

Additions to the avifauna of Kanha Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh

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Introduction

Kanha Tiger Reserve (KTR; 22°01'05"N–22°27'48"N and 80°26'10"E–81°04'40"E; Madhya Pradesh, India) in the eastern part of Satpuda–Maikal landscape and is classified an Important Bird Area (IN MP-09, criteria A1) (Islam & Rahmani 2004). This landscape holds one of the best-protected habitats in central India. As per the biogeographic classification of India (Rodgers & Panwar 1988), the area lies in zone-6 E—Deccan Peninsula—Central Highlands. The eastern and the western half of KTR form part of the Halon and the Banjar valleys respectively (Gopal & Shukla 2001). Falling in the districts of Mandla and Balaghat, KTR lies within the Maikal Hills, situated between the Mahadeo Hills of Pachmari and Chota Nagpur. The area of the core zone (National Park) is 940 km² and that of the buffer zone is 1,009 km², adding up to 1,949 km² as the total area of KTR, with the additional area of Phen Wildlife Sanctuary—110 km².

The vegetation of the area comprises two broad categories: moist peninsular sal forests, southern tropical moist mixed deciduous forest and southern tropical dry mixed deciduous forest type (Champion & Seth 1968). The terrain is highly undulating with sporadic vast grasslands, dissected by a number of seasonal streams and *nallahs*. The altitudinal range of KTR is 400–960 m. Climatically the area has three distinct seasons: winter (November–February), summer (March–mid-June) and monsoon (mid-June–September), followed by a short phase of post monsoon from early October to early November. The temperature in winter descends to 0°C and rises up to 45°C in summer. The average rainfall is more than 1,300 mm, 80 per cent of which is received during the south-west monsoon between mid-June and late September.

Ornithological history of Kanha Tiger Reserve

Kanha has attractions for various field biologists, mainly concentrating on large mammals (Panwar Undated; Kotwal Undated; Schaller 1967; Kurt 1973; Martin 1977; Newton 1984), whereas attention towards birds has been slack. Early ornithological records are by Hewetson (1956), Anderson

(1979), and Ranjitsinh (1984). Panwar (Undated) compiled the first comprehensive list of birds (84 spp.) seen in these areas, based on 12 years' work. Guntert & Homberger (1973) added 51 spp., to his list, based on their intensive, month-long, ornithological work with mist netting. Ranjitsinh (1983) reported, for the first time, sightings of Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica* in June 1969 and again in May 1971. Newton *et al.* (1987) prepared the first systematic list of birds (225 spp.), adding 89 new records for KTR during January 1980–May 1983. Ghosal (1995) added 6 spp., to this list, whereas, D'Cunha & Ali (2001) added 35 spp. In his checklist, D'Cunha (Undated) recorded 263 spp. Pittie & Poddar (2000) recorded Ashy Minivet *Pericrocotus divaricatus* for the first time from KTR, which was also the first record for Madhya Pradesh. Devarshi (2006) sighted a single Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* in December 2004—another first for KTR. Lastly, the Zoological Survey of India's central regional station, after a 10-month detailed avifaunal survey, covering almost all the ranges of core, and some areas of buffer forest, including the nearby village ponds, compiled a checklist of 297 spp., (Chandra *et al.* 2005), adding 32 spp., to the avifauna of KTR. In this paper we add 35 spp., to the avifaunal records of KTR bringing it to a total of 329 spp.

This list was compiled during the ongoing project, 'monitoring of tiger, co-predators, prey and their habitat', in KTR—from March 2004 to September 2005—with some more additional work from April 2006 to August 2006, covering all the seasons.

Methods

The area was regularly surveyed for birds in all the major habitats. Birds were identified with the help of Grimmett *et al.* (1999) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2005). Records of habitat type and local status (resident, winter visitor, local migrant and straggler) were maintained. On the basis of frequency of sighting, the bird species were assigned categories of abundance (absent, rare, uncommon, occasional and common). All the standardised common names follow Manakadan & Pittie (2001).

Results and discussion

Sightings of special interest and status of rare birds

In the following list, English names preceded by an asterisk are additions to Kanha's avian checklist (after Chandra *et al.* 2005).

*Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*: More than 12 individuals sighted five times in three wetlands, namely Indari pond, near Badrinath in Kanha meadow and Sondhar pond, between December 2004 and March 2005.

Black Bittern *Dupetor flavicollis*: Rare; sighted four times during the entire survey period—at Chuhari nullah and Phatak Pullia nullah near Kanha meadow—confirming its presence in KTR. D'Cunha & Ali (2001) had recorded it earlier, as a first sighting from KTR. Hewetson (1956) did not record it in entire Madhya Pradesh.

*Ferruginous Pochard *Aythya nyroca*: Rare. Four individuals noticed foraging along with Tufted Pochard *A. fuligula* in Sonf meadow in January 2005. They remained in KTR for more than a month.

*Tufted Pochard *A. fuligula*: Uncommon winter visitor. Nine individuals were sighted at two different locations—near Badrinath pond in Kanha meadow and at a pond in Sonf meadow. First sighted in December 2004, continuing till February 2005—however, restricted to these two ponds.

*Jerdon's Baza *Aviceda jerdoni*: A male was seen in the Budbudi nullah region, perched on the edge of a sal *Shorea robusta* tree near Kisli meadow—its long, erect, white-tipped black crest clearly visible. This should be treated as an unconfirmed / vagrant record until such time more sightings are reported.

*Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*: Uncommon. A pair noticed perched near Sondhar pond and Mukki pond in February 2005. Their movements were mostly restricted to water bodies though occasionally they were seen soaring over meadows.

Indian White-backed Vulture *Gyps bengalensis*: More than 50 individuals can easily be sighted in the Kanha and Sonf meadows. They are also breeding here—three nests were sighted near Sulkum bridge on sal trees.

Long-billed Vulture *G. indicus*: A pair seen twice with a flock of White-backed Vultures, over and near Kanha meadow, in June 2005. This bird is very rare in Kanha—the probable cause may be the absence of cliffs in and around KTR—while they are quite common in Bandhavgarh National Park.

*Short-toed Snake-Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*: Rare. Observed thrice at three different locations—Bamni Dadar plateau, Digdola hilly area and Kodai Dadar. Twice it was noticed perched on sal trees and once, soaring. All records from February 2005–May 2005.

*Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*: Sighted once in January 2005, on the edge of sal forest and grassland, in Mukki range. This bird is very rare from this part of the country and further sightings are required to confirm its presence.

*Mountain Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus nipalensis*: Rare. Sighted twice on the edge of sal forest and grassland, in Supkhar range in November 2004.

*Painted Spurfowl *Galloperdix lunulata*: Uncommon / rare. Sighted only twice in a flock of 2–3 individuals in Mukki range in June 2004. This spurfowl was earlier reported from Balaghat district (Hewetson 1956), a part of which, interestingly, falls under the present jurisdiction of KTR.

*Grey Junglefowl *Gallus sonneratii*: Rare and unusual for KTR. Sighted twice in sal forest with lantana cover, along with bamboo thickets, in February 2005. Pasha *et al.* (2004) do not report it from Pench Tiger Reserve, while it is quite common in Bori Sanctuary and Satpura National Park. Locals in reserve forest areas of Seoni and Mandla district also report it. However, given its recorded distribution, this could be a straggler or vagrant and the record could be treated as an unconfirmed report.

*Small Buttonquail *Turnix sylvatica*: Uncommon. A covey of eight birds was sighted in Neela nullah on the way to Bamni Dadar plateau in January 2005. All birds were actively feeding on termites and other ground insects near a dead tree trunk.

*Common Buttonquail *T. suscitator*: More than 12 individuals were seen at five different locations, with a maximum of four birds, together at Supkhar road—actively searching for food amidst dried bamboo leaves in a bamboo thicket. The other four locations are Suwar kachar (near Sondhar camp), Duke's road, Bamni dadar road towards Mukki and Bottle behra area.

Sarus Crane *Grus antigone*: A pair permanently residing in the water bodies, in buffer zone of KTR, in paddies, in Sarekha and adjoining villages. It raised two chicks successfully in 2004, whereas in 2005, golden jackals *Canis aureus* predated the eggs one night. Forest department was actively engaged with the help of local people in the protection of this pair, and a watchman was posted every year, keeping a vigil on the eggs till they hatched. Hewetson (1956) and Newton *et al.* (1987) have reported the Sarus from central India and Kanha National Park, as a local migrant, absent during the breeding season.

*Purple Moorhen *Porphyrio porphyrio*: Uncommon. Six individuals were noticed in December 2004. There were five sightings at two different sites—Indri pond and Chuhari anicut.

*Black-bellied Tern *Sterna acuticauda*: Rare. Only two sightings, from February 2005, of birds actively flying over the waterbody, near Badrinath pond.

*Purple Wood-Pigeon *Columba punicea*: Uncommon. Sighted three solitary birds, two males and one female, in bamboo-dominated forest patches of Digdola, Kodai daddar and Chuhari area in March 2004 and again in April 2005. May be a vagrant record requiring further confirmation.

*Drongo Cuckoo *Surniculus lugubris*: Uncommon. Seen and heard three times in early monsoon (June 2005), from inside thick sal forest patches—at Chuhari district fire line area and above Neela nullah.

*Large Green-billed Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus tristis*: Sighted three times in sal-dominated forest patches—once in the Jamun Tola area, and twice at Supkhar range. Interestingly sighting of this malkoha was twice in summer

and once in monsoon season, but none from the winter season. Is it a summer migrant?

*Grass Owl *Tyto capensis*: Rare. Sighted once at dusk, in May 2006, on the forest road at the Phen Sanctuary of KTR. It is known to occur in well-wooded forest and intermediate grasslands, and as breeding resident in grasslands of eastern India, including eastern Madhya Pradesh (now Chhattisgarh), but locality not mentioned (Ripley 1982).

*Dusky Eagle-Owl *Bubo coromandus*: Uncommon. Regularly sighted and heard around the forest department's hutments at Khatiya, where a resident pair called almost daily in the monsoon months of 2005 and also seen occasionally.

Mottled Wood-Owl *Strix ocellata*: Rare. Heard twice in the winter of 2004. First reported by D'Cunha & Ali (2001) in November 1994–January 1995.

*Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus*: Seen five times at different places in the Kanha meadow area, mainly near Schaller hide and the Chuhari nullah side of the grassland. Activity increased dramatically at dusk with high intensity of 'chaunk-chaunk-chaunk' calls in late evenings—from a perch as well as the ground. This might be the bird's farthest western distribution range in central India.

*Black-capped Kingfisher *Halcyon pileata*: Seen twice in the riverine patches of Kanha meadow—first in November 2004 and again in February 2005. Local tourist guides also reported 2–3 sightings from the same areas during these periods. Should be treated as a vagrant till further sightings.

Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthraceros coronatus*: Uncommon. Four sightings, with largest flock size of six birds, in Mukki range, October 2004.

*Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*: A rare visitor for KTR. Noticed twice in a scrub patch in Indri meadow in February 2005, actively feeding on the bark of a sal tree and shifting its position swiftly.

*Greater Golden-backed Woodpecker *Chrysocolaptes lucidus*: Uncommon. Six separate sightings in old sal groves from Supkhar area, Bupsa behra and district fire line in March 2008.

*Red-winged Bush-Lark *Mirafra erythroptera*: Rare. A flock of 11 recorded at Bamni dadar once in July 2008 and another flock of six spotted in the Garhi range, near cultivation. Calls and direct sighting confirms its presence in Kanha.

*Sykes's Crested-Lark *Galerida deva*: Uncommon and probably vagrant. Spotted five times at Sonf meadow and Kanha meadow. All sightings were from early monsoon, with singing displays. There could be a small breeding population.

*Plain Martin *Riparia paludicola*: Uncommon. Recorded repeatedly from Salkum River area for more than three months from May 2005 to July 2005. Also seen actively collecting clay from riverbank.

*Dusky Crag-Martin *Hirundo concolor*: Rare. Seen thrice in hilly track from Mukki to Supkhar, around Hanuman temple area and surroundings, in August 2005.

*Eurasian Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*: Rare. A flock of nine

birds was seen in Indri meadow in February 2005. Three birds were also spotted in Kanha meadow along with Paddyfield Pipits *A. rufulus*.

*Malabar Whistling-Thrush *Myophonus horsfieldii*: Rare migrant during summer—sighted once in December 2004 near a hill stream on the Supkhar road, attracted by its peculiar soft whistle. Should be treated as a vagrant till further sightings are reported.

White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus*: Uncommon—sighted more than ten times in bamboo-dominated forest patches. All sighting were during summer.

*Jerdon's Bushchat *Saxicola jerdoni*: This is surely a vagrant record of a male that was seen in the long grass of Chuhari nullah near Kanha meadow, in May 2005. Presence of this species needs further corroboration with intensive searches in KTR and nearby areas. Till then it should be treated as an unconfirmed record.

*Rufous-fronted Prinia *Prinia buchanani*: A pair was regularly sighted in Mukki's meadow during April–September 2004. Two further sightings were from Bhamni daddar and Supkhar meadow. However further records are needed for confirmation.

*Indian Great Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus*: Rare. Sighted twice in reeds of nullah, near Badrinath guesthouse in January 2005.

*Spotted Creeper *Salpornis spilonotus*: Rare. Three sightings. Found actively feeding on insects in sal-dominated patches. Twice at district fire line (on the way to Mukki–Kisli) and once on the Jhulup forest trail.

*Purple-rumped Sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica*: Rare. Sighted five times, feeding on sal flowers in May 2005, all on the edge of the sal forest in Kanha meadow.

Crimson Sunbird *Aethopyga siparaja*: Uncommon late winter visitor, regularly seen in miscellaneous forest patches. A regular visitor to the flowers of the *Surteli* shrub, it can easily be seen at Wild Chalet Resort in buffer forest of Mocha village.

Green Munia *Amandava formosa*: Uncommon. A flock of five birds was seen once, in the grassland near Indri camp, in Kisli range, December 2004. A pair was also sighted on the northern side of KTR, in village complexes. The isolated flocks in KTR need proper conservation as this species is included in CITES Appendix II and protected under a 1991 amendment of the Wildlife (Protection) Act (1992) and categorized as Vulnerable by BirdLife International (2001).

*Bronzed Drongo *Dicrurus aeneus*: Three winter 2005 sightings from KTR—one bird in the Salghat area, and two together at Neela nullah area, on the upper road for Bhamni daddar. Could be a vagrant or local winter migrant.

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Fig. 1. Syke's Crested-Lark

The six Tiger Reserves in the state are Kanha Tiger Reserve, Pench Tiger Reserve, Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, Panna Tiger Reserve, Satpura Tiger Reserve, and Sanjay-Dubri Tiger Reserve. Amongst the six, Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Pench, and Panna are the best tiger reserves belonging to the Madhya Pradesh Wildlife. Tigers are the most charismatic breed of cats and spotting them is sheer joy. If you are planning a trip to enjoy wildlife safari or specifically tiger spotting, then read further to learn more about the Tiger Reserves of Madhya Pradesh Wildlife. It adds immense beauty to the Tiger Reserve of Madhya Pradesh Wildlife sanctuary. 5. Satpura Tiger Reserve. The Satpura Tiger Reserve is located in the Hoshangabad district of Madhya Pradesh. Kanha Tiger Reserve, set in the Maikal Hills of the Satpura mountain range in Madhya Pradesh, makes for a perfect vacation destination for two reasons—one it is a natural paradise and second, this is where you can spot tigers in their natural habitat. The tiger reserve is spread across two revenue districts, Mandla and Balaghat. The park gained the reserve forest status in the year 1879. It became a wildlife sanctuary in 1993 and, soon after, in the year 1955, the park became a national park with its supremely rich wildlife. With its population of tigers, Kanha got popular as a tiger reserve soon. There are several regions within the park having a high concentration of tigers. The paper presents a comprehensive account of the avifauna of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. It includes the annotated list of birds recorded so far from these two states and provides information on district-wise localities (in the web supplement). In all, 517 species/ subspecies of birds belonging to 69 families are reported from Chhattisgarh (197 taxa) and Madhya Pradesh (488 taxa). Discover the world's research. 20+ million members. The birds of Kanha Tiger Reserve. Jan 1986. 477-498.