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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

in both size and distribution. Probably, this could be the reason for the change in the population structure of many of the birds in recent years in Vedanthangal. Leslie (2001) and Kingsford & Norman (2002) suggest that successful breeding often requires exceptional flooding events that last long enough for completion of the breeding cycle. Hence, lack of competition and the instance of exceptional flooding could be the likely factors for the Glossy Ibis breeding first time in Vedanthangal.

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The Black Baza *Aviceda leuphotes* in Chennai: a review of sight records

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The Black Baza *Aviceda leuphotes* is represented on the Indian Subcontinent by two races of which *A. l. syama* is believed to be a winter visitor from the north-east that moves along the eastern seaboard to southern India and to Sri Lanka, where it is a rare and irregular winter vagrant (Naoroji 2006). Naoroji (2006) also mentions that there are a few sight records around Chennai and Point Calimere on the eastern coast, and the accompanying distribution map indicates that the birds are seen in Chennai, north of Chennai (Nellore?), and Point Calimere, besides other sites on the eastern coast on passage. However there appears to be a paucity of data on the sightings of the bird. In this note I have put together all my sightings along with a few reports that I had recorded in my notebook from Chennai.

I have seen the species 15 times in Chennai since December 1980 up till February 1997. With the exception of two, all sightings were in Guindy National Park. The two exceptional sight records were at a mango grove at Manali-Madhavaram in northern Chennai suburbs and at the Theosophical Society Estate.

The Black Baza is seen in Chennai between October and March. The earliest of these sightings was on 20th October (1990) and the latest on 19th March (1994). Tables 1–3 provide year-wise and month-wise summaries of my sightings. I have also incorporated

six additional sightings recorded by others (Kannan (1985), Kumaran Sathasivam, S. Thyagarajan, C.S. Swaminathan, Geetha Jaikumar, M. Nanda Kishore and B. Rajashekar).

These tables indicate that the Black Baza is far from being a 'stray' visitor to the city as was suggested by the Wikipedia article on Black Baza (accessed on 23rd November 2008). It also suggests that the birds may not just be passage migrants as felt by Naoroji (2006) but are regular winter visitors with sightings in every month between October and March. There have been regular reports of this species at the Guindy National Park since the early 1970s by groups of birdwatchers (Selvakumar *et. al.* 1981). However, on perusal of some earlier literature, I came across the records by Jerdon from 'near Nellore' (1862; 1: 111) and the Madras Museum specimen procured from the city (date and exact locality not specified) – (Satyamurti 1970). More recently there have been sightings from the Sriharikota Island, Nellore district in the months of November (12th and 14th) and February (6th) (Manakadan *et.al.* in prep.).

Elsewhere, I have come across the baza in the Western Ghats:

- Mundanturai Tiger Reserve (Tirunelveli district, Tamil Nadu): 17th January 1988: 10–15; 17th January 1989: 9 (coincidentally