

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

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On the 20th 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 22nd 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 22nd, 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