

Additions to the avifauna of the Biligirirangan Hills, Karnataka

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Biligirirangan Temple Wildlife Sanctuary (hereafter called BR Hills: 11°47'-12°9'N 77°0'-77°16'E) is situated in the Chamarajanagar district of south-eastern Karnataka and covers an area of 540km². To the north and east lie the town of Kollegala and the Kollegala Forest Division respectively. Westward the plains of Yelandur and Gundlupet separate the sanctuary from Bandipur National Park. To the south, the range merges with the Satyamangalam Hills, which further to the south drop down to the Coimbatore plains. Eastwards, the Kollegala forests and a few villages separate the range from the Mahadeswara Malai Hills. Situated thus at the tail end of the eastern ghats, the BR Hills form a part of the hill ranges that connect the Eastern Ghats with the Western Ghats, with avifaunal elements of both these areas. (Ramesh 1989)

BR Hills comprises roughly four parallel hill ranges running north to south. The central pair is taller, with the highest peak, Kattari Betta, rising to over 1,800m a.s.l. These hills bear tropical moist deciduous forest, and at higher elevations, tropical evergreen forest. The hilltops are covered with mosaic patches of shola-grassland.

BR Hills receives rainfall from both the south-western and the retreating (NE) monsoon, with an average annual precipitation of c.600mm in the periphery and c.3,000mm in the higher elevations. (Aravind *et al.* 2001)

BR Hills has been designated as an Important Bird Area (IBA) – a priority area for conservation (Islam and Rahmani 2004). In view of this, the results of over two years of field surveys by us are significant. For instance, the Grey-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus priocephalus* an endemic Western Ghats species (Stattersfield *et al.* 1998) and a Threatened species (Collar *et al.* 1994; BirdLife International 2001) has not been reported from the sanctuary previously. The occurrence of the Tickell's Thrush *Turdus unicolor* from the area is the southernmost winter record of the species till date.

The avifauna of the Biligirirangans has been the subject of scientific study since the early part of the last century. R. C. Morris, a coffee planter and keen big game hunter in the BR Hills, was also an

enthusiastic bird watcher and published several notes in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society on the birdlife of the area. As his guest in November 1939, Dr Sálím Ali surveyed the area as part of his 'Birds of Mysore' survey. Baskaran (1992) reports the occurrence of the Dusky Eagle-Owl *Bubo coromandus* from the area. Srinivasa *et al.* (1997) published the Faunal Survey of BR Hills and recorded a total of 229 species from the sanctuary. More recently, Aravind *et al.* (2001) reported an additional 28 species of birds from BR Hills, of which 15 are waterbirds. A consolidated checklist of the bird species recorded till 2001 from BR Hills, comprising a total of 245 species, is appended to the above work. Later works include trip reports listing birds seen in BR Hills (Uttangi 2000; Shyamal 2003; Nani *et al.* 2004; Subramanya *et al.* 2004; Krishna *et al.* 2005).

We undertook extensive field surveys, covering all the habitats and areas of the sanctuary in all seasons from May 2003 to August 2005. GPS readings were used to determine altitudes and coordinates. In addition to recording a majority of the species reported from the sanctuary till date, nine bird species as yet unreported from BR Hills were met with. An annotated list of these species is given below. Taxonomy follows Manakadan and Pittie (2001).

Accipitridae

Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus*
Two records from the sanctuary. A pair was seen circling over moist deciduous forest just beyond Maruladakadu c.1,200m a.s.l., on 7.xii.2003. A single individual seen in flight over moist deciduous forest on Jyothi Betta on 18.iv.2005 at c.1,300m a.s.l. Silent on both occasions. May be resident in BR Hills.

The north Indian race *A. t. indicus* has been recorded up to 2,000m a.s.l., in the Himalaya whereas the south Indian race *A. t. peninsulae*, "...affect moist deciduous and evergreen forested foothills and broken country and up to at least c. 1100 metres elevation in the Western Ghats system and Nilgiri Hills." (Ali and Ripley 1987). This species may thus affect higher elevations in the peninsula than previously recorded.

White-eyed Buzzard *Butastur teesa* A single sighting from a scrub and dry-deciduous interface in the northern part of

the sanctuary, sitting on the ground by the Krishnayyana Katte reservoir in May 2003.

Long-billed Vulture *Gyps indicus* A single record of an individual soaring over low scrub-covered hillside near the Gumballi forest check-post in the northern part of the sanctuary on 10.x.2003.

Picidae

Speckled Piculet *Picumnus innominatus*
This species was recorded frequently at all times of the year in moist deciduous habitat during our field surveys, but has not been recorded earlier from the sanctuary. Seen singly or in pairs, it keeps to the mid-storey, sometimes descending to tangled undergrowth. Most often met with as part of large mixed hunting parties, keeping company with species such as the Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos nanus*, the golden-backed woodpeckers *Dinopium* spp., White-cheeked Barbet *Megalaima viridis*, Grey Tit *Parus major*, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch *Sitta frontalis* and Bronzed Drongo *Dicrurus aeneus*, but "...liable to be overlooked amongst the restless itinerant hunting parties of tits, warblers, nuthatches and small timelines, etc., with which it usually associates." (Ali and Ripley 1987).

Black-shouldered Woodpecker *Chrysocolaptes festivus* A single record of a female in moist deciduous forest on 1.ii.2003. The bird was on the ground and flew up into a tree on being approached closer. A second individual, probably the male, also took flight at the same time but was not conclusively identified. Both individuals called from the trees, the call being similar to that of the Greater Golden-backed Woodpecker *Chrysocolaptes lucidus*. Although it is considered to be "fairly common but local in low-elevation deciduous forest, and scrub with scattered trees" (Rasmussen and Anderton 2005), our record is from moist deciduous forest at c.1,200m a.s.l.

Pycnonotidae

Grey-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus priocephalus* A poorly known Western Ghats endemic (Stattersfield *et al.* 1998), restricted to heavy rainfall areas. We have recorded the occurrence of this species from BR Hills on three occasions. All sightings were significantly in the same area, in a ravine with moist deciduous and semi-evergreen

forest at c.1,200m a.s.l., near the '40km' milestone on the BR Hills-Chamarajanagar road. A pair was seen in the treetops of this ravine, at eye-level from a road that runs along the top edge of the ravine, on 1.vi.2003, and a single birds seen on 8.xii.2003 and 31.i.2004. These records extend the known range of this species and may indicate that the species is resident in the area.

Muscicapidae

Yellow-eyed Babbler *Chrysomma sinense*
One individual recorded from scrub jungle at c.800m a.s.l., in the northern part of the sanctuary, in May 2004, near the lake after the Gumballi checkpost.

Blue-throated Flycatcher *Cyornis rubeculoides* A single male recorded on 11.x.2003 in a bamboo clump in the garden of a coffee plantation (Watapi Coffee estate) at c.1,200m a.s.l. We also heard it uttering a song very similar in pattern and quality to that of Tickell's Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis tickelliae*. Although a winter migrant to "SW Ghats and possibly Eastern Ghats" (Rasmussen and Anderton 2005), this is the first record of this species from BR Hills.

Tickell's Thrush *Turdus unicolor* A single record of a female from the edge of a coffee plantation near Bangli Podu in March 2004 at c.1,200m a.s.l. The bird was foraging in leaf litter in the typical thrush manner. This is the southernmost winter record of this species till date, having previously been recorded "...in the peninsula to eastern M. P. (Bastar, Raipur), Orissa (Mayurbhanj, Nilgiri), north-eastern Andhra (Anantagiri, Lammasinghi), southern Bengal. In winter frequents edges of forests and, in the Peninsula groves and well wooded areas," (Ali and Ripley 1987). Most recently, it has been recorded at Lalbagh botanical garden in Bangalore (Prashanth 2005).

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Bird watching in Kedarnath Musk Deer Sanctuary, Chamoli district, Uttarakhand: the upper Garhwal Himalayas

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A bird survey was carried out from 13-16.v.2003 in areas lying in the south-eastern part of Kedarnath Musk Deer Sanctuary (975km²) comprising Mandal (1,720m), Kanchula Kharak (2,665m), Chopta Chatti (2,840m), Tunganath (3,600m) and Duggal Bitta (2,360m), all located

between c. 30°27'-30°33'N, 79°10'-79°20'E along an altitudinal gradient, situated about 350km north of Delhi. This was done during a continuous 40km trek on a stretch of forest road from Mandal up to Duggal Bitta (on the Gopeshwar-Okhimath road). Besides this, a 3.5km trek uphill to Tunganath temple

and peak from Chopta Chatti in between this route was also done.

The entire sanctuary lies in the northern catchments of Alaknanda River, which is the main tributary of River Ganga (Fig. 1). The area has one of the best, undisturbed forests designated as Himalayan wet-evergreen,