



Heronries in Vidarbha, Maharashtra

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Introduction

In this paper we present data on 17 heronries in Vidarbha, Maharashtra. These heronries were actually visited by us between Jan 2000 and July 2007. The species found nesting in the heronries include: Asian Openbills (*Anastomus oscitans*), Black-crowned Night Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) (NH), Indian Pond Herons (*Ardeola grayii*) (PH), Indian Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*) (IC), Little Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax niger*), Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*), Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*), Little Egrets (*Egretta garzetta*) and Intermediate Egrets (*Mesophoyx intermedia*).

There might be many more unexplored heronries in Vidarbha and we are actively searching for them. Hence this list is not comprehensive. However, these heronries have not been reported earlier (D'Abreu, 1923, 1935; Kasambe & Wadatkar, 2003, 2007; Sawarkar, 1987).

HERONRY IN GONDIA DISTRICT:

Chorakhmara Heronry :

Mr. Vilas Bardekar, Conservator of Forests, Nagzira Wildlife Sanctuary (NWS) informed the authors of a heronry of Asian Openbills (*Anastomus oscitans*) on an island in Chorakhmara reservoir in Gondia district. He had visited the heronry on 16th September 2002 with Mr. Kiran Purandare, an avid birdwatcher. After a week Dr. Anil Pimplapure and Mr. Gopal Thosar visited Chorakhmara heronry and counted more than 150 nests of Asian Openbills. Each nest had 2 or 3 chicks. The chicks were in various phases of development; some with white feathers and some with immature plumage.

The nests were prominently on Umbar (*Ficus glomerata*), Katesawar (*Bombax malabarica*), Arjuna (*Terminalia arjuna*) and Mowai trees (*Lannea coromandelica*). Chorakhmara reservoir is on the fringe of NWS in Gondia district. Mr. Rajkamal Job, another keen birdwatcher from Bhandara informed us that in June 2006, there were more than 100 nests of Asian Openbills in the heronry. The geographical location of NWS is 21°18'46"N and 80°04'03"E.

HERONRIES IN NAGPUR DISTRICT:

1. Central Jail Heronry, Nagpur:

This heronry was found on 14th April 2006 (RK) in the heart of Nagpur city in the premises of the Central Jail on Wardha road. It was like a birder's paradise in the heart of the city! There were nests of Black-crowned Night Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) and Indian Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*). The geographical location of Nagpur is 21°07'N and 79°04'E. It was difficult for me to count the nests all by myself.

On 16th April 2006, we visited the heronry along with birders, Dr. Tarique Sani (of nagpurbirds.org), Mr. Parag Sawji and Mr. Shailendra Chaudhary. We found a dead chick of Black-crowned Night Heron hanging from a Tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*) tree

branch. A live chick of Black-crowned Night Heron was found below a Chichbilai (*Pithecolobium dulce*) tree. We placed it on a low branch and the chick quickly clambered up the branches.

There is an old roost of around 200 Large Fruit-eating Bats here. The nesting birds had encounters with the bats in the evening. But the bats kept to the large Wad or Banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*) tree most of the time.

On 30th April 2006 again we visited the heronry with Mr. M. S. R. Shaad and found 32 nests of Indian Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*) and 33 nests of Black-crowned Night Herons on one Tamarind tree. The girth of this tree was 114 inches. We counted five dead fishes below the nests.

The second Tamarind tree had 24 nests of Black-crowned Night Herons all above 40 feet from the ground. The girth of this tree was 93 inches.

The third Tamarind tree had a total of 62 nests of Black-crowned Night Herons and Indian Cormorants.

The fourth Tamarind tree had 14 nests of Black-crowned Night Herons at lower heights and 30 nests of Indian Cormorants in the top canopy.

Nest count on other trees was as:

1. Subabul tree (*Leucaena leucocephala*): One nest of Black-crowned Night Herons.
2. Peepal tree (*Ficus religiosa*): 20 nests of Indian Cormorants.
3. Chichbilai (*Pithecolobium dulce*): 15 nests of Indian Cormorants.
4. Shirish tree (*Albizia lebbek*): 12 nests of Indian Cormorants.

Some Black-crowned Night Heron chicks had fledged and were flying around clumsily. We could mark three chicks in a nest, which were as big as the adults and seemed ready to fledge. Surprisingly these four trees are on Wardha highway!

Indian Cormorant chicks in all the nests were very young. We counted two chicks each in two nests and three chicks each in two nests. The chicks swayed their heads in harmony and fluttered their wings vigorously. Adults of both species were seen feeding the chicks. On 15th June 2006, I (RK) visited the site again. I counted 26 fledged chicks flying around the nest trees.

"Paradise Lost!"

In 2007, the fishing contract for the four small tanks in the Central Jail campus was given to some fishermen. It resulted in the continuous disturbance and chaos at the site. On 11th March 2007 we saw three pairs of Black-crowned Night Herons sitting in half constructed nests on Chichbilai (*Pithecolobium dulce*) trees. On 14th we saw 14-15 Black-crowned Night Herons in the area. Sadly, the activity stopped and the birds disappeared. Now

there is not a single nest here. All the birds have left. The bird paradise in the heart of Nagpur is lost!

2. Model Mill Heronry, Nagpur: Paradise Found!

Model Mill in Nagpur city is closed since 2003 due to some problems. We were concerned about the missing Black-crowned Night Herons from the Central Jail premises. We followed the movements of the herons and (RK) found them to be shuttling in and out of the Model Mill. On 22nd July 2007 a count of the nests was taken (RK). In all there were 70 nests of Black-crowned Night Herons on 67 Subabul (*Leucaena leucocephala*) trees. One Subabul tree had a nest of Indian Cormorant with one visible chick. Many nests had chicks which were as big as the adults. Many fledglings were seen flying around. There is a small cement tank in the premises of the Mill with lots of fish. Here some 25 Indian Cormorant fledglings and a few adults were seen fishing.

3. Empress Mill Heronry, Nagpur:

This heronry was found on 20th April 2006 (RK) by following the movements of Black-crowned Night Herons, Indian Pond Herons (*Ardeola grayii*) and Indian Cormorants towards the area, in Nagpur city. However the security guards of the Mill did not allow me to enter the premises of the long closed textile mill. Therefore I went around the Textile Mill compound to get some glimpses of nests. One pair of Indian Pond Herons with red legs was seen on a nest. A few nests of Little Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax niger*) were seen on the fringe trees.

A visit to this heronry again on 6th June 2006 (RK) revealed (from outside) many nests of Little Cormorants as also of Indian Pond Herons and Black-crowned Night Herons. The latter two species were seen bringing nesting materials.

On 21st July 2006, one of us (RK) managed to enter the Mill premises. The nests were counted. The approximate number of nests were: Black-crowned Night Herons (75), Little Cormorants (93), Indian Cormorants (8), Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) (25) and Indian Pond Herons (30) on various trees. In all there were more than 230 nests. But RK could not cover the entire premises though he could see many more nests, as he was not allowed to go far.

Three chicks of Black-crowned Night Herons were seen running on the ground. Most of the Black-crowned Night Heron chicks seemed ready to fledge. Two adult Black-crowned Night Herons with white crest were seen near most of the nests.

There is a big question mark over the future of this heronry, as Gandhisagar Lake from where the birds procure fish is likely to be reclaimed. One of the plots of the Empress Mills opposite to this lake has been sold and a mega residential project called Empress City is coming up.

RK visited this heronry on 22nd July 2007 and counted the nests. The nest counts were:

- a. *Saraca indica* trees: 223 nests of NH (no. of trees=24), 14 nests of PH (t=3),
- b. *Ficus religiosa* trees: 10 nests of PH (t=2), 3 nests of NH (t=2).

- c. *Polyalthia longifolia* trees: 12 nests of PH (t=8), 16 nests of NH (t=5), 2 nests of IC (t=1), 4 unidentified nests (t=3).
- d. *Pithecolobium dulce* tree: 2 nests of PH (t=1)
- e. *Millingtonia hortensis* tree: 2 nests of PH (t=1), 12 nests of NH (t=2) and 6 nests of IC (t=2).
- f. *Leucaena leucocephala* tree: One nest of PH, 3 nests of NH (t=3).
- g. *Melia azadirachta* tree: 28 nests of NH (t=2).
- h. *Ficus religiosa* tree: 4 nests of NH (t=1).
- i. *Ficus glomerata* tree: Two nests of NH (t=1).

Total number of nests were NH= 287, PH=41, IC=8, Unidentified species=4 nests.

4. Khaparkheda Heronry, District Nagpur:

RK found this heronry on 26th May 2006 in the Bhanegaon Abadi area of Khaparkheda village, north of Nagpur. RK visited the heronry again along with Dr. Ravi Waikar and Ms. Ashwini Waikar (a young birder) on 28th May 2006. The heronry is located on two roadside Tamarind trees (*Tamarindus indica*). On one tree there were two nests of Little Egrets (*Egretta garzetta*) and 62 nests of Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*). The other tree had two nests of Little Egrets and 32 nests of Cattle Egrets. All nests were at heights ranging from 25 to 40 feet above ground. The Little Egrets were displaying their beautiful plumes.

5. Pardi Heronry, Nagpur:

RK found this heronry in Pardi village near the busy Bhandara road at the eastern end of Nagpur city on 17th July 2006. This heronry was on a single Tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*) tree. There were around 40 nests of Cattle Egrets on the tree at a height of around 30 to 40 feet above ground.

RK again visited this heronry on 10th July 2007. The heronry had shifted to two adjacent trees which could not be identified by him. There were at least 2 nests of Indian Pond Herons and 26 nests of Cattle Egrets. Both species were bringing nesting materials.

6. Kapshi (Khurd) Heronry, District Nagpur:

A heronry was found at Kapshi (Khurd) village near Pardi on Bhandara road, in Nagpur district in June 2006. There were around 150 nests of Cattle Egrets on six Tamarind trees near the Gram Panchayat office. On 17th July 2006, RK found 2 dead chicks and around 50 eggshells below the six trees.

On 10th July 2007 RK counted the nests. There were 95 nests on six Tamarind trees. 46 eggshells were found scattered below the trees.

7. Heronry near Pili River on the Jabalpur Highway, Nagpur:

RK found this heronry in July 2005. There were around 55 nests on a single Neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*) on Jabalpur highway near Pili river in Nagpur district. He again visited the heronry with Dr. Tarique Sani and found three dead frogs below the tree. The tree started to die before the chicks could fledge. Fortunately most of the chicks fledged. Some chicks were collected from the dying tree by a poacher. There is a tea kiosk below this tree. We suspect that the owner of the kiosk was vexed because of the falling excreta. He might have been instrumental in killing the ancient tree. There were no nests on the dead tree in June 2007.

8. Kanhan Heronry, District Nagpur:

This heronry was located on 19th July 2006. RK found 10 nests of Indian Pond Herons on three Banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*) trees on the Nagpur-Jabalpur highway in Kanhan town. One pair had red legs and they were found visiting the same nest. These trees also had 10 nests of Cattle Egrets and a solitary nest of House Crows (*Corvus splendens*).

The striking feature was the chicks of Indian Pond Herons were very quiet and did not move much even when the parents arrived with food. RK found a small fish below a nest. On 26th June 2007 also, RK found 10 nests of Indian Pond Herons on two Banyan trees and three eggshells below the trees.

9. Kandri village Heronry, Kanhan, District Nagpur:

This heronry was also located on 19th July 2006. There were around 25 nests of Cattle Egrets on a single Tamarind tree. On 26th June 2007 there were around the same number of nests as counted in 2006. Also three more nests of Cattle Egrets were seen on a Banyan tree near the Tamarind tree. Some nests were being built and three eggshells were found below the tree.

10. C.P Foundry Heronry, Nagpur:

RK located this heronry on 19th July 2006. There were around 40 nests of Cattle Egrets on a single tree behind Lord Hanuman temple, in front of the main gate of C.P. Foundry on Jabalpur Highway. Inside the Foundry premises, RK counted around 34 nests of Indian Pond Herons. These nests were on various trees like Subabul (*Leucaena leucocephala*) (6), Ber (*Zizyphus spp.*) (5), Mango (*Mangifera indica*) (8), Umbar (*Ficus glomerata*) (4), Jamun (*Eugenia jambolana*) (5+2) and an unidentified tree (4). The unidentified tree also had 10 nests of Cattle Egrets in it. All the nests were at heights ranging between 20 and 30 feet from the ground.

11. Sakkardara Heronry, Nagpur:

RK found this heronry of Cattle Egrets on 4th June 2005 near Chhota Tajbagh dargah. There were approximately 45 nests of Cattle Egrets on a single Tamarind tree. In the monsoon of 2006 the heronry shifted to two Tamarind trees behind the dargah. On 13th July 2007, RK visited the site. There were no active nests on any of those trees.

12. Heronry at VNIT, Nagpur:

Dr. Tarique Sani (pers. com.) located a heronry of around 50 nests of Cattle Egrets in June 2005 near VNIT campus, in Nagpur city. RK visited the heronry and found that it was on a giant Tamarind tree.

13. Heronry at Shivangaon, Nagpur:

This small heronry was located in the monsoon of 2000 (AP). It had only three nests of Black-headed Ibises (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*).

14. Tarodi (Bujurg) Heronry:

There were around 100 nests of Cattle Egrets on Tamarind trees in June 2000 (AP). On 10th July 2007 RK visited the village and found only 9 nests of Indian Pond Herons and 2 nests of Cattle Egrets. However, there was a flock of 65 Cattle Egrets with breeding plumage and 21 without breeding plumage foraging with a herd of cattle.

HERONRY IN BHANDARA DISTRICT:**Heronry at Pauni :**

RK located this heronry on 31st July 2006 by following the movements of Little Cormorants on a bicycle. This heronry was on three Tamarind trees on the bank of a small tank near the historical fort. First tree had nests of Indian Pond Heron (no. of nests, n=10), Intermediate Egrets (*Mesophoyx intermedia*) (n=10), Little Cormorants (n=13-14) and Cattle Egrets (n=9). Second tree had nests of Indian Pond Heron (n=5), Intermediate Egrets (n=10) and Cattle Egrets (n=5). Third tree had nests of Intermediate Egrets (n=10), Little Cormorants (n=3) and Cattle Egrets (n=5). The adult birds were seen feeding the chicks. Little Cormorants were seen bringing food from Kurala tank near the old Bus Stop.

HERONRY IN AMRAVATI DISTRICT:**Wadali Garden Heronry, Amravati:**

RK found this heronry on 25th August 2003 in the Wadali Garden in Amravati city. There were 16 nests of Indian Pond Herons on Ashoka (*Polyalthia longifolia*) trees. There were one to three chicks on the nests. Parents were seen feeding actively. Nests were 20-25 feet above the ground. The garden keeper told RK that 10-12 chicks had fallen and died because of wind. The geographical location of Amravati city is 20°54'N and 77°45'E.

HERONRY IN CHANDRAPUR DISTRICT:**Kokwada Heronry :**

A heronry of Cattle Egrets and Intermediate Egrets was located (RK) in two Tamarind trees in Kokwada (Mankar) village, Taluq Bhadravati, District Chandrapur. Most of the chicks had fledged and they were seen feeding in paddy fields. The farmers informed that the birds nested there every year in the same trees.

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