

Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis* feeding on chir pine *Pinus roxburghii* needles

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As part of a wildlife assessment program in the western Himalaya, we undertook a status survey of birds along the Bhagirathi River valley in Uttaranchal during October–November 2005. On 28.xi.2005, we saw a Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis* feeding on needles of chir pine *Pinus roxburghii* at about 08:55 hrs, along one of our monitoring trails between Dhauldhar and Badni villages, the former being situated around 15 km from Deoprayag town. The altitude of the trail ranged between 1038–1088 m. The vegetation was mainly chir pine mixed with scrub, with species like *Cordia myxa*, *Lantana camara*, and *Carrisa* sp. On that particular morning, we saw a vulture perched on top of a chir pine at about 10–12 m from us on the trek. As the day was clear with no mist in the air and the morning sun was behind us, we had a clear view of the vulture. The bird was quite large with a greyish head and cream-coloured ruff; its bill was noticeably yellowish and there were striking whitish streaks on the under parts.

We confirmed the identity of the vulture as a Himalayan Griffon from Grimmett et al. (1998). Even as the bird was basking, it plucked a few chir pine needles and started feeding on the more tender needles. This lasted for about five minutes. Since vultures are known to feed mainly on carrion, we wonder if this unusual behavior of feeding on vegetative matter helps the bird in procuring nutrient supplement and / or roughage to aid in digestion, as practised by mammalian carnivores.

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Reference

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Grey-headed Lapwings *Vanellus cinereus* extend range into coastal Tamil Nadu, India

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In recent years, sightings of Grey-headed lapwing *Vanellus cinereus*, have become frequent in coastal Tamil Nadu. We summarise all the recent sightings below:

Pallikaranai (South-east of Chennai)

In early 2003, c17 birds were observed here (A. Rajaram, verbally).

11.xii.2003: Four birds in mixed group with other waders (Ramachandran 2004).

26.xii.2003: 30+ birds seen (Ramachandran 2004).

26.i.2004: 28 birds seen. (V. Santharam, pers. obs.)

In January 2004, 35–40 birds were seen on three occasions (K. V. Sudhakar & K. Sathasivam, verbally).

19.xii.2004: 80 birds seen (Rajaram 2005).

24.i.2005: 80 birds seen (V. Santharam, pers. obs.).

Pallikaranai is a marshy area with open grassy patches and reed beds. The birds were seen in open grassy meadows.

The earliest sightings in the vicinity of Chennai date back to 1987 at Adyar Estuary (Santharam 2003b). Twelve birds were seen around Machlipatnam, Krishna district, Andhra Pradesh in February 2001 and a few more birds were sighted on later dates up to April 2001. (Conroy 2003).

Kaliveli

Sundar (2000) reported a single bird from Kaliveli in January 1997. The species was filmed here in 2003 during the preparation of a documentary film on Kaliveli by FERAL (V. Srinivas, verbally).