



Forested area with open space habitat mosaic is preferred for nesting



Indian Pitta perching on a branch

Habitat:

Scrub forests, mosaic of sparse deciduous and evergreen vegetation, fallow land and partially cultivated fields, on plains and hills.

Habit:

Secretive. Diurnal; crepuscular. Seen in pairs. Mostly terrestrial, it flies on a branch when disturbed. Usually silent but calls loudly on rainy days. Comically wags the short tail on perch.

Nest:



Nest with side entrance placed in a tree fork



Nest placed in a creeper



Indian Pitta with nesting material in beak

Globular medium sized structure placed in a tree fork or in a tangle of vines, made of twigs, grass, roots, vines, etc. The entrance is at one end. The nest is placed 3 to 10 m above the ground, but rarely on ground hidden

in a tussock or a bush. Smooth and slimy inside. Nests are seen in Kokan, eastern Maharashtra and northwards on trees like *Mangifera indica*, *Phyllanthus emblica* and *Terminalia elliptica*.

Food:

Ground dwelling invertebrates: Insects, grub, maggots, worms, centipedes, millipedes, etc. Energetically hops on ground in search of food which it gleans with the beak from the forest floor.



Multiple food items such as grub, millipedes, dragonflies, caterpillars, spiders, etc. are consumed

Distribution:

Indian Subcontinent, up to 1700 m.

Status:

Resident. Local migration coincides with SW monsoon. Breeding migrant to Kokan.



Indian Pitta often calls from an open perch

Key features:



Green wings with a blue flash on scapulars, crimson belly and dark eye stripe



Under-tail feathers are crimson and upper-tail feathers are blue with a subterminal dark band. The stubby tail is obvious



Crimson tarso-metatarsus and toes



Pitta spends a lot of time in preening



The central crown stripe is typical

- Adult plumage: green, black, white, bright blue, fulvous and crimson-pink .
- Broad black eye stripe and thin central stripe on crown.
- Bill horny black, tip gently curved downwards.
- Iris - brown. Stubby tail.
- Green above, fulvous below, crimson belly and blue wing stripe.
- Wings rounded.
- Dark primaries with white trailing edge and white mirror.
- Legs –bare, long, pink. Dusky claws.
- Young: Darker blue above, pale below; wings with dark trailing edge. Little crimson on belly. Gape bright crimson.

Flight:



Mirror on the dark outer and inner flight feathers . Bullet-shaped body in flight.

Cultural aspects:

The multi-colored plumage of the Indian Pitta has registered its presence in our culture. A postal stamp commemorating the Indian Pitta is issued by the Department of Posts, India.

Etymology:

Pitta (L.), Latinized from Telugu word *Pitta* meaning a bird; *brachyura* (L) one with a short-tail. (Pande, Satish 2009).



Indian Pitta on our postal stamp

Parental Care:



Unique orange-yellow colour of the inside mouth of chicks.



Adult atop the nest with young



Chick demanding food in front of the parent



Two chicks have emerged from the nest



Feathers in-pin give the nestling a porcupine look ! Adult holds several millipedes in its beak



Hopping is the preferred mode of locomotion of the Indian Pitta

Amazing Facts:

Several food items are gathered in the beak while feeding the young. This exquisitely colored ground dwelling bird of our forest floor is not easily noticed and hence its presence is overlooked, unless it vocalizes. In monsoon, when the Pittas breed, several birds from adjacent territories call simultaneously and intermittently throughout the day, and to listen to this orchestra is a mesmerizing experience.

Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura* (Linnaeus, 1766)

Type locality: Moluccas=Ceylon.

Avichchiya (Simhala); **Polanki pitta** (Telugu); **Thotta kallan;** **Kathelachi;** **Arumani kuruvi** (Tamil); **Kavi** (Malayalam); **Navrang** (Marathi); **Naorang** (Hindi); **Dao bui yegashi** (Cachari).

- **Size:** 19 cm.
- **Weight:** 47 to 66 g.
- **Wing:** Male/Female 10.1 – 11.1 cm.
- **Tail:** 3.6 – 4.0 cm.
- **Tarsus:** 3.5 – 3.9 cm.
- **Bill:** 2.2 – 2.6 cm.
- **Breeding season:** May – August.
- **Clutch:** 3 – 6 eggs. One clutch per year.
- **Eggs:** Oval; China white, glossy, sparsely speckled, spotted and lined with purple.
- **Egg Size:** 24.7 x 21.2 mm (Baker).
- **Incubation:** 14 -15 d. Sexes alike.
- **Nuptial displays:** Running, flying and calling.
- **Call:** Typical double whistle *wheet-tue;* *wheet-tue*. Hissing by nestlings. Also mews, *chees*, etc.



www.elafoundation.org

Sudhir Kulkarni Pvt Ltd.

SPONSORED
BY:



- **Chief Editor:** Dr. Satish Pande.
- **Associate Editor:** Ram Mone
- **Photographs:** Dr. Satish Pande, Pramod Deshpande, Ram Mone, Prashant Deshpande, Yogesh Gurav, Kiran Ghadge -cover.
- **Design:** Kiran Velhankar, Media Next Infoprocessors Pvt. Ltd.
- **Copyright and Published by:** Ela Foundation, C-9, Bhosale Park, Sahakarnagar-2, Pune 411009. July, 2014. An OENSL initiative. www.elafoundation.org.
- **References:** Ali Salim and S. Dillon Ripley (1969) Handbook of Birds of India and Pakistan, Oxford University Press, Bombay; vol 3: 1-325. Pande, Satish; Tambe, Saleel; Francis, C. F. and Sant, Niranjani (2003). Birds of Western Ghats, Kokan and Malabar (Including birds of Goa) Oxford University Press and Bombay Natural History Society, India. Pp-1-378
- **Recommended citation:** Pande, Satish and Ram Mone (2015). Indian Pitta. **Ela File 18:** 1-6. Ela Foundation, Pune.



Ela
File **18**

Indian Pitta

- **Order:** Passeriformes
- **Family:** Pittidae.
- **Status:** Resident; Local Migrant.

ELA FOUNDATION



Conservation
Through
Education &
Research



Phenology:



Pair foraging on the ground



Parent incubating eggs in the nest



Clutch of four eggs.



One egg has hatched, three remain



Another nest with two hatchlings and three eggs



Porcupine-like feathers



Parent on the net



A recently fledged young shows predominatly bluish feathers

Young:



The inner pattern of flight feathers out of pin



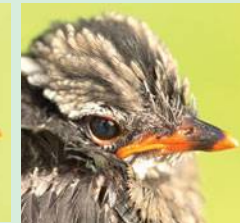
Outer pattern of flight feathers of a nestling



The tarsus grow first and the wings later



Head and beak design of the young differ from that of the adult. Top view of a nestling



Recently fledged chick flaps its feathers

Threats:

Habitat loss and habitat modification. We have observed predation of active nest by treepie, coucal, crow and mongoose. In coastal southern Tamil Nadu, vast numbers reported killed by man for food (Ali, 1970). Attracted by light, Pittas accidentally enter houses in Kokan during foggy days of monsoon and can get hurt by fans.

Economic importance and conservation:

Being insectivorous it plays an important role as controller of insect pest. While rummaging for food, it scrapes the wet forest floor and causes aeration of soil. Protected under Wild Life (Protection) Act. 'Rural Outreach Programs', such as those undertaken by **Ela Foundation**, for public education stressing conservation of bird habitats is the key to their conservation.

Field work was done for over ten years in Raigad, Ratnagiri, Sindhudurga and Pune districts of Maharashtra state by Dr. Satish Pande, Ram Mone, Premeasagar Mestri, Chandrashekhar Salunkhe, Vishwas Joshi, Rajendra Kokate, Prashant Deshpande, Pramod Deshpande, Rahul Lonkar and Rajkumar Pawar.