Records of European Roller *Coracias garrulus* from southern Peninsular India, including the first sighting from Kerala

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Introduction

The European Roller *Coracias garrulus* Linnaeus, 1758, belongs to the family Coraciidae (Order: Coraciformes). Also known as Common Roller (Whistler 1949) and Kashmir Roller (Bates & Lowther 1991; Ali & Ripley 2001), though Blanford (1895) used the present common. According to del Hoyo *et al*. (2001) two sub-species are recognised, the nominate and *C. g. semenowi*; the latter breeds in Iraq, Iran (except northwest), Turkmenistan, south Kazakhistan and northwest China (west Sinkiang) and Kashmir in India. Blanford (1895) states that it breeds commonly in Kashmir and Bates & Lowther (1991) and Ali & Ripley (2001) have given account on its breeding grounds and habits. It winters in Africa (Blanford 1895), from Ethiopia, Congo and south to South Africa (del Hoyo *et al.* 2001). But Ali & Ripley (2001) state that *C. g. semenowi* winters mainly in Arabia and most probably in Africa.

Migration records from southern India

European Roller is a passage migrant in north-western India (Blanford 1895; Grimmet *et al*. 2000). Whistler (1949) mentioned that this species is plentiful during its fall migration in the plains of the north-western regions of India. It passes through Rajasthan, north and north-west Gujarat during mid August-October (Ali & Ripley 2001). The southern range figures only on the outward migration towards its wintering quarters (Bates & Lowther 1991). According to Ghorpade (2002) this species seems to be a regular winter straggler to the northern part of Peninsular India. But Prasad (2003) states that it is an uncommon passage and winter migrant to western Maharashtra. However the map in Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) indicates that western Maharashtra and Goa lie on the fall migration route. These passage migrants are quite rare in southern India and there are only a few records of the species from Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh (Sashikumar 2002). Therefore records of European Rollers from Peninsular India south of latitude 18ºN are collated and assessed in this note. Other than the sighting from Kerala, this species has been recorded at least 18 times from 15 locations in southern Peninsular India (Table 1). Of these, most of the records are from Goa followed by Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. So far there are no reports of this species from Tamil Nadu. It has been spotted twice at the International Crop Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) Campus of Andhra Pradesh and the Bhagavan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary in Goa. All available reports of the species in this region are during September–January, with most records in October–November.

First sighting of the European Roller from Kerala

On 29th September 2002, we had a birding trip to the Erupathinalayiram Kayal (Kayal = back-water/lake) (09°30'55''N, 76°27'37''E) paddy fields of the Alappuzha district, which is in the Kayal land agro-economic division of Kuttanad wetland region (Indo-Dutch Mission 1989). This area forms a part of the Vembanad Important Bird Area (Islam & Rahmani 2005) and Vembanad-Kol Ramsar Site (Sreekumar 2003). These paddy fields are in the command area of the Vembanad Lake. During our visit, water had been drained for cultivation purposes, leaving the entire area covered with black mud, the favourite foraging habitat for waders. Our objective was to observe waders and we watched birds from 0630hrs to 1130hrs. When we were returning, we saw an unusual bird with a brownish back and pale sky-blue head and under parts. We immediately identified it as a roller based on our familiarity with the locally occurring Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis*. The bird was perched on a bamboo stake planted in the muddy paddy field. It flew away after a few minutes and sat near a small channel close to a *bund* separating two paddy fields. The flight pattern was similar to that of an Indian Roller and we were able to clearly see the dark primary feathers and corners of the tail of the bird in flight. We later lost sight of the bird in

the fields. On returning home we confirmed it to be an adult European Roller-using descriptions from Grimmett *et al.* (2000), Kazmierczak (2000) and Ali & Ripley (2001). Ali (1984) and Neelakantan (1996) do not mention the occurrence of this species from Kerala nor has there been any record, published or anecdotal, from this state. Subsequent to our sighting, K. V. Eldhose and three British birders spotted a lone European Roller on 28th November 2002, at Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary (Idukki district), which is situated in the rain-shadow region of the Western Ghats (Eldhose, *verbally*, 2003).

Discussion

The earliest arrival record of this species in southern Peninsular India is 22nd September from Andhra Pradesh (Table 1) and the southern limit of this species was earlier considered to be Lingambudhi Lake in Mysore (Thejasawi *et al.* 2000). Our record thus extends the southern limit of the species (Fig. 4) and is also very early in the season. Of the 18 sightings, 65% are between 1999 and 2007. This may have been due to the growth of birdwatchers in these years and faster mode of reporting. Locations and sightings of this species, including Kerala were divided into three classes namely inland, west and east coast, with the west coast having the most sightings (Fig. 3).

As mentioned by Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) southern western Maharashtra and Goa lie on its fall migration path. We assume that European Rollers are stragglers to the rest of the southern region. Simpson (1984) recorded this species on two occasions (26th & 27th September 1983), 140km west of Thane (Maharashtra), in the Arabian Sea. Satheesan (1990) reported a bird-hit involving this species with an aircraft, at an altitude of 2,424m, 55km west of Dabolim, Goa. Could the birds straying to the south-western portion of the country be on passage to their wintering areas across the Indian Ocean? European Rollers are seen in the breeding areas in Kashmir mainly between April and September (Bates & Lowther 1991). The species was earlier placed in the lower risk / least concern category (BirdLife International 2000) as it had a large global population with the major global breeding population in Europe-however European populations declined 30% in 15 years and the species is now considered Near-threatened (BirdLife International 2007). There is however no evidence of decline in Central Asia (BirdLife International 2005).

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Fig. 1. European Roller (moulting), 23rd November 2007, Kachchh district, Gujarat.

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Fig. 2. Indian Roller.

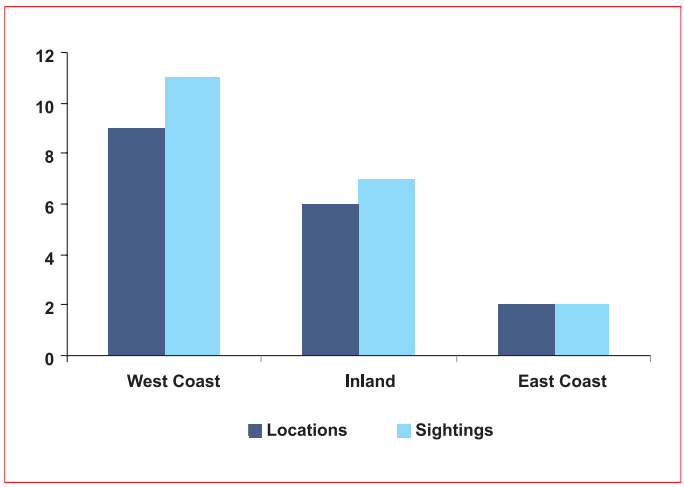

Fig. 3. Status of European Roller locations and sightings in inland, west and east coasts

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Table 1. Records of European Rollers from the Peninsular India (south of latitude 18ºN)

Sl No.	Date	Reference	Location	District
		Maharashtra		
1.	Nil	Showler *et al.* 2004	Nannaj Bustard Wildlife Sanctuary	Solapur
		Andhra Pradesh		
2.	22.ix.2000	Suhel Quader (Anon. 2000)	ICRISAT campus (Patancheru)	Medak
3.	18.xii.2000	Swati Kukreti (Pittie 2001)	Talakona (Tirupati)	Chittoor
4.	18.xii.2000	Swati Kukreti (Pittie 2001)	Srivaarimetlu	Chittoor
5.	27.x.2002	C.T. Hash (Pittie 2002)	ICRISAT campus (Patancheru)	Medak
		Karnataka		
6.	xi.1893	Davidson 1898	Majali	Uttara Kannada
7.	1990-91	Daniels 1998	Gokarna	Uttara Kannada
8.	1990-91	Daniels 1998	Near to Bhatkal	Uttara Kannada
9.	30.ix.1984	Subramanya *et al.* 1988	Ranebennur Blackbuck Sanctuary	Haveri
10.	2-7.x.1999	Thejaswi *et al.* 2000	Lingambudhi Lake	Mysore
11.	8.x.2006	Prince 2006	Hessarghatta Lake	Banglore Urban
		Goa		
12.	xi / xii.1972	Grubh and Ali 1979	Almost close to Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary	South Goa
13.	13.x.1998	Heinz Lainer (Pittie 1998)	Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary	South Goa
14.	x / xi.1999	Lainer 1999	Divar (Tiswadi) Island	North Goa
15.	x / xi.1999	Lainer 1999	Grassland between Mollem and Collem (Sanguem)	South Goa
16	9.i.2005	Barlow *et al.* 2005	Close to Biera Mar Resort, Baga	North Goa
17.	18.xi.2005	Anon. 2005	Backwoods Camp near to Bhagavan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary	North Goa
18.	16.x.2007	Aasheesh Pittie *in. litt.* 2007	Backwoods Camp near to Bhagavan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary	North Goa

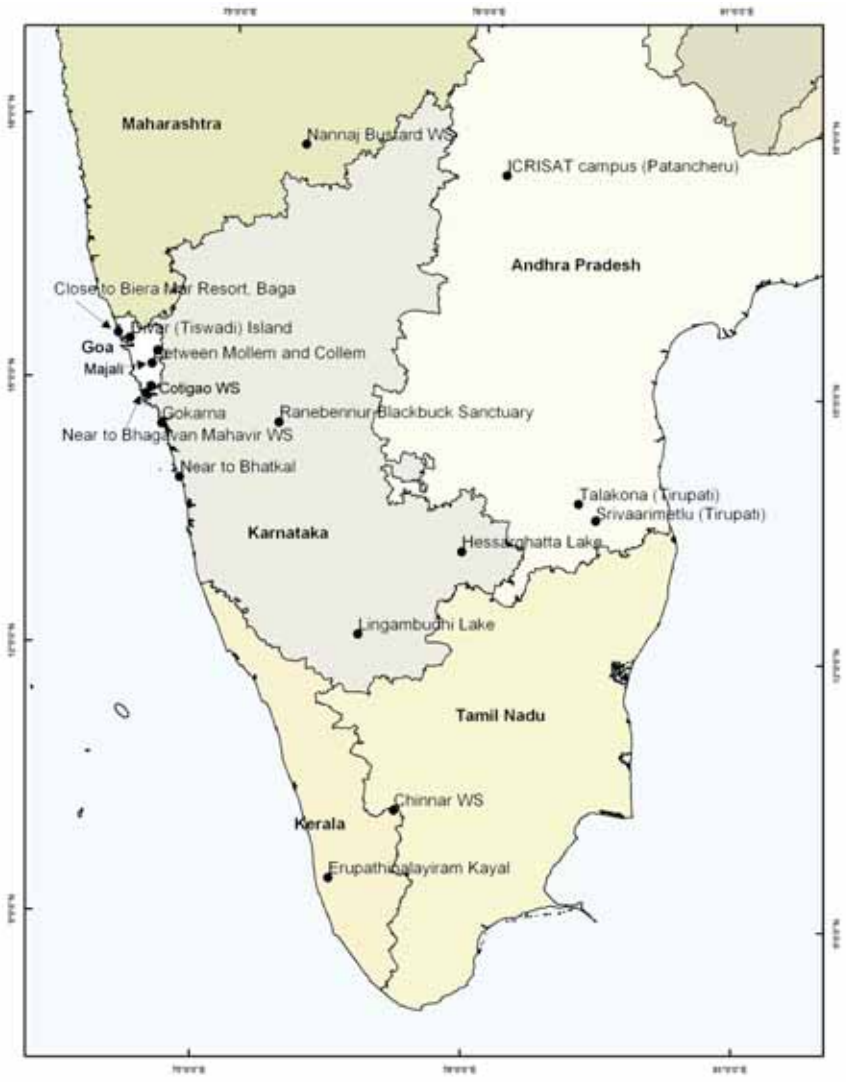

Fig 4. European Roller locations in southern Peninsular India

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