Jerdon’s Baza *Aviceda jerdoni* is considered one of the least studied raptors in India. Its distribution is discontinuous and locally it is uncommon-to-rare (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001). Of the two races found in India, the nominate, *Aviceda j. jerdoni*, is present in Sikkim, Assam, northern West Bengal and the north-eastern hill states. The southern, *Aviceda j. ceylonensis*, is found south of c12ºN, in the Western Ghats of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, and the Eastern Ghats of Andhra Pradesh (Ali & Ripley 1983; Grimmett et al. 1985).

Nair (see elsewhere in this issue) reports the bird from Similipal, at the northern tip of the Eastern Ghats range) in Orissa, which is almost midway between north-eastern India and the Western Ghats, indicating a likely intergradation of races in the Eastern Ghats (Praveen J., in litt.). Ripley et al. (1988) collected a specimen of a non-breeding female A. j. jerdoni, south of Similipal in the Visakhapatnam Ghats. In Orissa it has been sighted at Kurichyat range of Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary and Eravikulam National Park (Sashikumar in litt.). There are also random sightings from Silent Valley, Peechi, Nelliampathy, Parambikulam, Eravikulam and Periyar (Praveen J., in litt.).

Ali (1969) reports of an 1890 record of *Aviceda jerdoni* from Vaduvanchal in Wayanad district, Kerala, indicating the potential for breeding in this region. “There is also a juvenile specimen documented by Baker (1935). There is no report since, of breeding in this region. “There is also a juvenile specimen from the Wayanad in the British Museum” (Baker & Inglis 1930).

This note documents the first breeding record, in over a century, of Jerdon’s Baza *Aviceda jerdoni* from Vaduvanchal in Wayanad district, Kerala (India), during two breeding seasons, 2006 and 2007.

**Methods**

Breeding behavior was observed for eight days in 2006, between 15.v–20.vi and again for a total of 20 days between 1.iii.2007 and 5.v.2007. Most observations were carried out between 09:30hr–17:00hr, from a 15m tall hide placed c.50cm from top of the tree. Ripley, S. D., Beehler, B. M. & Raju, K. S. R. K. 1988. Birds of the Visakhapatnam Ghats. J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. 84 (3): 540–559. (1987).


Location

The Wayanad district region of Kerala is characterized by undulating hills and valleys, in the foothills of Chembra Peak (2,100m), the highest geographical point in the region. Isolated human habitations and plantations of tea, coffee, arecanut, etc., surrounded the nesting location. These areas originally comprised semi-evergreen forest, but during the 1960s they were cleared for planting various cash crops like coffee, pepper, tea, etc.

A nest was first observed on 6.vi.2006, in an isolated tea garden on a hilltop, 1,000m a.s.l., at Vanduvanchal (Wayanad district, Kerala), supporting Ali & Ripley’s (1998) observations. The nest was built among the top branches in the dense canopy of a previously pruned rubber tree, using twigs and leaves. The tree had a diameter, at breast-height, of 68cm. The cup-shaped nest was 13m above the ground and c.50cm from top of the tree. The birds were never worried about the presence of human beings (plantation workers) under the nest tree and in its vicinity.

**Breeding**

**2006 season:** On 7.vi.2006 there were two nestlings in the nest. They sported a white-tipped black crest and white underparts with chestnut buff. Bars on the tail were much narrower than those of the parents. Their heads had noticeable black streaks and the bills were slaty black.

Both parents were seen feeding the nestlings, at intervals of c.30min. A major portion of their diet comprised lizards. 12 lizards and three frogs were fed on 8.vi.2006 between 10:00hrs–16:30hrs. Other prey included large beetles and a

**Notes on the breeding of Jerdon’s Baza**

*Aviceda jerdoni* in Wayanad district, Kerala

*C. K. Vishnudas*


*Mss received on 11.viii.2006.*
Indian Birds
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Out of 323 prey deliveries in two nests, 33% comprised amphibians, 24% lizards, 19% grasshoppers, 7.7% beetles, 3% preying mantis and 11.5% remained unidentified. One small bird and two rodents (rats?) were also included. The amphibians were mainly Malabar flying frogs.

**Nestlings**

Nestlings are scaly in appearance (Fig. 2), with white eyes and nine broad white-tipped black crest feathers (29th day after hatching) in ascending order from back to front (Fig. 3). Head is streaked with black. Bill is bluish-black. Upper parts are brown with white buff edged. Throat streaked and white, abdomen and belly white, legs pale rufus-white and tail feathers white tipped brown, primaries and secondaries brown.

**Vocalisation**

The call of the bird is a “long drawn mournful queer…” somewhat resembling the cry of the Crested Serpent-Eagle (Ali & Ripley 1998). The first three notes “to-wheeeh” resemble the call of Crested Serpent-Eagle. Other than this the adults made a call “Kit-Kit-Kit” or “Kip-kip-kip”. The chicks make loud “kili-kili-kili” calls when the parents are approaching. This was audible up to 30m–45m from the nest.

**Survival…**

In the last week of June 2006, the family of bazas successfully survived torrential monsoon rain (1,000 mm) and strong winds. The chicks struggled valiantly to remain in their small, perilously swaying nest. Whenever they were without the adults, the chicks stretched out their wings and stabilized themselves from the winds, moving to the part of the nest closest to a strong branch. In 2007, the family faced a similar situation but miraculously survived a strong wind on 25.v.2007—when the previous years’ nest tree and three other rubber trees near it snapped in the middle. One adult used to roost in this previous years’ nest tree before this happened.

**…and tragedy**

During the current (2007) breeding season, a Crested Serpent-Eagle was often seen gliding above the rubber tree canopies. The adult bazas invariably kept it at bay by aggressively chasing it away from the nest. But the situation changed when one of the nestlings flew away from the nest on 30.v.2007. The parents concentrated their attention on this fledgling—feeding it thrice between 11.00–12.00hrs, in comparison to one visit to the nest. On 1.vi.2007, the second nestling also flew out of nest. This indicates a fledging period of 27–29 days vis-à-vis 45 days recorded by Sivakumar & Prakash (2005).

While the parents were busy attending the two fledglings, a Crested Serpent-Eagle predated the smallest chick from the nest on 1.vi.2007. After fledging, the young ones and the adults remained in the tea garden for nearly one week.

I have observed a Scarlet Minivet Pericrocotus flammeus attacking the adult baza when it sat on a rubber tree, near its nest. On the same hillside, 20m below the nest tree, was a Shikra’s Accipiter badius nest. There was no aggressive behaviour between these two species of raptors, during their nesting.

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