

Record of Malabar Pied Hornbills *Anthracoceros coronatus* and other birds from Melghat:

Raju Kasambe* and Jayant Wadatkar

*G-1, Laxmi Apartments, 64, Vidya Vihar Colony, Pratap Nagar, Nagpur-440022, Maharashtra. E-mail: kasambe.raju@gmail.com. Phone: (0712-2241893)

Melghat Tiger Reserve (MTR) is located in Amravati district of Maharashtra and covers an area of 1676.93km². The geographical location of MTR is 21°15' to 21° 45' N and 76°57' to 77°30' E. A preliminary list of 33 birds was prepared by Mr. R. T. Jenkin (D.F.O. Melghat) in 1925 and was published in the Guide to Chikhalda (Nelson, 1925). Sawarkar (1987) published the first comprehensive checklist of birds of Melghat, which included 252 species. Besides the old records of Fairy Blue-bird (*Irena puella*) and recent record of Great Black Woodpecker (*Dryocopus javensis*) Forest Owlet (*Heteroglaux blewitti*) has been rediscovered in Melghat. It was Mr. Kamlakar Dhamge (Dy. Conservator of Forest, MTR), who first sighted three Malabar Pied Hornbills near Kolkas rest house on July 20th 2003 in the canopy of a Banyan tree *Ficus benghalensis*. These included one immature bird indicating successful breeding. He being a bird enthusiast informed me of this finding.

Jayant stayed for 4 days from 5th to 8th December 2003 at Raipur village rest house in MTR for the study of butterflies. On the second day in the afternoon, he saw 2 more birds on a fruit laden Banyan tree tree. The Raipur rest house is a century old building constructed by the Britishers and has 3 equally old Banyan trees. During the next two days stay, Jayant saw the pair every noon visiting the Banyan trees.

Raju visited the Raipur range on 20th and 21st December 2003 for the study of Forest Owlets alongwith friend Mr. Satish Charthal. On 21st at 0615hrs. when Raju came out with binoculars for birdwatching, a Malabar Pied Hornbill was just alighting a Banyan tree.

Along with *A. coronatus* many Indian Grey Hornbills *Ocyrceros birostris*, Yellow-footed Green Pigeons *Treron phoenicoptera* and Asian Koels *Eudynamis scolopacea* flocked the tree. Other birds like Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*, Black-hooded Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus*, Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*, Large Cuckooshrike *Coracina macei*, White-bellied Drongo *Dicrurus caerulescens* and Greater

Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus* also visited the trees. Both Raju and Jayant took photographs of *A. coronatus* separately.

It has an axe shaped casque on its bill with a large black patch along the upper ridge of the casque. The outer tail feathers are white and have a white trailing edge to wings and have pink throat patches. The male and female can be differentiated. It is resident in peninsular hills, North East Peninsula from South-West West Bengal and Bihar to North Andhra, Western Ghats (mainly along Eastern edge), South of South Maharashtra (Ratnagiri) and Sri Lanka (Rasmussen and Anderton, 2005). It is a near threatened bird species (criterion NT C1) (Islam and Rahmani, 2002) and its population is declining.

The sighting of total five birds in Melghat including a immature bird confirms the presence of a small breeding population of *A. coronatus*. Many expert birdwatchers like Salim Ali, Mr. V.B. Sawarkar, Ms. Prachi Mehta, Mr. Aasheesh Kothari, Mr. Kishor Rithe, Mr. Nishikant Kale etc. have studied the avifauna of Melghat for many years but never came across this bird. And it is not a species to be confused with any other species or which may escape attention of a good birdwatcher.

We can thence presume that the species is trying to establish itself in a new habitat (Melghat), which is suitable and safe. Few birds could have probably migrated from Pench Tiger Reserve (Madhya Pradesh) in search of suitable habitat. It is a good sign both for the survival of *A. coronatus* and for the biodiversity of Melghat.

Additional records for Melghat:

Mr. Aashish Kothari (1998) have reported Storkbilled Kingfisher (*Halcyon capensis*) near Kolkhas rest house. Ms. Prachi Mehta has reported the sighting of Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*) near Sidukund, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike (*Hemipus picatus*) and Blue-bearded Bee-eater (*Nyctyornis athertoni*). Also Kishor Rithe has sighted Fire-capped Tit (*Cephalopyrus flammiceps*) and Blue-capped Rock Thrush (*Monticola cinclorhynchus*) at Jamoda Padav,

Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*) in the Tapi river, and a White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) at Rangubeli. Mr. Nishikant Kale again sighted the Green Munia (*Amandava formosa*) near Raipur village.

Raju Kasambe saw many Indian Silverbills (*Lonchura malabarica*) at Chourakund and many Little Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax niger*) in Tapi river at Rangubeli. Raju Kasambe have also reported (Kasambe, R. 2003) the occurrence of Little Green Heron (*Butorides striatus*), Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), Crested Bunting (*Melophus lathami*), and a probable Sparrow Hawk (*Accipiter nisus*) in Melghat.

References:

- BirdLife International (2001): Threatened Birds of Asia. The BirdLife International Red Data Book, Cambridge, U.K.
- Grimmet R. Inskipp C. & Inskipp T. (2000) Birds of the Indian Subcontinent. Oxford University Press.
- Islam, MZ & Rahmani, A. R. (2002) Threatened Birds of India. Bucerus. Vol.7 (1&2) pp.78.
- Kasambe, R. M. (2003) Additions to the birds of Melghat Tiger Reserve, Maharashtra. Zoos' Print Journal. Vol.18(3) pp.1050.
- Kasambe, R., Pande. S., Wadatkar, J., Pawashe, A. (2004): Additional Records of the Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti* in Melghat Tiger Reserve, Maharashtra, Newsletter for Ornithologists: Vol. I-II: 12-14.
- Kasambe, R., Wadatkar J., Bhusum N.S., & Kasdekar F. (2005): Forest Owlets *Heteroglaux blewitti* in Melghat Tiger Reserve, Distt. Amravati, Maharashtra, Newsletter for Birdwatchers: Vol.45 No.3. pp.38-40
- Kothari A. (1998) Sighting of Black-capped Kingfisher *Halcyon pileata* in Melghat Tiger Reserve, Maharashtra, Newsletter for Birdwatchers. Vol.38(1).pp.11.
- M.K.S. Pasha, R. Jayapal, G. Areendran, Q. Qureshi, K. Sankar (2004). Birds of Pench Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh, central India. Newsletter for Ornithologists: Vol.1(1&2): 2-9

Nelson A. E. (1925) A Guide to Chikalda. Govt. Press Nagpur.

Ranjitsinh M. K. (1985) Saker Falcons in the Melghat, Journal of Bom. Nat. Hist. Soc. Vol.82.

Rasmussen, P. & Anderton, J. (2005): Birds of South Asia-The Ripley Guide Vol.2. Attributes and Status pp.152

Rithe K. (2003) New bird species recorded from Melghat. 18th National Symposium on Recent Trends in Life Sciences, Amravati University, Amravati.pp.27-29.

R. Jayapal, Qamar Qureshi & Ravi Chellam (2005): Some significant records from the central Indian highlands of Madhya Pradesh. Indian Birds. Vol.1 (5): 98-102

Sawarkar V. B. (1987) Bird survey of Melghat Tiger Reserve. Cheetal. Vol.29.pp.4-27.

Recommended citation:

Kasambe, R., & Wadatkar, J. (2006): Record of Malabar Pied Hornbill (*Anthracoceros coronatus*) and other birds from Melghat. Newsletter for Birdwatchers. Vol. 46(5): 67-68.