Birds of the Sirumalai Hills

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Introduction

The Sirumalai Hills, or Sirumalais, are a range of hills in southern India. They are outliers of the Western Ghats, one of the biodiversity hotspots of the world. The point on these hills closest to the Western Ghats is just 15 km or so to the east of the Palni Hills. The Palnis run west to east, perpendicular to the Western Ghats proper. The Sirumalais and the Palnis both arise from the plains of Tamil Nadu. According to Foote (1883), the Sirumalai Hills (along with a few other hills near them) ‘may be regarded geologically as an extension of the gneissic beds forming the Palani mountains.’ The Sirumalais extend over an area that is c. 20 km long and 13 km wide, located in Dindigul district of Tamil Nadu, southern India. They are located to the north of Madurai and extend east from the vicinity of Dindigul. The Sirumalais are centered roughly at 10°13’N, 78°15’E (Fig. 1). The highest peaks in the Sirumalais rise to nearly 1400 m. However, most of the Sirumalais are of comparatively lower altitude. A plateau c. 1000 m high is a significant feature of the hills, and the slopes are fairly steep. The Sirumalais are one of the largest and highest hill ranges independent of the Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu. There are a few bird specimens from the Sirumalais at the Government Museum in Chennai, with no details such as their collection date or location. E. G. Nichols mentions, in passing, some birds seen here in his series of three articles (Nichols 1944a,b, 1945). Except for these records, we were not able to find any material on the birds of the Sirumalais. This lack of ornithological work in the Sirumalais motivated us to carry out a survey.

Through our survey we wished to draw up a checklist of birds of the Sirumalais and look at how the avifauna was distributed. We also wanted to compare the birdlife of this region with that of the adjacent Palni Hills (Sathasivam 2006).

Just when we began our survey, an article dealing with the avifauna of the Sirumalai Hills was published in Indian Birds (Swami 2006). And subsequently, we came across two other articles on the birds of the Sirumalais (Bundell 2010; Kumar 2007). Except for what may be gleaned from the four sources we have cited, no information is available about the bird life of the Sirumalai Hills.

History of study site

Historically, the Sirumalais have been noted for their great fertility. The great variety of fruits produced in abundance in these hills is said to be mentioned in the earliest Tamil poems (Francis 1906). But in the 19th century, the climate was known to be ‘very malarious’ (Francis 1906). This stood in the way of attempts to settle on these hills. A fever swept through the area in 1809–1810, causing such havoc that at one point only 89 people were left on the Sirumalais. American missionaries based in Madurai built two bungalows in the Sirumalais with the intention of establishing a sanatorium there, but they abandoned the idea in 1845.

In the early years of the 19th century, timber trees of great size and height grew upon the Sirumalai Hills. But these were ‘recklessly denuded’ over the years. William Elliott, who was Judge of Madura from 1838 to 1840, introduced coffee in the Sirumalais. He obtained seeds and young plants from Mysore, and the labourers came up the hill every day to work, returning to their villages in the plains at night. The coffee grown in these hills was considered to be superior to that of the Palnis. In 1870, one Capt. E. A. Campbell experimented with mulberry trees and ‘exotic cotton’ in the Sirumalais on behalf of the Cotton and Silk Supply Associations.

In 1877–1878, Madura district experienced great damage on account of floods. Roads, the railway, and 950 tanks in Melur taluk alone were breached, and the District Collector attributed the destruction to the total bareness of the slopes of the Sirumalais.

By the beginning of the 20th century, the Sirumalais were famous for their plantains, which were said to be ‘ vociferously hawked at all the neighbouring railway-stations,’ coffee, and cardamom (Francis 1906). All the fruit trees cultivated in the Lower Palnis were grown in the Sirumalai Hills as well. It might be mentioned that the ‘hill banana’ continues to be sold at Dindigul railway station to this day (Francis 1906).

Study area

The major human activity in the Sirumalais today is agriculture. The crops cultivated include coffee, banana, vegetables, and spices. Road connectivity is rudimentary. A single motorable road provides access to the villages of Pazhajjur and Sirumalai Pudhur on the Sirumalai Plateau. There is a simple network of unmettalled roads branching off this road to the various hamlets and estates on the plateau. There is only a footpath to the settlement of Tholukadu. There are some infrequently used bridle paths running from the top of the Sirumalais to the plains.

The vegetation of the Sirumalais has been studied by J. M. Pallithanam (2001), who divided the vegetation of the Sirumalais into two groups: (1) that of the outer slopes; and (2) that of the plateau and hilltops.

The vegetation of the outer slopes, which rise from 250 m to 1000 m, consists of scrub forests, dry deciduous forests, savannah woodlands, dry evergreen forests, and riparian forests. The features observed with regard to the vegetation of the plateau and hilltops include semi-evergreen forests, dry deciduous forests, savannah woodlands, wet rocky slopes, ponds,
Fig. 1. Map of the Sirumalais. [After University of Texas at Austin’s 1:250,000 Map “NC43-8 Dindigul”].

Website: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/ams/india/nc-43-08
streamlets, estates, and cultivated fields.

The months from February to August are mostly dry. There are a few showers in April and May. There is a little rainfall in September, followed by the showers of the north-eastern monsoon, from the middle of October till the end of December. March to June or July is the hottest period. The temperature drops significantly with the arrival of the north-eastern monsoon. The average annual rainfall is 132 cm on the plateau and 120 cm on the slopes (Palithanam 2001).

Survey dates
We chose the fieldwork dates so as to survey the area round the year, with emphasis on those periods when maximum bird movement within and outside the hills may be expected. Inclement weather during the north-eastern monsoon disrupted the schedule somewhat. Eventually we carried out six surveys, on the following dates:

- 13–15 August 2006
- 15 November 2006
- 9–11 February 2007
- 2–4 April 2007
- 4–6 July 2007
- 3–5 September 2007

Survey locations & methods
Using Palithanam’s description of the flora, we chose a set of sites that we believed would cover the Sirumalais well and had a representative range of habitats and altitudes (Appendix 2). We also used topographical maps and made enquiries with local residents to choose the survey sites. The list of locations we surveyed reflects these factors and the accessibility of the sites.

We recorded birds at each site and from the footpaths and roads. We identified birds on the basis of unambiguous sightings and calls.

Results & discussion
Considering the extent and height of the Sirumalai Hills, and their proximity to the Western Ghats, we had expected the Sirumalais to have a bird fauna typical of this biodiversity hotspot. However, the birdlife is relatively impoverished. This may be due to the fact that the Sirumalais rise to only about 1500 m, whereas the altitude of the Western Ghats is more than 2000 m in places, including in the Palnis. The other factors could be related to the theory of island biogeography, which states that fewer species are present on islands farther away from mainlands and on smaller islands (MacArthur & Wilson 1967). The Sirumalais, being isolated from the main Western Ghats ranges, although by only a short distance, are likely to have a smaller number of species compared with the Western Ghats and the Palnis. The latter are contiguous with the Western Ghats and are considerably larger in extent than the Sirumalais. They also have greater altitudinal and habitat ranges. Besides, the Sirumalais receive less rainfall than the Palni Hills, which get 90–190 cm (Balachandran & Rahman 2005), being located on the leeward side of the southwest monsoon winds. As a consequence, there is more deciduous vegetation in the Sirumalais. The vegetation of the Sirumalais is also highly degraded, particularly on the plateau. Notwithstanding this, we recorded a total of 159 species (Appendix 1). Additional species recorded by other authors are discussed in the notes following the appendix.

The commoner birds include the Red-whiskered Bulbul Pycnonotus jocosus, Black Eagle Ictinaetus malayensis, Grey Junglefowl Gallus sonnerati, Greater Coucal Centropus sinensis, Malabar Parakeet Psittacula columboides, Coppersmith Barbet Megalaima haemacephala, Black-headed Orieol Oriolus xanthornus, White-browed Bulbul P. luteolus, Purple-rumped Sunbird Nectarinia zeylanica and Oriental White-eye Zosterops palpebrosa. Commensals of man such as crows Corvus spp., mynas Acridotheres spp., and the House Sparrow Passer domesticus were not very common or were absent on the slopes and at the top of the hills. Also absent from the Sirumalais are waterbirds, and this is mainly attributable to a lack of significant wetlands in the hills. We did not come across any hornbill species, whereas at least two species occur in the adjacent Palni hills (Sathasivam 2006). The woodpecker assemblage also seems highly impoverished, with just four species recorded. Three Western Ghats endemics occur in the Sirumalais: the Malabar Parakeet, the Indian Rufous Babbler Turdoides subrufa, and the Nilgiri Flowerpecker Dicaeum agile. We also found the Indian Swiftlet Collocalia unicolor, and the Yellow-browed Bulbul Iole indica, which are endemic to the Western Ghats and Sri Lanka. However, it is intriguing that we did not find birds such as the Malabar Small Barbet M. malabarica and the Jungle Myna A. fuscus though suitable habitats were available and these birds are found in the Palni Hills (Sathasivam 2006), so close by. We believe that some of the high altitude endemics, such as the Nilgiri Pipit Anthus nilghiriensis, are unlikely to occur in the Sirumalais.

Our checklist includes various rare and threatened species. The occurrence of the Mountain Hawk-eagle Spizaetus nipalensis, Northern House-martin Delichon urbicum, Indian Blue Robin Luscinia brunnea, Pied Ground Thrush Zoothera wardii, and Yellow-throated Bulbul P. xantholaemus, in the Sirumalais, is noteworthy.

Our discussions with residents of the Sirumalais indicated that hunting is prevalent in these hills. Birds may be threatened by this, as well as by habitat loss to plantations. It is possible that the use of pesticides in the plantations has an adverse effect on the bird life. The periodic occurrence of forest fires in the Sirumalais may also pose a threat to bird populations here.

Recommendations
On account of the limited access to suitable sites in the foothills and the slopes, our findings are somewhat biased towards the plateau (a list of locations surveyed by us is provided in Appendix 2). On the instances that we traversed footpaths going down the mountainside, we found them overgrown or unfamiliar to our guides, so that some altitudes were inaccessible to us at the times of the day when birds are most active. To survey these altitudes, it may be necessary to camp there in the future. Use of mistnets will help locate skulking birds.

The time spent by us at the few waterbodies of the Sirumalais was limited. It may be productive to spend greater effort at these places, namely Kadamankulam, Periapannai Kulam, and Sathiar Reservoir, particularly during the months immediately after the rains. We also need to monitor these hills on a regular basis as they may host passage migrants like the Pied Ground Thrush and several warbler species.

The Kanavaypatti foothills appeared promising in terms of relatively undisturbed stretches of vegetation. This section of the Sirumalais deserves ornithological attention for species that may occur in the open scrub and dry deciduous vegetation.
We believe that eventually the checklist of the Sirumalais will grow to exceed 200 species since as explained earlier above, we have not been able to survey all the habitats thoroughly and over all seasons during this survey.

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References


Podicipedidae

Dabchick or Little Grebe Tachybaptus ruficollis Seen at Sathiar Reservoir.

Phalacrocoracidae

Great Cormorant Phalacrocorax carbo Seen at Sathiar Reservoir.

Indian Cormorant or Shag Phalacrocorax fuscicolis Sathiar Reservoir.

Ardeidae

Indian Pond Heron Ardeola grayii Recorded in the foothills, at Sathiar Reservoir and Kolijipatti. Not seen at the Kadamanukulam pond. They were seen at Periapannai in February (2–3 birds), and in April (3–4 birds).

Eastern Cattle Egret Bubulcus coromandus Seen with other egrets at Sathiar Reservoir.

Great Egret Egretta alba Recorded only at Sathiar Reservoir. None of the egrets were seen at the waterbodies in the plateau.

Intermediate Egret E. intermedia Sathiar Reservoir.

Little Egret E. garzetta Sathiar Reservoir.

Accipitridae

Black-shouldered Kite Elanus caeruleus Recorded at the Kolijipatti foothills.

Oriental Honey Buzzard Pernis ptilorhynchus Fairly common. Encountered at all altitudes.
particularly numerous. Vernal Hanging Parrot Lonchura vernalis Found everywhere in moist forest. Especially fond of flowering Erythrina.

Cuculidae

Pied Crested Cuckoo Clamator jacobinus One record, from the Kolinjipatti foothills. Common Hawk-Cuckoo Hierococcyx varius Widespread. We recorded this bird at all altitudes and habitats. Banded Bay Cuckoo Cacomantis sonnerati This appears to be a sparse resident of the plateau. Three records. Heard calls at the foothills in August 2006. Grey-bellied Plaintive Cuckoo C. pasianus Our records are all from the higher elevations. It is easily overlooked outside the season when it vocalises. Vocal in April 2007. Asian Koel Eudynamys scolopacea Very uncommon. We heard it once near Periapannai pond. Bluefaced Malkoha Phoenicophaeus vиндrostis Common at the lower elevations, but we have one sighting from higher up at Aralikkadu in moist forest and cultivation, which is somewhat surprising for this species. Sirkeer Malkoha P. leschenaultii This appears to be a widespread species. We saw it at both the lower and higher elevations, including in the savannah. Greater Coucal Centropus sinensis Common and widespread.

Strigidae

Oriental Scops-Owl Otus sunia Apparently widespread at the higher elevations. We heard it in the night at Kamakoti and Namaste estates and at sunset at Vellimalai Koil. Indian Scops-Owl O. bakkamoena We heard the calls at Vellimalai Koil and at Kamakoti Estate. Jungle Owlet Glaucidium radiatum Less restricted to the higher elevations than the Scops and Collared Scops owls. We recorded it at Kolinjipatti. Brown Hawk-Owl Ninox scutulata Our only record of this species is from Namaste Estate, where we heard the calls in February 2007. Spotted Owlet Athene brama This bird seems to be restricted to the plains. We heard it calling from the foothills once.

Caprimulgidae

Jerdon’s Nightjar Caprimulgus atripennis Widespread on the plateau.

Apodidae

Indian White-rumped Spinetail Zoonavena sylvestrica Recorded in September. Alpine Swift Tachymarptis melba Three records. More than 25 birds seen in September 2007. Little Swift Apus affinis Seen once at Periapannai pond and once at Kolinjipatti in a heavy shower of rain. Asian Palm Swift Cypsiurus balasiensis Our only record is from the foothills near Kodai Road. Indian Swiftlet Collocalia unicolor Seen once in August and several times the next July.

Hemiprocnidae

Crested Tree Swift Hemiprocne corone A few records covering all altitudes including the foothills.

Alcedinidae

Lesser Pied Kingfisher Ceryle rudis Recorded at Sathiar Reservoir. Small Blue Kingfisher Alcedo atthis Found at Sathiar Reservoir, Kolinjipatti and Periapannai pond. White-breasted Kingfisher Halcyon smyrnensis Widespread; found at all altitudes.

Meropidae

Chestnut-headed Bee-eater Merops leschenaultia Widespread at the higher elevations. Little Green Bee-eater M. orientalis Not uncommon; our records are from the plateau and from the Kolinjipatti foothills.

Coracidae

Indian Roller Coracias benghalensis Only one record: from the foothills near Kodai Road.

Upupidae

Common Hoopoe Upupa epops Seen at various habitats including the savannah and the Kolinjipatti foothills.

Capitonidae

Brownheaded Barbet Megalaima zeylanica Commonly heard in the lower elevations. Whitecheeked Barbet M. viridis Very common in the moister vegetation of the higher elevations. Coppersmith Barbet M. haemacephala Very common. Many records from all over the hills.

Picidae

Rufous Woodpecker Microrhytios brachyrhynus Recorded at Kamakoti and Namaste estates and on the track to Tholukadu. Streak-throated Woodpecker Picus xanthopygaeus Fairly common. All altitudes except the lowest. Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker Dinopium benghalense Common. Found at all elevations. Indian Pygmy Woodpecker Dendrocopos nanus Widespread at the higher elevations. Seen feeding on nectar of silver oak trees.

Pittidae

Indian Pitta Pitta brachyura Calls heard at Vellimalai Koil and at Namaste Estate. Not very common.

Alaudidae

Jerdon’s Bush Lark Mirafra affinis Our only records are from the foothills.

Hirundinidae

Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica Not uncommon. Also seen at higher elevations. Red-rumped Swallow H. daurica Many records from all over the hills. Northern House Martin Delichon urbicum We saw less than half-a-dozen of these birds in a congregation of swallows and swifts at Periapannai pond in April 2007. They were apparently having a drinking of water before retiring at sunset. Dusky Crag Martin Hirundo concolor Seen at Thozhukadu in July 2007.

Motacillidae

Forest Wagtail Dendronanthus indicus Not common. Three records covering all elevations. Also seen in April (2007). Grey Wagtail Motacilla cinerea We found this bird at a few locations scattered across the hills. Seen on September 3, 2007 and in early April 2007. White-browed Wagtail M. madraspatensis Recorded only from Periapannai and the Kolinjipatti foothills.

Campephagidae

Pied Flycatcher-Shrike Hemipus piceatus We found this bird in a few locations at the higher elevations. Seen over half-a-dozen birds in a mixed hunting party in August 2006 at Namaste Estates. Malabar Woodshrike Tephrodornis sylveola One unconfirmed record from the Horticultural Station. Common Woodshrike T. pondicerianus We found it very common at Kamakoti Estate in August. But subsequently we found it only at a few other locations. Large Cuckoo-shrike Coracina macroura Found at all altitudes. Black-headed Cuckoo-shrike C. melanoptera We have records from Kalankulavi Ar Valley, Namaste Estate and Velampamani. Orange Minivet Pericrocotus flammeus Seen at a few locations at the moist forests of the higher elevations.
Small Minivet P. cinnamomeus Not very common. Found at a few locations at various altitudes.

Monarchiidae
Asian Paradise-flycatcher Terpsiphone paradisi Recorded only from the lower elevations (August 2006). Suspected by Nichols to be a resident as birds were at the base of the Sirimalai hills in July/August.

Black-naped Monarch Hypothymis azurea Widespread. Mostly in the higher elevations, but we found it at Kolinjipatti and Kannimana Oothu.

Rhipiduridae
White-browed Fantail Rhipidura aureola Pair at Namaste Estate in the drier forests.

Pycnonotidae

Yellow-throated Bulbul P. xantholoemus Restricted to a narrow altitudinal range. Recorded from the Dindigul-Pazhayur road, the Tholukadu track and near Kannimana Oothu.

White-browed Bulbul P. leuteus Common. Found at all altitudes. Yellow-browed Bulbul Iole indica Found mostly at the upper elevations but also at the Kolinjipatti foothills.

Aegithinidae
Common Iora Aegithina tiphia Fairly common. Found at all altitudes.

Chloropseidae
Gold-fronted Leaf-bird Chloropsis aurifrons Seen at Kamakoti Estate and near Thalaikadai. One unconfirmed record from the Horticultural Station.

Jordon’s Leaf-bird C. cochinchenensis More common than the Goldfronted Chloropsis. Seen at a number of locations.

Laniidae
Bay-backed Shrike Lanius vitattus We found this bird in the foothills at Kolinjipatti and near Kodai Road.

Brown Shrike L. cristatus We have just a few records. Found from the foothills up to the top. A single bird noticed in April 2007.

Turdidae
Malabar Whistling-Thrush Myophonus horsfieldi Not confirmed. Calls heard once at Karuppukoil and a flying bird seen near Vellimalai Koi. Mr. Narayan Swami reports this species to be common.

Pied Ground-Thrush Zoothera eques Two records, the first one of a male near Pazhayur (February) and the second one of a female near Meenakshi Estate (April).

Orange-headed Thrush Z. citrina We heard what we believe is the call of this species at Vellimalai Koi once. The record is not confirmed. Reported seen by Bundell (2010).

Musicipidae

Brown-breasted Flycatcher M. muttui Our only records are from Rajaram Pallam, Poonjolai and Kolinjipatti.

Red-throated Flycatcher Ficedula albicilla One record from Karuppukoil.

Blue-throated Flycatcher Cyornis rubeculoides Recorded from near the stream at the Kolinjipatti foothills in November.

Tickell’s Blue Flycatcher C. tickelliae Widespread at the higher elevations.

Indian Blue Robin Luscinia brunnea Three records, from Rajaram Pallam, Agasthiarpuram and Meenakshi Estate (February and April, 2007).

Oriental Magpie-Robin Copsychus saularis Common bird found at all elevations. White-rumped Shama C. malabaricus Not always seen, but calls heard at a number of locations. Apparently widespread.

Pied Bushchat Saxicola caprata Found in the foothills; one record from Periapannai.

Indian Black Robin Saxicoloides fulicatus A few records from the foothills.

Timalidae
Puff-throated Babbler Pellomeum nuliceps Common and widespread.

Indian Scimitar Babbler Pomatorhinus horsfieldii Recorded from a number of locations, mostly at the higher elevations.

Tawny-bellied Babbler Durnetia hyperythra Found at nearly all altitudes.

Yellow-eyed Babbler Chloropsis siberina Our only record is from the Kolinjipatti foothills.

Indian Rufous Babbler Turdoides subrufa A few records from the plateau.

Jungle Babbler T. striata Common in most parts of the hills.

Pale-headed Babbler T. affinis Common in the foothills.


Cisticolidae

Jungle Prinia P. sylvatica Recorded twice at the lower elevations.

Ashy Prinia P. socialis Recorded once, the calls being heard at Kolinjipatti.

Common Tailorbird Orthotomus sutorius Common everywhere.

Sylviidae
Thick-billed Warbler Acrocephalus aedon Uncommon. Recorded at two locations in April.

Blyth’s Reed Warbler A. dumetorum Widespread in April. Only two other records in other months.

Booted Warbler Hippolais caligata Our only record is from Kanavaypatti in February. Large-billed Leaf-Warbler Phylloscopus magnirostris We found this bird at the Kolinjipatti foothills in November. Subsequently we recorded it only at Namaste Estate.

Greenish Leaf-Warbler P. trochiloides Not very common, but our records are from all elevations (seen in early September 2007).

Green Leaf-Warbler P. occipitalis Recorded from a number of locations, mostly at the higher elevations.

Western Crowned Warbler P. occipitalis We saw this bird once at Rajaram Pallam and once at Namaste.

Paridae
Great Tit Parus major Sparsely distributed over the hills.

Sittidae
Velvet-fronted Nuthatch Sitta frontalis Not uncommon in the higher elevations.

Dicaeidae
Thick-billed Flowerpecker Dicaeum agile The least common of the flowerpeckers in the Sirimalai. One record each from Kamakoti and Namaste estates.

Tickell’s Flowerpecker D. erythronychos Common. Found at all elevations.

Nilgiri Flowerpecker D. concolor Less common than former.

Nectariniidae


Zosteropidae
**Estrildidae**
Indian Silverbill *Eudice malabarica* One record from Kolinjipatti.  
White-rumped Munia *Lonchura striata* Two records: from Vellimalai Koil and from near the stream at Kolinjipatti.  
Scaly-breasted Munia *L. punctulata* Three records from scattered locations.

**Ploceidae**
Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus* Found at the Kolinjipatti foothills, where it appears to be abundant.

**Sturnidae**
Black-headed Myna *Sturnus pagodarum* Seen only at Kolinjipatti.  
Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* Seen at various locations, but not particularly common.

**Oriolidae**
Golden Oriole *Oriolus kundoo* We have just a couple of records: from Pudur and Karuppukoil.  
Black-headed Oriole *O. xanthornus* Common. Found at all altitudes.

**Irenidae**
Fairy Bluebird *Irena puella* Fairly common at the higher elevations.

**Dicuridae**
Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus* Found only at the foothills.  
Ashy Drongo *D. leucophaeus* A few records from well wooded areas.  
White-bellied Drongo *D. caerulescens* Widespread; our records are mostly from the higher elevations.  
Bronzed Drongo *D. aeneus* Common in the most forests of the upper elevations.  
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *D. paradiseus* We saw these birds only twice, both times at Meenakshi Estate.

**Artamidae**
Ashy Swallow-Shrike *Artamus fuscus* Seen at many locations, at all altitudes.

**Corvidae**
Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda* Fairly common everywhere.  
House Crow *Corvus splendens* Seen only at Kolinjipatti and at Thalaikadai. Not established in the hills. According to Bundell (2010) these birds were not seen here even as recently as 1980.  
Jungle Crow *C. macrourhynchos* Uncommon, but we recorded small numbers at various locations. Bundell (2010) these birds were not seen here even as recent as 1980.

**Notes:**
Bundell (2010) includes the Mountain Imperial Pigeon *Ducula badia* in his list based on secondary data.  
Green Imperial Pigeon *D. aeneus* was seen by Nichols (1944-45) at the foot of the Sirumalais.  
Bundell (2010) includes the Large Green-billed Malkoha *Phoenicoparrus tristis* – this is obviously through oversight!  
Bundell (2010) includes the Mottled Wood-owl *Strix ocellata* based on secondary data.  
The Great Eared Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* is a rare bird recorded in the higher elevations of the Palnis. Narayan Swami found the species to be common in the Sirumalais. We did not encounter it during the survey. Narayan Swami has recorded the Ceylon or Sri Lanka Frogmouth *Batrachostomus moniliger* in the Sirumalais.  
Haberkorn’s Nightjar *Caprimulgus nigripennis* was seen by Nichols (1944-45) at the base of Sirumalai.  
The Heart-spotted Woodpecker *Hemixorus canente* has been included by Bundell (2010) on the basis of secondary data.  
Kumar (2007) recorded the White-naped Woodpecker *Chrysocolaptes festivus*.  
Kumar’s (2007) record of Long-tailed Minivet *Pericrocotus ethologus* and Great Barbet *Megalaima nuchalis* in the Sirumalais are cases of oversight or mistaken identity.  
Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassina* was seen by Kumar (2007).  
The Nilgiri Flycatcher *E. albicollis* has been recorded in the Sirumalais by Narayan Swami. He considers it uncommon. We did not come across this species. It has also been reported by Kumar (2007).  
The Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis* is included in the Sirumalais list by Bundell (2010) on the basis of secondary information.  
Bundell (2010) includes the Black-headed Munia *Lonchura malacca* in his list on the basis of secondary data.

**Appendix 2: Gazetteer of locations and habitats**
Agasthyaparam (10°13’N, 77°58’E; 1181 m): Eucalyptus stands, dense undergrowth of lantana.  
Arakkadu (10°11’N, 78°00’E; 1072 m) and Chandra Estate: Agricultural land (banana, jackfruit and silk cotton cultivation) and some dense moist forest.  
Dindigul–Pahajur road (Pahajur–10°4’4”N, 78°00’E; 1118 m): Scrub with dense shrubs and occasional trees, changing gradually to deciduous forest.  
Horticultural Station (10°11’N, 77°59’E; 1064 m): Riverine habitat; many old and tall trees; introduced trees including eucalyptus, pine and *Grevillea*.  
Kalanikaval Ar Valley (10°12’N, 77°58’E; 1106 m): Chowchow plantations on either side of street; small patches of natural vegetation with tall trees.  
Kamakoti Estate (10°12’N, 77°58’E; 1218 m) and Vinayagakoil (coordinates and altitude not recorded): Coffee, *Grevillea*, garden plants, pepper, degraded savannah.  
Kanavappathy foothills (coordinates and altitude not recorded): Scrub forest; deciduous forest with a few tall trees; extensive planting of *Acacia planifrons*.  
Karuppukoil village (10°09’N, 77°59’E; 1166 m): Sacred grove; a few old trees; riverine habitat; cultivation.  
Kolinjipatti foothills (10°03’N, 78°03’E; 275 m): Riverine forest (including tall *Terminalia arjuna*, mango, *Albizia lebbeck* and tamarind trees); deciduous forest; fruit and coconut plantations.  
Kuladampatti Falls (10°07’N, 78°01’E; 307 m): Overgrown scrub; riverine forest; occasional tall trees; waterfalls; intense human presence.  
Loyala (Ayyanar) Estate (coordinates and altitude not recorded): Coffee and *Grevillea* in savannah.  
Meenakshi Estate: As in Sirumalai Pudur.  
Namaste (Kandighe) Estate (10°10’N, 77°58’E; 988 m): Riverine habitat; savannah; vegetable cultivation; large stretches of dense deciduous forest (one of the very few such places we saw).  
Periapannil Kulam (10°14’N, 78°00’E; 1124 m) and Kadamankulam (10°14’N, 78°01’E; 1113 m) ponds: Open waterbodies, no visible aquatic vegetation; possible inflow of sewage. Landscaping in vicinity of Periapannil.  
Poonjolai (10°11’N, 77°58’E; 967 m): Abandoned coffee estate: tall *Grevillea*; some old *Ficus* and other native trees; some riverine patches, resembling Kalankulav Ar valley.  
Pudur–Tholukadu (Tholukadu Malai peak–10°14’N, 77°57’E; 1126 m) track: Belt of plantations with jackfruit and silk cotton; occasional rocky outcrops with grass; patches of dense forest.  
Rajaram Pallam (10°13’N, 77°58’E; 1184 m): Riverine, dense deciduous forest; some large (planted) trees; banana plantations.  
Sathiar Reservoir (coordinates and altitude not recorded): Open waterbody surrounded by degraded, low scrub jungle.  
Savannah between Namaste and Loyola estates: Short grass with intervening trees of medium height. The secondary forest between Namaste and the savannah has taller grass and a dense growth of lantana on the sides of the tracks.  
Sirumalai Pudur (Meenakshi Estate) (10°14’N, 77°58’E; 1183 m): Plantations of coffee, *Grevillea* and pepper; *Ficus* trees; habitations.  
Temalai village (10°11’N, 77°59’E; 1059 m): Chow chow plantations.  
Thalaikadai (10°12’N, 78°01’E; 818 m): Betel nut and jackfruit cultivation; some forestland.  
Thenkuzhi Pallam (coordinates and altitude not recorded): Savannah with some large old trees  
Track to Kodai Road from Kamakoti Estate via Kanminna Oothu: Mixture of habitats: riverine, deciduous, savannah (tall grass), thorny scrub (*Acacia and Prosopis*).  
Vellimalai Koil (10°14’N, 77°59’E; 1115 m): Mixed habitat: stream, dense lantana, tall *Grevillea* and coffee, open areas.