

## CORRESPONDENCE

**FIRST SIGHTING OF GREAT BITTERN (*Botaurus stellaris*) IN AND AROUND NORTH ORISSA UNIVERSITY CAMPUS, TAKATPUR, MAYURBHANJ, ORISSA** by DIPANKAR LAHKAR, H. K. SAHU and S. D. ROUT. P.G. Department of Wildlife and Conservation Biology, North Orissa University, Baripada, Orissa

During the course of our Monsoon bird study, we had the rare opportunity to observe the Great Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*) near the North Orissa University Campus.

North Orissa University (N21°55'56.5" and E86°44'47.3") is situated 5 Km. south of the district headquarter, Baripada with large numbers of residential and Royal family planted patches of trees, tanks and paddy fields with water bodies. The area is also considered to be a fringe of Simlipal Tiger Reserve. Observations were made in the habitats such as semi urban areas, residential plots, college and university campuses, paddy fields in conjugation of a heterogeneous terrestrial plain area scattered with very small numbers of water bodies.

An individual Great Bittern (*B. stellaris*) was seen during August, 2007 on a small water body (N 21°56'4.6" and E 86°44'48.2") standing motionless on a javelin, laying on other side of the National Highway No 5 which is laid adjacent to the university. Ninety percent of the pond was covered with water hyacinth with very little open water.

According to Ali and Ripley (1983) the bird is a winter visitor to India, but most interestingly we had sighted it in the monsoon period. In Orissa, June to September is considered as the monsoon period, (Anonymous 2006). Thus this may be new information regarding its distribution. So, it would be worthwhile for the birdwatchers in Orissa, India, to lookout for this bird and provide additional information about its distributional status.

The bird was identified as Great Bittern because of its large size (larger than all other bitterns), green yellow bill, green eyes, green legs and yellow sole. It has a black crown and moustachial stripes and a black barring mantle. The chin and throat is white. No calls were recorded. The bird was observed for about three minutes at a distance of 10 feet through 8x40 binoculars. The Great Bittern was not included in the checklist of Mayurbhanj district of Orissa (Sahu and Rout, 2005). Thus this is the first record of this species in this area.

### References :

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**SIGHTING RECORDS OF BLACK-CAPPED KINGFISHER (*Halcyon pileata*) in VIDARBHA, MAHARASHTRA**, by RAJU KASAMBE\*, ROHIT CHAKRAVARTY\*\*, PADMAKAR LAD# and UDAYAN DHARMADHIKARI. \* G-1, Laxmi Apartments, 64, Vidya Vihar Colony, Pratap Nagar, Nagpur-440 022, Maharashtra, E-mail: rajukasambe@rediffmail.com, \*\*46, Om Sai Building, Anant Nagar, Surana Layout, Nagpur-440013, Maharashtra, #B-7, Unique Towers, Near Saturna Bus Stop, Badnera Road, Amravati-444 605, Maharashtra

On 21<sup>st</sup> April 2009, Rohit Chakravarty and Udayan Dharmadhikari were birding at Ambazari tank in the outskirts of Nagpur city. At around 07:00 hrs they located a Kingfisher. This kingfisher had a velvet black head and a prominent white collar on its hind neck. Its brilliant purple blue plumage was shining in bright sunlight. The underside was somewhat rufous or pale rusty. It perched on the ground or on small rocks and captured large insects. It neither dived into water nor hovered over water. The geographical location of Ambazari tank is 21° 7'37.90"N and 79° 2'20.24"E and the elevation is 1040 feet above sea level.

When Rohit referred the Grimmett *et. al.*'s book (2000), he was surprised to identify the kingfisher as Black-capped Kingfisher *Halcyon pileata*. As there are very few sightings shown in the book, he called Raju and Tarique, who rushed to the spot confirmed that it was indeed a Black-capped Kingfisher.

Incidentally, Anuj Kale, a friend and bird enthusiast from Nagpur shared a photo with Raju of a Black-capped Kingfisher taken at Ambazari tank, Nagpur on the same day i.e., on 19<sup>th</sup> April, 2009 confirming that the kingfisher was there for atleast three days. The Black-capped Kingfisher was sighted again by Raju on 26<sup>th</sup> April, 2009 at a small tank in the Central Jail premises in the heart of Nagpur city.

One more Black-capped Kingfisher was sighted and photographed by Harshawardhan Dhanwatey of the Tiger Research and Conservation Trust (TRACT) three days before, that is, on 19<sup>th</sup> April, 2009 near the backwaters of Irai dam on the outskirts of Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) in Chandrapur district in Vidarbha. Irai dam is located 25 km north of Chandrapur city and its geographical location is 20°09' N and 79°18' E and the elevation is 686 feet above sea level.

Padmakar Lad along with fellow birdwatchers, namely, Manohar Khode, Vijay Ingole, and Shirishkumar Patil had sighted one Black-capped Kingfisher on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2002 at Pandhari reservoir in Warud taluq in Amravati district of Vidarbha. The geographical location of Warud town is 21°28' N and 78°16' E and the elevation is 1315 feet above sea level.

Black-capped Kingfisher was once recorded from Melghat Tiger Reserve (Kothari, 1998). It has also been sighted a few times in Nagzira wildlife sanctuary and once in Pench Tiger Reserve (Madhya Pradesh).

Importantly, the Black-capped Kingfisher did not feature in the checklist prepared by D'Abreu (1923) which is one of the best avifaunal inventories of the Vidarbha and Madhya Pradesh.

Ali and Ripley (1987) describe the status and distribution of the Black-capped Kingfisher as: Resident and locally migratory. Primarily a maritime kingfisher, not common but frequent on the western seaboard from about Bombay southward and up the eastern coast of the peninsula through the Godavari delta, Sunderbans and East Pakistan (Bangladesh) and beyond. It sporadically penetrates much deeper inland along the larger rivers and their feeders; as such collected and/ or observed in Gonda district (Uttar Pradesh), Monghyr, Madhubani, Tirhut (Bihar), Dumagudiem (Andhra), Bharatpur (Rajasthan), N. Kakhimpur (Assam), Naga Hills, North of Manipur and elsewhere.

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**A REPORT ON THE 11<sup>TH</sup> VIDARBHA PAKSHIMITRA SAMMELAN HELD AT AMRAVATI** by RAJU KASAMBE\* and JAYANT S. WADATKAR\*\*. \*Bombay Natural History Society, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai-400 001, Maharashtra, \*\*Secretary, Wildlife and Environment Conservation Society, 42, Greenpark Colony, Shegaon Road, Amravati, Email : wecs\_2001@yahoo.com

The 11th Vidarbha Pakshi Mitra Sammelan (Gathering of bird lovers of Vidarbha) was jointly organised by Wildlife and Environment Conservation Society, Amravati, Department of Zoology, Sant Gadge Baba Amravati University, Amravati and Indian Science Congress Association, (Amravati Chapter) on 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> April, 2010. The Sammelan was organized in the beautiful auditorium of the Amravati University. This is a concise report of the Sammelan.

The 11<sup>th</sup> Pakshi Mitra Sammelan was inaugurated by Principal Sharad Tankhiwale and presided over by Raju Kasambe, Manager IBA, BNHS Mumbai.

The invited guests were Prof. Dr. G. N. Vankhede (Convener Indian Science Congress, Amravati Chapter, Head of the Department of Zoology, Amravati University, Mr. Milind

Chimote (Ex-Mayor, Amravati), Dr. Prabha Bhogaonkar (President, WECS and eminent Botanist), Mr. Kishor Rithe (founder Satpuda Foundation and eminent conservationist in Central India), Mr. Ramesh Ladhkar (pioneer of Maharashtra Pakshimitra movement), Dr. Jayant Wadatkhar (President of the 10<sup>th</sup> Vidarbha Pakshimitra Sammelan and Secretary, WECS), Principal Dr. Shrikant Deshpande and Mr. Ganesh Halkare.

The inaugural session saw the release of the publication of souvenir named 'Ranvedh' and felicitations of birdwatchers and naturalists. A photo exhibition of renowned nature photographers in Vidarbha, viz., Mr. C. R. Shelare, Mr. Vilas Deshmukh and Mr. M.S.R. Shad and other amateur bird photographers from Vidarbha was also arranged.

The Sammelan saw a series of lectures and PowerPoint presentations besides an open discussion on the birds and issues related to the Sammelan. Mr. Kishor Rithe guided the audience on bird study and the conservation of Forest Owlet (*Heteroglaux blewitti*). Dr. Pravin Bankar presented his views on the veterinary perspectives of birds. Kaustubh Pandharipande guided the birders about his work on Lesser Florican (*Sypheotides indica*) with the help of Pardhi community. Dr. G. A. Wagh gave a presentation on his findings on the Malabar Pied Hornbills (*Anthracoceros coronatus*) in Melghat. Raju Kasambe spoke on general aspects besides his doctoral thesis on the Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*) and on the endangered Birds in Vidarbha. Prof. Nishikant Kale dealt on the issues relating to Forest Owlet (*Heteroglaux blewitti*) in Melghat.

Rajkamal Job shared his experiences of birding in United States of America. Yadav Tarte described the issue of poaching of birds in Amravati. Prof. Sachin Tayade gave an illustrated talk on nesting materials. Some students of the department of Zoology, Amravati University had prepared artificial nest boxes for House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) from the rubbish. These were on display. Dr. G. T. Kedar presented a talk on birdwatching skills and offered very useful tips to birdwatchers.

More than 200 bird lovers and scientists participated in this Pakshimitra Sammelan. Some resolutions were passed during the Sammelan out of which one is: We request and recommend the Forest Owlet (*Heteroglaux blewitti*) to be declared as the state bird of Maharashtra in place of the Yellow-footed Green Pigeon (*Treron phoenicopterus*).

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