

breeding range (Azov Sea?), and are slightly different from the western *cachinnans* in showing more black in wings.

All these records, especially of the individual from the Little Rann of Kachchh in January 2015 showing typical characters of the eastern population indicate that Caspian Gull is a scarce but regular visitor to the region, probably overlooked amidst flocks of 'Steppe' and 'Heuglin's Gulls'. Though some *barabensis* / *cachinnans* intergrades could occur in India, it is unlikely that all *cachinnans* type birds seen here are intergrades. We, therefore, call for inclusion of Caspian Gull in the India Checklist until any revision, in future, of taxonomic status of eastern population (that is currently treated as *cachinnans* by Dickinson & Remsen 2015).

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Woolly-necked Storks *Ciconia episcopus* nesting on mobile-towers in Pune, Maharashtra

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The Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* is a large wading bird that is patchily distributed throughout the Indian Subcontinent. It prefers well watered areas including flooded grassland, irrigated ploughed fields, rain-filled puddles, banks of streams and rivers, ponds, lakes, and marshes, including ones deep inside forests (Ali & Ripley 1978). The South Asian population is split from its African counterpart *C. microscelis* and assigned a specific status as Asian Woolly-neck *C. episcopus* by BirdLife International (2014), which listed it as Vulnerable since the population is decreasing due to habitat loss (Wetlands International 2014). Though this species is known to normally nest singly in trees (Ali & Ripley 1978), here we report two instances of it nesting on mobile-towers in Pune, Maharashtra.

Nest 1: On 15 October 2011, at 1310 hrs two of us (UV & DS) noticed a pair of Woolly-necked Storks nesting on top of a mobile-tower (17.50°N, 73.84°E) above a four storey hostel building near Mutha River, in the densely populated area of Dattawadi, Pune [147]. The nest was c. 23 m above the ground. The mobile-tower itself was 11 m tall. The nest comprised a platform of c. 1 m diameter built using sticks and other plant materials [148]. Both birds were seen visiting the nest. The

presence, or absence, of chicks could not be ascertained, as the nest was inaccessible.

Nest 2: On 22 September 2013, 0743 hrs, while watching birds at Pashan Lake, Pune (18.54°N, 73.79°E), a reservoir on Ramnadi River, two of us (UV & VB) noticed a Woolly-necked Stork flying with a leafy forked branch, probably of an eucalyptus tree. It briefly alighted on top of the tallest building in the vicinity, and then flew a short distance to a mobile-tower. The mobile-tower was on top of a multi-storey residential building. Another bird was already present on that nest. The bird placed the twig in nest, and spent a few minutes preening [149]. Then the pair started re-arranging the sticks and twigs in the nest. They ignored the House Crows *Corvus splendens* perched close to nest, and also a Black Kite *Milvus migrans* that was soaring over the nest [150]. The three-storey building was c. 10 m tall, and the mobile-tower, an additional 14 m, i.e., the nest was about 24 m from the ground. The nest was similar to the one observed at Dattawadi. Both the nests were built on top of mobile-towers, in the vicinity of rivers, and / or wetlands.

Unlike other colonial breeding storks in this geographical region, Woolly-necked Stork is known to breed individually (Ali



147. Nest of Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* on a mobile-tower at Dattawadi, Pune.



Photos: Umesh Vaghela

148. Detail of Woolly-necked Stork nest on mobile-tower at Dattawadi, Pune.

& Ripley 1978). Its breeding season may vary geographically; nesting during December–March in southern India, but between July–September in northern India. However, our observations, and discussions with fellow birdwatchers suggest that their breeding activity in Pune's surroundings is during September–December.

They prefer tall and lofty trees, like *Bombax ceiba* (Ali & Ripley 1978), *Ficus religiosa*, *F. bengalensis*, *Tamarindus indica*, and *Dalbergia sissoo* to build nests (Hume 1890). Nests are usually seen on medium sized trees (10–30 m), though it is not uncommon to find nests on large trees, as high as 50 m. An unusual nesting of Woolly-necked Stork on a ledge was reported from the Chambal River valley (Rahmani & Singh 1996; Vyas & Tomar 2007). There appear to be no prior reported instances of this species nesting on man-made (artificial) structures. Though both nests were seen in habitation with several tall trees, the mobile-towers were taller than most trees in the neighbourhood. Probably, this height was more advantageous to the storks rather than the shorter trees. This exceptional nesting behaviour could be an example of rapid adaptability of wildlife to anthropogenic developments.

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149. Woolly-necked Stork preening in nest on mobile-tower at Pashan, Pune.



150. Woolly-necked Stork pair in nest on mobile-tower, ignoring other birds, at Pashan, Pune.

Photos: Umesh Vaghela

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