

# A sight record of the Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* from the Kandukur Tank, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh

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On the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, 2002, a team of seven Class IX Environment Science students of Rishi Valley School accompanied by myself and another colleague, Aruna Reddy, visited three major water bodies in the vicinity of our campus as a part of the wetland survey for the SACON project on wetland prioritization.

We arrived at the Kandukur Tank, some 10 kms from the Peddatippa Samudram Tank close to Karnataka state border around noon. The tank was located amidst an arid and poorly inhabited zone. It was also picturesque, having rocky hillocks in the backdrop and huge rocks partially submerged in it. All these submerged rocks were covered with white droppings and had several birds perched on them – Cormorants (Phalacrocoracidae), Egrets (Ardeidae) and White-necked Storks *Ciconia episcopus*. In the water, we could see Northern Shovellers *Anas clypeata* and a few Common Coots *Fulica atra* lazily swimming about.

As I scanned, I noticed three White-necked Storks on the rocks closest to the shore and amongst them in the water was another bird a little larger than them. I looked closer and realized I was seeing the Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, a bird not too common in southern India. Approaching it slowly, I went fairly closer and was able to see it well enough and record all the characteristics to confirm its identity. I also was lucky to be able to click a few pictures with my 400mm lens.

The bird had blackish colouration above including the head and neck and the upper breast. The lower breast and belly was white but in the overhead lighting was not too conspicuous. When

the bird flew as I had approached, I could make out a little amount of white under the wings (the axillaries). The bill and legs looked dark from a distance but from a closer range I could make out the red colouration. Compared to the Whitenecked Storks, the Black Stork appeared to have a thinner bill.

This bird has been reported as uncommon or rare in southern India and recorded in recent years in all the four southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, in small numbers. The earlier records for Andhra Pradesh are from Nandikotkur near Rollapadu in the Kurnool district (Manakadan 1987), the vicinity of Hyderabad (Kanniah and Ganesh 1990), and four different sites in the East Godavari District (Rao et. al. 2000). This sighting indicates that this bird is likely to be seen in other wetlands in the state and elsewhere in southern India in small numbers from time to time.

## References

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# Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* at Rollapadu Sanctuary, Andhra Pradesh

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On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2003, at c.10:00h, Mr Adisheshaiah (a forest guard {and expert naturalist}), Kavita Isvaran, and I were conducting a count of Blackbuck *Antelope cervicapra* in and around Rollapadu Sanctuary (18km south-east of Nandikotkur town, 15°52'N, 78°18'E), Kurnool District, Andhra Pradesh, when we stopped to take a closer look at a kestrel perched on a concrete electricity pole. The previous day we had casually recorded three kestrels (2 males, 1 female) in the same area, a newly acquired piece of land called Cherukuchellipalam, c.2km southwest of the main sanctuary. These we identified without second thought as Common Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus*. A careful look on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, however, revealed a male kestrel with a curiously unspotted

chestnut-red back, and with a blue-grey edge to the folded wing. This suggested that the bird was a Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*, rather than a Common Kestrel, which has a back heavily marked with black, and no grey on the wing. These two distinguishing features were the most prominent from video footage and photographs taken at the time, although other features separating males of the two species also exist (Ali and Ripley 1987, Grimmett, et al. 1999, Kazmierczak 2000). We saw two other kestrels in the same area that morning, but these were too far away to identify.

Lesser Kestrels seen in India are thought to be passage migrants between their breeding grounds in China and Mongolia and their main wintering grounds in Africa (Ali and Ripley 1987). There

are scattered records almost throughout India, and these have been collated in the Asian Red Data Book (BirdLife International 2001). There have been several records since 1950 from States neighbouring Andhra Pradesh (Orissa, 2 records; Madhya Pradesh, 1 record; Maharashtra, 5-6 records; Karnataka, 1 record; see also Grimmett et al. 1999, Kazmierczak 2000). In addition, there are two (apparently hitherto overlooked) records from coastal Andhra Pradesh (Rajahmundry and Vishakhapatnam; Kumar 1984).

As a species, the Lesser Kestrel is classified as Vulnerable, having suffered declines in western Europe of about 46% in each decade since 1950, and on its wintering grounds in South Africa of about 25% in each decade since 1971 (BirdLife International 2001). These declines are thought to be caused mainly by habitat change, loss of roost sites, and an increase in the use of pesticides.

Because the two kestrels are easily confused with one another, the number of Lesser Kestrels reported from the Indian subcontinent may be a serious underestimate. If birdwatchers looked more closely at every kestrel they saw, we may be able to form an accurate picture of the abundance of Lesser Kestrels in the region, and of change in their numbers over time.

The Lesser Kestrel we saw, and those seen the previous day, spent most of their time perched on any one of a series of bare concrete poles (c.5 m high) running alongside the jeep track, with

an occasional brief flight away. Visitors to Rollapadu in the winter may wish to spend some time watching these (very distinctive) poles to check whether Lesser Kestrels are regular visitors to the area.

## References

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[Editors' Note: A picture of the Lesser Kestrel, taken by the author, can be seen on the *New. Ornith.* website. For URL see inside front cover.]

# Abnormal nest of the Black-breasted Weaver *Ploceus benghalensis*

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On a Sunday morning in July 1997, a photographer colleague and I planned to go on the Shobhan road (outer area of Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh), in search of birds. We chose this area because an irrigation sub-canal from the Ganges passes through it, making the area rich in vegetation and attracting a variety of birds.

This was the season for nesting so we rode our scooter, searching for birds and their nests. Birds usually drop anchor at the time of nesting, and so they are easily approachable. Luckily we found a warbler's nest containing three eggs. We planned to shoot it after a week, after they had hatched. Further ahead, we saw a boy, staring at the spectacle of two strangers searching for something in bushes; this aroused his curiosity. We rode up to him and inquired whether he had seen any birds' nests nearby, recently? He told us that there were some Baya's nests near the canal, and on

our request he took us to the spot.

On the opposite bank were nests of Black-breasted Weavers *Ploceus benghalensis*. They had amazingly long entrance tubes. It was difficult to get closer to the hanging nests as they stood in water. As soon as the birds saw us, they flew away in a flock, to our great disappointment. We discussed the unusual size and shape of the nests, which we had never seen before. The entrance tube was about a meter in length. This prompted us to wonder as to what could be the reason behind making such long entrance. Perhaps the birds make long entrance tubes to prevent enemies like snakes from entering the nests. We took some shots and moved on.

[Editors' Note: A picture of the Lesser Kestrel, taken by the author, can be seen on the *New. Ornith.* website. For URL see inside front cover.]

## Recently published

*This column contains citations of ornithological publications from around the world, for the political areas of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Tibet.*

### PAPERS

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