

The fate of the other chicks was not known and even along other parts of the stream there were no signs of the birds including the adult. Considering their skulking habits it is possible that we missed spotting the birds, however, we wondered whether the other chicks had been predated. The lone chick was repeatedly sighted for a few more days—it was last seen was on 22nd August 2007. Going by the severity of winter in Dehradun and the fact that many resident birds migrate locally from the campus, we suspected the rail had departed too. In the summer of 2008, we awaited the arrival of the Slaty-breasted Rail, hoping that it would breed again on the campus. And to our joy, a single adult Slaty-breasted Rail was seen at the same location along the stream on 28th June 2008 at 1245 hrs. Alas this was the only sighting in 2008. Ali & Ripley (2001) report that this species is resident, but moves about locally under the stress of drought or flood. Thus, this breeding record of the Slaty-breasted Rail in the WII campus may have been a result of such movements.

Within the WII campus seven other species of Rallids have been recorded previously, namely, Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*, Baillon's Porzana *pusilla*, Brown *P. akool* and Ruddy-breasted Crakes *P. fuscata*, White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*, Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, and Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*. White-breasted Waterhen and Common Moorhen have been observed to regularly breed within the campus while the other species are only occasionally seen.



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Fig. 2. Juvenile Slaty-breasted Rail *Rallus striatus*.

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Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* in the diet of the African Catfish *Clarias gariepinus* in Keoladeo Ghana National Park, India

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Anoop, K. R., Sundar, K. S. G., Khan, B. A. & Lal, S. 2009. Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* in the diet of the African catfish *Clarias gariepinus* in Keoladeo Ghana National Park, India. *Indian Birds* 5 (2): 22–23.

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Ms received on 17th March 2009.

The Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* is a widespread and common wetland bird species globally, also occurring commonly in India. There are very few observations of predation on this species (Bannor & Kiviat 2002). On 8th March 2009 we fished out a large African catfish *Clarias gariepinus* at Keoladeo Ghana National Park (KGNP) as part of a reconnaissance study on the diet of this invasive fish species. We retrieved a freshly eaten carcass of an adult Common Moorhen from the stomach of the fish. The fish measured 72 cm from snout to tail tip with a gape of 14.5 cm.

Fish predation on birds in freshwater habitats is not uncommon, though usually chicks are taken (Lagler 1956). Predation of adult waterbirds is commoner in marine habitats, which have larger fish (Glegg 1945, 1947; Straneck *et al.* 1983; Carlson *et al.* 2002). Common Moorhen mortality records by fish are very rare and are from outside India. Chicks have been recovered from stomachs of largemouth bass *Micropterus salmoides* (Bell & Cordes 1977), and

one adult each has been recovered from the stomach of pike *Esox lucius* (Glegg 1947) and eel *Anguilla anguilla* (Glegg 1945).

The African catfish is a very widespread invasive fish species and is suspected to be a major threat to native fish fauna (Casal 2006; de Silva *et al.* 2009). It is an omnivore / predator that feeds mostly on fish (de Graaf & Janssen 1996), and birds have not been recorded in its diet before. The fish was first seen in KGNP in 2004 (BAK *pers. obs.*). It is thought to have been distributed to villagers in surrounding villages for pisciculture and is believed to have entered the park by accident. It is a hardy species that can survive dry seasons due to the presence of its accessory air breathing organs (de Graaf & Janssen 1996). It is possible that local fish species are being out-competed by this fast growing and rapidly reproducing invasive. Owing to the wide head of the African catfish, the bigger individuals are not eaten by waterbirds in the park; the Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* has been observed to choke on this species (BAK *pers. obs.*). This invasive

species therefore appears to be a serious and new problem to KGNP's ecosystem owing to its potential to out-compete and / or crowd out local fish species thereby reducing the prey-base for waterbirds, and predating on waterbirds. An appraisal of the impact of the fish on local fauna is currently being planning.

Acknowledgements

KSGS thanks L. Shyamal and A. Pittie for providing references at very short notice, and we thank S. Kittur for field support during the observation.

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Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*