

Correspondence

Breeding of Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* in Bharathapuzha River Basin, Kerala, India

The Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* is a resident waterbird of central Kerala (Sashikumar *et al.* 2011). It is known to be a solitary breeder, staying away from mixed heronries (Ali & Ripley 1987). Historically, it has been known to breed only in the Periyar Tiger Reserve in Kerala (Neelakantan 1986; Jackson & Robertson 1992). However, several breeding instances have recently been recorded in the Bharathapuzha River Basin in central Kerala and documented in Sashikumar *et al.* (2011), from: Kuttipuram by Anand & Jayachandran (2002, 2006); Edappal by Ramakrishnan (2002); Mannanur by Rajeevan & Susanthkumar (2004); Kootanad by Shino Jacob & Ravindran (2004); and Thiruvilvamala by Raju & Jayachandran (2004). Here we document five more breeding sites from this river basin.

Nest 1: On 07 December 2015, GP, MK and VA noted a pair of Woolly-necked Storks nesting on top of a mobile-tower at Paralikkadu [64], 15 km from Thrissur. The nest, constructed with sticks, was 23 m above the ground. The tower was situated inside human settlements, 30 m away from the road. We spotted one bird on the tower, preening, and another on a nearby jackfruit *Artocarpus heterophyllus* tree. No other nest was visible on nearby trees. Local people stated that the stork had been nesting at the same location for the last three years, and that these birds foraged in the adjacent paddy fields, and on the foreshores of the Pathazhakundu Dam, which was six kilometres from the nest. Choudhary *et al.* (2013) and Vaghela *et al.* (2015) have reported similar breeding on mobile towers in northern India.

Nest 2: MK recorded a nest that held a young Woolly-necked Stork, which fell down when the mango *Mangifera indica* tree that held it, was cut down at Varadiyam, Thrissur, on 19 October 2017. The local people handed over the young bird to the Kerala Forest and Wildlife Department, which shifted it, after few days,



65. Rehabilitated Woolly-necked Stork at Thrissur Zoo

K. Manoj

to the Thrissur Zoo [65]. A House Crow *Corvus splendens* was later seen selecting twigs from the fallen nesting material for its own nest.

Nest 3: On 06 November 2017, GP saw a Woolly-necked Stork pair nesting on top of a mobile-tower near the Wadakkanchery Railway station [66]. The nest was 25 m above the ground and it was built using sticks. It held the adult storks, and a single chick.

Nest 4: RPN, EGS & EAJ spotted a nest on a banyan *Ficus religiosa* tree at Cheerakuzhi [67] by. The nest was 26 m above



V. Anya

64. Nest with Woolly-necked storks from Paralikkad



66. Nest with chick on mobile tower at Wadakkanchery

P. Greshma



Riju P. Nair

67. Nest on Banyan tree at Cheerakuzhi

the ground, and was built with sticks of different sizes. The tree was ten meters away from the road and the nest was on a branch directly above the road. Two adult Woolly-necked Storks were seen on the tree on 09 November 2017. One was sitting inside the nest, and other was perched nearby. The Gayathri River, one of the main tributaries of the Bharathapuzha, flowed just 100 m away from the nesting tree. The residents of the area said that these birds were seasonal visitors to the tree, for the last six years, and they had named them '*Kazhuthil munduketti*' (=dhoti wrapped around the neck)!

Nest 5: MK spotted a nest in a banyan tree at Paroor Siva temple, Punnayurkulam, Thrissur on 24 November 2017. Interaction with the people revealed that the nest had been active for the past four to six years.

The Woolly-necked Stork breeds in India during the rains; between July and September in southern India, and December to March in northern parts of the country (Ali & Ripley 1987). Based on our observations, its breeding period extends to December in the Bharathapuzha River Basin region. The earliest nest we

saw was on 17 October (Nest 2), but since the nest had a chick, breeding must have started much earlier. The number of breeding instances from this region since 2000, including our recent 2017 records (Fig. 1) indicate that the Bharathapuzha River Basin is an important breeding area for this stork in southern India.

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Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* hunts a lark

The Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* is a large, wide-ranging wader that has a varied diet comprising fish, small mammals, amphibians (frogs and salamanders), nestlings or small birds, reptiles (snakes, lizards, and skinks), crustaceans, molluscs (water snails), and insects (hemiptera, grasshoppers, dragonflies, bees, flies, spiders, beetles, and aquatic larvae) (Witherby 1943; Cachia 1984–1985; Johnson 1988; Martínez-Vilalta & Motis 1992; Kushlan & Hancock 2005). An analysis of the stomach contents of 70 adult specimens of Purple Herons, collected in the Sundarbans, showed that their diet comprised 57% fish, 21% reptiles (especially snakes), 14% crustaceans, and 8% Insects (Mukherjee 1971).

A Purple Heron will often wait motionless for prey, by hiding in vegetation, or slowly stalk its victim (Witherby 1943)—its commonest hunting strategy. However, observations of it swooping down and catching its prey are rarely observed. We present here one such observation that took place near Vastana village which is located in Matar Tehsil of Kheda District in Gujarat.

VM saw a Purple Heron catching, and feeding upon a lark (Alaudidae), at 1620 hrs on 04 January 2018, from a flock of larks and pipits (Motacillidae) that were feeding on left-over grain

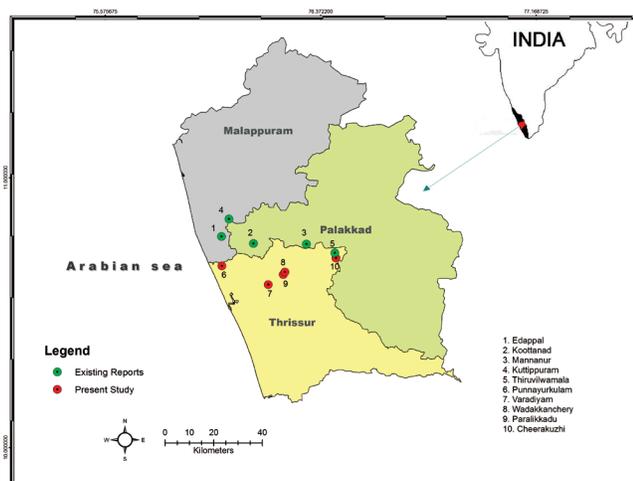


Fig. 1. Map showing the nesting locations of Woolly-necked Stork