

Gurmeet Singh, Deputy Chief Wildlife Warden, Punjab, who studied the Bank Myna for his M.Sc. degree (1992). *The ecology of the Bank Myna (Acridotheres fuscus) in an urban environment*. University of Bombay: Bombay.), backs my inference.

On returning to Chandigarh it was not the turn of the Jungle Myna to astonish me with such vast congregations on my chosen corner in the Rose Garden where the Common Myna stood driven to near anonymity; at least for about ten days any way. Perhaps it is best to reproduce the observations I noted:

1. 28th March, 07:00 hours: Jungle Mynas are just about everywhere. On one Jacaranda tree alone, there are 54 and elsewhere in the Rose Garden I saw 5 Common Mynas only.
2. 30th March, 07:30 hours: Jungle Mynas in flocks of 10 to 50. They are so crazy over the nectar of the Bottle Brush *Callistemon lanceolatus* flowers that you could throw a butterfly net over them, almost!
3. 1st April, 08:15 hours: Jungle Mynas, no change.
4. 2nd April, 08:00 hours: 33 Jungle Mynas on a *Semal* tree *Salmalia malabarica* and 20 on a nearby Silver Oak *Grevillea robusta*. In contrast only four Common Mynas encountered.
5. 4th April, 07:30 hours: The Jungle Mynas are also attracted to the nectar of the Silver Oak flowers.
6. 7th April, 07:30 hours: Jungle Mynas still around in large numbers but beginning to form smaller congregations of 5-15 birds. The rose garden full of myna chatter.
7. 10th April, 07:30 hours: Jungle Mynas now more or less in the same numbers as Common Mynas. The return 'passage' of the Jungle Mynas may well have begun.
8. 14th April, 08:00 hours: Jungle Mynas diminishing in numbers. Blossoms on Bottle Brush and Silver Oaks have faded out.
9. 16th April, 07:30 hours: One flock of 20 Jungle Mynas.
10. 21st April, 07:00 hours: One reason why so few of the Common Mynas were visible is perhaps because the peak 'passage' of the Jungle Myna here coincides with the peak nesting activity of the Common. There is no direct evidence of the Jungle Myna nesting here. Surely there must be a few Jungle Mynas resident here. Should they not be nesting? One pair was seen exploring a nest-cavity on a *Semal* tree and another contesting a cavity with a Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*

(Scopoli, 1769). Finally one Common Myna arrived and cleared every one from the site!

11. 20th May, 08:00 hours: Since 23rd April, no Jungle Mynas have been seen at all, anywhere.

Of course no conclusions can be formed on the basis of a few observations. But what appears probable about the large but temporary influx and presence of the Jungle Myna here from about mid-March to end-April may well have a link with tree blossoms (the Bottle Brush and Silver Oak, for instance). The absence of Jungle Myna beginning about end-April, which coincides with the fading of certain tree blossoms, may also imply that there are no exceptions to Ali and Ripley's assertion about the Jungle Myna "breeding from foothills to c.2100m". As they begin breeding in March and once the biological urge sets in, off they got to the foothills and beyond. May be next year, someone will get up the Shivaliks and map out this movement. Will some reader please also check out whether the seasonal fluctuation of numbers of the Bank Myna at the Kanpur and Allahabad railway stations is related to their breeding period, March-April? I concede that it may not make ornithological waves but it will be an interesting insight.

Postscript

I had readied this article for dispatch when I hit a lucky patch with the Jungle Myna at 07:45 hours on 25th May 2003. One Jungle Myna in a blaze of a hurry landed almost at my feet, grabbed at some tid-bit and took off in a flash. Fortunately, I could follow his flight and saw him enter a cavity of a tree trunk about 20m away. It was an old, gnarled Gulmohar tree *Delonix regia*, with a large cavity about 10 inches across and five feet above the ground. But Jungle Myna parents were busy carrying food to their chicks in never-ceasing shuttles. Two very hungry gaping gullets kept bobbing up to the rim of the cavity. So there is a small permanent resident population of the Jungle Myna here and they do nest also. After all, Chandigarh is at the Shivalik foothills. On 28th May, three more active nests of the Jungle Myna were seen in the same general area.

A pair of Common Myna was nesting and happily co-existing in another cavity of the same tree about 2m up and away to a side. And three more, in cavities, in the decayed, thick whorl of a *Semal*, some 20m away.

Now at the end of this article, someone may well ask what was all this pothor about? Mere myna chatter!

Sighting of Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* Linnaeus, 1758, in Sriharikota Island, Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh, India

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Two races of the Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* Linnaeus, 1758, are reported from the Indian region. *R. a. korejewi*

Zarudny, 1905, which breeds in Kashmir and Ladakh (?) and straggles as far as Madhya Pradesh; and *R. a. indicus*

Blyth, 1849, an extralimital species that winters in eastern Nepal, terai and Kathmandu valley, Bengal, south to Kolkata (Calcutta), Bangladesh and N.E. India (Ali and Ripley 1987). The race *indicus* differs from *korejewi* in being darker olive-brown; less grey above and below; having a distinct brownish wash on upper breast (vs. clear grey); more white on throat (vs. white largely lacking); and the brown eye-stripe more prominent behind eye (Ali and Ripley 1987). Recently, Punjabi (1997) sighted the species (race?) from Mumbai citing it as the southernmost record in India. Kazmierczak (2000) points to stray records in southern India. However, on our enquiry to provide details of these sightings, he replied that these records are probably erroneous (*in litt.*).

Sriharikota (Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh) is a spindle shaped island (181 km²), bordered by the waters of Pulicat Lake (c.461km²) on its western, northern and southern borders and by the Bay of Bengal on the east. The Island is accessible by road from the mainland from Sullurpet, 18km to the west of its central portion. Sriharikota is a "restricted area" due to its status as a satellite-launching base of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). Due to its special status, Sriharikota has now the largest and best protected of the few remaining patches of Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest in India. The wetlands of the Island comprise of fresh and brackish water streams and lakes, and some abandoned and almost silted village ponds.

On 28th May 2003 at 07:00 hours, we sighted a Water Rail along one of the streams in Sriharikota. The Water Rail has not been recorded by earlier workers in Sriharikota (BNHS 1976, Samant & Rao 1996, Rao 1998) nor during the first year of our on-going 3-year project on the faunal diversity of the Island. The species is easily separated from most other rails and crakes by its long red bill, and, is further distinguished from the Blue-breasted Rail *Gallirallus striatus*, which also has a (less) relatively long reddish bill, by the latter's barred upperparts (vs. brown blotches running backwards). However, being unfamiliar with the species, we

failed to look for the presence of a brownish wash on the upper breast (present in race *korejewi*), helpful in the separation of the races. However, we presume it to be *indicus* as the brownish wash was not noted in both our jottings.

The sighting of the Water Rail in Sriharikota is interesting, as besides adding to the scanty records in southern India, the sighting was towards the end of May, an out-of-season sighting. Due to its skulking nature the species is easily missed and birders should keep a lookout for it with extra efforts to identify the race, as Ali & Ripley (1987) comments, 'owing to paucity of specimens and dependable records, status for the two races in our area remains uncertain'.²

References

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² **Editors' Note:** This observation of the authors extends the range of the Water Rail so much that it warrants caution. It has been published not so much to imply acceptance as to alert birdwatchers to look out for the species in particular and to pay more attention to the family Rallidae.

A meeting of the Goose Specialist Group

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The Goose Specialist Group of Wetlands International meets annually in one of the countries of Europe to discuss conservation and management of various goose species. The 2004 meeting took place in Odessa, Ukraine, in early March. Scientists from the University of Odessa organized it. Specialists from Finland, Sweden, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, France and Spain were present in strength, together with some from Hungary, Estonia and Kazakhstan.

I attended the meeting on invitation as the coordinator for Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* (Latham, 1790).

The meeting mainly discussed the problems of geese wintering in various nations of Europe. A number of goose species from Pink-footed *Anser brachyrhynchus* Baillon, 1834, Greylag *Anser anser* (Linnaeus, 1758) and Greater White-fronted *Anser albifrons* (Scopoli, 1769) to Lesser White-fronted *Anser erythropus* (Linnaeus, 1758), Bean *Anser fabalis* (Latham, 1787), Barnacle *Branta leucopsis* (Bechstein, 1803), Brent *Branta bernicla* (Linnaeus, 1758),