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Blue-bearded Bee-eater and other birds in Kaigal, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh

V.Santharam

Institute of Bird Studies & Natural History, Rishi Valley Education Centre, Rishi Valley P.O. 517 352, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh. Email: birds@rishivalley.org

We went camping to Kaigal, with students of Rishi Valley School. This riparian forest area is owned by Krishnamurti Foundation India and is located on the Palamner-Kuppam road. The trip was short and lasted just over 27 hours on 18th-19th January, 2004. The habitat is mainly riparian with dry deciduous forests (reduced to scrub or grassy stretches on the fringes) and cultivation. During our visit there was hardly any water flowing in the stream and the only water in the vicinity was in the few deep pools.

With a group of 27 highly energetic students one rarely gets a chance to watch birds and I did not anticipate much on this trip. Yet I was able to record over 40 bird species here. One of the interesting birds seen was the Blue-bearded Bee-eater *Nyctornis athertoni* (Jardine & Selby, 1828). A single bird was seen in the riparian habitat on the morning of 19th January. This species was earlier recorded in the Rishi Valley campus in 2000-2001 (Santharam 2001) and it was exciting seeing it here.

Another interesting bird identified from the calls was the Red Spur-fowl *Galloperdix spadicea* (Gmelin, 1789). At least 2-3 birds were heard calling from the forest sloping to the stream early that morning. There are reports of this bird from scrub / deciduous forests around

Madanapalle (Chittoor district) as also reports of it being hunted / captured for the pot. The other interesting birds seen were Grey Junglefowl *Gallus sonneratii* Temminck, 1813, White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus* (Scopoli, 1786), Spotted Babbler *Pellorneum ruficeps* Swainson, 1832, Black-naped Monarch-flycatcher *Hypothymis azurea* (Boddaert, 1783), and White-spotted Fantail Flycatcher *Rhipidura albicollis albogularis* (Lesson, 1831).

This forest tract lies adjacent to the Kaundinya Wildlife Sanctuary, which has a small population of Asian Elephants *Elephas maximus* Linnaeus, 1758, which seasonally migrate from Tamil Nadu. There are old records of the White-bellied Treepie *Dendrocitta leucogastra* Gould, 1833, from these forests (Ali and Ripley 1983). Perhaps a detailed survey of these forests could tell us the present status of these birds and other interesting birds that are patchily distributed outside the Western Ghats.

References

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Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* (Gmelin, 1789) feeding on insect road kills

S. Sivakumar

Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai 400023

On the evening of 8th September 2003 (around 16:00 hours), the weather was humid at Sriharikota Island (Andhra Pradesh). Passing patchy dark clouds gave shade intermittently. Thousands of dragonflies were flying low over the road that connects Sriharikota Island with the mainland (Sulurpet), by passing through the Pulicat Lake. Vehicular traffic is high at this hour. This caused a heavy casualty among the dragonflies. A pair of Gull-billed Terns *Gelochelidon nilotica* (Gmelin, 1789) utilized this

opportunity for effective feeding with minimum effort. They flew slowly over the road and made swooping dives to pick up the dead dragonflies from the road.

The Gull-billed Tern is one among the five species of terns reported from Sriharikota Island and the adjoining Pulicat Lake (Rao 1998). In India, the bird breeds in northwestern parts and is distributed widely throughout the country during winter (Ali and Ripley 1987). The Gull-billed Tern is an opportunistic feeder, more insectivorous