

BUCEROS

ENVIS Newsletter: Avian Ecology & Inland Wetlands

Vol. 10, No. 2&3 (2005)

Bibliography of the birds of South India

Compiled

by

Sujit S. Narwade, Girish A. Jathar & Asad R. Rahmani



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ENVIS

ENVIS (Environmental Information System) is a network of subject specific nodes located in various institutions throughout the country. The Focal Point of the present 25 ENVIS centres in India is at the Ministry of Environment and Forests, New Delhi, which further serves as the Regional Service Centre (RCS) for INFOTERRA, the global information network of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to cater to environment information needs in the South Asian sub-region. The primary objective of all ENVIS centres is to collect, collate, store and disseminate environment related information to various user groups, including researchers, policy planners and decision makers.

The ENVIS Centre at the Bombay Natural History Society was set up in June 1996 to serve as a source of information on *Avian Ecology* and *Inland Wetlands*.

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CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Abbreviations	1
Andhra Pradesh	4
Karnataka	40
Kerala	75
Tamil Nadu	111
Index	162

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE BIRDS OF SOUTH INDIA

Introduction

This issue of BUCEROS is a state-wise bibliography of birds of South India. It has been extracted from the bibliographic database of Avian Ecology maintained by the ENVIS Centre at Bombay Natural History Society. A bibliography of this type can not be complete and this bibliography is also not an exception. There are limitations on collecting all the published material on such a vast subject. This bibliography includes only references that are available at the BNHS library.

We have included four major states of South India namely Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Hence, the bibliography is divided into four parts. It is organized according to taxonomic order of the birds following Manakadan & Pittie (2001). Remaining references are categorized under broad headings such as Checklist, Survey, Wetlands (estuary, tanks, reservoirs), Protected Areas (National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, Tiger Reserves, Reserve Forest and Biosphere Reserve), Regions (City, Area), Agriculture and Birds, Conservation and Miscellaneous.

Our aim is to bring out ready reference material for amateur and expert birdwatchers. At the end of the bibliography an index has been provided and abbreviations are placed at the beginning on page no.1 for quick reference.

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Abbreviations used:

Agr. Res. J. Ker. = Agriculture Research Journal of Kerala

All Indian Symp. Environ. Biol. = All Indian Symposium on Environmental Biology

Anim. Behav. = Animal Behaviour

- APNHS* = Andhra Pradesh Natural History Society
AWB Publ. = Asian Wetland Burea
Bangladesh J. Zool = Bangladesh Journal of Zoology
Blackbuck = *Blackbuck* (Madras Naturalist Society)
Bird Conserv. Internatn. = Bird Conservation International
Bulletin B.O.C. / Bulletin BOC = Bulletin of British Ornithological Club
Bull. Bot. Surv. India = Bulletin of Botanical Survey of India
Conserv. Biol. = Conservation Biololgy
Indian J. For. = Indian Journal of Forestry
IWRB Spec. Pub = International Waterfowl & Wetland Research Burea
J. Applied Ecology = Journal of Applied Ecology
J. Bengal Nat. Hist. Soc. = Journal of Bengal Natural History Society
J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. = Journal of Bombay Natural History Society
J. Biosci. = Journal of Bioscience
J. Ecobiol. = Journal Of Ecobiology
J. Ecol. Soc. = Journal of Ecological Society
J. Ind. Bot. Soc. = Journal of Indian Botanical Society
J. Kerala Nat. Hist. Soc. = Journal of Kerala Natural History Society
J. Mar. Biol. Ass. India = Journal of Marine Biological Association of India
Resonance J. of Sci. education = Resonance Journal of Science & Education
J. Tropical Ecol. = Journal of Tropical Ecology
Jaipur: TWSI = Jaipur: Tourism & Wildlife Society of India
JASB = Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal
JPASB = Journal of Proceedings of the Asiatic Society Bengal
KFRI = Kerala Forest Research Institute
OBC Bulletin = Oriental Bird Club Bulletin
Pres. Soc. Golden Jubilee Souvenir = Preservation Society Golden Jubilee Souvenir
Proc. Indian Acad. Sci. = Proceedings of the Indian Academy of Sciences
Proc. Nat. Sem. Esturine Manag. = Proceedings of the National Seminar on Esturine Management

Proc. Zool. Soc. London = Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London

Rec. Ind. Mus. = Records of the Indian Museum

Rec. Zool. Surv. India = Records of the Zoological Survey of India

Soc. Appl. Ornith. = Society of Applied Ornithology

Zool. Surv. India = Zoological Survey of India

ANDHRA PRADESH

Andhra Pradesh (12° 40' - 19° 50' N and 76° 45' - 84° 40' E) is the fifth largest state in India, with a geographical area of 27.51 million ha, 8.37% of the total area of India. The state is surrounded by Tamil Nadu in the south, by Orissa on the northeast, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh on the north, eastern Maharashtra and Karnataka on the west and by the Bay of Bengal on the east. Andhra Pradesh has three distinct regions: the coastal region (Andhra), the interior region (Rayalaseema) and the Telengana region (Hyderabad).

Andhra Pradesh is situated in the tropical zone and has 16% of its area under forest. It has a coastline of about 972 km on its eastern side. The altitude varies from sea level along the coastal plains to about 1,500 m in the Eastern Ghats. The average altitude of the plains is about 500 m.

The Eastern Ghats are a rugged, hilly terrain running almost parallel to the eastern coast of India. The Eastern Ghats are divisible into three zones: the northern Eastern Ghats, the middle Eastern Ghats, and the southern Eastern Ghats. Of these three zones, the northern and middle portions lie in Andhra Pradesh. The Eastern Ghats are located between 11° 30' - 22° 00' N and 76° 50' - 86° 30' E in a N-E to S-W axis. The Ghats cover an area of about 75,000 sq. km with an average width of 200 km in the north and 100 km in the south. They extend over a length of 1,750 km between the rivers Mahanadi and Vaigainal. The elevation of the Eastern Ghats is from 750 m to 1,672 m. The Eastern Ghats run through Mallur in Warangal, Ukkumanidi in Khammam district, Maredumilli in East Godavari, Lankapakala in Visakhapatnam, Coringa in East Godavari, Peddacheruvu in Kurnool, Kuntlapalli in Anaparthi and Talakona in Chittoor (Jadhav and Reddy 2002).

Vegetation

According to the Forest Survey of India (1999), the forest cover in the State is 44,229 sq. km constituting 16.08% of the geographical area. Dense forest accounts for 24,190 sq. km; open forest 19,642 sq. km and mangrove 397 sq. km. Five major forest types occur in Andhra Pradesh: Tropical Dry Deciduous, Tropical Thorn, Tropical Moist Deciduous, Tropical Dry Evergreen and Littoral and Swamp Forests. The forest area, a long strip, begins in the north from the Nizamabad district in the west, to Srikakulam in the east. Besides this, a forest belt runs from the central to the southern part of the State in the Nallamalai hills.

In Andhra Pradesh there are 26 protected areas of which four are national parks and 22 are

wildlife sanctuaries, constituting 4.56% of the State (Rodgers *et al.* 2000).

AVIFAUNA

Andhra Pradesh has a long history of ornithological investigation, beginning with T. C. Jerdon in 1839-1840 when he worked on the birds of the Madras Presidency (now largely in Andhra Pradesh). After 30 years, Ball (1877) worked in Kondakarla and the surrounding areas of the Vishakapatnam district. Later, Whistler and Kinnear (1930-37) and Ali (1933-34) conducted scientific surveys of the Eastern Ghats and the erstwhile Hyderabad state, respectively. Abdulali (1945) surveyed the areas of Ananthagiri, Sankarmetta and Lamasinghi and collated a fairly comprehensive list of the 'Birds of Vizagapatam' with nearly 277 species. In 1953, Abdulali drew up an additional list. Several more studies were conducted in recent decades by Price (1978, 1979, 1990), Krishna Raju and Justus (1971), Krishna Raju and Price (1973), Grubh (1976) in Sriharikota (Nellore district), Krishna Raju (1985), Hussain (1989,1991), Ripley *et al.* (1987-88), and Majumdar (1984) in Adilabad district.

Some significant studies were carried out on the Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* (Rahmani 1989), and the Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica* (Sankaran and Manakadan 1990) in Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary. The rediscovery of the Jerdon's Courser *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus*, near Reddipalli village in Cuddapah district in 1986 (Bhushan 1986) led to the notification of the Sri Lankamalleswara Sanctuary in Cuddapah district. During recent years, detailed studies were carried out on the threatened Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* in Pulicat Lake and Nelapattu of Nellore district (Manakadan and Kannan 2003) and the Critically Endangered Jerdon's Courser (Jeganathan *et al.* 2002, Jeganathan *et al.* 2004) in Sri Lankamalleswara Wildlife Sanctuary. Andhra Pradesh has a large number of heronries, perhaps as many as 60, of which 41 are active. The Telikunchi heronry in the Srikakulam district is the largest in India (Subramanya 1996a), and as many as 25,000 Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans* breed here (Subramanya 1996b). According to the IBA criteria, 16 sites were identified as Important Bird Areas (Islam & Rahmani 2004).

The Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh and its members have made a considerable contribution to the ornithology of Andhra Pradesh through various field trips, especially in and around Hyderabad and also in the surrounding districts of Medak, Ranga Reddy, Warangal, Nizamabad, Nalgonda and Mahboobnagar. A *checklist of Birds of Andhra Pradesh*, compiled by Taher and Pittie (1989, 1996) includes nearly 500 species and the races found in Andhra Pradesh.

The information given above is obtained from "Important Bird Areas in India: Priority sites for Conservation" (Islam and Rahmani 2004).

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KARNATAKA

Karnataka (11° 30' - 18° 25' N and 74° 10' - 78° 35' E) has a geographical area of 19.18 million ha, constituting 5.83% of the total area of the country. It is the eighth largest state in the country. The name Karnataka is derived from Karunadu, which means lofty land. The physiography of the State, most of which is plateau, justifies the name. The State can be divided into two regions, the 'Maland' or hilly region comprising mainly the Western Ghats, and the 'Maidan' or the plain region comprising the inland plateau of varying heights. The major rivers of the State are Cauvery, Tungbhadra, Krishna, Sharavati and Kalinadi. All these rivers flow eastward and meet the Bay of Bengal.

Vegetation

Karnataka has five major forest types: Tropical Wet Evergreen, Tropical Semi-evergreen, Tropical Moist Deciduous, Tropical Dry Deciduous, and Tropical Thorn Forest. Most of the forest in Karnataka is situated in a belt running from north to south starting from Belgaum and ending in Mysore (Forest Survey of India report of 1999). The State ranks fourth among all the States and Union Territories in respect of area under tree cover (Ministry of Environment and Forests 2001). A large number of hills and hill ranges dot the inland plateau area. According to the Forest Survey of India report of 2001, the recorded forest area is 38,72,400 ha which constitutes 20.2% of the geographical area of the State. Reserved forest constitutes 28,61,100 ha (73.8%), protected forest 3,93,200 ha (10.2%), and unclassed forest 6,18,100 ha (16%). There are five national parks and 20 wildlife sanctuaries in Karnataka, constituting about 2.05% area of the State under protected system (Rodgers *et al.* 2000). The national parks cover 2,47,218 ha while sanctuaries cover about 3,93,061 ha. Rodgers *et al.* (2000) have suggested addition of two national parks and seven wildlife sanctuaries.

Avifauna

Some significant work has been carried out on the Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* in Kokkare Bellur pelicanry (Neginhal 1976, 1977; Sridhar 1992; Johnson *et al.* 1993; Talukdar 1999); Nelligudda tank (George 1994). This species is under threat due to disturbance, persecution, and degradation of wetlands by pollution, entanglement in fishing equipment and decline in food supplies (Crivelli and Schreiber 1984). More than 500 species of birds have been recorded here (Singh & Ahmed 2001).

Work has been carried out on the Yellow-throated Bulbul *Pycnonotus xantholaemus*. This bulbul inhabits sparse thorn scrub, interspersed with some large trees among stony hillocks

(Ali and Whistler 1942-1943). It is endemic to southern peninsular India, where it is patchily distributed (Subramanya *et al.* 1995). It is considered Vulnerable (BirdLife International 2001) because of its fragmented population and the degradation of scrub and forest habitats. From Karnataka the species has been recorded from Nandi Hills (Subramanya *et al.* 1991); Kanganahalli betta, Kendatti State Forest (S. Subramanya, *pers. comm.* in 2003); Adichunchunagiri (Prasad *et al.* 1991); Ragihalli State Forest (S. Subramanya, *pers. comm.* 2003) and Biligirirangan hill (Karthikeyan *et al.* 1995).

Along with these two birds, the Nilgiri Wood-Pigeon *Columba elphinstonii* is also reported in Karnataka. This bird has been recorded from Castle Rock, Anshi National Park (Uttangi 1994); Nandi Hills (Subramanya *et al.* 1994); Bannerghatta National Park (George 1994) and Bandipur National Park. A relict population has been found at Nandi Hills, which is well separated from the rest of the known distributional range of the species. According to the IBA criteria, 37 sites were identified as Important Bird Areas (Islam & Rahmani 2004).

The information given above is obtained from “Important Bird Areas in India: Priority sites for Conservation” (Islam and Rahmani 2004).

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KERALA

Kerala (8° 17' - 12° 47' North and 74° 52' - 77° 24' East) is one of the smaller states of India. With an area of 38,86,300 ha, Kerala constitutes about 1.18% of the land area of India. The State is divided into 14 administrative districts. The Union Territory of Lakshadweep is situated in the Arabian Sea off the coast of north Kerala. Tamil Nadu forms a border on the south and partly on the east, and Karnataka is located on the north and northeast. Its greatest length north to south is about 545 km and its greatest width is about 120 km, though most parts are considerably less wide (Ali 1999).

Kerala can be physiographically subdivided into Lowlands (< 75 m above msl), Midlands (75-500 m above msl), Highlands (500-780 m above msl) and High ranges (> 750 m above msl) (Iype *et al.* 1991). The Lowlands comprise the long and narrow coastal belt on the west with stretches of sand and backwaters. Extensive paddy fields and numerous coconut plantations dominate the landscape in this area.

In between the highland and lowland is the midland, which is undulating country covered by laterite soil cut across by rivers with isolated hills and plains leading to the forest-clad highlands. Paddy is the common crop in the valleys, while tapioca is cultivated on the slopes and highlands. The Western Ghats that bound Kerala on its eastern side, constitute dominant highland. While thick forests cover the upper ranges in this mountain area, the lower ranges have plantations, which are interspersed with forests. Crops such as tea, coffee, cardamom and turmeric abound in the higher elevations whereas in the sub-mountainous tracts and below the Ghats, pepper, rubber and ginger are grown. The continuous mountain is broken only by the Palghat Gap, a transverse valley about 25 km wide which cuts across it, sharply dividing Wynaad and the Nilgiris from the Nelliampathi Hills of Thrissur district to their south (Ali 1999). The Wynaad tableland, 95 km by 50 km, at an average elevation of 900 m, is interesting for its avifauna and other biodiversity.

The rivers of Kerala provide the State with an abundance of water resources. Fortyfour rivers flow through Kerala. The bigger rivers are Bharatapuzha, Periyar, Pampa and Chaliyar which exceed 160 km in length, while all the others are relatively small with an average length of about 64 km (Sreedhara Menon 1997). The state has an extensive range of physical features that result in a corresponding diversity of climatic features. The high ranges of Kerala have a cool and bracing climate while the plains are hot and humid. The temperature ranges from 19.8 °C to 36.7 °C. Owing to the mountainous nature of the State, it receives heavy rainfall. However, there are some rain shadow areas that receive less than 1,000 mm

rainfall. The most important of the rain shadow area is the Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary where the rainfall is about 500 mm. However, in most of the other areas, the average annual rainfall varies between 1,520 to 4,075 mm, the heaviest rainfall being received in June.

The State is the major producer of food crops like grains, cereals and pulses. The principal plantation crops are rubber, tea, coffee and cardamom. The total population is 31.84 million, of which 74% is rural. The population density is 749 persons per sq. km, one of the most densely populated states of India (Forests Survey of India, 2001). The forests of Kerala are home to some of the endemic and endangered species of India. For example, Agasthyamalai harbours 150 endemic taxa of flowering plants. The hills of Munnar are said to be the richest in the world, with more than 30 species of balsams within 16 sq. km (Pillay 1929, Barnes 1939). Hora and Nair (1941) and Hora and Law (1941) have documented the fish fauna of the State. About 150 species of freshwater fish have been reported from the Western Ghats of Kerala as well from other parts of the State. According to Menon (1987) there are about 40 species of Indian freshwater fish, which are either seriously threatened or rare, and deserve immediate protection. A blind catfish, discovered in Kottayam (Menon 1950) is known only from Kerala. Ten endemic fish species have been reported from the State including *Puntius denisonii*, *Osteobrama bakeri*, *Garra surendranathanii*, *Osteochilus longidorsalis*, *Chela fasciata*, *Travancoria jonesi*, *Nemacheilus keralensis*, *Horabagrus brachysoma*, *Batario travancoria*, and *Tetradon travancoricus*; about 28 species of Endangered fish, and seven species of Critically Endangered fish *Pisoclonopliius boro*, *Tor tor*, *Travancoria jonesi*, *Horabiosia joshuai*, *Nemacheilus monilis*, *Balitora mysorensis*, and *Chela fasciata* have been reported (Biju *et al.* 2000).

Vegetation

The major forest types observed in Kerala are Tropical Evergreen, Tropical Semi-evergreen, Tropical Moist Deciduous, Dry Deciduous, Montane *Sholas*, Savannas, Grasslands and Lowland Scrub jungles. The outstanding feature of the Western Ghats of Kerala is the development of Tropical Rain Forest towards the south between 500-1500 m (Subramanyam and Nayar 1974, Chandrasekaran 1962). The flora and fauna of the Western Ghats in general have been discussed by several authors like Blasco (1970); Krishnan (1974); Mani (1974); Subramanyam and Nayar (1974); Nayar (1977; 1980a; 1980b); Ahmedullah and Nayar (1987); Rao (1978); Pascal (1988); Nair and Daniel (1986); Nair (1991). Ali (1969) has broadly divided the forest of Kerala into four classes, as follows: (i) Heavy Moist Evergreen, confined to the Ghats (chiefly the western slopes) and ravines, and perhaps to one-third of the upper hill plateau, (ii) Land originally covered with Evergreen Forest, but now overgrown

by secondary scrub jungles of various ages, (iii) Deciduous Forest with tall coarse grass growing under the trees which cover the ridges and higher ground and a part of the hill plateau, (iv) Rock and stony land covered with short grass (*shola* grasslands).

AVIFAUNA

About 475 species of birds have been recorded in the State, of which 149 species are found in the coastal areas and the remaining in the midlands and highlands (Neelakantan *et al.* 1993). These constitute about 25% of Indian avifauna. K. V. Eldose and Thomas Zacharias (unpublished) have listed 463 species, some not noted by Neelakantan *et al.* (1993) or Ali (1999). Kerala has a long history of ornithological surveys. Based on the birds collected by Fulton and Frank Bourdillon, A. O. Hume wrote two papers in *Stray Feathers* (Hume 1876, 1878). At almost the same time, H. S. Ferguson, another tea planter, collected birds and wrote a series of papers in *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* (Ferguson and Bourdillon 1903, 1904). An exhaustive investigation of the forest birds of Travancore was conducted by Ali and Whistler (1935-1937) while Ali (1969) documented the avifauna of the State. Since then several workers have made further observations in different parts of the protected areas of the State (eg. Vijayan and Balakrishnan 1977, Vijayan 1978, Zacharias and Gaston 1993, Srivasthava *et al.* 1993). Among the Critically Endangered species, the Oriental White-backed Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* is present in the State. BirdLife International (2001) has listed 10 Endangered species, of which, the Nilgiri Laughingthrush *Garrulax cachinnans* has definitely been recorded in two IBAs. The Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*, Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* and Yellow-throated Bulbul *Pycnonotus xantholaemus* are occasionally seen. In Kerala, 13 out of 57 Vulnerable species listed for India by BirdLife International (2001) are found. Ten of these 13 are found in the IBAs, while three are stray records (Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*, Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea* and Green Munia *Amandava formosa*: listed by Eldose and Zacharias, unpublished). The Green Munia could be an escape from pet trade. BirdLife International (2001) has listed 52 Near Threatened bird species for India, 15 of them occur in Kerala. In the biome classification done by BirdLife International (undated), Kerala lies in Biome-10 (Indian Peninsula Tropical Moist Forest), where 15 species are considered as representative of this biome. All of them are found in Kerala. Like in any other state, birds of other biomes, such as Biome-5 (Eurasian High Montane-Alpine and Tibetan), Biome-7 (Sino-Himalayan Temperate Forest), Biome-8 (Sino-Himalayan Subtropical Forest) and Biome-11 (Indo-Malayan Tropical Dry Zone) are also found, mostly as migratory birds. In the case of Biome-11, BirdLife International (undated) has listed 59 species, out of which 48 are found in Kerala. However, most of the birds of this biome are common and widespread, so their occurrence in Kerala is not surprising. According to the IBA criteria, 24 sites were

identified as Important Bird Areas (Islam & Rahmani 2004).

The information given above is obtained from “Important Bird Areas in India: Priority sites for Conservation” (Islam and Rahmani 2004).

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TAMIL NADU

Tamil Nadu (8° 04' - 13° 34' North and 76° 14' - 80° 21' East) is situated on the southeastern side of the Indian peninsula. It has a geographical area of 1,30,058 sq. km which constitutes about 4% of the land area of the country. The State is divided into 30 administrative districts. Tamil Nadu can be divided into three physiographic regions namely, the eastern coastal region, the western hilly region and the plains. The northern and western parts of the state are mainly hilly areas of the Western Ghats with an average elevation of 1,220 m and going up to 2,440 m, which is the highest point. The major rivers flowing through the State are the Palar, Cheyyar, Ponnaiyar, Cauvery, Moyar, Bhavani, Amaravati, Vaigai, Chittar, and Tamaraparni. The Cauvery is the eighth largest river of the Indian subcontinent and is 760 km long. There are about 37 small rivers and rivulets in the State (Sadasivan *et al.* 2000). Tamil Nadu is an agricultural state with good fertile land. It is a major producer of rice, sugarcane, cotton, tea and coffee. The total population is 62.11 million (6% of the country's population) of which 56.14% is rural. The human population density is 478 per sq. km (Ministry of Environment and Forests 1999). Tamil Nadu has many important protected areas such as Anamalai, Kalakadu-Mundanthurai, Mudumalai, Point Calimere and Vedanthangal. The temperature ranges from as low as 0 °C in the higher reaches of the Western Ghats to as high as 42 °C in the hot plains. There are three seasons: pre-monsoon (July-September), monsoon (October-December) and post-monsoon (January-June).

Most parts of Tamil Nadu fall in the Indo-Malayan Tropical Dry Zone (Biome-11) and some parts in the Indian Peninsula Tropical Moist Forest (Biome-10). The Western Ghats and the Southern Eastern Ghats form the major forested areas of the State. In the Western Ghats, the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR) was the first to be set up in India under the Indian National Man and Biosphere Programme in 1986. The NBR includes forested areas of Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, and forms a total area of 5,520 sq. km. The area is divided into a core zone (1,240 sq. km) and a buffer zone (4,280 sq. km) (Ministry of Environment and Forests 1989). The core zone is distributed in Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The total area of the NBR in Tamil Nadu forms 2,537 sq. km, with a core area of 274 sq. km (Ministry of Environment and Forests 1989).

The NBR is biogeographically a part of the Indo-Malayan Realm and representative of the topographic and climatic complexity of the Western Ghats, a biodiversity 'hot-spot' in India. The NBR is also representative of some of the oldest hills in India which arose somewhere around 40 million years ago. As a result of this topographic complexity, the

NBR encompasses a wide range of rainfall zones. The annual rainfall ranges between 500-7,000 mm. The wet season is June to September. April and May are the hottest months. The temperature falls to 0 °C during December-January in the higher hills of the Nilgiris. The varied climate pattern, coupled with a complex and wide variety of vegetation types, namely scrubs in the eastern plains, dry and moist deciduous forests in Mudumalai, montane forest (*Shola*) and grassland on the Nilgiri Plateau have given rise to rich biodiversity. About 156 species of vertebrates are endemic to the NBR (Daniels 1992). It supports all the 16 species of Western Ghats endemic birds, of which one is Endangered, four are Vulnerable and five are Near Threatened (BirdLife International 2001). Of the 427 Indian plants listed under various descriptions, e.g. extinct, possibly extinct, endangered, vulnerable or rare, as many as 123 species occur or are known to have occurred in Tamil Nadu. It is also relevant that of the 123 species relating to Tamil Nadu, as many as 62 species are endemic to Tamil Nadu. The Eastern and Western Ghats meet along the Moyar Gorge with the Biligirirangan Hills along the northeast and the Nilgiris on the southwest. This results in a series of forest gaps in the Ghats, which are actually valleys that break the continuity of the mountain ranges, such as the Palghat Gap, the Moyar Gap or Gorge and the Chenkotta Gap. These gaps have prevented the spread of certain species and hence facilitated local speciation and endemism.

Tamil Nadu has a total of 25 protected areas, of which five are national parks and 20 are wildlife sanctuaries. The total protected area spreads over 0.29 million ha, which constitutes 2.24% of the geographical area (Rodgers *et al.* 2000). The Ramsar Convention has designated 19 wetlands of International Importance in India. Point Calimere Wildlife and Bird Sanctuary is one among them, designated in November 2002 (Ministry of Environment and Forests 2002).

Vegetation

The principal forest types in Tamil Nadu are the Tropical Rain Forests, Dry Deciduous Forests, Dry Thorn Forests, Montane *Shola*, Grassland and Mangroves. According to the 2001 report of the Forest Survey of India, the forest area is 2.26 million ha which constitutes 17.40% of the land area of the State. The flora and fauna of the Western Ghats in particular are of great interest from the scientific point of view because they illustrate the phenomenon of discontinuous parallel distribution. Out of about 35,000 species of flowering plants in the whole of India, about 3,000 species are found in Tamil Nadu. The flora of the Nilgiris show a relationship with that of the Eastern Himalaya, and the forest in this region is evergreen composed of tropical and subtropical vegetation (Lakshminarayana *et al.* 2002). Of 2100 species of flowering plants endemic to peninsular India, 818 are found in the

Nilgiris and adjoining areas (Mohanan and Balakrishnan 1991). Tamil Nadu has a long coastline of about 999 km (Ramakrishna and Venkataraman 2001), comprising of 574 km sandy coast, 31 km rocky coast, and 394 km muddy coast. This is mostly on the east coast and constitutes 18.9% of the coastline of India. Apart from the extensive fishery - inshore and offshore regions of Tamil Nadu the coastal habitat is of great importance for its many special features, particularly the estuaries and wetlands with their complex and dynamic ecosystems. The following major estuaries are found in the State: Edayar, Ennore, Cooum, Adayar, Uppanar, Vellar, Kollidam, Cauvery (= Kavery), Agniyar and Kallar. Tamil Nadu has only a very small representation of mangroves, a mere 2,640 ha (0.46% of the total mangrove area in India). The main mangrove formations in the State are at Pichavaram at the northern extremity of the Cauvery delta in the Cuddalore district, in the areas of Chatram, Adhirampattinam, Point Calimere and Muthupet of Nagapatinam district, and in the Thanjavur (Tanjore) district. These are considered ecologically sensitive areas of the east coast of Tamil Nadu.

The Gulf of Mannar Marine Biosphere Reserve in Tamil Nadu is the first marine biosphere of its kind to be established in India on the east coast, during 1989. The seabed has a rich vegetation of seaweed and sea grasses, and also small patches of mangrove vegetation. The Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park harbours a good population of the endangered marine mammal *Dugong dugon*.

AVIFAUNA

An annotated checklist of the birds of Tamil Nadu is not available, but more than 450 species are likely to occur. Among the Critically Endangered species, the Oriental White-backed Vulture *Gyps bengalensis*, and the Long-billed Vulture *Gyps indicus* are present in the State. BirdLife International (2001) has listed 10 Endangered species. The Lesser Adjutant-Stork *Leptoptilos javanicus*, Wood Snipe *Gallinago nemoricola* and the Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* are occasionally seen. Fifteen out of 57 Vulnerable species listed for India by BirdLife International (2001) are found in Tamil Nadu. The Western Ghats region occurring in Tamil Nadu contains high diversity and a great number of endemic rainforest plants and animal taxa (Nair and Daniel 1986, Vasudevan *et al.* 2001). Some of the key species of this region are the Nilgiri Wood-Pigeon *Columba elphinstoni*, Blue-winged Parakeet *Psittacula columboides*, Malabar Grey Hornbill *Ocyeros griseus*, Nilgiri Pipit *Anthus nilghiriensis*, Grey-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus priocephalus*, Black-and-Orange Flycatcher *Ficedula nigrorufa*, Broad-tailed Grass-Warbler or Grassbird *Schoenicola platyura*, Small Sunbird *Nectarinia minima*, Grey-breasted Laughingthrush *Garrulax jerdoni*, Nilgiri Flycatcher *Eumyias albicaudata*, Indian Rufous Babbler *Turdoides subrufus*,

Nilgiri Laughingthrush *Garrulax cachinnans*, White-bellied Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis pallipes*, White-bellied Shortwing *Brachypteryx major*, White-bellied Treepie *Dendrocitta leucogastra*, and Wynaad Laughingthrush *Garrulax delesserti*. In this group, four threatened species are mainly confined to Tamil Nadu, as well as the Western Ghats (Stattersfield *et al.* 1998). Besides the endemic species, the Vulnerable Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* is found in the State in significant numbers (Manakadan and Kannan 2003). BirdLife International (2001) has listed 52 Near Threatened bird species of India of which 15 occur in Tamil Nadu. Earlier, Nagulu and Rao (1983) and recently Manakadan and Kannan (2003), have shown that the wetlands of Tamil Nadu are the major strongholds of the Spot-billed Pelican. According to the IBA criteria, 37 sites were identified as Important Bird Areas (Islam & Rahmani 2004).

The information given above is obtained from “Important Bird Areas in India: Priority sites for Conservation” (Islam and Rahmani 2004).

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INDEX

States

Andhra Pradesh - 4 -39
Karnataka - 40 -74
Kerala - 75 - 110
Tamil Nadu - 111 - 161

Bird Groups

Grebes - 10, 44, 116
Petrels and Shearwater - 116
Tropicbirds - 82, 116
Pelicans - 10, 44, 82, 116
Boobies - 44, 82
Cormorants/Shags - 44, 82, 117
Darters - 82
Frigatebirds - 82, 117
Hérons, egrets and Bittern - 11, 44, 83, 117
Storks -12, 45, 83, 118
Ibises & Spoonbills - 45, 84, 119
Flamingos - 13, 46, 119
Swans, Geese and Ducks - 13, 46, 84, 119
Hawks, Eagles, Buzzards, Vultures, Kites and Harriers - 14, 47, 85, 120
Osprey -122
Falcons - 16, 48, 85, 122
Pheasants, Partridge and Quails - 16, 49, 86, 122
Cranes - 16, 49, 123
Rails, Crakes, Moorhens and Coots - 17, 49, 86, 123
Bustards - 17, 50, 87, 123
Jacanas - 18, 87, 123
Painted-Snipes - 87, 124
Plovers, Dotterels and Lapwings - 18, 50, 87, 124
Sandpipers, Stint, Snipes, Godwits and Curlews - 19, 51, 87, 125
Ibisbill, Avocets and Stilts - 88
Phalaropes - 52
Crab-Plovers- 88
Stone-Curlew and Stone-Plovers/Thick-knees - 88
Coursers and Pratincoles - 19, 52, 88, 127

Skuas and Jaegers - 52, 127
Gulls, Terns and Noddies - 21, 52, 88, 127
Sandgrouse - 53
Pigeons and Doves - 21, 53, 89, 128
Parakeets and hanging Parrots - 21, 53, 90, 128
Cuckoos, Malkohas and Coucals - 22, 53, 90, 129
Barn Owls - 90, 130
Owls - 22, 90, 131
Frogmouths - 54, 91, 132
Nightjars - 22, 91
Swifts - 54, 132
Kingfishers - 22, 54, 91, 133
Bee-eaters - 23, 54, 92, 133
Rollers - 23, 55, 92, 133
Hornbills - 23, 55, 92, 134
Barbets - 23, 55, 92, 134
Woodpeckers - 23, 55, 93, 134
Pittas - 135
Larks - 24, 56, 135
Swallows and Martins - 24, 94, 136
Wagtails and Pipits - 24, 56, 94, 136
Cuckoo-Shrikes, Flycatcher-Shrikes, Trillers, Minivets, Woodshrikes - 56, 95, 136
Bulbuls and Finchbills - 24, 56, 95, 137
Ioras, Chloropsis/Leafbird, Fairy-Bluebird - 57
Shrikes - 24, 57, 95, 138
Thrushes, Shortwings, Robins, Forktails and Wheatears - 25, 58, 95, 138
Babblers, Laughingthrushes, Babaxes, Barwings, Yuhinas - 58, 96, 139
Goldcrest, Prinias, Tesias and Warblers - 25, 58, 97, 140
Flycatchers - 25, 59, 98, 141
Paradise-flycatcher/Monarch Flycatcher - 141
Fantail-Flycatchers - 59, 141
Tits - 59
Flowerpeckers - 26, 60, 98, 142
Sunbirds and Spiderhunters - 26, 60, 99, 142
White-eyes - 27, 142
Buntings - 60

Finches - 60
Munias - 27, 60, 99
Sparrows and Snowfinches -27
Weavers - 28, 61, 99, 142
Starlings and Mynas - 28, 61, 99, 143
Orioles - 29, 100
Drongos - 29, 100, 143
Woodswallows/ Swallow-Shrikes - 143
Crows, Jays, Treepies and Magpies - 29, 61, 100, 143

Others

Eastern Ghats - 30
Checklists- 31, 62, 101, 144
Survey - 33, 62, 101, 144
Wetlands - 33, 63, 101, 145
Protected Areas - 34, 65, 102, 147
Region - 35, 68, 104, 151
Agriculture - 37, 66, 110, 150
Miscellaneous - 37, 71, 108, 159
Conservation - 39, 67, 110, 151

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