

Mynall in Travancore: Present-day location of a historical type locality

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'Mynall in Travancore' is a familiar location for nature enthusiasts who dig in to the past or refer literature of species description. It was an estate run by the British in the Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala, India. Once upon a time the estate was established in the pristine forest of the southern Western Ghats and some naturalists of the British administration used it for their explorations. References mostly include correspondences between naturalists like Hume and Moore with either Frank W. Bourdillon or his brother Fulton T. Bourdillon, mostly published in *Stray Feathers* by A. O. Hume during 1872–1888 period.

Despite these frequent references, somewhere in the course of time, Mynall vanished from further accounts and in the present age, the locality is considered untraced (Lozupone et al. 2004:122) or sometimes incorrectly attributed. One such instance is when (Eck & Martens 2006) changed Mynall to 'Mynali' without sufficient inputs (Praveen 2025). Only mention of Mynall on a map appears on the inside cover of *Birds of Kerala* (Ali 1984), but the small-scale map can only point to a vague location. Hence, I made some investigation into this aspect to gain a few lines of evidence that can provide rough coordinates of Mynall.

Table 1. List of important specimens that bear the collection locality as Mynall (listed chronologically)
NHMUK: Natural History Museum, London, ZSI: Zoological Survey of India Collections

Sl. No	Species	Year of Collection	Notes	Specimen Numbers	References
1	Sri Lanka Frogmouth <i>Batrachostomus moniliger</i>	1874, 1875, & 1876	Two skins exist in NHMUK. Nest with remains of egg by T. F. Bourdillon was a first report. The <i>pullus</i> [=chick] dated 24 February 1875 must have been from this nest.	NHMUK#1887.8.1.806 NHMUK#1887.8.1.807 NHMUK#1887.8.1.808 (<i>pullus</i>)	Hume (1890a):38
2	Bourdillon's Dark fronted Babbler <i>Dumetia atriceps bourdilloni</i>	1875, 1877, & 1878	Holotype and two other specimens in NHMUK.	NHMUK#1886.10.1.6531 (Holotype) NHMUK#1886.10.1.6530 NHMUK#1880.8.19.19	Hume (1876b)
3	Legge's Hawk Eagle <i>Nisaetus kelaarti</i>	1876 & 1878	Three skins, one undated, obtained by Mr. Bourdillon at Mynall are one of the first skins from India.	NHMUK#1880.8.19.91, NHMUK#1885.8.19.1440 NHMUK#1885.8.19.1407	Blanford (1895):354; Whistler & Kinnear (1936):426 Gjershaug et al. (2008):66
4	Travancore Puff-throated Babbler <i>Pellorneum ruficeps granti</i>	1877	Holotype in NHMUK. Synonymized with <i>P. r. olivaceum</i> Jerdon, 1839 (Thrissur, Kerala) by Deignan (1947):3.	NHMUK#1886.10.1.4821	Harington (1913)
5	Travancore Black-lored Tit <i>Machlolophus apilonotus travancorensis</i>	1874 & 1877	Holotype and two other specimens from Mynall in NHMUK.	NHMUK#1880.8.19.109 (Holotype) NHMUK#1880.8.19.132 NHMUK#1886.11.1.301	Whistler & Kinnear (1932): 520
6	Ashambu Laughingthrush <i>Monticola meridionalis</i>	1879 & 1880	All three syntypes used in original description, including two from Mynall, are in NHMUK. Two typotypes in ZSI (though one is labelled as a syntype), and another specimen from Mynall also at NHMUK.	NHMUK#1880.8.19.11 (Syntype) NHMUK#1880.8.19.161 (Syntype) NHMUK#1886.10.1.2951 ZSI#12142 (Typotype) ZSI#35453 (Typotype)	Blanford (1880); Sakthivel et al. (2011):35
7	Southern Sullied Sailer <i>Neptis clinia kallaura</i> Phylum: Arthropoda, Class: Insecta, Order: Lepidoptera, Family: Nymphalidae	Pre-1881	Syntypes probably in the ZSI collection, one from Kallaur [=Kallar] Road and another from Mynall. Catalogue numbers unknown.		Moore (1881):309
8	Tortulosa Snail sp. <i>Tortulosa albescens</i> Phylum: Mollusca, Class: Gastropoda, Order: Architaenioglossa, Family: Pupinidae	Pre-1881	Syntypes	NHMUK#1906.05.05.69	Blanford (1881):215; Raheem et al. (2014):51
9	Dakhan Two-eyed Treebrown <i>Lethe drypetis todara</i> Phylum: Arthropoda, Class: Insecta, Order: Lepidoptera, Family: Nymphalidae	Pre-1882	One of the first specimens from Kerala, probably still in the ZSI collection. Catalogue numbers unknown.		Marshall & de Nicéville (1882):151

Faunistic references

The first reference to Mynall was in 1875 under the account of the Great Eared Nightjar *Lyncornis macrotis bourdilloni*. Here, the mention of Mynall is only as a relative reference for another locality which is a hillmen’s clearing ‘...on the banks of the Peenaven-aur about 15 miles north of this (Mynall), at an elevation of 600 feet above sea level’ (Hume 1875:302). Presumably, Hume inserted this locality to signify what ‘this’ means. However, Mynall does not seem to indicate type locality as the type specimen (NHMUK# 1887.8.1.849) has a location put as ‘Kalland, Khauni, south Travancore, 15 Jan. 1875’ (Warren 1966) and this location may have been ‘15 miles north’ of Mynall. Later, other authors including Marshall, Blanford, de Nicéville, Sharpe, Baker, Whistler, and Salim Ali have liberally quoted information from Mynall mostly referring to the notes published by Hume or having access to the specimens collected by the Bourdillons. Search for Mynall in Biodiversity Heritage Library (www.biodiversitylibrary.org) revealed 118 publications, though some of them are duplicates. Several faunae have been collected from this locale during the late 19th century; some of them are in fact type specimens preserved in the Natural History Museum, London (NHMUK) or at the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) (Table 1). The online database of Global Biodiversity Information Facility (www.gbif.org) has 15 occurrence records of fauna collected during 1874 to 1886. In the first list of birds of Travancore prepared by Bourdillon, Mynall is mentioned against five species, namely, Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, Crested Goshawk *Lophospiza trivirgata*, Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malaiensis*, Sri Lanka Frogmouth *Batrachostomus moniliger*, and Crested Treeswift *Hemiprocne coronata* (Hume 1876a). A collection of ‘201 birds’ was purchased in 1880 from ‘Mr. Frank Bourdillon’ by NHMUK (Sharpe 1906) and most of them have been from Mynall as evident from the number of references in latter works of Salim Ali and Hugh Whistler.

Etymology

Though the name ‘Mynall’ sounds to be of a Malayalam origin, the regional language of erstwhile princely state of Travancore (now Kerala), this is most likely not the case. Most of the estates of the British in Travancore were named in English; Bonacaud, Brimore, Eridge, and Seafield just to name a few from a dozen others. When traced, places with these names exist in the United Kingdom or in the commonwealth countries like Canada, South Africa, and Australia, and hence certainly are of English, Scottish, or Irish origin. There are family lineages with their surname ‘Mynall’ in England. Possible variations of the surname include Minall, Mynell, Minell, or Mynell. The name ‘Mynall’ could have also originated from a small market town in England, named Mildenhall (pronounced /ˈmaɪnəl/) in Wiltshire, England. Hence, it is probably not a good idea to attempt finding similar sounding Malayalam names for geolocating Mynall, like attempted by some earlier ornithologists (e.g., Eck & Martens 2006).

History

Mynall Estate was a result of cultivation of coffee in Travancore. Idea of plantations in the province started when the price of coffee in the western world experienced a rapid rise. During 1858, forests of Ashambu hills were cleared for coffee plantation. North of Ashambu hills, 500 acres of wooded land was allotted to a Scottish planter John Grant, aimed at large scale production of coffee (Prakash 2018). Grant, a pioneer in coffee plantation in Sri Lanka, established his new estate by 1864 at Mahendragiri in Kanyakumari district (Mateer 1883:228), which probably is the first coffee plantation in this general area, that soon expanded across Travancore.

However, the only record of Mynall as a coffee estate is in Salim Ali’s *Birds of Kerala* (Ali 1984:11), who obtained the geographic details of Mynall from A. J. Moore of Merchiston Estate, Kallar. Additionally, Ali states that Bourdillon brothers owned Mynall or Pallipara Coffee Estate, and when coffee failed, Frank Bourdillon returned to England while Fulton joined government service to eventually become the Conservator of Forests. All coffee plantations in Travancore faced a severe leaf disease and was ravaged by heavy monsoon; hence, the crop pattern had to be changed (Mateer 1883). Entries in two editions of Travancore Almanac (Table 2) indicates that the crop transitioned to tea while Fulton Bourdillon was the proprietor. However, by 1905, Mynall has been listed as just ‘forest’ with a new proprietor, James Finch. However, all volumes of Almanac that referred to Mynall Estate clearly listed Pallipara as its Malayalam name. Hence, there is little doubt that both are synonymous. In a few years, Mynall and Pallipara disappeared from the list of estates in Ponmudi, starting with the *Travancore Almanac and Directory for 1911* (1910):147.

Altitude

The main contention points for figuring out the location is the documentation of different altitudes (Table 3) for Mynall and the specimens labelled as Mynall being of some birds with a narrow altitude range. Very few specimens from Bourdillon have altitude mentioned in their original labels. Most natural history works provide an altitude of 2,000 ft [=610m] for Mynall. However, there are some cases where it is as low as 1,500 ft [=460m] or as high as 2,600 ft [=790m], with the extreme being 4,000 ft [=1,220m]. In addition, we are also in receipt of a photograph from NHMUK with the original tag of the type specimen of *Dumetia atriceps bourdilloni* as 3,500 ft [=1,066m].

Surprisingly, Bourdillon himself documented Pallipara as a ‘rounded hill near Chemmunji, and about 3,500 ft. high’ [=1,066m] while Chemmunji peak (8.679°N, 77.193°E) itself is listed at 4,000 ft. [=1,220m] (Bourdillon 1893:35). Hence, it is possible that Pallipara [=Mynall] Estate may be different from Pallipara hill; perhaps the former is at the foothills of the latter. It may be noted that the correct altitude of the well-known Chemmunji peak is 1,717m and the disparity with Bourdillon’s

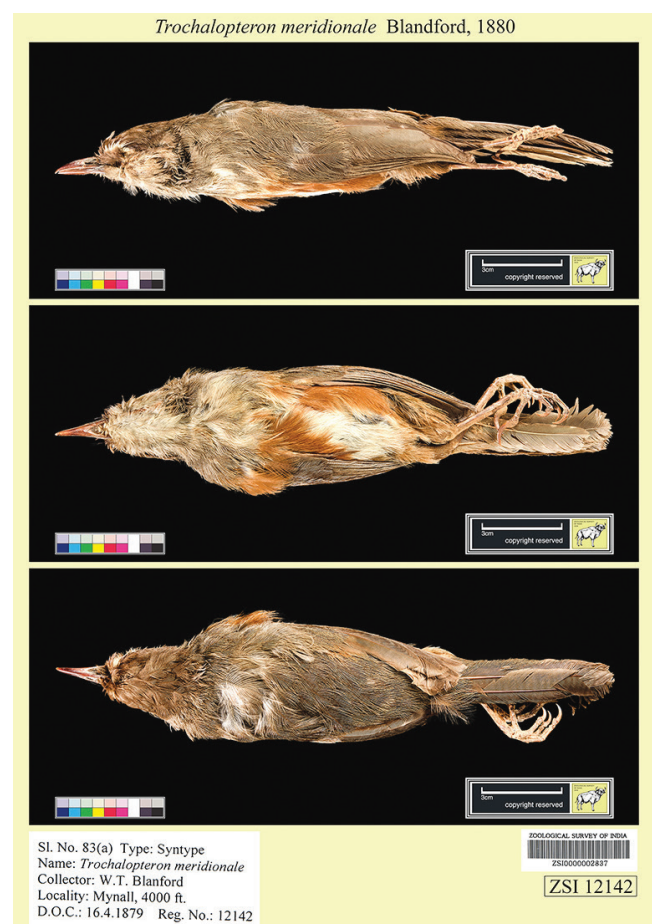
Table 2. List of entries in Travancore Almanac with details of acreage of Mynall listed under Ponmudi district					
Almanac Year	Name of Estate	Malayalam Name	Proprietor, Manager & Assistant Superintendent	Land use: Acres	Reference
1895	Mynall	Pallipara	T. F. Bourdillon, J. S. Valentine	Tea: 7	Travancore Almanac of 1895 (1894):383
1898	Mynall	Pallipara	T. F. Bourdillon, J. S. Valentine, C. F. Ewart	Tea: 30	Travancore Almanac of 1898 (1897):154
1905–1907	Mynall	Pallipara	James Finch	Forest: 550	Travancore Almanac of 1905 (1904):244; Travancore Almanac of 1906 (1905):219; Travancore Almanac of 1907 (1906):132

Table 3. Altitude references to Mynall or Pallipara in literature (listed chronologically)

Sl. No	Altitude	Phrasing	Reference
1	2,000 ft [=610m]	"A young male killed at Mynall on the 6th August at an elevation of about 2,000 feet, clearly..." under the account of Crested Goshawk	Hume (1876a):355
2	2,000 ft [=610m]	"The specimen, like the female, was shot at Mynall, in South Travancore at an elevation of about 2,000 feet above the sea level" under the account of Sri Lanka Frogmouth	Hume (1876a):379
3	4,000 ft [=1,220m]	"The three specimens were all shot at an elevation of 4000 feet. Two are from Mynall, one from the Travancore and Tinnevely boundary" under the type description of Ashambu Laughingthrush.	Blanford (1880):143
4	2,000 ft [=610m]	"Hab. Travancore, Kallaur Road, 1200 feet, April; Mynall, 2000 feet (Bourdillon)" under the type account of Southern Sullied Sailor <i>Neptis kallaura</i> . However, later Moore (1890):238 contradicted himself by stating 2,700 feet for Mynall. I have chosen his first reference as the second could even be a printing mistake.	Moore (1881):309
5	2,000 ft [=610m]	"We have specimen taken at Mynall 2,000 feet elevation" under the account of Dakhan Two-eyed Treebrown <i>Lethe drypetis todara</i> .	Marshall & de Niceville (1882):151
6	2,600 ft [=790m]	"We possess the wet-season form from Mynall, 2600 feet, in Travancore" under the account of White Four-ring <i>Ypthima hubneri</i>	Moore (1890):80
7	1,500 ft [=460m]	"Mynall, Travancore, 1500 feet" while listing a series of specimens of Common Sailor <i>Neptis hylas varmana</i>	Moore (1890):231
8	3,500 ft [=1,066m]	"Pallipara, a rounded hill near Chemmunji, and about 3,500 ft. high..." under the most important peaks of Paloda [=Palode] river. No mention of Mynall	Bourdillon (1893):35
9	3,510 ft [=1,070m]	"Pallipara hill 3510", listed in Appendix XIV of list of elevations under "The Paloda or Vamanapuram river". No mention of Mynall.	Bourdillon (1893):xlv
10	2,000–2,500 ft (600–760m)	"Two brothers who owned Mynall or Pallipara Coffee Estate (near Ponmudi in S. Travancore, c. 2,000–2,500 feet) in the 1870s..." under the account of T. Fulton and Frank Bourdillon.	Ali (1984):11

work cannot be easily explained as a trigonometric error since the same page has the height of Agasthayamala (referred to as Agasthyar peak) at 6,200 ft [=1,890m], which is very close to the present day documented height of 1,869m [=6,132 ft]. Hence, the fact that Pallipara hill could actually be a few hundred meters higher than Bourdillon's documented height cannot be discounted. It is also clear that Bourdillon sometimes collected outside Mynall and correspondents like Hume may have transcribed in a way that indicates all specimens to have come from a single locality, Mynall. For e.g., under the account of Black-and-orange Flycatcher *Ficedula nigrorufa*, Hume quotes Bourdillon writing from Mynall Estate as "...found in dense jungle at an elevation of 3700 to 4000 feet. The bird is not uncommon here..." (Hume 1890b). However, it is not explicitly mentioned whether Bourdillon's observations were from Mynall or at a higher altitude. Sometimes, there is an explicit mention of records from 'near Mynall' whence the altitude is slightly higher '2700 feet', like the case of Lesser False Vampire Bat *Megaderma spasma* (Blanford 1888:264).

Breeding records of Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus*, Southern Hill Myna *Gracula indica*, Sri Lanka Frogmouth, Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*, Crested Goshawk, and Black-and-orange Flycatcher from Mynall (Hume 1889, 1890b, a) lead us to presume that the site may not have a single elevation but rather, a range of heights. Thus, the various altitudes of Mynall (Table 2) may be likely, considering an estate on a sloping hill. However, the presence of Ashambu Laughingthrush *Montecinla meridionalis* in Mynall (Blanford 1880; Sakthivel et al. 2011), whose syntypes, all three of them, are in NHMUK with typotypes in ZSI [178], takes this range much higher, as documented in Blanford (1880):143. From what we understand of the species now, Ashambu Laughingthrush could hardly be found at an elevation below 1,200m [=3,940 ft]; hence at least 500 ft below the highest documented elevation of Pallipara,



178. Typotype of Ashambu Laughingthrush in ZSI collections. Altitude in the label was taken from the type description by Blanford. Reproduced with permission from Zoological Survey of India

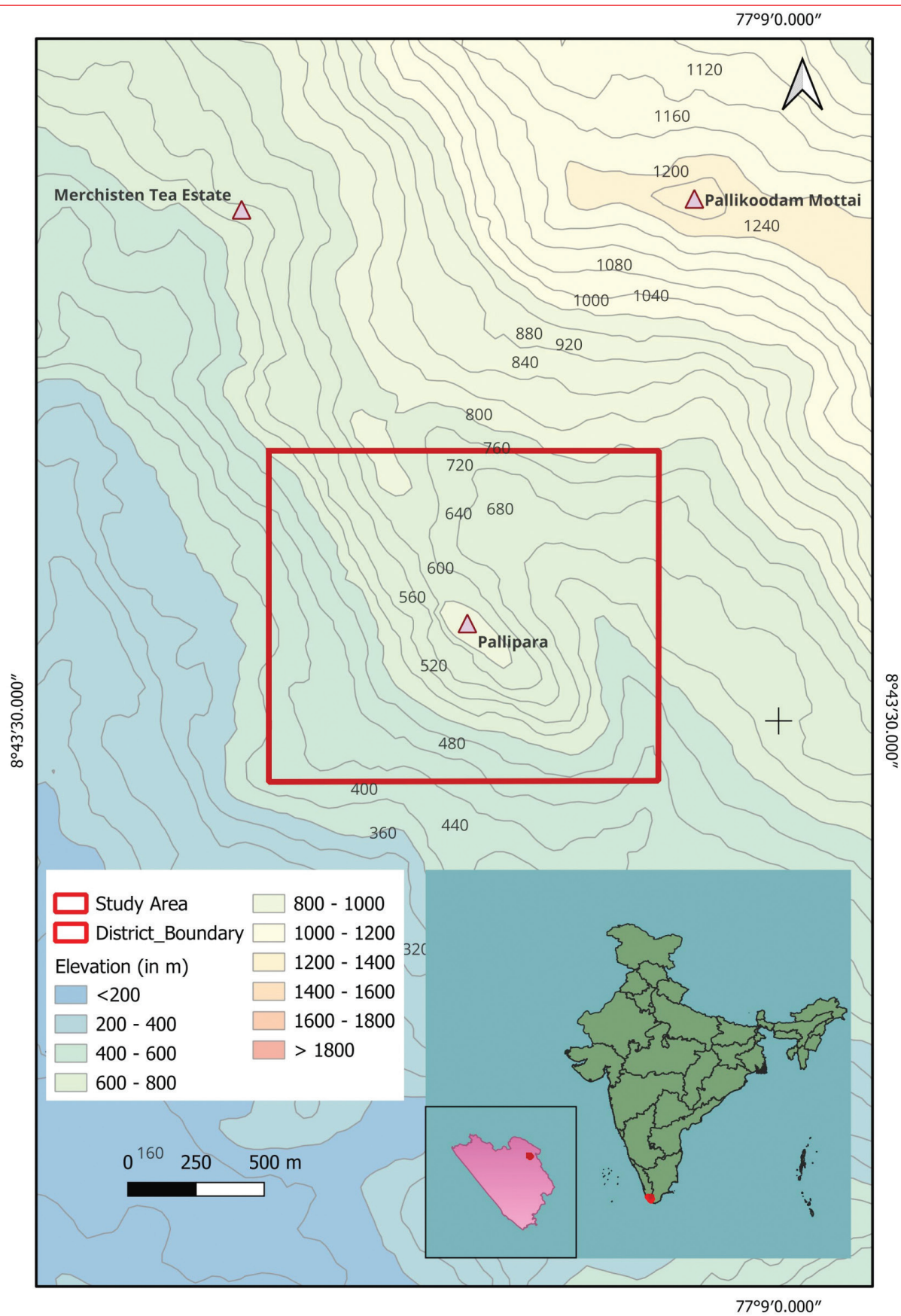


Fig. 2a & 2b. Georeferenced location of Mynall [=Pallippara] Estate on a contemporary map of Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala.

1,500–2,000 ft more than the documented height of Mynall. Of course, there exist a chance that the bird was collected by Bourdillon or his party at a higher elevation and brought to Mynall, though Blanford, in his original description, perhaps oblivious of the details, states that two were taken at Mynall and the third from 'Travancore and Tinnevely boundary' (Blanford 1880). The syntype selected in the type catalogue at NHMUK is the third one, which has details as collected from 'Travancore-Tinnevely boundary, 4,400', south India, 3 April 1880' (Warren & Harrison 1971). However, by definition, all localities of specimens used for the type description, unless explicitly stated, should be considered type locality. Hence, Mynall is also its type locality. It is also unclear why Blanford mentioned all three syntypes to have the same altitude as 4,000 feet, when one clearly is taken at a location 400 feet higher.

Though unlikely, there is also a modest chance that Ashambu Laughingthrush used to occur at a slightly lower elevation, closer to the altitude of Pallipara given by Bourdillon. However, other reasons are much stronger.

Geography

There is some conflict in the exact geographical location of Mynall. As per Ali (1984):11, quoting A. J. Moore of Merchiston Estate, Mynall or Pallipara estate was near Ponmudi in southern Travancore. However, Bourdillon's documentation of Pallipara hill is near Chemmunji Peak, described as a 'rounded hill'. Both are along the Vamanapuram River but Bourdillon's location is further upstream, within the borders or close to Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary. To add to it, there is a present-day lesser-known uninhabited location by name Pallipara, an elongated hill, located near Ponmudi and south of Merchiston Estate in the Kallar Forest Section, Palode Forest Range, Thiruvananthapuram Forest Division. I discussed this with forest officers in Palode Forest Range and confirmed that they still use this name. Villagers near Merchiston Estate also knows this area as a natural forest that was once a tea estate decades back. A recent floristic study has visited this location and mapped this elongated hill which has a peak altitude of 820m [=2,700 ft] with rocky exposures ending in a woodland in all sides at about 600m [=2,000 ft] (Decruse & Rajendraprasad 2020:66). This hill corresponds to Kavadiar Mala (8.729°N, 77.139°E) on the Survey of India Toposheet.

Bourdillon's description of Pallipara hill is in conflict with the present-day location in terms of geographic positioning as well as the altitude range. However, the present-day location of Pallipara matches more with the location described by Salim Ali and A. J. Moore. Moore, in 1930s, must have been well-versed about an estate that existed in the landscape a couple of decades back. The possibility of two places with the same name within a constrained geography is feeble, but one is a hill while the other is an estate, and hence not impossible. However, any conclusions drawn might not be definitive, as we are integrating secondary sources from different era.

With rapid socio-economic shift during early 20th century, Mynall must have quickly lost its importance. As geographical coordinates were not mentioned in this early time documentation, locating this site has been a problem for all natural history workers. The estate may have been forced to shut down as plantation crops proved to be economically nonviable. Secondary forest must have overgrown the area and gradually Mynall must have been pushed into obscurity. Later the Forest Department of Kerala must have annexed this land and permission to access

made limited. While contemporary estates like Brimore and Bonacaud still retain some evidence of built-up areas or remaining structures, the absence or obscurity of physical evidence for Mynall has necessitated our reliance on secondary sources like publications and correspondence to determine its location.

Considering the range of species collected and described from Mynall, it seems prudent to fix the location of Mynall to the present day Pallipara near Ponmudi as this is the best match in terms of geography and altitude. Hence, I fix the location of Mynall to be between 8.723°N and 8.734°N latitude and 77.133°E and 77.146°E longitude (Fig. 1). The only significant anomaly is the type locality of Ashambu Laughingthrush which certainly must have been procured from higher-up the range, contrary to Blanford (1880), and is closer to the present-day label (4,000 ft = 1,220m) on the cotype at ZSI (Fig. 2). Most studies on sky island birds of Ashambu hills now happen at Pandipath in Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary, not far from Chemmunji peak, which is where these type specimens must have also originated. Hence, I propose to restrict the type locality of Ashambu Laughingthrush to 'Travancore-Tinnevely boundary [=state border of Kerala and Tamil Nadu in Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary, southern Kerala]' and remove Mynall from the same. While the primary objective of this note was to geo-reference the site, very few sites in India have a natural history legacy that is comparable to Mynall. Hence, studies could be undertaken to compare the present faunistic wealth with the documentation in the late 19th century.

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Correspondence

A Menetries's Warbler *Curruca mystacea* from Hanley, Ladakh: An addition to the Indian avifauna

On 05 July 2025, I was birding in the Khaldo Bagh Plantations in Hanley village (32.773°N, 78.984°E), eastern Ladakh, when a medium-sized moth caught my attention as it flew just a meter ahead of me. As I followed the moth in the hope of photographing it, I noticed a sparrow-sized bird perched in front of me in the *Salix* tree. While looking through the binoculars, the jizz was that of a *Curruca* species. As I was unsure of the identification, I took some photographs [179, 180] which revealed many characteristics not seen in any *Curruca* sp. recorded in Ladakh (Gyalpo 2025). Photographs showed the bird with a reddish orbital eye ring, pale iris, white moustachial stripe, and orangish throat becoming pale towards the belly. The forehead, crown and ear-coverts blackish, grading into pale grey of upperparts; tertials dark grey with broad, ill-defined pale grey fringes. Pale legs and brick-red orbital ring separate from invariably dark-legged Lesser Whitethroat *C. curruca*. Smaller size and daintier shape, shorter tail, lack of rufous wing panel and presence of a brick-red orbital ring separated it from Greater Whitethroat *C. communis* (Shirihai & Svensson 2018). The images were forwarded to eBird India Editors group where the bird was suspected to be either an Eastern Subalpine Warbler *C. cantillans* or a Menetries's Warbler *C. mystacea*.



179. Menetries's Warbler showing black hood, crown and ear coverts with reddish orbital ring, pale iris, white moustachial stripe and paler legs on 05 July 2025.



180. Menetries's Warbler showing white moustachial stripe, orangish throat grading paler towards belly on 05 July 2025.