

showing streaked breasts and lime yellow upper plumage. Two of them bulged half over the side of their rather inadequate hammock shaped nest, waiting to be fed. Their nest seemed to be woven exclusively from grass. We were impressed by the regular visits of the male to feed them, as he usually takes only the briefest perfunctory shifts on the nest during incubation. Less than a hundred yards from our Rest House were two more conspicuous nests. The most exciting for me, a Long-tailed Minivet's nest which was welded between three slender forking twigs, high up in the crown of a small *Acer* sp., tree. The nest itself was decorated outside with flakes of lichen and quite conspicuous. The female was incubating and sitting tightly whenever we passed the nest. The Ashy Drongo's nest was rather untidier in appearance and did not look substantial, being woven into the fork amongst the uppermost branches of a small tree, and built in a rough shallow cup shape with root and bark fibres. The female also seemed to be still incubating, as we did not see any sign of young being fed. During our leisurely walks around the forest track we had other memorable moments. Watching an Asian Paradise-Flycatcher, foraging around the horizontal branches of a moss-draped oak bough, which flushed and seized a large Sphengid Hawkmoth. Flying to a lower branch, the hapless moth was jiggled around in its bill, until one by one the wings were scissored off. During the last stages of this process, the heavy abdomen of this large moth twice slipped from its bill, only to be quickly recaptured in a downward swoop.

We also watched a Black Bulbul, which had already caught a large female Preying Mantis before we noticed it; of which we could clearly see its struggling legs visible on either side of the bird's blood red bill. Perhaps this was not a usual meal for this largely frugivorous bulbul, because it hesitated several times, perched motionless, before finally, after more than several minutes, bashing the insect against a twig and swallowing it in several rather jerky gulps. So

much was going on around us in the sun dappled glades and we were also entertained on the evening before our departure, by watching a party of Slaty-headed Parakeets *Psittacula himalayana* (Lesson, 1832) with fully fledged young, feeding on the tiny purplish brown flowers of the Smoke Bush *Cotinus coggyria*. The young, well able to fly and feed for themselves, seemed more keen to beg from their parents with much curious head bobbing rather than to enjoy the flowery feast. One final treat during that visit was the opportunity to watch for a prolonged period a pair of Speckled Piculets *Picumnus innominatus* Burton, 1836, foraging on low shrubs. This species is distinctly rare and local in Pakistan, occurring in only several widely scattered localities. My diary notes describe how we had just returned from our morning walk when by the Rest House we were attracted by their weak tinny single noted calls. They were able to hang upside down on pendant twigs and perch sideways on slender branches, their tiny grey green feet with two toes firmly gripped around each side of the twig. They did not use their tails as a support when ascending a vertical branch yet they seemed very proficient at so doing. I noted that their white breasts were dotted in vertical radiating lines with blackish grey small crescent marks turning lower down to solid grey black spots, and that their wing coverts were a lovely shade of golden olive, whilst their stubby tails were blackish grey with the outer tail feather clearly showing white outer webs when they flew. They are so small that they can search for insects along the lower shrubs or more slender twigs, which are inaccessible to the heavier woodpeckers. Like all small birds they seemed particularly restless and constantly on the move, fluttering into the air to reach an adjacent twig, rather than hopping along a branch as their larger cousins usually do when foraging.

The birds obviously loved this place as well, and as it is a reserved forest, I hope it will ever more remain a magical place.

Additional records of the Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti* Hume, 1873, in Melghat Tiger Reserve, Maharashtra

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F. R. Blewitt first collected a specimen of this owl from the dense forests of eastern Madhya Pradesh on 14th December 1872 (Hume 1873). A. O. Hume dedicated the bird to his friend and placed it in a new genus that he erected for it, calling it *Heteroglaux blewitti* (Hume, 1873). In the foothills of the Satpura Mountains north of Shahada in Maharashtra, India, the endemic Forest Owlet that was thought to be extinct was rediscovered after 113 years on 25th November 1997, in a tropical dry deciduous forest, by American ornithologists (King and Rasmussen 1998).

Subsequently during the surveys conducted by Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) from June 1998 to June 1999, four nesting pairs of Forest Owlets were recorded in Toranmal forest range (Maharashtra) between 400-500 m. elevation, in October 1998. Three of these nests were found at Shahada, while one nest was found in Taloda, about 30 km from Shahada (Ishtiaq 2000). Further, in the second phase of this study, conducted from 28 January to 22 February 2000, 25 Forest Owlets were located from two new sites in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Forest

Owlets had never been reported from these sites (Ishtiaq 2000). Rithe (2003) reported nine Forest Owlets from the Satpuras in Melghat. Two birds at Raipur, two at Malur, four at Jamodapadao and one at Mahendri, about 100 km to the east of Melghat.

Records of two new sites: All these above-mentioned locations are quite different from the additional sightings recorded on 19-vi-2002 and 1-vi-2003 and described by us here.

On 19-vi-2002, Raju Kasambe and Jayant Wadatkar visited the Harisal range of Melghat Tiger Reserve, in Malur bit No. 597, north of Malur village. Amidst a forest of *Tectona grandis*, *Madhuca indica*, *Terminalia tomentosa*, *Schleichera oleosa*, *Lagerstroemea parvifolia*, *Boswellia serrata*, *Anogeissus latifolia*, *Lanne grandis*, close to Bhavar Nullah and ploughed fallow fields, at an altitude of less than 100m, one Forest Owlet was sighted early in the morning. No calls were heard. The owlet was perching in direct sunlight and gave excellent viewing and photographic opportunity for 30 minutes. It then flew to the nest, in a teak tree (*Tectona grandis*), situated at a height of 13-15 m above the ground. The narrow nest entrance suggested that a Plum-headed Parakeet *Psitaculla cyanocephala* (Linnaeus, 1766) had excavated the nest. Eight pellets were collected from under the nest and revealed a skull with a beak of an unidentified warbler in one pellet, and feathers with bird bones in the rest of them.

About 200m from this Forest Owlet, two Spotted Owlets *Athene brama* (Temminck, 1821) were seen. A nest of this pair was seen at a height of 10-12m in the same region. Interestingly we also recorded Jungle Owlet *Glaucidium radiatum* (Tickell, 1833) and Mottled Wood-Owl *Strix ocellata* (Lesson, 1839) from the same locality. This fact indicates the importance of conservation of this area. A study to explore possible associations between these species needs to be undertaken (Pande, *in press.*). Competition for food between the Forest Owlet and other owls may not be significant due to the partly diurnal habit of the former.

One year later, on 1-vi-2003, members of ELA Foundation and we visited a different location in the same area, south of Malur village. On the Chaurakund-Malur road, at 6.45 a.m., a Forest Owlet was seen perched in the shade of the trunk of a teak tree. It was at a height of about 10m. After some time it flew to an adjacent tree, perched in direct sunlight and uttered the typical 'cooing' call. The mate answered this call from a distance of about 100m. Satish Pande was ready with the audio recording equipment and Amit Pawashe and he recorded the call of the Forest Owlet. Other members of the team (Prashant Deshpande, Chandahas Kolhatkar and Mohan Panse) made a video recording. The typical tail wagging and cooing were documented. The bird retreated to the shady portion of the tree and dozed when the temperature started climbing. It is possible that Rithe (2003) has already reported the same pair from this area of Malur. We therefore do not claim it as

a new record but merely state the observation. During this visit we were accompanied by a local Korku youth.

We then decided to search in new areas for Forest Owlets, by playing the recently taped call every half a kilometre, as we proceeded further. After a journey of about 10km we were rewarded. Near the Jambukuwa water hole, on bit No. 591 of the Harisal range, one Forest Owlet answered our tape-recorded call. This was the second new addition to the existing reported numbers of the Forest Owlet. By this time it was late afternoon with the mercury reaching 46°C. Our movements had become arduous due to the tormenting heat. We therefore stopped our search.

Conservation and threats: The Forest Owlet is endemic to this area of the Satpura range and is Critically Endangered (BirdLife International 2001, IUCN 2002). This species is also included under Schedule I (Part III: Birds) of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. Our two new records of this endemic species are significant because every addition to the existing documented numbers, and identification of each new site, play an important role in ascertaining its population size, density and distribution. It enables planning of future conservation measures for the survival of this owlet. Ishtiaq (2000) emphasized an immediate need to declare all the rediscovered sites as Important Bird Areas (IBA), as they meet the criterion of a Globally Threatened Species (BirdLife International 2001).

Further, Ishtiaq (2000) has indicated that the major threat for the Forest Owlet is habitat degradation. Around 5,000ha of forest had recently been clear-felled to serve as a rehabilitation site for people displaced by the Sardar Sarovar Dam. Besides this, we have noticed that shifting cultivation is practiced extensively in the area occupied by Forest Owlet. Hence not only their habitat but also nest trees are at a great risk. Tree felling in the area occupied by the Forest Owlet should be immediately checked. Another larger danger lurks in the form of the proposed Upper Tapi Irrigation Project, Stage II, which threatens to submerge the 244ha of prime habitat of this rare owlet. James Duncan (2003) has emphasized that more intensive research and management effort is needed to prevent this species from disappearing from our planet. The balance unfortunately appears to be unfavorably tilted against the Forest Owlet.

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Jungle Myna and Bank Myna. Too few, too many, then none at all!

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Over the past few decades whenever I happened to come by Jungle Mynas *Acridotheres fuscus* (Wagler, 1827), they were almost always in the company of the Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* (Linnaeus, 1766). I had never consciously noted the numbers of the one against the other but I have carried the imprint that the Common would outnumber the Jungle Myna by about ten to one. For confirmation, I recently went back to the oldest, and the first, bird book in which Jerdon (*The birds of India*, 1863; vol. II: 329) reproduces Hodgson's observation on the Jungle Myna, "perpetually associating with *A. tristis*, every large flock of which has many individuals of this bird among them."

At this stage, I decided to make a field sample survey of the numbers of the Jungle Myna obtaining at Chandigarh (30°45'N, 70°45'E. 360m a.s.l.) vis-à-vis the Common Myna. I opted for the Zakir Rose Garden for my survey. For, on the way out and return from my daily morning walk, I traverse about 800m through it and am able to observe bird-life at random up to 30-50m all around. To give an idea of its space, it is paraded as the largest in Asia with 1,200 varieties of roses and more than 50 species of trees, most of them flowering. It is a favoured roosting and breeding site for the resident birds and it also attracts local migrants and 'passage' birds through the year-long cycle of bird movements. Here are the observations (2003).

S.No.	Date and time	Common Myna	Jungle Myna
1	21.ii: 07:55	17	4
2	22.ii: 07:30	12	2
3	23.ii: 08:15	20+	3
4	24.ii: 07:45	15+	3
5	26.ii: 07:55	20	4
6	28.ii: 08:00	30+	9
7	2.iii: 08:30	35+	2
8	5.iii: 07:30	42	2

Thus far, the above tabulation places one Jungle Myna for every seven of the Common. Now on 7th March, we boarded the train that would transport us to the bad lands of

tribal Jharkhand. At 11:30 hours when the train reached Kanpur Railway Station (80°10'N, 26°20'E), I stepped out on the platform as I hoped to see a variety of birds including the mynas. I was at once astonished because to the total exclusion of all species of birds, all I saw were hundreds upon hundreds of Bank Mynas *Acridotheres ginginianus* (Latham, 1790). Later at 16:10 hours, I was to witness exactly the same scene at Allahabad Railway Station (81°51'N, 25°30'E) with just a few House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* (Linnaeus, 1758), and Blue Rock Pigeons *Columba livia* Gmelin, 1789, thrown in. This is probably the kind of setting which had inspired Ali and Ripley (*Handbook* 1972, vol. 5: 181) to state how it particularly favoured railway stations, sauntering along confidently on the platform, in and out of passengers feet and baggage, picking up bits of food. We spent the next three weeks at Mcluskie Ganj (23°48'N, 84°56'E. 360m a.s.l.) where Bank Mynas have never been sighted but Jungle Mynas are seen occasionally. However, from 8-26 March 2003 not a single Jungle Myna was spotted during my daily fairly extensive morning walks.

The return journey was performed on 27th March. Surprise of surprises, there was no trace of any Bank Myna even as I tramped up and down the platform of Allahabad Railway Station at 10:30 hours for the next 15 minutes. At 14:40 hours the Kanpur Railway Station replicated exactly the same scene! Ali and Ripley (op. cit.) state that this Myna is "...subject to...seasonal local...movements..." In the instant case this seemed inadequate to explain the two so completely divergent observations made twenty days apart at the same spots and the same clock hours. Perhaps what I had witnessed is the sharp divide between the preferred living habitat of this myna (towns, cities, bazaars and railway stations) and its preferred breeding habitat (steep earth banks, road cuttings and banks of rivers and canals). Now Kanpur has the Ganges and the Chambal in close vicinity and the Allahabad Railway Station is virtually on the confluence of the Ganges, Jamuna and Sarswat rivers. In all probability the Bank Mynas had left their living habitat for their breeding habitat between 7 and 27 March. Mr.