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Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* predating and feeding on Buff-striped Keelback *Amphiesma stolatum* in Blackbuck National Park, India

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Common Kestrel is also known as Eurasian or European Kestrel. It is listed as 'Least Concern' based on its population (Birdlife International 2019). Common Kestrel from family *Falconidae* is a medium sized falcon, and is one of the most abundant raptors in urban and suburban environments (Cramp & Simmons 1980). This species is widespread winter visitor, It is a resident in mountains of Pakistan (Baluchistan and outer Himalayas), East Afghanistan Bhutan Western Ghats, and hills of Sri Lanka (Naoroji 2006, Grimmet 2011 & Rasmussen 2012). It is a common winter visitor in Gujarat state (Ganpule 2016).

Aspects about the feeding behavior of the Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* and information describing how this bird ingests snakes is not known. Although this falcon eats insects, rodents, frogs, rand eptiles such as lizards. Reptiles consumed include *Agama himalayana*, *Agama caucasia*, *Calotes versicolor* and Skink *Leiolopisma* (Naoroji 2006). Hence, the predating and eating of a snake by kestrel is unusual. There are no reports of the kestrel feeding on Buff-striped Keelback *Amphiesma stolatum*. In this paper, I describe this predation event.

On 10 January 2013, around 17:30 hours [RT] observed Common Kestrel female perched on *prosopis* bush. It took off and came in hunting position from soaring position and dived in the grass, [RT] tried a closer approach and observed that the Common Kestrel was holding a 1 foot long Buff-striped Keelback snake (*Amphiesma stolatum*) on the patch of grassland at Blackbuck National Park, located in Bhavnagar district, Gujarat, India. The Blackbuck National Park is a home to several species of raptors.

The kestrel was holding the snake by the head with

Common Kestrel feeding on Buff-striped Keelback snake

its sharp talons, grasping it with one foot, In the initial stage no signs of damage were observed on the snake's body. Subsequently the kestrel occasionally started picking the head of the snake and body movement of the snake was observed. It was trying to decapitate the snake and eat it. This continued for a few minutes. Finally, the kestrel decapitated the snake. We were surprised to note and pleased to document that the Buff-striped Keelback is a part of the diet of the Common Kestrel. [RT] took a photograph where the Common Kestrel could be seen with the kill of the Buff-striped Keelback. The observation of the kestrel feeding on the snake was interesting and it is an evidence of it ability of predating on *Colubridae* family species. To the best of our knowledge this is the first report of the Common Kestrel eating a snake and is an an addition to the diverse diet of this raptor.

Acknowledgment

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(Note : All the photographs taken by Rajni Trivedi)

Breeding of Red-Vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* and nest predation by Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopaceus*

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Abstract

Background: We studied events of breeding of Red-Vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) during March 2019, from the process of nest building, egg laying, hatching of eggs and finally unexpected predation by the female Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*).

Materials and Methods: A Red-vented Bulbul initiated nest building on our fourth floor balcony. The nest and the eggs were closely observed for a total period of 25 days to study the behaviour of birds in an urban environment.

The material for the nest included dry leaves, dry sticks, cotton threads and plastic threads. The nest building required 14 days for completion.

Results: The pair of Red-vented Bulbuls laid two eggs, out of which one egg hatched after 14 days of incubation. The second egg did not hatch, probably because it was either not fertile or was not healthy (addled). After 11 days of survival, unfortunately the juvenile succumbed to predation by the female Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*).

Conclusions: The study highlights the facts that the nature of material used for nesting used by the bulbuls included plastic threads indicating the environmental contamination with plastic. Due to lack of trees and nesting sites in an urban area, birds are being exposed to predation. Since this nest was observed in a residential five-storeyed building, this also highlights that increasing urbanization is affecting the natural habitat of birds.

Key words: Red-vented Bulbul, Asian Koel, Predation

The Red-vented bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) on the nest. Note the diverse nesting material

Figure 2. Nest with two eggs

One egg has hatched and one egg is intact. The nest is placed on the window frame.

- A pair of red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) was observed in the gallery of our house.
- The birds started building a nest in gallery of our house on 11th March 2019, which is the hot summer month.
- The material used for building the nest included dry leaves, dry sticks, cotton threads and also plastic threads.
- The nest building was completed on 25th March 2019. Therefore the nest building required 14 days for completion of the nest.
- The female laid the first egg on 26th March 2019 and the second egg on 5th April 2019.
- The first egg hatched on 8th April from the egg laid on 25 March 2019. Therefore the egg was incubated for 14 days before hatching.
- The second egg did not hatch, probably the reason was either not fertile or was not healthy.
- The feeding material included insects and seeds.
- On 19th April 2019, it was found that there was no egg in the nest, and the juvenile was also missing.
- On 20th April 2019, a female Asian Koel was sighted on the nest, and predated the juvenile from the nest.
- The juvenile survived for 11 days.

Conclusions

The study highlights the following facts:

The nature of material used for nesting included plastic threads indicating the environmental contamination with plastic and lack of readily available plant material in the urban environment.

Due to lack of trees and natural nesting sites in an urban area, birds are forced to build nests in relatively open areas and thus become prone to predation.

Nest predation by female Asian Koel

Report of White-capped Bunting, *Emberiza stewarti* from Mhasave Lake, Parola Jalgaon district

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Abstract

Mhasave village famous for its Jhinjani Mata temple and ancient Sun temple is little known for its avian diversity. This small village 3 km east of Parola, in Jalgaon district, Maharashtra has got special mention in the Gazetteer of Khandesh for brick and mortar lamp-pillars or deepmals, each sixteen feet round and thirty-one feet high (Campbell, 1880), much of which is in ruins now. A water reservoir from the British era is on one side of the national highway, meant for water supply and irrigation for Mhasave village. This lake is fed by rain water during monsoon by the runoff from adjoining farms and meadows. Mhasave Lake is surrounded by wheat, cotton, gram, bajra, and jowar fields. Every year during winter, Mhasave L Lake and wetland draws thousands of migratory birds to its shallow water spread over half a kilometer. This note deals reports sighting of White-capped Bunting *Emberiza stewarti* Blyth 1854, from Mhasave lake area. This record is an addition to the checklist of birds of Jalgaon district and to the Khandesh (Jalgaon, Dhule and Nandurbar districts) region.

Introduction

Mhasave Lake and adjoining area is a winter refuge to thousands of migratory birds from Northern India, Siberia, Mongolia, Europe, Tibet, etc. This wetland supports large congregations of waders and waterfowls every year. This lake is connected to Bhokarbari Dam through a canal on the north-western side of the lake. Overflow from Mhasave Lake is fed to Bhokarbari Dam in monsoon. Water level of the lake fluctuates depending on rainfall and usage for irrigation. This suits waterfowls and waders, as most of them prefer shallow water, mudflats and marshes. At some place's marshy places and mudflats, islands are surrounded by *Typha domingensis* and *Ipomoea carnea* vegetation,

providing safety and shelter to waterfowls and waders. General vegetation around lake is dominated by *Caesullia axillaris, Ammannia baccifera, Eclipta alba, Altenanthera sessilis*, *Rotala serpilyfolia, Grangea madaraspatana, Hygrophilla auriculata, Tamarix dioica, Phyla nodiflora* etc. *Ottelia alismoides, Vallisneria spiralis, Hydrila verticillata* are submerged aquatics found in this lake. *Ipomoea aquatica and Spirodella polyrrhiza* are floating aquatics found here. *Eragrostis tenella, Iseilema anthephoroides, Iseilema laxum, Cymbopogon martini, Dactyloctenium aegyptium, Dicanthium aristatum, Chloris virgata, Tragus roxburghii, Cyperus squarosus, Cyperus difformis, Kyllinga bulbosa* species of grasses and sedges are also found on the bank and adjoining area of the lake. Along with good quality wetland habitat, cotton, jowar fields are providing suitable habitat for agro-avian diversity.

Results

Mhasave Lake attracts avian fauna to its shallow waters every year that we are recording since last 6 years. On 24th and 25th November 2018 we were on our birding visit to Mhasave and Bhokarbari reservoirs. There were poor rains in Jalgaon district in 2018, and as a result, Bhokarbari Dam was totally dry. Hence, we proceeded to to Mhasave Lake for observation. On reaching Mhasave Lake, we recorded seven species of threatened birds viz.- Oriental Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*, Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala*, Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*, Red-necked Falcon *Falco chicquera*, Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*, River Tern *Sterna aurantia*, Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus*, Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus*. In addition, Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus*, Greylag Goose *Anser anser*, Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*, Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*, Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*, Gadwall *Mareca strepera*, Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus* were also observed. On our way back, along a dirt road running through wheat and cotton fields (20^0 89’ 07 ” N , 75^0 15’ 80” E) Prasad Sonawane noticed a bird on the dirt road wagging its tail. He took pictures of the bird. The bird flew to the nearby fields and returned to the dirt road and then flew to a branch of Neem *Azadirachta indica* tree and then disappeared in the cotton field. We could identify the bird as White-capped Bunting *Emberiza stewarti* (Grimmett 2011, Kazmierazack, 2014). It is a small passerine (15cm) with a grey head, black supercilium and chestnut breast-band which are characteristic of White-capped Bunting. It is a distinctive bunting with comparatively small bill. It forages on the ground and in bushes; in winter forms small flocks often in the

company of other buntings and finches. Non-breeding males have chestnut and black plumage areas obscured by pale feather edges. White-capped Bunting breeds in Kashmir, Himalayan foothills, and further north-western regions like Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. In winter it moves southwards (Norman A, 2015). Its natural habitats are temperate grasslands, boreal shrub and scrubland, grassy and rocky slopes with or without bushes and trees; in winter it prefers dry foothills, scrub, agricultural land and the edges of plains with scattered bushes.

Uncontrolled fishing and grazing by domestic livestock cause a lot of disturbance to the birds at Mhasave Lake. Poaching of waterfowls by locals goes unchecked. Diesel engine driven water pumps cause immense pollution. Pesticides used in nearby farms cause contamination of the aquatic ecosystem. Community-based conservation will play crucial role in conservation of this bird's winter refuge.

Conclusions

We have gone through published literature on the avifauna of Jalgaon district with respect to reports of White-capped Bunting. There are some sporadic reports from Jalgaon district (Mahajan et al, 2018). There are however no records in checklists such as *Checklist of birds and mammals of Jalgaon district* (Uzagare 2014), *Avifauna of Hatnur dam and its adjoining forest* (Mahajan Anil et al, 2013), *Checklist of birds of Jalgaon district*, (Patil Ashwin, 2016). Its distribution range is also not shown in Jalgaon district or nearby areas (Grimmett et al). Its nearest records are from Aurangabad and Amravati. On e-bird White-capped Bunting is reported from only 3 locations in Maharashtra. It indicates that this species is rare in Jalgaon district and Maharashtra.

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First ringing record of site fidelity of Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius* in Ela Habitat, Pingori, Pune, Maharashtra, India

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Introduction:

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius* in three races is widely distributed species extending in range across Mediterranean region to Spain and Morocco, across Middle East to Japan and Taiwan. The race *Monticola solitarius pandoo* is a winter migrant to India, Nepal, Bangla Desh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. During winter migration (October to April) It inhabits semi-arid hilly country with rocks and boulders, and also sea coasts. In summer this race breeds in the Himalayas in India, Bhutan and Tibet. The race *M solitarius pandoo* is dark overall (Ali and Ripley 1968). It is omnivorous and consumes berries, figs, seeds, reptiles, small frogs, spiders, and insects (Pande et al 2003).

Material and Methods:

A solitary female Blue Rock Thrush was observed in Ela Habitat, the field research station of Ela Foundation for several years. The female was very wary and flew after human approach. On 4th April 2019 the female thrush along with a few Large Grey Babblers *Turdoidus malcolmii* entered the compost pit in Ela Habitat through a small opening that was accidentally left open. The commotion in the pit attracted attention.

Although the Blue Rock Thrush is known to return to the same locality in winter year after year there has been no confirmation based on ringing records from India of the same individual coming to the same traditional wintering ground. Hence, in order to see if site fidelity was true for this individual thrush we decided to take advantage of this opportunity. All birds from the compost pit were caught, measured, ringed and released. Vernier calipers with least count of 0.1 mm, metal scale with stopper with a least count of 1 mm and pesola scale with a least count of 1 g were used. Temperature was measured with a digital laser thermometer. A red plastic ring bearing the number R 430was placed on the right tarsus of the female Blue

Rock Thrush. The female could be identified because there is a distinct sexual dimorphism in this species overall (Ali and Ripley 1968).

Results:

The ringed thrush was seen in the same locality in Ela Habitat till 20th April 2019. Each night it roosted in the same niche under the roof of residential quarters in Ela Habitat. It undertook return migration after 20th April and was not seen again. The thrush was seen again after 5 months on 29th September 2019. Careful observation and examination of photographs (taken by author SP) confirmed that it was a ringed female thrush with a red plastic ring on the right tarsus. The thrush was subsequently mist netted and the ring number in right tarsus was confirmed to be R 430. The thrush had returned to the same locality but had changed the place of roosting and now roosted at night under the roof of an adjacent residential quarter. It freely entered the verandahs but flew when human activity occurred. It caught spiders and insects from under the roof and in flight and also took insects from the ground.

Table: Biometric parameters taken during ringing and other relevant information about the Blue Rock Thrush is given below.:

Species	***Monticola solitarius***
Gender	Female, adult
Biomass	48.9 g
Wing chord	115 mm
Tail	80 mm
Beak	22 mm
Tarsus	31.5 mm
Middle toe	18.3 mm
Middle talon	6.1 mm
Body temperature	35.1^0C
Plumage	Fresh, no molting
Date of ringing	4 April 2019, 1100 AM
Date of re-sighting	29 September 2019
Locality of ringing and re-sighting	Ela Habitat, Pingori, Purandar taluka, Pune district, Maharashtra
Number of individuals ringed	One

Conclusion:

The present report is thus the first confirmed evidence of site fidelity of the same ringed individual female Blue Rock Thrush returning to the same locality where it was ringed. It returned to the same locality after five months in subsequent winter after migrating to its breeding site. The finding of site fidelity importantly highlights the need of protecting and conserving all wintering sites of migratory birds.

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A report of Scaly Thrush *(Zoothera dauma)* from Central India

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On 2nd February at noon around 12:30 pm while watching birds I noticed a medium sized passerine perched on an *Acacia penninervis* tree. The location was a public garden in Ujjain at a place called Vikram Vatika near a pond (23°10'03.7"N 75°48'19.0"E) on Dewas Road, Ujjain District, Madhya Pradesh. The park has a dense growth area with lot of adjacent acacia trees in this patch.

The bird was roosting motionless in the shade of the *acacia* tree. It defecated once on the branch and remained there for a while. It flew away later. I photographed the bird on the perch. Initially the unique plumage of the bird indicated that it was a new species for the area and subsequently on comparison of my photograph of the bird with bird guides I could identify the bird as the Scaly Thrush (*Zoothera dauma*). The key features were: the size of 26-27 cm, scaled appearance of the plumage on body, a pale face and prominent black eyes. Further clues were a dark patch on ear-coverts, dark bar at the tip of primary coverts and distinctly spotted breast.

The Scaly Thrush (*Zoothera dauma*) breeds in Himalayas and is generally known to winter in the peninsular India up to Orrisa in the east (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). To the best of my knowledge this is the first photographic record of Scaly Thrush (*Zoothera dauma*) from Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh.

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Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* stuck in a molluscan shell: Indore, Madhya Pradesh.

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- **Name of Species:** - Black-winged Stilt
- **Scientific Name.** – *Himantopus himantopus*
- **Status: -** Resident and augmented by winter migrants
- **Date of sighting:**- 10 July 2019
- **Time of sighting:-** 09.00 am
- **Weather parameters:** - Sunny
- **Number of times sighted: -** Common bird at Sirpur Lake
- **Number of birds: -** Three
- **Age and Gender of bird in distress:** Chick, gender unknowm
- **Locality: -** Sirpur Lake, Indore, Madhya Pradesh
- **Habitat description: -**; Wetland at the periphery of a lake
- **Distance from human habitation:-**0 km.
- **Any other bird/animal associates:** Stints, Plovers, Herons, Ducks, Waterhens
- **Bird Behaviour: -** The tiny toes of the chick were found stuck in a molluscan shell on the dried portion of the shore, probably while foraging for food. The shell of the bivalve was partly broken.The chick was rescued and released immediately.
- **Threats to the habitat: -** Pollution, human disturbance
- **Photographs: -** Attached.
- **Previous records: -** No. Probably the first such record for the species.

A case of bald Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* in Orchha, Madhya Pradesh

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Abstract

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* is commonly seen flocking bird of urban habitats. The present paper presents an observation of a solitary bald Common Myna from Orchha Nature Reserve, Orchha, Madhya Pradesh.

Key words: Common Myna, Bald, deformities

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* family Sturnidae is a resident bird in urban and rural habitats. It is distributed throughout the Indian Subcontinent, up to 3000 m in the Himalayas in summer (Ali, 2012; Grimmett et al. 2014). The identifying features of Common Myna are the yellow bill, yellow patches behind eyes and yellow legs and feet. The head feathers are black and tail feathers are white-tipped (Fig.1). The wings have prominent white patches. Sexes are alike (Grewal et al., 2011).

Deformities in aves are not exceptional. The general anomalies may be related to the color aberrations or beak abnormalities (Mahabal et al., 2015; Kushwaha

Fig.1: Partially bald Common Myna with few feathers on occiput

Fig.2: Common Myna sighted on a carcass

Fig.3: A solitary Bald Common Myna foraging on a carcass

and Kumar, 2018; Pandey and Jangid, 2018). It is difficult to identify deformities in rare and uncommon birds; however, the common species that are easy to sight can be easily observed to detect any anomaly.

The present paper illustrate an observation of bald Common Myna on 14th April 2019, at Orchha Nature Reserve, Orchha (N 25°17′06.29″ E078°36′19.42″) in Madhya Pradesh. The Bald Common Myna was sighted while the team members were observing a carcass of cattle (Fig.2). On first impression it appeared like a tiny fledgling of Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterous*), however the size was much smaller. Closer observation confirmed it to be a Common Myna with an anomaly is plumage. The baldness was however not complete and the back side of the head showed some black feathers (Fig.3).

The neck and face were completely featherless with exposed ears. Several cases of bald Common myna have been reported from various places in India such as Maharashtra, Chandigarh, Tamil Nadu and Coimbatore (Kasambe et al., 2010; Ali et al., 2010 and Sagar et al., 2013). This is the first case reported from Madhya Pradesh. Sighting of bald Pied Starling (*Gracupica contra*) was reported from Nalgonda district, Telangana in 2012 (Surender et al., 2015).

The bald Common Myna was feeding on insects over the carcass. Usually, the Common mynas are seen in flocks, foraging and roosting together, however, this bald Common Myna was solitary. It visited the carcass twice in 30 minutes observation and on both occasions it was alone (Fig.4). A flock of Common Mynas with normal plumage were busy foraging on Palash flowers (*Butea monosperma)* of an adjacent tree.

Several reasons have been attributed to baldness in birds including genetic disorders, hormonal imbalances, ecto-parasite infestation, nutritional deficiencies or molting (Surender et al., 2015; Kasambe et al., 2010). In India, there are few case reports of deformities in Aves. So far no scientific study has been undertaken in this field in India, which may reveal the exact causes responsible for such cases.

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