

# Discovery of new nesting colonies of Grey Herons in Ahmednagar District, Maharashtra

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Very little has been published on the birds of Ahmednagar district, especially on the nesting sites of large waterbirds. In this note, the discovery of four heronries around Shirgonda (18°41'N, 74°04'E) town is reported. Shirgonda is a small town in Shirgonda taluk (Ahmednagar district). It lies on the Sarasvati, a tributary of Bhima River. The small reservoirs, minor irrigation and percolation dams surrounding the town provide an important habitat for waterbirds in Ahmednagar district. Awatewadi is famous for Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*, Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala* and Brahminy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*. Through this note, the details of these heronries around Shirgonda are presented for the first time.

During May 2002, four nesting colonies of Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* were recorded at Pedgaon (120 nests); Madhevadgaon (20 nests) on Neem *Azadirachta indica* and Tamarind *Tamarindus indius* trees; Shedgaon (50 nests) on Banyan *Ficus benghalensis* and Sisoo *Dalbergia sisoo* and at Bhambora (50 nests) on Sisoo trees. All these villages are approximately 10km from each other, on the banks of Bhima River. All of them, except Bhambora (Karjat taluk) are in Shirgonda taluk. At Pedgaon, a small village c. 12km north of Shirgonda, the Grey Herons were found to nest on 10 Babool *Acacia nilotica*, two Sisoo, three 'Banyan' and one Neem trees. These trees are located on the roadside, close to human habitation. The birds nest at these sites due to the availability of ample food in the surrounding wetlands.

At Pedgaon, about 60 Grey heron chicks fell from their nests in the first week of May 2002, and were found dead from sunstroke. The temperature was hovering between 42°C-43°C. Most of the chicks fell on the hot tar road from their nests 40-50 feet above the ground. About 30 of those young ones were released on the banks of Bhima River, after giving first aid by the locals. The site was visited again on May 10, 2002 and about 63 chicks were counted on the nests. Eight chicks that had fallen from the nests were brought

to the Ahmednagar forest office. On 4.vi.2002, all the chicks were ringed under the expert guidance and keen supervision of Dr Satish Pande (Pune) and released on the banks of Bhima River at Pedgaon. At Pedgaon, only the nests of Grey Heron were observed and this could be the largest single species heronry in Maharashtra. As the Pedgaon heronry is near human habitation, people have to bear the offensive smell that emanates from defecation and rotting of fish scraps falling from the nests.

Developmental activities like widening of roads are not in favour of these nesting birds. Unfortunately, some trees used by nesting birds have been cut down by the Public Works Department. Although, natural calamities like floods, cyclones, thunderstorms and drought are known to destroy heronries (Subramanya 1996), the chicks found dead at the Pedgaon heronry died of sunstroke and starvation, as the nearby feeding sites had dried up during summer.

As a number of heronries (pure and mixed) are being lost due to various reasons, the Pedgaon and nearby heronries need further protection. The NGOs and forest officials are making efforts to educate the local people to protect these nesting sites. If the nesting continues for years to come, this could be one of the largest ever 'pure' Grey heron heronries in Maharashtra.

## Acknowledgements

I thank Mr Arif Shaikh and his team (Shirgonda) for firsthand information. Thanks are due to Dr Satish Pande (Pune) for ringing the herons. Mr S. B. Shelke (Dy. C.F. Ahmednagar) and Mr Bhavsar (RFO, Shirgonda) for their full cooperation during my visits to the sites.

## References

Subramanya, S. 1996. Distribution, status and conservation of Indian heronries. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 93 (2): 442-459.

## Recoveries from the Newsletter for Birdwatchers – 2

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In the February 1961 issue of the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* I again published several letters relating to this new venture from Calcutta. The skeptical P H Sykes wrote: I think it would be a very good thing for India to have an Indian Ornithological Society, but the question is whether the time is ripe for it to be launched... It has always seemed to me tragic that most people in India are quite unable to describe colours (a failing in the Indian language system?): and few have any idea of how to describe the points for recognition of a bird... Would it be possible for some simple form of bulletin with pictures, and very easily understood aids to recognition...?"

Several others were not so hesitant and in fact were quite enthusiastic about the proposed Society. Among them were people

who played an important part in the subsequent progress of the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. Professor K. K. Neelakantan wanted to send his subscription immediately, Commander N. S. Tyabji (I. N.) thought that a "subscription of Rs.12/- would help to build up a modest capital". K. S. Lavkumar wrote, "To get this fledgeling to soar your enthusiasm will have to be matched by us the members...". Professor B. R. Sesachar of the University of Delhi said, "We will extend all our cooperation in the functioning of this Society". Several other letters left me in no doubt that the *Newsletter* would be well received.

The star item in this issue, I thought, was a poem by the internationally admired poet, Nissim Ezekiel, about the shooting of