

Record of the Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* from Uppalapadu, Andhra Pradesh, India

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The Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* is a winter visitor to Africa and Asia with two distinct populations—one in eastern Europe and Asia, and the other in Africa (Crivelli 1984; Crivelli *et al.* 1991). It occurs in scattered colonies or as a migrant in many African countries (Kenya, Sudan and Morocco), Greece, Turkey, Iran; Black, Caspian and Aral Seas; Kazakhstan, Kuwait, India, and Vietnam (Crivelli *et al.* 1991; Jiguet *et al.* 2008). In India it occurs from Punjab to Assam (Ali & Ripley 1978), besides a single record from southern India (Grimmett *et al.* 1999). Ali (1960) recorded the nesting of the Great White Pelican in the Rann of Kachchh in 1960. However, Tiwari *et al.* (2003) reported the presence of first year juveniles along with adult Great White Pelican in the Kachchh region, but could not confirm breeding. Very few wintering records of this species are available from southern India—eight individuals were recorded at Vellimukkuchali swamp in Kerala (Jacob *et al.* 1995), an isolated record from Udupi district, Karnataka (Bhatta & Pushpalatha 2003), and a pair observed at Kolleru Lake, Andhra Pradesh (Taher & Mani 2008).

Sighting at Uppalapadu

Uppalapadu (16°16'26"N 80°21'58"E) is a village tank in Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh, which is listed as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by Islam & Rahmani (2004). It is also ranked for conservation priority and has been recommended as a Ramsar site (Vijayan *et al.* 2004). The tank receives water from the Thekkallpadu channel. Vegetation is mainly *Prosopis juliflora*. This wetland is characterised by earthen mounds in the middle of the tank. Taher (2007) gives a detailed description of the area. 46 species of waterbirds and 29 land birds have been recorded from Uppalapadu during 2006–2008 (*pers. observ.*). This habitat is used as a roosting, foraging and breeding ground by many species including the near-threatened Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*, Oriental Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*, Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus*, and Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala*. The peak population of birds varied in different seasons, with a maximum of 6,000 breeding birds during July–August and December–January (*pers. observ.*).

As part of the study on the Spot-billed Pelican, NS counted birds at several points along the dike at Uppalapadu. On 22nd July 2007, a single Great White Pelican was spotted sitting on the bund, which was devoid of vegetation. Its bright yellow pouch caught attention, as against the pinkish pouch of the Spot-billed Pelican. Its identity was clinched without any doubt when it stood up after 30 min., stretched its wings and leg simultaneously and preened its wing displaying distinctive black primaries and secondaries, fleshy pink leg and feet and yellowish webbed feet, as given by Ali & Ripley (1978).

Pattern of sighting of the Great White Pelican at Uppalapadu

Dates of observation	Duration of stay
22nd July 2007	Short visit
19th December 2007	Short visit
20th December 2007	Short visit
2nd January 2008	Roost
8th–9th January 2008	Halt
28th January 2008	Roost
11th–15th February 2008	Halt
24th February 2008	Short visit
28th February–1st March 2008	Halt
8th March 2008	Roost
10th March 2008	Roost
17th March 2008	Roost
21st March 2008	Roost
23rd–24th March 2008	Halt
29th March 2008	Short visit

After that first sighting, the species was next sighted only on 19th December 2007 when it sported pinkish breeding plumage, with brighter orbital skin and yellowish pouch. Malhotra (1991) observed the breeding of this species in November–December in Delhi, which is in contrast with the February–April record given in Ali & Ripley (1978). The dates of its subsequent sightings and duration of its stay at Uppalapadu are given in the table above. When this bird was observed for short durations in the day time and not observed after 30 min. of sunset or the very next day, it was categorised into 'short visit'; when it arrived in the evening and was observed after sunset, it was considered as 'roosting'; and when the stay was for the day time and the subsequent day, it was termed as 'halt'. Interestingly, a 'halt' was observed on rainy days. This observation shows that the bird might have been moving in and around Uppalapadu, probably up to Kolleru, as Taher & Mani (2008) sighted it at Kolleru in the same season.

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Breeding of Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* at Vedanthangal Waterbird Sanctuary, southern India

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Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* a migratory and most widespread ibis species, breeds in scattered sites in the warm regions of Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and the Atlantic and Caribbean regions of the Americas.

Vedanthangal Waterbird Sanctuary (12°32'N 79°52'E) is one of the oldest sanctuaries in southern India attracting birds from last two centuries. It comprises a small village located in the north-western part of the Madhuranthagam taluk in Chingleput district of Tamil Nadu.

I have been monitoring waterbird populations at Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary since 1992. In 2007, I recorded 212 Glossy Ibis here, when the lake was full from the north-east monsoon. Subsequently, Glossy Ibis numbers increased to 347 in January 2008 and to my surprise they started constructing nests. Adult birds were readily identified by their breeding plumage—reddish-brown bodies and shiny bottle-green wings, while non-breeders and juveniles have duller bodies. Nests were built exclusively on *Acacia nilotica* trees in the eastern part of the sanctuary and incubation started at the end of January 2008. Nests were built largely away from the nests of other breeding species namely Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala*, Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippinus*, Open-bill Stork *Anastomus oscitans*, Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*, and Oriental White Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus*. In all 52 nests were found at the mean height of 3.82 m (± 1.13 m) above ground level. The complete breeding behaviour could not be observed due to inaccessibility of the nests. A few sub-adults were noticed in May.

During 1990–1996, I had recorded 26–60 individuals of wintering Glossy Ibis, which used the sanctuary exclusively

for roosting. There have been no conclusive breeding records of Glossy Ibis from Vedanthangal, only sight records (Kannan 1984; Shiromoney 1984; Sasikumar *et al.* 1991; Desai 1996; Praveen & Kumar 1996; Venkatraman 1996; Santharam 2000; Narayanan & Sathasivan 2002; Subramanya 2005; Thirumalai & Radhakrishnan 2005). Perusal of postings on the email group, Tamilbirds (<http://in.groups.yahoo.com/group/Tamilbirds/>) reveals that Sasikumar (4th December 2008) and Narayanan (18th December 2008) have reported an increase in the population of Glossy Ibis in recent years in the southern India, especially Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Sasikumar (*ibid.*) recorded a roosting population of nearly 8,000 individuals in Peria Kammai, Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu. One could argue that with the increased number of birdwatchers, sightings of birds have also increased, but overall, the Glossy Ibis population boom is due to a genuine increase in its population. For the past two years Vedanthangal, like other parts of Tamil Nadu, experienced unusually good rainfall resulting in a majority of the wetlands filling up. Subsequently, birds started moving from Vedanthangal to Karikili lake (10 km from Vedanthangal) to breed. Earlier only ducks and teals were known to breed there.

Since two years, the number of bird species breeding at Karikili has been generally increasing even though Vedanthangal has seen a decline in the numbers of breeding Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*, Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, Oriental White Ibis, and Eurasian Spoonbill. The resulting lack of competition for nesting sites at the latter may have encouraged Spot-billed Pelican and Painted Stork to breed in unusually larger numbers than the past. Finlayson *et al.* (2006) stated that due to climate change the populations of some species will decline, while others increase