, and Sathyamangalam forest division, lie to the north, and west of the reservoir, and are known as the 'Western Cluster'. The Sathyamangalam forest adjoins the main Western Ghats range, separated only by the Moyar River Valley. The hills south of River Cauvery were not covered during

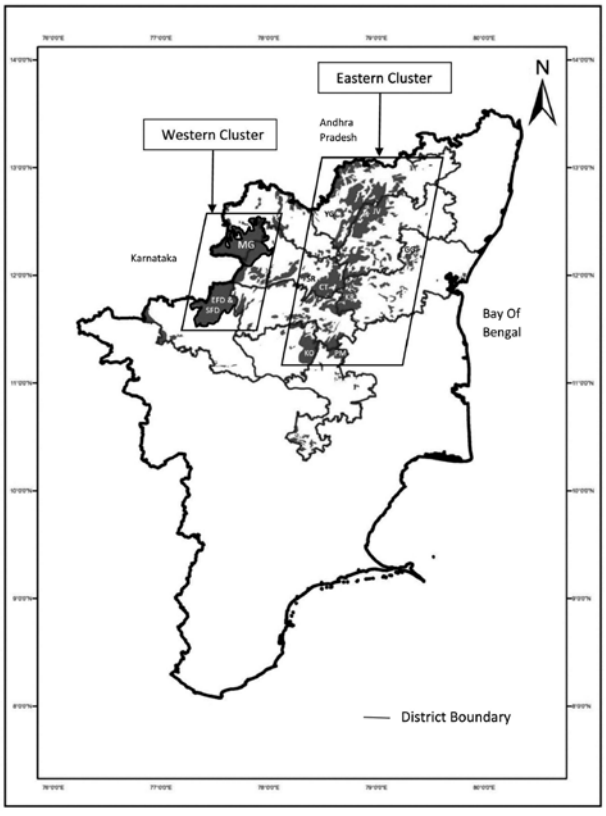

Fig. 1. Eastern Ghats of Tamil Nadu
Legend: YG–Yelagiri, JV–Javvadu, GG–Gingee Hills, SR–Shevroys, CT–Chitheri, KR–Kalrayan, KO–Kolli, PM–Pachamalai, MG–Melagiris, EFD–Erode Forest Division, SFD–Sathyamangalam Forest Division.

the survey as they are often considered to be outliers of the Western Ghats (Santharam *et al*. 2014), and hence not strictly a part of EGTN. Forests of EGTN have been heavily disturbed, and no longer exist as climax vegetation. Hence the landscape is a mix of remnant forest, plantation, cultivation, and habitation.

Methods

Due to their cryptic nature, nocturnal species are difficult to sight during the day. Even if they are sighted, identification is often difficult due to morphological similarity, e.g., nightjars. In such circumstances, their calls have helped to identify them (Kemp & Siriporn 2009; Pande & Dahanukar 2011; Koparde & Sirish 2013). We too followed a similar method, of listening to calls, to identify nocturnal birds, for the present study.

After completing our diurnal survey we identified suitable spots inside the forest, or at the village–forest edge to carry out our nocturnal documentation. Around 1700 hrs we reached a pre-determined spot, and sat their quietly, listened to bird calls till 1900 hrs. If there were no calls, we played back recorded calls using a mobile phone (Nokia C5-03), and speaker, to elicit a response. Before setting out on the survey, we familiarised ourselves with calls from standard websites, e.g., www.indiabirds.com, and www.xeno-canto.org. We also recorded bird calls in the field, on the mobile phone. Roosting nocturnal birds, spotted during the diurnal surveys, were recorded, along with a description of the habitat where they were seen (Table 1).

Table 1. Habitat traits

Habitat	Habitat trait
Rocky hillock	A chiefly bare hillock with huge rocks, boulders, and very little vegetation.
Habitation	Villages and cultivation
Plantation	Plantation of coconut, eucalyptus, red sanders.
Open scrub	An area covered with short vegetation (mostly thorny), with bare, or grass-covered ground.
Dense forest	A forest of either a dense undergrowth with short to medium height trees, or a forest with very little undergrowth but with good canopy cover (shaded).

Results & discussion

Species richness

We recorded 12 species during the survey: Three Caprimulgidae, and nine Strigidae (Table 2). This represents 28% of species recorded in India, and 55% recorded in peninsular India. Among the species recorded from peninsular India, only species restricted to the Western Ghats, and the northern Eastern Ghats remain unrecorded from these hills. These are the Great Eared Nightjar *Lyncornis macrotis*, Bay Owl *Phodilus badius*, Sri Lanka Frogmouth *Batrachostomus moniliger*, and Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus*.

The most widely recorded species were the Spotted Owlet *Athene brama*, Jungle Owlet *Glaucidium radiatum*, Indian Nightjar *C.asiaticus*, and Jerdon's Nightjar *C. atripennis*. Surprisingly, the Savanna Nightjar *C. affinis* had remained unrecorded from EGTN, till our survey.

Habitat use

Five types of habitats were used by nocturnal birds (Table 1; Fig. 2). Owls were recorded from all the five habitats, while nightjars were recorded only from dense forest, and open scrub. Most of the records of the Indian Eagle-Owl *Bubo bengalensis* were fromrocky hillocks, the habitat where it is generally found

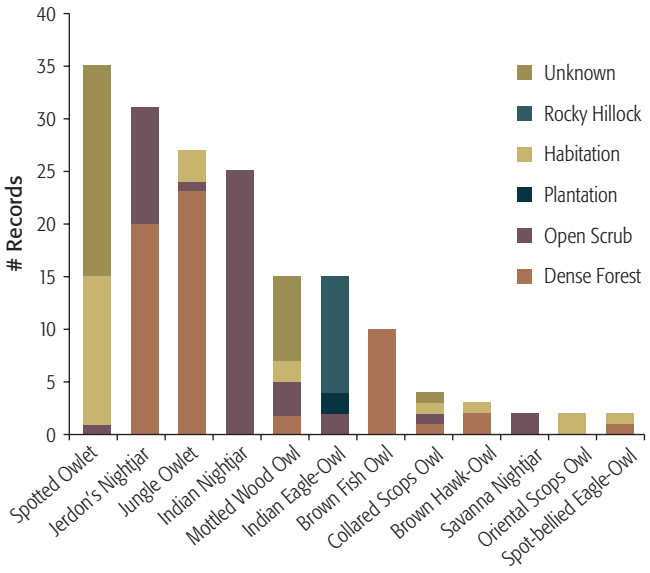

Fig.2: Habitat use by nocturnal bird species

(Grimmett *et al*. 2011). The two records of the Savanna Nightjar were from open scrub covered with grass.

More than 80% of the records of Jungle Owlet, and Brown Fish Owl *Ketupa zeylonensis* were from dense forest. Infact, all the records of Brown Fish Owl were from dense forest, indicating its preference for riparian vegetation. Another forest specialist is the Spot-bellied Eagle Owl *B. nipalensis*. Though one of the records was from a habitation, it was very close to dense forest. Most of the records of the Jerdon's Nightjar were also from dense forest. However, all the records of its congener, the Indian Nightjar, were from open scrub.

Except for four species, Jerdon's Nightjar, Brown Fish Owl, Brown Hawk-Owl, and Jungle Owlet, most of the records of other species were close to human habitation. Since much of the natural habitat of EGTN has been denuded, with drastic conversion of natural forests into cultivation, and habitation, our sampling has an inherent bias of being from close to human habitations. However it is gladdening that several species are resilient, adapt to changing landscape, and are still persisting in the available natural habitat. We do not have prior data on bird densities to compare trends. However, if there has been a decline, it was not catastrophic, and did not wipe out species. Future analysis of landscape level changes, of vegetation, and habitat use by nocturnal birds, will throw more light on the ability of species to adapt to changes in land cover. This exercise should be carried out for the entire Eastern Ghats.

Past and present records

During the Vernay Survey in EGTN (Whistler & Kinnear 1935a,b), eight species of nocturnal birds were recorded. Three, which were not recorded by that survey, were found to be widespread during our survey: Indian Nightjar, Mottled Wood Owl *Strix ocellata*, and Jungle Owlet. The Spot-bellied Eagle Owl, was recorded by the Vernay Survey in the Shevroys. We recorded it from Erode, and Dharmapuri forest division on the western side. However there is a strong possibility that it could occur in the Tirthamalai Range, as a similar sounding call was recorded near the forest guest house, but the recording was subsequently lost. The Brown Wood Owl *Strix leptogrammica* was recorded during the Vernay Survey only

Table 2. List of nocturnal birds recorded in EGTN (including past records)

Common Name	Scientific Name	# Sites recorded (present survey)	Past records
Grey Nightjar	*Caprimulgus indicus*	0	Shevroys (Karthikeyan 1996), and Kolli (Daniels & Saravanan 1998)
Jerdon's Nightjar	*Caprimulgus atripennis*	31	Chitheri (Whistler & Kinnear 1935a), Kolli (Daniels & Saravanan 1998)
Indian Nightjar	*Caprimulgus asiaticus*	25	No records
Savanna Nightjar	*Caprimulgus affinis*	02 (Shevroys and Pachamalai foothill)	No records
Brown Hawk Owl	*Ninox scutulata*	03 (Chitheri, Biligundlu and Hogenakkal)	No records
Jungle Owlet	*Glaucidium radiatum*	27	Kolli (Daniels and Saravanan 1998), Shevroys (Karthikeyan 1996)
Spotted Owlet	*Athene brama*	35	Shevroysand Kurumbapatti (Whistler & Kinnear 1935b), Kolli (Daniels & Saravanan 1998)
Oriental Scops Owl	*Otus sunia*	02 (Kolli, Koil Natham)	Mr. Daly collected eggs from Shevroys (Whistler & Kinnear 1935b)
Collared Scops Owl	*Otus bakkomaena*	04 (Yelagiri, Kolli, Pachamalai. Pachamalai foothill)	Shevroys (Karthikeyan 1996)
Mottled Wood Owl	*Strix ocellata*	15	Shevroys (Karthikeyan 1996)
Brown Wood Owl	*Strix leptogrammica*	0	Specimen in Chennai museum from Shevroys (Whistler & Kinnear 1935b)
Indian Eagle Owl	*Bubo bengalensis*	15	Tirthamalai (Whistler & Kinnear 1935b)
Spot-bellied Eagle Owl	*Bubo nipalensis*	02 (Kanniamman koil, Tamaraikarai)	Shevroys (Whistler & Kinnear 1935b)
Brown Fish Owl	*Ketupa zeylonensis*	10	Chitheri (Whistler & Kinnear 1935b)

Note: Biligundlu, and Hogenakkal are in the Cauvery River's riparian tract. Koil Natham, and Tamaraikarai are in Erode Forest Division, and Kanniamman Koil is in Dharmapuri Forest Division.

from the Shevroys. We did not carry out a nocturnal survey at high altitudes in the Shevroys, where the species is likely to occur, due to inclement weather.

Four species of nocturnal birds have been reported in the past from Shevroys (Karthikeyan 1996), and three from the Kolli Hills (Daniels & Saravanan 1998). An interesting species recorded by those surveys was of the Grey Nightjar *C. indicus*. The Grey Nightjar has not been reported widely from outside the Western Ghats, i.e., from within peninsular India, and was not recorded during our survey either. The Brown Hawk Owl, which was recorded at Chitheri during the present survey, was not reported by the Vernay Survey. The species was also recorded along the Cauvery's riparian tract in Hogenakkal, and Biligundlu during the present survey. The Savanna Nightjar *C. affinis* was recorded at a couple of sites during the present survey. There are no past records of this species, and recent surveys in the Melagiris (Tom & Praveen 2014), and Sathyamangalam forest division (Chandrasekaran & Kumaraguru undated) did not record the species.

Conservation issues

Our survey revealed that most of the forest habitat has been taken over for cultivation, and habitation. There was large scale cultivation of tapioca on most of the hills. Coffee plantations are abundant in the Shevroys and the Kolli Hills. Other crops cultivated were paddy, sugarcane, pineapple, and banana. Resorts are everywhere in the Shevroys and the Kolli Hills. Direct disturbances /threats to these species were also evident in the form of road kills (two instances of road kills were recorded in the foothills of Pachamalai, and the Shevroys), wood-cutting, and cattle grazing. Therefore there is an urgent need to protect the existing habitats by regulating the expansion of cultivation, and construction of resorts. The creation of awareness amongst the local people, about the presence, and value of these species, is also necessary to prevent wood cutting, and cattle grazing.

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Some interesting sightings from the 2014 Asian Waterbird Census in Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana, India

Humayun Taher

Taher, H., 2015. Some interesting sightings from the 2014 Asian Waterbird Census in Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana, India.
Indian BIRDS 11 (2): 42–44.
Humayun Taher, 2-B Atlas Apartments, Road No. 10, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, Telangana. E-mail: humayun.taher@gmail.com
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The annual exercise of the Asian Waterbird Census (hereafter AWC) takes place under the aegis of Wetlands International every year, normally during the second and third week of January. This is the period when the population of wintering waterfowl in the South-East Asia region would have stabilised and the birds have spread out to their regular wintering areas. In a way, this has been one of the longest-running, and most successful projects ever undertaken by the members of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh (hereafter BSAP). Since the inception of this exercise, in 1987, the members of the BSAP have participated in the annual counts, and submitted the data to the Asian Wetlands Bureau (Wetlands International).

These 27 years have seen many changes in the methods of counts, and also, inevitably, changes in the populations, densities, and distribution of wintering waterfowl in the region. One of the major achievements of this project has been the addition of species to the known list of the birds of Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh (hereafter AP) and, and new distribution ranges. Cases in point are the addition of the Heuglin's Gull *Larus fuscus heuglini* to the list of birds seen around Hyderabad city (Taher *et. al.* 2012), and the sighting of the Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* in Kolleru (Taher & Mani 2008).

Here I present some interesting observations made during the 2014 AWC exercise, with notes, and further details in Table 1.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

This species is a winter visitor from Sind (Pakistan), in small numbers, to India, spreading from northern India to Tadoba, Maharashtra (Haribal 1987). There are three records from Andhra Pradesh: Visakhapatnam District (Palot 1999); the coastal areas of the state (Raju *et al.* 1985); and the coastal plains (Taher & Pittie 1989).

The bird was recorded in the AWC for the first time during the 2009 census. In December 2008 I saw, and photographed a single bird at the Nelapattu Tank in Nellore District **[49]**. Subsequent visits to this tank have drawn a blank, and the bird has never again been seen at this site.

Photo: Humayun Taher

49. Great Crested Grebe in Nelapattu Tank, December 2008.

The sightings made of the species in the 2014 AWC are given in Table 1.

This species is now being regularly sighted in the districts of Visakhapatnam, and Srikakulam. So it is probable that the record from Nellore District was a stray, or vagrant bird, but since there are regular sightings from the coastal districts, it is perhaps safe to say that the bird is a regular winter visitor to the state. The bird is now breeding in Srikakulam District (Sravan Kumar R., *et al.* 2014; Vikram P., *pers. comm.*, verbally).

Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*

Great White Pelicans have been only very sporadically reported from erstwhile Andhra Pradesh. According to Ali & Ripley (1987) they are 'mainly winter visitor[s] to W. Pakistan (Baluchistan, Sind) and N. India from the Punjab to Assam (U.P., Rajasthan, Kutch, Saurashtra, N. Gujarat), Andhra Visakhapatnam), and "Madras". Taher & Pittie (1989) do not list it. Kumar (1980) reports seeing 'a pair on the Mir Alam Tank (near Hyderabad), in January 1973 (it was a year of drought).'

On all these locations, the birds are seen in company with the commoner Spot-billed Pelicans *P. philippensis*. It is not yet clear whether the birds are regular breeders in the state. Only in Uppalapadu were there any signs that the birds may be nesting, as they were seen perched on half-finished nests. There is no evidence of nesting from the other locations, though there are signs, such as for example the single Great White Pelican that was observed flying into one of the nesting trees in the Nelapattu WLS. More observations are required.

Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis*

Breeding colonies of this species are known from around Pulicat Lake. The sightings made of the species in the 2014 AWC are given in Table 1.

Being a predominantly coastal species, it was interesting to spot it at Himayat Sagar, which is a large fresh-water lake supplying drinking water to the city of Hyderabad. The only other known records of this species from the Hyderabad district that I have been able to trace is one by Neavoll (1968), an undated records from ICRISAT Asia Center (Medak District), Rouriyal Lake, and Inkriyal Tank (both in Ranga Reddy District) (Pittie & Taher 2004).

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

In Andhra Pradesh, the Black Stork is scantily reported. One of the early records is from 1990, from near Jeedimetla, Hyderabad District (Kanniah & Ganesh 1990). A single bird was reported

from Kotepally Reservoir, Ranga Reddy District in 2011 (K. B. Rao, *pers. comm*., e-mail of 26 December 2011). There is a record from 1985, from Rollapadu, Kurnool District (Manakadan 1988). Subsequently there are reports from along the banks of the Gowthami River, East Godavari, in 1987; Madanapalli, Chittoor District, 1989; Kumarajulanka, East Godavari, 1992; and Ravulapalem, East Godavari, 1995 (Rao *et al.* 2000). G. Ramakrishna Rao has photographed it in 2013, in Adilabad District (*pers. comm*., e-mail of 30 March 2013). Sightings from the 2014 AWC are given in Table 1.

On 06 February 2014 G. Ramakrishna Rao, DFO, Kawal Reserve, photographed a flock of 16 birds (*in litt.*, e-mail dated 08 February 2014). This is by far one of the largest flocks sighted in the state, and the fact that it has been seen twice in successive years in the same district, is significant.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

There are a limited number of records of this species from Andhra Pradesh. The first is of 56 birds from Pulicat Lake, Nellore District, in 1989 (Anonymous 1989), but such a large number seems suspect. The 1990 record from Kurnool District seems to be of doubtful veracity, even though it is reported in the AWC for 1989. In 1992 there were many records from Nellore District, from Pulicat, Kesavaram Tank, and Venkatachalam Tank (Pittie & Taher 2004). Of these, the Pulicat Lagoon is brackish, while the other two are fresh-water tanks. The 1996 record from Coringa Mangroves, East Godavari District is also of doubtful veracity.

The sightings from the 2014 AWC are given in Table 1.

This time again the species has been seen in the state on brackish water (if we discount the report from the Coringa Mangroves). It is generally thought that the birds mostly stay on fresh-water bodies in their winter quarters. In its summer quarters however, it seems to favour estuaries and salt marshes.

Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo*

As Demoiselle Cranes are migratory, their winter habitats include north-eastern Africa, Pakistan, and India.

Historically there is a considerable corpus of data of the species from both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, though nowhere is it abundant in its southern-most range in India. There are sight records from Singur, Medak District (Kumar 1990), and in 1986 from Rollapadu, Kurnool District, and one from Kurnool town (Choudhury 1990). There are sight records from Manjira, and Singur reservoirs, from 2004 (G. Ramakrishna Rao, *verbally*). However, this will be the first time in more than ten years that Demoiselle Cranes are being reported from Andhra Pradesh in the AWC.

The sightings made of the species in the 2014 AWC are given in Table 1.

It is pertinent to note that after its sighting on 02 February 2014 (see Table 1), the bird was still present on the lake two days later, when G. Ramakrishna Rao, DFO, visited the lake, and photographed the bird (*in litt*., e-mail dated 07 February 2014). It was noted as being completely solitary, not mingling with any other birds on the lake, and it also fed almost continuously. It spent the greater part of its time feeding. So, although the bird is not exactly unknown from Andhra Pradesh, it is being reported from Adilabad District for the first time and therefore, even if it is a stray record, it becomes important as showing that possibly the birds do fly over this district.

Greyheaded Lapwing *Vanellus cinereus*

There appears to be very little published literature of this species from Andhra Pradesh or Telangana. Though it has been recorded in Taher & Pittie (1989), it seems to be mostly known from a few sight records. In Andhra Pradesh, it has been recorded from Pulicat Lagoon by Dipu K (2009), Praveen J (2010), and by this author in 2011, when five birds were seen. A subsequent trip

Table 1. Interesting Sightings from the AWC in AP and Telangana in 2014

Species	Date	Location	Count	Remarks
Podiceps cristatus	12 January 2014	Thatipudi Reservoir, Vizianagaram (18.13°N, 83.18°E); Andhra Pradesh	2	Clear photograph available (Team: Vikram P., and Surekha A.)
Pelecanus onocrotalus	26 December 2013	Nelapattu WLS, Nellore (13.77°N, 80°E); Andhra Pradesh	1	A single bird seen going into the nesting trees. (Team: K.B. Rao, H. Taher, Y.S.R.K. Prasad)
	18 January 2014	Uppalapadu Tank, Guntur (16.32°N, 80.52°E); Andhra Pradesh	5	This is the third successive year the species has been seen at this site. (Team: Sathvik R., P. Gowthama)
	25 January 2014	Kolleru Lake & WLS, West Godavari (16.53°N, 81.35°E); Andhra Pradesh	2	In company with the nesting Spot-billed Pelicans at Atapaka (Team: J.V.D. Moorty, K. Madhusudan, Vikram P.)
Egretta gularis	18 January 2014	Himayath Sagar Reservoir, Ranga Reddy (17.33°N, 78.33°E); Telangana	1	A single bird seen foraging in the shallows along with Little Egrets. This was a dark morph bird. (Team: Shafaat Ulla, Sharada A., Anjali P.)
	21 January 2014	Coringa Mangroves WLS, East Godavari (16.5°N, 82.38°E); Andhra Pradesh	66	This species is fairly common in the mangrove creeks of the sanctuary. (Team: K.T. Rao, K.M. Rao, P.S. Selvam)
Ciconia nigra	01 February 2014	Kalpakunta Lake, Adilabad (19.1°N, 78.98°E); Telangana	2	Two birds were seen on this lake close to the Kawal Project Tiger Reserve (Team: Shafaat Ulla, Anjali P.)
Tadorna tadorna	29 December 2013	Pulicat Lagoon, Nellore (13.57°N, 80.17°E); Andhra Pradesh	21	A single flock mingling with a mixed flock of ducks. (Team: K.B. Rao, H. Taher, Y.S.R.K. Prasad)
Anthropoides virgo	02 February 2014	Kawal Lake, Adilabad (19.17°N, 78.97°E); Telangana	1	A single bird, probably a juvenile, was observed foraging in the small village lake of Kawal, close to the Kawal Project Tiger Reserve. (Team: Shafaat Ulla, Anjali P, Nand Kumar)
Vanellus cinereus	27 December 2013	Pulicat Lagoon, Nellore (13.57°N, 80.17°E); Andhra Pradesh	9	Seen in the same place as the sightings in all previous years; on the shores of a fresh-water pond on Irakkam Island. (Team: K.B. Rao, H. Taher, Y.S.R.K. Prasad)
	27 January 2014	Kolleru Lake & WLS, West Godavari (16.53°N, 81.35°E); Andhra Pradesh	1	A single individual seen. (Team: J.V.D. Moorty, K. Madhusudan, Vikram P.)

in 2012 did not spot it, but three birds were seen in 2013. One bird was photographed at Hussain Sagar, in Hyderabad city in 2008 (Sreekar & Ram 2010). There are reports from Tamil Nadu (Santharam 1987; Gopi Sundar 2000; Santharam *et al*. 2007), Karnataka (Subramanya 1987), Goa (Lainer 1991), and Kerala (Sashikumar *et al.* 2011).

The sightings from 2014 AWC are given in Table 1.

Conclusion

In the past decade, six species of birds have been added to the list of birds of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. These are:

1. Greylag Goose (Ulla & Taher 2011)
2. Sooty Tern (Taher, *et. al*. 2011)
3. Red Phalarope (Rawal, *et. al*. 2013)
4. Great White Pelican (Taher & Mani 2008)
5. Grey-headed Lapwing (Conroy 2003)
6. Indian White-rumped Spinetail (Kalinadhabhatla 2013)

Most of these birds were added as a direct result of the findings during the AWC. The Red Phalarope is a good example: It was found while members had gone to watch, and photograph the Greater Flamingos that were reported in the 2013 AWC from the Gandipet Lake. The Greylag Goose, the Great White Pelican, and Greyheaded Lapwing are all census-related discoveries. The Sooty Tern is perhaps the only waterbird that was seen outside of any waterfowl count related activity.

The AWC is a great success story for Indian ornithology, and I hope state coordinators of the project research their data and write up about interesting records that it has thrown up from their areas, as has been done by Nameer *et al.* (2015).

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Records of Blue Pitta *Pitta cyanea* in Dampa Tiger Reserve, Mizoram, and a review of its status in north-eastern India

Priya Singh & David W. Macdonald

Singh, P., & Macdonald, D. W., 2016. Records of Blue Pitta *Pitta cyanea* in Dampa Tiger Reserve, Mizoram, and a review of its status in north-eastern India. *Indian BIRDS* 11 (2): 45–47.

Priya Singh, Researchers for Wildlife Conservation, National Centre for Biological Sciences, Tata Institute for Fundamental Research, GKVK Campus, Bellary Road, Bangalore, India 560065. E-mail: karnisar@gmail.com [Corresponding author.]

David W Macdonald, The Wildlife Conservation Research Unit, Department of Zoology, The Recanati-Kaplan Centre, Tubney House, Abingdon Road, Tubney, OX13 5QL, UK.

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The avian Family Pittidae comprises 30 species globally (Erritzoe 2003a). These are restricted to the Old World, mostly to South and South-east Asia barring few in Australia and Africa (Erritzoe 2003a). Of these, six are found in India. These include the Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura*, Hooded Pitta *P. sordida*, Blue-naped Pitta *P. nipalensis*, Blue Pitta *P. cyanea*, Mangrove Pitta *P. megarhyncha*, and a more recent inclusion, the Blue-winged Pitta *P. moluccensis* (Manchi & Kumar 2014). The Hooded Pitta, Blue-naped Pitta, and the Blue Pitta have a distribution in north-eastern India (Grimmett *et al*. 1998; Rasmussen & Anderton, 2012), with the Blue Pitta being the rarest, having never been photographed in India (Grewal 2012).

Global distribution of the Blue Pitta is vast, stretching from Bangladesh in the west to Vietnam in the east (Erritzoe 2003b). While the species is frequently reported from its eastern range in Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam (Erritzoe 2003b), it is rarely recorded from other parts of its range. Its elusive nature, and forest habitat make the Blue Pitta an infrequently sighted bird (Round & Treesucon 1983; Erritzoe 2003b). This is true, particularly, along its western distributional extremity in the countries of Bangladesh, India, southern China, and Myanmar. The only reports of Blue Pitta from north-eastern Bangladesh date back to 1988, while its status in Myanmar is unknown (Erritzoe 2003b).

Within India, the Blue Pitta is a local resident, with an expected distribution across the north-eastern states of Assam, Mizoram, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh (Ali & Ripley 1983; Grimmett *et al*. 1998; Choudhury 2009; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), Nagaland (Ali & Ripley 1983; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), the Garo Hills of Meghalaya (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; VertNet 2015a), and Tripura (Grimmett *et al*. 1998). It is known to inhabit tropical, and sub-tropical moist forests, broad-leaved evergreen forests (Erritzoe 2003b; Grimmett *et al*. 1998; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), and bamboo forests along steep (Round & Treesucon 1983; Erritzoe 2003b), and moist ravines (Grimmett *et al*. 1998; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). However, most information regarding the distribution of Blue Pitta in India is based on old records, some of them from before the twentieth century (Table 1). The only evidence of the species occurring in Tripura is a specimen given to Godwin-Austen by a member of the Topographical Survey, working in Tripura in the second half of the nineteenth century (Godwin-Austen 1874). A few years later, in 1899, two specimen were also collected in Hangrum, in the North Cachar Hills, by Stuart Baker (Boev 1997).

Although Blue Pitta distribution includes states such as Manipur, and Nagaland, no site-specific information exists on sightings from these states. Preferring dense forested habitat, the Blue Pitta is easier heard than observed (Round & Treesucon 1983). Recent records of Blue Pitta from Mehao Wildlife Sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh, and Jatinga in Cachar Hills are both based on calls (Robson 1999; Jalan & Phukan 2015). The only sightings of Blue Pitta, reported from India in recent times have been from either Assam or Mizoram. The Blue Pitta has been recorded, once each, from Assam's Kaziranga National Park, and the adjoining Panbari Reserved Forest (Barua & Sharma 1999; Barua, *in litt*., e-mail dated 01 October 2015). In Mizoram, the species was recorded from Dampa Tiger Reserve on four different occasions

Table 1. Records of the Blue Pitta from India

Year	Observers	Location	State	Notes	References
Undated	G.C.Crozier	Unknown	Assam		Vertnet 2015a,b,c,d,e
1870s	Specimen given to Godwin-Austen by Mr. Chennell	Unknown	Tripura		Godwin-Austen 1874
26 December 1895	Stuart Baker	Gunjong, N Cachar Hills	Assam	Male	Vertnet 2015a,b,c,d,e
26 June 1899	Stuart Baker	Hangrum, N Cachar Hills	Assam	Male and female	Boev 1997
20 February 1950	Walter N Koelz	Garo Hills, Tura	Meghalaya	Female	Vertnet 2015a,b,c,d,e
02 April 1951	Rupchand Thakur	Lushai Hills, Zabauk	Mizoram	Male	Vertnet 2015a,b,c,d,e
01 February 1953	Rupchand Thakur	Lushai Hills, Pangzawl	Mizoram	Female	Vertnet 2015a,b,c,d,e
19 April 1999	Craig Robson	Ham Pu Ped Peak, Jatinga, Cachar Hills	Assam	Identified from call	Robson 1999
1993–1999	Sonowal	Kaziranga NP	Assam	In Semi-evergreen habitat	Barua & Sharma 1999
April 2007	Polash Bora	Panbari RF	Assam		Barua in litt, Email 2015
August 2012	Bikram Grewal	Nagaland	Nagaland	Dead specimen filmed	Grewal 2012
14 April 2015	Maanav Jalan & Raj Phukan	Mehao WLS, Frogmouth Camp	Arunachal Pradesh	Heard at dusk	Jalan & Phukan 2015

Table 2. Records of Blue Pitta from Dampa Tiger Reserve

Date	Observers	Location	Forest type	Time of day
19 December 1994	Raman, T.R.S[1]	Between Pathlawitlang and Dampatlang	Mature	0930 hrs
16 February 1995	Raman, T.R.S[1]	Tuichar area	Mature	Unknown
03 April 1995	Raman, T.R.S[1]	Damparengpui trail	Mature	Unknown
11 April 1995	Raman, T.R.S[1]	Chawrpialtlang	Mature	Unknown
15 March 2014	Ingle & Raman[2]	Pathlawitlang	Unknown	0700 hrs
13 March 2014	Ingle & Raman[2]	Pathlawitlang	Unknown	0655 hrs
28 March 2014	Raman, T.R.S[2]	Along Tuichar Lui	Mature	0722 hrs
27 March 2014	Raman, T.R.S[2]	Tuichar area	Mature	0650 hrs
08 February 2015	Singh & Macdonald[3]	Near Terei-Damparengpui Rd	Bamboo	1512 hrs
09 February 2015	Singh & Macdonald[3]	Near Terei-Damparengpui Rd	Bamboo	0557 hrs
09 February2015	Singh & Macdonald[3]	Near Terei-Damparengpui Rd	Bamboo	0611 hrs
12 February 2015	Singh & Macdonald[3]	Near Terei-Damparengpui Rd	Bamboo	1428 hrs
02 February 2015	Singh & Macdonald[3]	Near Terei-Damparengpui Rd	Bamboo	1452 hrs
13 February 2015	Singh & Macdonald[3]	Near Terei-Damparengpui Rd	Bamboo	1637 hrs
17 February 2015	Singh & Macdonald[3]	Near Terei-Damparengpui Rd	Bamboo	0655 hrs

Source of Information: [1]Raman, T.R.S. 1995 & eBird; [2]eBird; [3]Data shared in this paper.

during an ecological study on bird communities in the 1990s (Raman 1994; Raman 1995a,b,c,d). Thereafter, in a bird survey in the same area, in 2014, it was again recorded on four different occasions, based either on calls, or direct sightings (Ingle & Raman 2014a,b; Raman 2014a,b) (Table 2).

In February 2015, while conducting a camera-trapping study in Dampa Tiger Reserve, Mizoram, we recorded the Blue Pitta on camera traps. We think this is the first photographic evidence of live Blue Pittas from India.

Dampa Tiger Reserve is an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) located in the Lushai Hills of north-western Mizoram (BirdLife International 2015). To its west is located the Chittagong Hill Tract region of Bangladesh. The 500 km^2 core area of Dampa is highly undulating terrain, with an average elevation of 400 m asl (BirdLife International 2015). Until around two decades ago, some parts of this area were under shifting cultivation. However, with shifting cultivation banned within the core area of the Reserve, secondary vegetation, chiefly comprising bamboo (*Melocanna* sp.), has become dominant.

Between December 2014, and March 2015, we conducted camera trapping in the north-eastern part of the core area of Dampa Tiger Reserve, to enumerate populations of clouded leopards *Neofelis nebulosa* in the region. For the purpose of our study, we placed 79 pairs of Cuddeback Ambush IR (Model 1187) camera traps, each placed one kilometer apart.

At camera trap location '11', along the north-eastern margin of the study area, we recorded Blue Pitta. In 76 trap nights, between 06 January 2015, and 22 March 2015, the camera traps photographed Blue Pittas on seven different occasions. All Blue Pitta photographs were obtained within a period of ten days, between 08 February 2015, and 17 February 2015. Only one of the photographs was in colour **[50]**, while all the others were taken using infrared technology, due to low light conditions, and hence were monochromatic. However, features such as the black stripe through the eye, the black moustachial stripe, and the barring pattern on the undersides, were distinct in all, but one, photograph, and were used to identify the species. In one case, where the bird was foraging, the black central crown stripe along with the black stripe through its eye were used to determine its species.

50. Male Blue Pitta photographed by a camera trap in Dampa Tiger Reserve in February 2015.

The camera traps were located at an elevation of 450 m asl in the midst of bamboo thickets. All photographs, taken by these cameras, were either in early morning (500-700 hrs) or late afternoon–evening (1400-1700 hrs). Due to low image quality, we could not determine the sex of all individuals. However, given the territorial nature of pittas, most of these images probably belong to either the same individual or the same pair.

Based on our records, and those from previous studies in Dampa, the Blue Pitta, although rare, does appear to have a fairly large distribution in the north-eastern part of Dampa Tiger Reserve. The species has been recorded in this area from mid-December to the first week of April. All sightings or records of the Blue Pitta in Dampa have been obtained from elevations between 400 and 600 m asl with vegetation ranging from late-secondary successional bamboo to mature evergreen forests.

While we recognise that the photographs we obtained, of the Blue Pitta, were incidental, they prove the utility of camera traps in documenting not just mammalian species frequenting forested areas but also forest dwelling, uncommon, terrestrial avian species. The Blue Pitta has been recognised as a very rare species in India (Grewal 2012), and across its entire western distributional range. Under such circumstances, protected areas, such as Dampa Tiger Reserve, could be important and safe areas for lesser known or rare species like the Blue Pitta.

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White-browed Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus schisticeps* in the Indian Sundarbans

Dibyendu Ash, Soumyajit Nandy, Tamanud Mitra & Nityananda Chowkidar

Ash, D., Nandy, S., Mitra, T., & Chowkidar, N., 2016. White-browed Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus schisticeps* in Indian Sundarbans. *Indian BIRDS* 11 (2): 47–48.
Dibyendu Ash, 6/1/A, Banku Behari Paul Lane, Baranagar, Kolkata 700036, West Bengal, India. E-mail: *dbndsh@gmail.com*
Soumyajit Nandy, 87/4, Raja SC Mullick Road, Kolkata 700047, West Bengal, India. E-mail: *nandy.soumyajit@gmail.com*
Tamanud Mitra, Flat 2A,12/4/1 Khanpur Road, Kolkata 700047, West Bengal, India. E-mail: *mitra.tamanud@gmail.com*
Manuscript received on 24 August 2015.

The White-browed Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus schisticeps* is a resident of the Himalayan foothills, the hills of north-eastern India, and eastern Bangladesh (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It has been recently discovered in the mangrove forests in the Sundarbans of Bangladesh (Halder 2008). This note describes more sightings from mangrove habitats, but from the Indian side of Sundarbans.

On 25 June 2015, at 0750 hrs, we observed four birds at the Sudhanyakhali Compartment (22.10°N, 88.80°E) of Sundarban Tiger Reserve, South 24-Parganas District, West Bengal, and photographed one of them **[51, 52]**. It was identified as a White-browed Scimitar Babbler by its pale eyes, white throat, breast, and under parts, chestnut flanks and collar, black lores and ear-coverts with long white supercilium, and down-curved yellow bill. Subsequently, we recorded the species thrice from the same area (see Table). It must be mentioned that Jayanta Manna reported sightings of this species from this area in October 2012, and twice in December 2014. On all occasions, the bird responded to artificial callback (Jayanta Manna, *verbally* in November 2015).

Though the White-browed Scimitar Babbler is not known to occur in mangrove forests, Halder (2008) reported it as 'common' in the Sundarbans of Bangladesh. Grimmett *et al.* (2011) accepted this record. This is a rather surprising record, as the Sundarbans is isolated from its main distribution, in the eastern Bangladesh, and north-eastern India, by the deltas of the Ganges, and the Brahmaputra rivers. This area is separated from its population in northern Bengal by about 500 km. Infact, the distribution of Indian Scimitar Babbler *P. horsfieldii* reaches as far as central Odisha, and would only be 500 km from the Indian Sundarbans. Interestingly, Chatterjee (2004) lists the Indian Scimitar Babbler [=Slaty-headed Scimitar Babbler] from the Sunderbans Tiger Reserve. However, details about that bird are lacking, to comment on its identity. Considering the fact that these two species are completely allopatric in the rest of their

51. White-browed Scimitar Babbler in 25 June 2015.

52. White-browed Scimitar Babbler in 12 July 2015.

Table. White-browed Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus schisticeps* records from the Sudhanyakhali Compartment of the Sundarban Tiger Reserve

Date	Time	No. of birds	Remarks
25 June 2015	0750 hrs	4	Photographed. **[51]**
12 July 2015	1701 hrs	2	Photographed. **[52]**
21 July 2015	1420 hrs	3	Seen. Birds were responding to calls
22 July 2015	1642 hrs	2	Seen. Birds were responding to calls

range, there is a high probability that the bird listed by Chatterjee (2004) was also the White-browed Scimitar Babbler.

Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) list five subspecies from South Asia. While nominate race occurs in northern Bengal, race *cryptanthus* occurs in Meghalaya and southern Assam while race *mearsi* occurs in Mizo [=Lushai] hills and possibly Chittagong hills tracts of Bangladesh, from our photographs we cannot judge the subspecies of the bird. Since the range is disjunct from all known races of the species, a fresh study should be carried out to collect morphometric and plumage details of a few individuals to assess the racial status of this population.

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First record of Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana* from Kerala, India

S. Prasanth Narayanan, V. Prashobh Kumar, A. Al Badush, Saji Jayamohan, P.S. Jinesh, B. Sreekumar, & A. P. Thomas

Prasanth Narayanan, S., Kumar, V. P., Al Badush, A., Jayamohan, S., Jinesh, P. S., Sreekumar, B., & Thomas, A. P., 2016. First record of Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana* from Kerala, India. *Indian BIRDS* 11 (2): 48–49.

S. Prasanth Narayanan, Advanced Centre of Environmental Studies and Sustainable Development, Mahatma Gandhi University, Priyadarsini Hills, Kottayam 686560, Kerala, India. [Corresponding author.] [SPN]

V. Prashobh Kumar, Kottayam Nature Society, Near Union Club, Kottayam, Kerala, India. [VPK]

B. Sreekumar, Kottayam Nature Society, Near Union Club, Kottayam, Kerala, India. [BS]

Saji Jayamohan , Kottayam Nature Society, Near Union Club, Kottayam, Kerala, India. [SJ]

A. Al Badush, School of Environmental Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University, Priyadarsini Hills, Kottayam 686560, Kerala, India. [AAB]

P. S. Jinesh, Department of Forensic Medicine, Govt. Medical College, Gandhinagar, Kottayam 686008, Kerala, India. [PSJ]

A. P. Thomas, Advanced Centre of Environmental Studies and Sustainable Development, Mahatma Gandhi University, Priyadarsini Hills, Kottayam 686560, Kerala, India. [APT]

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The Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana* is a small, skulking bird, belonging to the family Rallidae (Order: Ralliformes). It is rare, and elusive, but is a widespread passage migrant and winter visitor to South Asia, mainly to the north-western, and north-central plains, from Sind to Assam, with scattered records from the Indian peninsula, up to Belgaum, in northern Karnataka (Ali & Ripley 2001; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It usually breeds in the West, the Central Palearctic, and in West Asia (Ali

Photo: V. Prashobh Kumar

53. Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana* recorded from Ottappana, near Thottapally.

& Ripley 2001; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It is normally found in India in shallow freshwater wetlands, such as seepages, marshes, reservoirs, and canals, with areas of dense reeds and grasses (Ali & Ripley 2001; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). As in the case of most crake it is a skulker, and easily overlooked. It is crepescular, and occurs singly, or in pairs (Kumar *et al.* 2005; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). This species has not been reported from the state of Kerala (Ali 1984; Ali & Ripley 2001; Sashikumar *et al.* 2010, 2011; Praveen 2015).

On 03 October 2015, around 0730 hrs, VPK was watching coastal birds from his home at Ottappana (9.32°N, 76.37°E), which is around 100 m away from the Arabian Sea. It is in Thottapally in Alappuzha district of Kerala. A noisy group of House Crows *Corvus splendens*, mobbing a rail-like bird, attracted his attention. The victim flew towards his house, and entered it, obviously to escape the attacking crows. VPK took a few photographs of the bird with his mobile camera **[53]**. After ten minutes the bird flew out of the same door it had used to fly in, and flew east.

Pale spotted anterior regions (breast, sides of breast, and mantle), white forewing, red bill, and brown eye were obvious in this specimen. Adult Spotted Crakes will show grey in the supercilium, and sides of the neck, but in this individual it was mainly browinsh. Subsequently we checked the images with the help of various references (Ali & Ripley 2001; Bruun *et al.* 2010; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), and concluded that it was a juvenile Spotted Crake, a new record for the state.

Spotted Crakes are a widespread migratory species. Apart from the Indian Subcontinent, they mainly winters in Africa (BirdLife International 2015). According to Ali & Ripley (2001), they arrive in the northern regions of India during September–October. The only published report from southern peninsular India is by E. A. Butler who obtained specimens in Belgaum (Butler 1881). In the Indian Subcontinent they are winter visitors and passage migrants. Hence, this specimen could have either straggled to Kerala from its regular wintering grounds in the north, or it could have been on autumn migration to Africa across the Arabian Sea, and had got blown onshore into Kerala by strong winds.

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Sighting of a Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* in Pune

Raghunath Iyer

Iyer, R., 2016. Sighting of a Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* in Pune. *Indian BIRDS* 11 (2): 50.
Raghunath Iyer, Bungalow 19, Kubera Bahar Society, Pashan Baner Link Road, Pashan, Pune 411021, Maharashtra, India. E-mail: raghunath.iyer@gmail.com
Manuscript received on 15 December 2015.

The Spotted flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* is a winter visitor to Baluchistan, and the Himalayas in Pakistan, and a passage migrant in Pakistan, and north-western India (Ali & Ripley 2001; Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). In India, most of the recent records of this species have been from Gujarat, though it has been reported from further north (Ali & Ripley 2001). Here, I report an instance where the bird stayed for two weeks in the neighbourhood of Pune, Maharashtra.

54. Spotted flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* in Pune.

A large pipal tree *Ficus religiosa* stands in the backyard of my workplace at Parihar Chowk, Aundh, Pune (18.55°N, 73.80°E). The windows on this side open into the pipal's canopy. In winters this tree comes alive with several resident and wintering birds. On the morning of 10 December 2015, as I was peering into the tree at 1015 hrs to spot some activity, I noticed a single, pale, sparrow-sized bird. The bird would fly away, and return to the same branch, or adjacent branches within a radius of 1.5 m. This behavior lasted for an hour. Next day, at the same time, I saw this bird again. I photographed it **[54]**, and sent the picture to a few birdwatchers in Pune, who tentatively identified it as an Asian Brown Flycatcher *M. latirostris*. Later, when I posted the photos on Facebook's 'Indian Birds Group', Pankaj Gupta, and Shantanu Bhattacharya corrected my identification to Spotted Flycatcher.

The bird was grey, or brownish-grey overall. It had a dark eye with no eye-ring, whitish under parts with some signature dark streaks on the breast, and the crown of the head. The longish beak was dark, and the lower mandible had a pale base. Its legs were dark, and its dark tail had a slight notch. The dark grey greater, and median coverts had obvious buffish-grey, or buffish-white edges. The tertial feathers also had similar buffish-white edges. Based on other photographs in 'Oriental Bird Images' (Parekh 2012, 2015), this bird appears to be an adult.

Since my initial sighting in December 2015, I have seen this bird in the same tree, around the same time in the morning, and in the same set of branches almost every day till 25 December 2015.

Prasad (2006) does not include this species in his list of birds of western Maharashtra but includes it as possible during the autumn migration. There are no other known records from the state. For a species, which is normally restricted up to western Gujarat, its occurrence in Pune, 1000 km away from its regular passage range, is noteworthy. However, this species is easy to confuse with the more common Asian Brown Flycatcher, and hence there is chance that it was overlooked earlier. It will be important to monitor its duration of stay in coming years, in Pune, to understand if this was a vagrant bird, or the species is a regular visitor, or a passage migrant.

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Chestnut-tailed Minla *Chrysominla strigula*, an addition to the avifauna of Jammu & Kashmir, India

Neeraj Sharma & Muzaffar A. Kichloo

Sharma, N.,& Kichloo, M. A., 2016. Chestnut-tailed Minla *Chrysominla strigula*, an addition to the avifauna of Jammu &Kashmir, India. *Indian BIRDS* 11 (2): 51.

Neeraj Sharma, Institute of Mountain Environment, University of Jammu, Bhaderwah Campus, Bhaderwah 182222, Jammu & Kashmir, India. E-mail: nirazsharma@gmail.com
Muzaffar A. Kichloo, Institute of Mountain Environment, University of Jammu, Bhaderwah Campus, Bhaderwah, 182222, Jammu & Kashmir, India.
E-mail: omar.mzfr@gmail.com

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The Chestnut-tailed Minla *Chrysominla strigula* is a widely distributed species in South, and South-east Asia, from the Western Himalayas till peninsular Malaysia, and Vietnam, with six recognised sub-species. Of these, three sub-species occur in India, including the nominate, which occurs from western–central Nepal up to western Arunachal Pradesh; *C. s. yunnanensis* is found in most of north-eastern India, excluding the range of the nominate; and *C. s. simlaensis* occurs from western Himachal Pradesh up to western Nepal (Ali 2002; Besten 2004; Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Singh 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Singh *et al.* 2014; Thakur *et al.* 2014). In the Indian Subcontinent it prefers temperate broadleaved, and mixed coniferous forests; timberline ecotones, and alpine scrub in an elevational range of 1800–3700 m asl.

During our survey on 23 August 2014, three individuals of Chestnut-tailed Minla **[55]** were seen in a dense oak–rhododendron scrub interface, in Seoj meadow, Upper Bhaderwah (32.90ºN, 75.63ºE; 3400 m asl) **[56]**. They were feeding on the fruits of *Rhododendron campanulatum*. Identification is fairly straight forward, as there are no other species with such distinctive plumage. Distributional limits of the species in north-western Himalayas, particularly in the sub-alpine, and alpine belts, remains relatively poorly known because of scattered, and isolated avifaunal surveys. The north-western extent of the species in the Himalayas, before our sighting, was reportedly limited to Kotla (Hingston 1921), Nurpur (Whsitler 1926), Kangra (Besten 2004), and more recently, to Solan (Thakur *et al.* 2010), and Chamba (Singh, 2011).The present sighting of the bird is *c.* 50 km from its known distribution, in the neighbouring state of Himachal Pradesh. Therefore, this is an addition to the avifauna of Jammu & Kashmir.

Photo: M. A. Kichloo

55. Chestnut-tailed Minla *Chrysominla strigula*.

Photos: N. Sharma

56. The Chestnut-tailed Minla was seen in this oak–rhododendron scrub interface, in Seoj meadow, Upper Bhaderwah.

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Highlights from the Uttar Pradesh Bird Festival 2015

Puja Sharma

Sharma, P., 2016. Highlights from the Uttar Pradesh Bird Festival 2015. *Indian BIRDS* 11 (2): 52–54.
Puja Sharma, A-13, New Friends Colony, New Delhi 110025, India. E-mail: *pujasharma1@gmail.com*
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The Uttar Pradesh Bird Festival 2015 was spearheaded by the Honourable Chief Minister of the state, Akhilesh Yadav, and managed by the Uttar Pradesh Eco Tourism and Forest Departments. It was held from 04 to 06 December 2015 at the National Chambal Sanctuary, Uttar Pradesh. Nikhil Devasar was the event consultant, under whose guidance the Festival successfully took shape. The world's leading ornithologists associated with the Indian Subcontinent, plus veterans in the field, scientists from India and around the globe, experts and professionals in the fields of photography, art, and technology, school and college students, wildlife enthusiasts, locals, and many from the Indian bird-watching community, were present in one of the largest congregations for birds on Indian soil. The main objectives of the Festival were to focus on the avifauna of the state, to highlight its incredibly diverse natural heritage, to generate mass awareness about wildlife conservation, and to promote its eco-tourism endeavours. The Festival offered a perfect cultural melting pot to celebrate the natural heritage of Uttar Pradesh, and India.

On the first evening most guests arrived for dinner, under a single canopy of the specially erected dining pavilion, giving a marvellous opportunity to meet idols, mentors, and old friends. There was a spirit of camaraderie in the air, and an atmosphere of excitement. The tailor-made birding camp, aptly named 'Sarus Village', on the sprawling grounds of Chambal Safari Lodge, near village Jarar, at Bah, Uttar Pradesh, hosted one hundred tents that housed invitees, and participants for the next three days.

Early mornings were reserved for a solid four-hour session of exhilarating birding, guided by excellent naturalists from Bharatpur (Rajasthan), many of whom are stationed at Keoladeo National Park. Birders were divided into three groups, each covering a different area and habitat, during the three-day birding extravaganza.

Photo: Chana Widawski

57. Local children enjoy birding with Per Alström.

On the first morning, my group was scheduled for birding from boats along the Chambal River, which is part of the National Chambal Sanctuary. The morning was slightly foggy, but soon a pleasant sunshine broke through and revealed a South Asian river dolphin *Platanista gangetica* as well as marsh crocodiles *Crocodylus palustris* in the water, and gharials *Gavialis gangeticus* basking in the sun on a sand-bank. A pair of Bonelli's Eagles *Aquila fasciata*, an Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* successfully hunting, and an Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, as well as good views of a Black-bellied Tern *Sterna melanogaster*, and a Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius* were the highlights of the day. The Plain Martins *Riparia paludicola* were accompanied by a couple of Pale/Sand Martins *R. diluta/riparia*, challenging to identify in the field, and prompting some inconclusive discussion as usual! The sand-banks and shores were dotted with a selection of waders, including a flock of nine Great Thick-knees *Esacus recurvirostris*, and waterfowl, including Lesser Whistling Ducks *Dendrocygna javanica*, Bar-headed Geese *Anser indicus*, and Ruddy Shelducks *Tadorna ferruginea*, gave close views.

After-birding hours were reserved for lectures featuring prominent ornithologists. Eminent professionals conducted simultaneous, interactive workshops, which gave the participants a first-hand experience to learn, and hone their skills. Jackie Garner, and Dr Pete Marshall demonstrated the art of sketching and painting birds. Giri Cavale, and a team from Leica Sport Optics conducted sessions on photography, and digiscoping respectively. Each workshop inspired and encouraged participants to practice, and pursue the skills learnt.

The bird-ringing station was an absolute favourite among the participants, ornithologists, and dignitaries alike. Dr Balachandran and his team from the Bombay Natural History Society conducted live demonstrations, and thanks to his incredible expertise, we learnt all about the art and science of bird-ringing. Each bird was carefully examined, measured, weighed, ringed, and released, allowing stunning close-up views of birds in hand—to the delighted audience—obviously a fitting case for better than two in the bush!

School children, clad in their school-uniforms, were escorted by their teachers to events each day, and were especially fascinated by the bird-ringing sessions. There were special events in which they could participate: painting, quiz, and essay-writing competitions, including wildlife and bird conservation awareness programs conducted by the Centre for Environment Education (CEE). They also participated in a walkthrough of the Festival marquees. They were thrilled with these educational excursions, and it was wonderful to see their enthusiasm. The Festival also attracted local bird-watchers from throughout the state of Uttar Pradesh, to go on a birding spree, and celebrate the Festival in the field, honouring it in the best possible way—by birding!

58. Spreading the joy of birding - local children thrilled to scope out birds.

On the second day, the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow organised bird-walks in all districts and ranges of the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department. It is heartening to see the tremendous amount of participation by local birders, school and college students, and teachers and government officials—adding great value to the bird records database, and helping raise the collective awareness about conservation issues in their local communities and neighbourhoods.

One of the major attractions of the Festival was a photography exhibition, featuring exquisite works by the best photographers in the country. Another crowd-puller was the incredible bird and wildlife paintings exhibited by Dr Pete Marshall, and Pratim Das. The Festival also hosted a number of stalls in the grounds, where attractive memorabilia, books, and souvenirs were displayed, and sold by organisations supporting conservation activities, including BNHS, and WWF-India. Newly designed 'Early Bird' teaching tools and pocket-guides were sold by the Nature Conservation Foundation to help introduce kids to the wonderful world of birds and to raise them into compassionate adults, who in turn learn to appreciate and care for their natural heritage.

The inaugural bird talk was by Carol Inskipp on '*The threatened birds of India and Nepal*'. It was deeply inspiring, and laid emphasis on why it is important to classify each bird's status on a nationwide- or state level. Carol highlighted how a collective effort by a larger community can contribute to the conservation of threatened species through systematic large-scale surveys involving amateur birders under the supervision of scientists. This talk was followed by '*Raptor field identification*' by Rajeev Mathew, enriched with his personal field-sketches and observations. Dr Pramod Patil explained the urgent need for protection of bustards with a special focus on the Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps*, and emphasised the tragedy of their rapid decline. Dr Asad Rahmani of BNHS highlighted '*The threatened birds of Uttar Pradesh*', and spoke unequivocally of the endangered species in the state, expressing that the need of the hour was increased conservation efforts; he mentioned the progress achieved till date. Dr Martin Kelsey spoke passionately of his '*Love affair with warblers*'. His talk began with a slide full of *Acrocephalus* warblers, and the bold letters LBJs or 'Little Brown Jobs' followed by seven question marks! He kept the audience on the edge of their seats explaining identification techniques and bird-song complexities, and adding exciting bird-trivia, and interesting anecdotes.

Photos: Chana Widawski

59. Women and children at the photo-exhibition with their kids.

By sundown the sessions were wrapped up for the day, and we gathered for dinner accompanied by traditional performances of ethnic folk dance and music by participants from Mathura, Rajasthan, and Gujarat. Celebrations soon turned into joyful revelries, and the evening was filled with interesting conversations, as people took advantage of this opportunity to informally chat with such illustrious figures of Indian ornithology. Every discussion either started, or ended, on an unanimously cheerful 'bird' note. With their energy restored after dinner, many people went to spotlight for owls, and to look out for Asian palm civets *Paradoxurus hermaphroditus* and other wildlife that lived in and around the village. The spotlighting highlights of all three days were the Brown Hawk Owl *Ninox scutulata*, Spotted Owlet *Athene brama*, and Collared Scops Owl *Otus bakkamoena*. The goodnights were usually said past midnight, in spite of the early 0400 hrs start each morning.

There was usually no need for an alarm, as everyone was up and about much before the scheduled time for a quick, healthy breakfast. Our groups were soon ushered to the parking lot, and on Day 2 ours was scheduled for the Blackbuck Safari, near Paprinagar village in Pinahat Tehsil, Agra District. A pair of Red-necked Falcons *Falco chicquera*, seen practicing a cooperative breakfast hunt, was a major highlight of the morning. A Northern Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*, Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*, Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*, juvenile Indian Spotted Eagle *Clanga hastata*, and Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* were some of the other good birds. The blackbucks *Antilope cervicapra*, and Nilgais *Boselaphus tragocamelus* gave majestic views, against the contrasting backdrop of bright yellow mustard fields. We soon changed location to a different habitat, of fields adjoining sand ravines, where we saw several Tawny- *Anthus campestris*, and Tree Pipits *A. trivialis*, a few Ashy-crowned Sparrow Larks *Eremopterix griseus*, Hume's Short-toed Larks *Calandrella acutirostris*, and Bimaculated Larks *Melanocorypha bimaculata.* A flock of feeding Black-breasted Weavers *Ploceus benghalensis*, and a pair of Variable Wheatears *Oenanthe picata* gave good views.

Kicking off the main program for the day, Jim Lawrence, of BirdLife International, spoke about the excellent work of the Bombay Natural History Society in India, and about their close partnership with BirdLife International for conservation efforts throughout the country. He emphasised that the BirdLife Preventing Extinctions Programme is diligently working on threatened Indian species such as Great Indian Bustard, and Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti*, and protecting the Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*. Through this programme, a special fund, the BirdLife Fund for Threatened Indian Species, has

been established. Jim Lawrence emotionally acknowledged the support of Per Undeland, who was seated in the audience, for setting up this fund. Per has been the BirdLife Species Champion for Great Indian Bustard since January 2013. His contribution to ornithological studies, especially in the Harike region in the mid-1990s, is of tremendous significance and it is gratifying to know about his continued interest in our region.

Jim Lawrence enthusiastically declared that the Government of Uttar Pradesh has agreed to support BirdLife International as a beneficiary, and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed with the government for the said commitment of protection of endangered species in the state. There was a sense of optimism in the air about the bright future for conservation output in years to come. Tim Appleton, as co-founder of the British Bird Fair, the aptly named 'grandfather of bird-fairs', echoed similar sentiments, and highlighted the importance of bird-fairs to gain international support, media recognition, and in turn raise awareness for conservation funding, and the promotion of eco-tourism.

The Honourable Chief Minister, Akhilesh Yadav, passionately addressed school-children in the audience and laid great emphasis on the participation of young people as they are the future of our country. He also announced his intention to make the Uttar Pradesh Bird Festival an annual affair. He highlighted that birds are an important part of our ecosystem and spoke about his commitments towards conservation efforts in the state. A coffee-table book, *Birds of Uttar Pradesh*, produced by the Times Group and the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department, was also released on the occasion.

Nigel Redman spoke about his favourite group of birds, '*Chats of the Indian subcontinent*'. He nostalgically reminisced about his first visit to India in 1978, when he saw his first Siberian Rubythroat *Calliope calliope* at Bharatpur, and also recalled the privilege of meeting Sálim Ali there. His delightful talk took us on a birding expedition through the Indian Subcontinent, illustrated with stunning photographs, and supplemented with updated maps from the recent book, '*Robins and Chats*'. Tim Inskipp presented '*The history of bird species mapping in the Indian subcontinent*'. The talk delved into the complexities and challenges for systematically mapping records, since Hugh Whistler's initiative in the early 1900s, and covering subsequent works of different authors till date. He also shed light on the advantages and drawbacks of modern-day, real-time mapping methods such as eBird. Dr Per Alström delivered an enthralling talk on '*How to identify Indian Pipits'.* He enlightened birders about the intricacies of identification techniques, especially through recognising birdcalls. Every birder in the audience had their bins out, pointing at the projector screen to have a better look at the illustrations! Rounding off the day, Dr Dhananjai Mohan spoke about '*Katernia Ghat as a birding destination*'; showcasing its great potential and leaving the audience planning their upcoming trips there!

Photo: Nikhil Devasar

60. CM Akhilesh Yadav interacts with organisers and participants.

Next morning, Day 3, our group visited the Sarus Crane wetlands near Saifai village in Etawah District. Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*, found by a different group on day 1, was a major highlight, alongside another local rarity, the Smoky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuligiventer*. Coupled with several Moustached Warblers *Acrocephalus melanopogon*, Paddyfield Warblers *A. agricola*, and Blyth's Reed Warblers *A. dumetorum* we had much to discuss. At one point there were 23 Sarus Cranes *Antigone antigone* in a single field, perhaps half the size of a football ground. A flock of Eurasian Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia*, a pair of Greater Painted-snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*, a single Ruddy-breasted Crake *Zapornia fusca*, and numerous Bluethroats *Luscinia svecica* stood out among other species.

The final day's talks included Dr Pamela Rasmussen speaking about her path-breaking '*Mystery of the Forest Owlet - Reconsideration, Revalidation, and Rediscovery.*' The talk took us through her personal quest on how her team's research helped unravel one of the greatest ornithological frauds ever committed. She used original material from her research, including data, photos and specimen x-rays, to illustrate the fascinating talk. One key take-away from her talk was her argument against discarding museum skins after digitizing them, as each specimen can be an important piece of evidence, especially to understand more about the Meinertzhagen fraud. Anand Arya showcased a marvellous, and locally focused photo-talk on '*Sarus Hatchlings*'. Pratap Singh expressed his passion for *'Bird song in India'*, and inspired birders to practice the art of bird sound recording. Ben King, known for the historic rediscoveries of the Forest Owlet, and the Rusty-throated Wren Babbler *Spelaeornis badeigularis*, regaled the audience with his personal experiences, and interesting anecdotes, '*Reminiscences of a veteran birder'*; those who were present will always be reminded of Ben when tucking in to their Christmas Dinners! Ian Barber from the RSPB then spoke on the '*Role of RSPB in India*', summarising its key projects on vulture conservation, and work on critically endangered species such as Greater Adjutant *Leptoptilos dubius*, Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis*, and Jerdon's Courser *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus*.

The Festival culminated with quizmaster Bikram Grewal's spellbinding, and light-hearted quiz, which threw some very tricky questions at the audience. It was then wrapped up with a round of group photographs and everyone looking forward to a final evening of myriad conversations on everything bird-related. The wonderful words of Jim Lawrence provide a fitting ending to this piece: birds are fantastic ambassadors of our environment and we have a moral imperative to act through events like bird-fairs to raise awareness for conservation around the world.

Review

Birds in my Indian garden
By Malcolm MacDonald
Hardback (13 x 19 cm), pp. 260
Price: Rs. 299/-

A classic on a few common Indian birds reprinted

As I read the brief review, of the reprint, of Malcolm MacDonald's book "Birds in My Indian Garden", in the Sunday supplement of *The Tribune* (Spectrum, 22 November 2015), my memory flashed back to a most pleasant, and totally unanticipated encounter in May 1962 with an affable diplomat who was an avid bird watcher, too. Although the Indian Subcontinent had evolved with a rich bounty of avian species (almost 1,300), our bird-enthusiasts had remained starved of illustrated guides for ease of pinning the identity of the bird spotted, till Sir Malcolm MacDonald's arrival as the British High Commissioner to India, and moving in to a bungalow in Lutyen's Delhi, with spacious lawns, fringed by shrubs and screened by flowering trees, which together constituted an ideal habitat for the roosting and breeding of birds in that locality. Of course, we had had since long the "Popular Handbook of Indian Birds" by Hugh Whistler (1928), followed by Salim Ali's "The Book of Indian Birds" (1941), but they were essentially textual narratives supported by few sketches, whereas Sir Malcolm's was among the first (perhaps, the first in the genre of photo-guides) in India to break fresh ground (a) by providing a full page black and white photograph of most resident birds figuring in his book, and (b) more importantly, a narrative so vivid and lively that birds literally hop and flit off the book's pages as opposed to mere taxonomical entities; it became an instant favourite.

My meeting with Sir Malcolm was simply a lucky chance as he happened to be transitting to Laos (on a mission to persuade the three estranged princes to put aside differences, and conflicting ambitions, to cobble up a liberal government so that the extremist Khmers could be kept at bay), with a brief stop at Delhi. On my part, I had at that moment returned after leading a successful mission to forestall Chinese incursion in the Barahoti plain (the disputed alignment in the Central Sector), and in the course of a debriefing at South Block, it was decided that I should attend the reception scheduled at Prime Minister Nehru's residence that evening (for felicitating the Indian team that had attempted to summit Everest, albeit unsuccessfully), where Mr Sarin, the Defence Secretary (also the President of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation) would introduce me to the PM, and also discreetly whisper about the success of "Showing the Flag" mission to Barahoti.

Surprised by the proposal, I was full of trepidation, but not for long; the warm handshake, and genial smile of Mr Nehru, and the effervescing presence of Smt Indira Gandhi by his side, at once revived my self confidence. Like other invitees, I too drifted to pick up a drink and noticed Lieutenant General Sir Harold Williams, OBE, the erstwhile Engineer-in-Chief of the Indian Army in an animated conversation with a gentleman whom he addressed as 'Malcolm', and their talk centred on bird-life in and around Delhi. General Williams was a man of many parts; besides being a distinguished soldier, he was an accomplished yachtsman (Founder President of Okhala Sailing Club, Delhi), keen mountaineer (leader of the successful first Indian ascent of Kamet, scaled by Major Nandu Jayal of the Sappers), and a dyed-in-the-wool ornithologist who had joined hands with Mr Salim Ali to call on Prime Minister Nehru, and have the extensive marshes of Bharatpur notified as the Koeladeo Ghana Water-birds Sanctuary, for posterity.

Shortly, the General was crowded by the Everest team when I summoned courage to walk up to Sir Malcolm, and tell him as to how much I had enjoyed the account of his teaming up with Loke Wan Tho for photographing the White-Bellied Sea Eagles, from atop a 120 foot high tower, especially erected inside the compound of the British High Commissioner's Residence at Singapore. And that High Commissioner too was none else but Sir Malcolm MacDonald!

Sir Malcolm appeared amused, and proceeded to recount how fearfully that tower had swayed in the breeze, and his wife had warned Wan that, *"If anything happens to my husband when these crazy things are going on, I shall have to blame you"!* Wan was perhaps the richest man of South-East Asia, as he was the sole owner of his family's monopoly over all rubber plantations, and tin mines in Malaya, but his passion, and chief relaxation lay in bird photography, almost always in the company of his wife, Christina, who too was an acclaimed avian photographer. And they possessed cameras that were custom-built to their demands by the world's best manufacturers—Hasselblad of Sweden. Wan's scouts scanned the outskirts of Singapore daily to report bird sightings, and once a bird caught his fancy, the couple spared neither money nor effort (despite demands of his business) to handle their cameras. However, in the instant case, it was Wan, and Sir Malcolm who had paired up, and persisted over ten consecutive days to obtain five images which became "viral" hits, the world over.

Sir Malcolm was in his element now, and enquired whether I had come across his book "Birds in My Indian Garden". and chuckled when I mentioned that I had a copy, and that I admired the manner the book opens with a gallant expression, *"This book is made beautiful by the illustrations by Christina Loke. They adorn my poor prose with lovely touches of poetry…I believe this volume will establish her securely in the front rank of those who practice the extremely difficult but brilliantly rewarding art of photographing wild birds."* Of course the 'poor prose' was typical of British under-statement as becomes evident by his inimitable descriptions; take for instance that of the Golden Oriole's plumage, *"No Emperor was ever more regally robed".*

The diplomat that he was, Sir Malcolm restrained his pen from telling his readers that Christina would have been a permanent Miss Universe, only if it had entered her mind to simply once step upon that pageant's stage! At another occasion, and in another book, Sir MacDonald had written, *"such activity by any woman would have aroused curiosity amongst the incorrigibly inquisitive Indians, but that she should be a Chinese female greatly magnified their astonishment. The peasants were amazed that an exquisite, sylph-like girl with strange, slanting black eyes and an ivory complexion should climb the rickety ladder to a lofty hide and sit all day alone there, contemplating only a birds nest a few feet away – like some particularly eccentric and unusually beautiful Sadhu. Her fame spread and in bucolic gossip she became a sort of legendary figure…"*

But her temperament was as fiery as her figure was beautiful, and that marriage had ended in a bitter divorce; Wan having to pay her alimony of over one thousand pounds Sterling. Of course that did not diminish Wan's love for ornithology, as shortly after he had sent a hefty cheque to his dear friend Salim Ali to buy a station wagon to help with his field surveys in India, accompanied with a note, *"do let me know if this will suffice because there is more credit, where this came from".* In hind-sight, I think this is what philanthropy was truly meant to be.

The affable diplomat then mentioned how gracious Mr Nehru had been to permit Christina unlimited access to photograph a white-eye nesting in his compound, *"where the little bird sat hatching two eggs while the Prime Minister sat in his study a hundred yards away conducting the highest affairs of state."* And he elaborates, *"One of my favourite birds is the white-eye. It is a dapper little creature measuring only four inches long from the tip of its beak to the end of its tail, and its colouring is pleasing. Its upper body is golden-yellow tinged with green, parts of its wings are dark brown, its chin and throat are bright yellow, its breast is light grey, and the yellow motif is repeated on its abdomen. But its most distinguishing mark is a white ring round each eye, which gives it the appearance of wearing a pair of white horn-rimmed spectacles"*. And the current reprint's cover is adorned by an outstanding colour photograph of a white-eye. Regrettably, the reprint is in the "economy" class, sans any other visual, and I am particularly disappointed that readers would not see another species which occupied *"the domain of my good neighbour, General Thimayya…".*

The reception ended after forty-five minutes, to the dot, but imagine my joy when Sir Malcolm walked up to me and invited me to travel with him to the British Embassy's guest suite where he was lodged, and have a look at (a) his album of Christina Loke's great many, eye-catching bird photographs, and (b) his soon to be released second book "Birds in the sun", a sequel to his first, but with a huge difference, that is, illustrations by Christina in breath-stopping colour photographs. And that is when I also learnt that during that single assignment, Christina had shot more than four thousand images, of which, the pick (about eighty in black and white, and over fifty in colour, only!) were used by Sir Malcolm in his two bird books. As I turned the album-leaves, he talked of many related details. I had never known such courtesy, before.

– Lieut General (Retd) Baljit Singh
House, 219, Sector 16-A,
Chandigarh 160015.

Letter to the Editor

Sightings of Tickell's Thrush *Turdus unicolor* from Ranthambhore area, Sawai Madhopur District, Rajasthan, India

The Tickell's Thrush *Turdus unicolor* is an endemic bird of the Indian Subcontinent. It is a fairly common winter visitor to peninsular India (Kazmierczak 2000; Grimmett *et al.* 2011) but has been rarely documented from Ranthambhore or its adjoining areas in Rajasthan. Andheria (2000) has reported the Tickell's Thrush as 'rare' from Ranthambhore.

On 07 November 2012, a myna-sized grey bird, similar to a *Turdus* thrush, was sighted foraging in the leaf litter under the manicured shrubs of *Putranjiva* sp., in the garden of a hotel touching the boundary of Ranthambhore National Park (26.01°N, 76.38°E; *c.* 277 m asl), at a distance of *c.* three to five metres from PP. The bird was observed for around 15 mins, and was photographed **[61]**. It had a uniform olive-grey back, with slight scalation on the mantle, and a white belly, with light streaking on the throat, chest, and flanks. The bird also featured a yellow-coloured eye-ring. The beak was blackish, with a yellow gape. The legs were pale pinkish. The next day, an individual was seen at the same location, with similar features, and was probably the same individual. Based on its yellow gape (*vs* black), shorter tail, and olive-greyish back (*vs* plain grey), this bird was separated from the similar Black-throated Thrush *T. atrogularis*.

On 29 January 2013, another individual was sighted at the same location by PP **[62]**. This time it was initially confused with a female Indian Blackbird *T. simillimus*, but our doubt was eliminated by the presence of a clear white vent on the bird, indicating a Tickell's Thrush.

Photos: Pranad Patil

61. Tickell's Thrush on 07 November 2012. **62.** Tickell's Thrush on 29 January 2013.

These two sightings, in successive years, indicate that the bird might be a regular, albeit uncommon, visitor to the Ranthambhore area.

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– Pranad Patil [PP], Varun Satose, & Vikrant Choursiya
Zoology Department, Bhavan's College, Andheri (West),
Mumbai 400058, Maharashtra, India.
E-mail: *madscientist.wilderness@gmail.com*

Snapshot sightings

Spotted Crake from Vasai, Maharashtra

Amol Lopes

On 31 December 2015, a single Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana* was photographed from a small marsh (19.40°N, 72.84°E) with *Typha* reeds wetland at Vasai, Mumbai, Maharashtra. Many bird-watchers were able to see the bird on 4 January 2016. This is a rarely recorded species due to its secretive habits, possibly was more common historically, but with very infrequent records from western Maharashtra in recent years (Prasad 2005, eBird 2016).

Nandakhal kolbhag, Post:Agashi, Dist:Thane, Taluka : Vasai , Virar west 401301. Maharashtra, India Email: *amol.lopes@gmail.com*

Eurasian Hobby from Punchakari wetlands, Kerala

Abhilash A K

While photographing Amur Falcons *Falco amurensis*, a single Eurasian Hobby *F. subbuteo* was also photographed from Punchakari wetlands (08.43°N, 76.97°E), Vellayani, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala on 14 December 2015. The bird was seen soaring the sky and feeding on insects for 20 minutes, before it flew away. This appears to be the first report of this species from Kerala (Praveen 2015).

Abhilash A K, A K Nivas, Thennoorkonam, Kottapuram (PO), Vizhinjam, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala 695521. Email: *abhialeena@gmail.com*

Spotted Sandgrouse near Ramgarh, Rajasthan

Shashank Dalvi

A flock of Spotted Sandgrouse *Pterocles senegallus* was photographed while they visited a small water source at Netse village (27.29°N, 70.50°E) near Ramgarh, Rajasthan on 2 December 2015. At the same site, Black-bellied- *P. orientalis* and Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouses *P. exustus* were also photographed on the same day. Once widespread in north-west India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), these birds appear

to have dwindled drastically due to excessive hunting and there are hardly any records from Rajasthan in the recent past. Even today, Sandgrouses are being hunted and this site was located through hunters.

A-16, Ila Darshan, Gilbert Hill Road, Andheri (west), Mumbai 400058, India. Email: *shashank.da@gmail.com*

Asian Stubtail at Jeypore forest, Assam

Jainy Kuriakose

A single Asian Stubtail *Urosphena squameiceps* was photographed from Jeypore forest (27.24°N, 95.41°E), Dehing Patkai WLS, Upper Assam on 29 December 2015. Until recently treated as hypothetical for south Asia (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), this is a recent entrant into Indian list (Das 2014) and is the second report for Assam (Baruah 2015) and the second one to be photographed from India.

Flat 9175, Prestige Shantiniketan, Whitefield, Bengaluru 560048, India
Email: *jainymaria@gmail.com*

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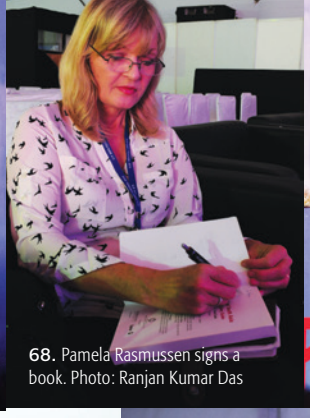
67. Jim Lawrence addresses the audience. Photo: Apoorva Lakshmi



68. Pamela Rasmussen signs a book. Photo: Ranjan Kumar Das

69. CM Akhilesh Yadav addresses the audience. Photo: Apoorva Lakshmi

70. Nigel Redman and Per Alström birding. Photo: Chana Widawski

71. Sanjiv Saran, Principal Secretary Forest, GoUP, exchanging the MoU with Jim Lawrence of BirdLife International in the presence of CM Akhilesh Yadav. Photo: Chambal Safari Lodge

72. Tim Appleton rings a Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus*. Photo: Nikhil Devasar

73. Martin Kelsey with a ringed Hume's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*. Photo: Nikhil Devasar

74. Tim Inskipp presenting his talk. Photo: Ranjan Kumar Das

75. A glimpse of the 'Sarus Village'. Photo: Apoorva Lakshmi

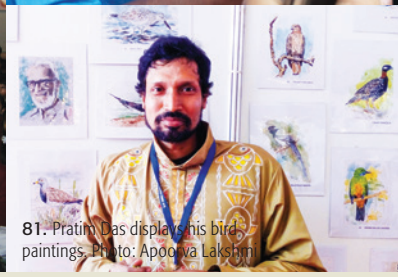
76. Jackie Garner demonstrates a bird-sketch. Photo: Chana Widawski

77. Carol Inskipp displays the 'Early Bird' Pocket Guide during her talk. Photo: Savio Fonseca

78. Dr. Balachandran releases a Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*. Photo: Nikhil Devasar

79. Birding along the River Chambal. Photo: Apoorva Lakshmi

80. CEE workshop for school children. Photo: Chambal Safari Lodge



81. Pratim Das displays his bird paintings. Photo: Apoorva Lakshmi