

Status of Greater Spotted Eagle *Clanga clanga* in Tamil Nadu, and Puducherry, India

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Santhakumar, B., Ali, A. M. S., & Arun, P. R., 2016. Status of Greater Spotted Eagle *Clanga clanga* in Tamil Nadu, and Puducherry, India. *Indian BIRDS* 11 (3): 71–74.

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Manuscript received on 04 February 2014.

The Greater Spotted Eagle *Clanga clanga* is a globally 'vulnerable' species (BirdLife International 2015), and its population is declining since a few years, mainly due to habitat destruction, disturbance, and hunting (Meyburg *et al.* 2001). It is a common winter visitor to most of northern India, but rare in the peninsula (Kazmierczak 2000; Ali & Ripley 2007; Grimmett *et al.* 2011), preferring a wide variety of lowland open habitats, particularly wetlands.

On 18 November 2012, we recorded a large, dark eagle perched on a tree branch close to Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* nests at Vettangudi Bird Sanctuary (10.10°N, 78.50°E), Tamil Nadu. A few days later, the bird was identified from photographs, and our field descriptions, as an adult Greater Spotted Eagle [90, 91].

This prompted us to do a literature survey for the distribution of this species in Tamil Nadu. Surprisingly, except Rahmani (2012), most other regional references (Naoroji 2006; Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) do not provide more than four distributional records in Tamil Nadu. The only previous summary of its status in Tamil Nadu was by Santharam (1999), which was nearly two decades ago. Hence, we intensively searched for, and collected, information on reliable distributional records of the species in Tamil Nadu, and Puducherry from various journals, books, newspapers, avian online forums such as eBird (<http://ebird.org>), Tamilnadu Birds—Yahoo Groups



91. A close view of Greater Spotted Eagle *Clanga clanga* perched on *Prosopis juliflora*.

(<https://in.groups.yahoo.com/group/TamilBirds>), Facebook bird forums, and different photographic databases (Oriental Bird Images: <http://orientalbirdimages.org>; India Nature Watch: <http://indianaturewatch.net>; Internet Bird Collection: <http://ibc.lynxeds.com>; and Flickr: <http://flickr.com>). Based on our survey, we present here the distributional records of Greater Spotted Eagle in Tamil Nadu, and Puducherry (Table; Fig. 1).

It is noteworthy that Jerdon (1862–1864) reported it as a 'tolerably common' in Carnatic coasts (=the southern Indian states of Tamil Nadu, south-eastern Karnataka, north-eastern Kerala, and southern Andhra Pradesh) in the nineteenth-century, a statement that is used later by both, Ali & Ripley (2007), and Naoroji (2006) to suggest a decline since then. But with the availability of modern photographic equipment in the hands of good photographers, and an increasing number of naturalists, there are many winter sight records of this species from various parts of Tamil Nadu. Admittedly, all the sight records cannot be validated independently, and the possible confusion with the scarcer, resident Indian Spotted Eagle *C. hastata*, or the much rarer dark morph of Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax*, remains. However, field techniques of bird-watchers have improved dramatically in the last few years due to the sheer number of photographs



90. The Greater Spotted Eagle *Clanga clanga* perched on a tree *Prosopis juliflora* near to Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* nests.

Table. Distributional records of Greater Spotted Eagle *Clanga clanga* in Tamil Nadu, and Puducherry, India

Locality	Coordinates	District	Date	No. of birds	Reference	Remarks
Tamil Nadu						
6/21, 3rd St, Chennai	Not available	Chennai	10 December 2014	2	Madhav & Madhav (2014)	Unspecified region at Chennai and not indicated in the map.
Annamalaicheri	13.45°N, 80.25°E	Thiruvallur	16 February 2014	1	Kesavabharathi (2014)	eBird checklist
Bhavanisagar Dam	11.47°N, 77.11°E	Erode	26 November 2015	2	Ashwin (2015)	eBird checklist
Guindy National Park	13.00°N, 80.13°E	Chennai	16 January 1982	1	Santharam (1999)	
			13 November 1982	1		
			28 November 1982	1		
			18 March 1990	2		
			January 2012	1	Anonymous (2012)	Recorded during Chennai Bird Race
Kannankurichi (Mookaneri) Lake	11.68°N, 78.17°E	Salem	06 November 2015	1	Ganeshwar (2015)	eBird checklist
Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary	10.58°N, 79.11°E	Ariyalur	01 February–02 March 2008	1 / 2	Fitzgerald (2008)	One or two birds seen on 24 days between 01 February 2008, and 02 March 2008
			January & March 2010	2	Gokula (2013)	
			23 November 2014	1	Pandiyan (2014)	eBird checklist
Kaveripakkam Lake	12.94°N, 79.45°E	Vellore	22 January 2012	1	Kesavabharathi (2012)	eBird checklist
Koonthankulam Bird Sanctuary	85.8°N, 77.76°E	Tirunelveli	01 March 2015	1	Narayanan (2015a)	eBird checklist
Madurai [=Madura] District	9.56°N, 78.07°E	Madurai	November–April 1930	--	Nichols (1944)	No dates available. Period of stay roughly coincides with our conclusion. Not mapped as record at district level
Manali	13.16°N, 80.25°E	Thiruvallur	30 January 1983	1	Santharam (1999)	
Masinagudi	11.56°N, 76.63°E	Nilgiri	03 December 2011	1	Vasanthan (2011)	Photographed in flight
			14 April 2014	1	Vasanthan (2014)	Probably a Greater Spotted Eagle. An Indian Spotted Eagle cannot be ruled out. This record is not used for latest wintering date.
Mathur	13.17°N, 80.24°E	Thiruvallur	14 March 2015	2	Kesavabharathi (2015)	eBird checklist
Mudaliarkuppam Backwaters / Odiyur Lake	12.21°N, 80.3°E	Kancheepuram	11 April 2009	1	Madhav & Madhav (2009)	eBird checklist
Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary	11.58°N, 76.55°E	Nilgiri	Undated	--	Gupta (1997)	Obtained from IBAs in India – Tamil Nadu. No further details
			06 November 2014	1	Irving (2014)	Photographed in flight
Patemanagaram	8°65'N, 77°95'E	Thoothukudi	22 February 2015	1	Narayanan (2015b)	eBird checklist. Photographed in flight
Pulicat Lake	13.33°N, 80.10°E	Thiruvallur	23 February 2014	1	Jayaraman (2014)	eBird checklist
			15 March 2014	1	Rajamani (2014)	eBird checklist
Rameswaram Island	9.11°N, 79.12°E	Ramanathapuram	February, July, and August 1929–1931	3	Biddulph (1938)	Includes summer records. Likely confusion with resident eagles, and hence not considered further
Samanatham Tank	9.86°N, 78.14°E	Madurai	11 December 2015	1	Nagappan (2015)	eBird checklist. Two photographs of a juvenile
Vallanadu Black Buck Sanctuary	85.6°N, 77.42°E	Thoothukudi	20 February 2015	1	Narayanan (2015c)	eBird checklist. Photographed in flight from two angles
			21 February 2015	1	Narayanan (2015d)	eBird checklist
			01 November 2015	1	Anand (2015a)	eBird checklist. Photograph of an immature
Vadakarai Tank	10.1°N, 77.57°E	Madurai	November 2014	1	Shrikumar (2014)	Reported by birders of Madurai Nature Forum
Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary	12.32°N, 79.51°E	Kancheepuram	23 March 1985	1	Santharam (1999)	
			November 1995	1	Chandrasekharan (1996)	
			14 and 15 February 1996	2	Santharam (1999)	
			February 2007	1	Anonymous (2007)	
Vettangudi Bird Sanctuary	10.6°N, 78.30°E	Sivagangai	December 2009	2	Jayakumar (2013)	Reported waterbirds nest destruction
			18 November 2012	1	Present study	
			13 December 2015	2	Anand (2015b)	eBird checklist
Puducherry= Pondicherry						
Kaliveli	12.10°N, 79.50°E	Villupuram	25 November to 18 March 1986-1987	3	Perennou (1989)	
			31 January and 29 October 1988	2	Santharam (1999)	
Osudu / Ousteri Lake	11.95°N, 79.74°E	Villupuram	07 December 2014	2	Seshadri (2014)	eBird checklist
			15 January 2015	1	Gawas (2015)	eBird checklist

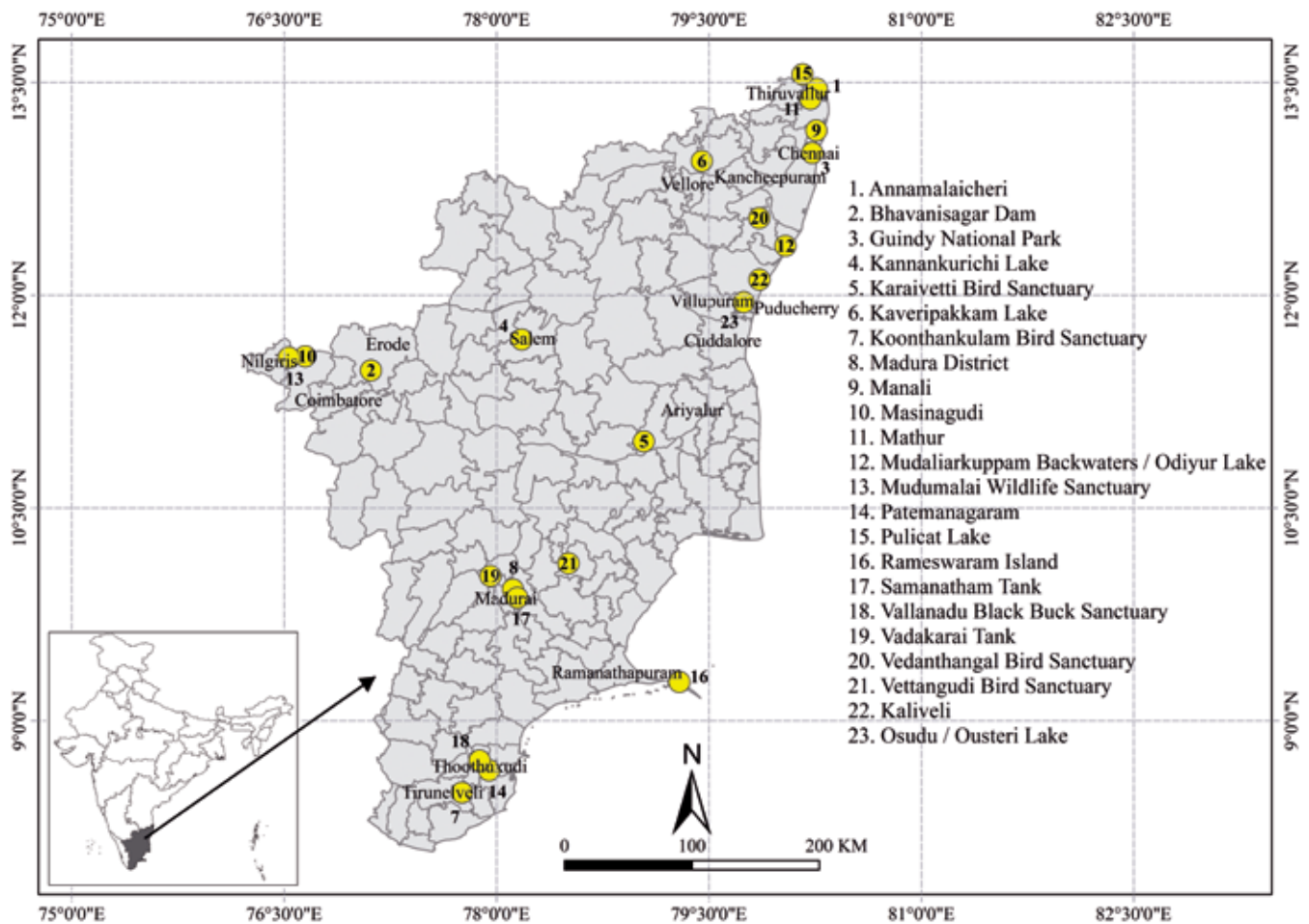


Fig. 1. Sightings of Greater Spotted Eagle *Clanga clanga* in various localities of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, India.

available for comparison, thereby making most of these sight observations fairly reliable. The earliest wintering date is 29 October (Santharam 1999), and the last winter record is on 11 April (Madhav & Madhav 2009). We conclude that the Greater Spotted Eagle is still a widespread and regularly wintering raptor in the open habitats of Tamil Nadu, and Puducherry.

Acknowledgements

We are thankful to P.A. Azeed, Director, Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON), for his support, and for providing facilities. We are extremely thankful to Rajah Jayapal, Principal Scientist and Head of Ornithology Division, SACON, for confirming the identification of the Greater Spotted Eagle, based on photographs.

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