

Rediscovery of the Broad-tailed Grassbird *Schoenicola platyurus* at Belgaum, Karnataka

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The Broad-tailed Grassbird *Schoenicola platyurus* is a Western Ghats endemic, and is listed as 'Vulnerable' and has been recorded mainly in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka (BirdLife International 2016). There are a few records of this species from Pune, Nasik, Lonavala, Kolhapur, and Dhule districts in Maharashtra (Prasad 2004, 2005). Recently, it was recorded breeding at Sinhagadh Fort, near Pune, Maharashtra, at an altitude of 1300 m (Rahane *et al.* 2016). It is typically found above 900 m, occupying dense stands of tall montane grassland, bracken, reed fringes, bamboo clumps, swampy *Pandanus* patches, lemongrass scrubland with dwarf dates, and grassy brushwood thickets at forest edges (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

On the morning of 19 June 2016, while scanning a stream for an Indian Spotted Eagle *Aquila hastata* near Belgaum (15.87°N, 74.50°E), Karnataka, at a location that was about one kilometer

from the nearest human habitation, we heard the call of a bird. NS immediately recognised it as that of a Broad-tailed Grassbird, as he was familiar with the call, having heard it earlier. On scanning the tall grass along the edges of the stream, we spotted the bird perched on a grass blade; it was calling. After a while, another bird was heard singing from the other side of the stream [137]. Later, one of the birds performed an aerial display while calling, flying up into the air, and descending on outstretched wings.

On the next day, one of us visited the site again and found two birds, each calling from either side of the stream. One bird was seen entering a bush with a grass blade in its beak. It was observed that the birds were collecting nesting material. On 22 June, five different birds were seen in the area. Out of these, two were seen collecting nesting material, which they took to two different grass clumps. On 26 June three birds were seen, and one was observed carrying nesting material. The birds were silent except for some contact calls.



N. Sant

138. Lowland tall grass stream-edge habitat of the Broad-tailed Grassbird at Belgaum.



The last visit to the site was on 08 July 2016, when one bird showed up very briefly, and was heard uttering contact calls. We could not visit the site later, due to inclement weather, the flooding of the adjacent paddy fields, and the swollen stream.

Discussion

The birds were probably nesting in the tall grass in the area they were seen in. We did not search for the nests, so as not to disturb the birds, but the collection of nesting material is indicative of breeding.

The sighting of the Broad-tailed Grassbird at Belgaum (750 m alt asl), and in a different habitat, i.e., in a stand of tall grass along a stream [138], is significant. It is also interesting to note that Capt. Edward Arthur Butler collected a breeding female close to a nest at Belgaum, late in the summer of 1880 (Hume 1880). This indicates that the species has been a resident around Belgaum since historical times. Thus, a detailed survey, over a much wider area, and in suitable habitats, would be helpful in ascertaining the population status and distribution of this vulnerable species in the lowlands in and around Belgaum.

Apart from sporadic one-off records from much lower elevations like Point Calimere (Hussain 1977), Manipal (Singal 2011), and Rajapalayam (Sharan 2015), or from the Eastern Ghats (Price 1979), most known populations of this species are from the highlands of the Western Ghats. However, its presence in Belgaum evokes the possibility that more such pockets may be present outside its main range in the Western Ghats in the hills of Peninsular India.

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Letters to the Editor

Demoiselle Cranes *Anthropoides virgo* at Uran, Navi Mumbai, western coast, Maharashtra

We have been regularly birding at a wetland (18.90°N, 72.98°E) between Sonari and Belpada villages, Uran Tehsil, Raigad District, Maharashtra, for the past four years. On 06 February 2013, between 1500 and 1800 hrs, we saw two Demoiselle Cranes *Anthropoides virgo* there. One bird was sitting on a grassy outcrop in the middle of the wetland [139] while the other was foraging in the wetland. This record seems exceptional—as this is only the second instance that this species has been reported from the Konkan coast of Maharashtra (Prasad 2004). The earlier record was one from somewhere near Mumbai, during 1899–1900, but lacked details (Aitken undated). Ali & Abdulali (1939) may have quoted Aitken (undated) stating, 'several' birds were seen in winter, whenever there was a drought in Gujarat and Deccan. Though wintering mainly in Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Haryana (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), there are sight records of this species from various parts of the Deccan (Prasad 2004) including one of about 1000 individuals from Veer, Pune (Gole 1977; Naik 1987; Naik 1989). In spite of subsequent regular visits to the site between February 2013 and February 2016, we did not see the Demoiselle Cranes again.



139. Demoiselle Crane at Uran.

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Fruits of *Trema orientalis* in the diet of the Pale-capped Pigeon *Columba punicea*

The Pale-capped Pigeon *Columba punicea* is classified as Vulnerable (Bird Life International 2016), and is considered rare or very local in its distribution (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). While working on a floristic survey between December 2014 to February 2015, in and around Bhubaneswar (20.48°N, 85.75°E),