

## Record of Malabar Pied Hornbill (*Anthracoceros coronatus*) and other birds from Melghat



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Melghat Tiger Reserve (MTR) is located in Amravati district of Maharashtra and covers an area of 1676.93 Sq km. The geographical location of MTR is 21°15' to 21° 45' N and 76°57' to 77°30'E. A preliminary list of 33 birds was prepared by Mr. R. T. Jenkin (D.F.O. Melghat) in 1925 and was published in the Guide to Chikhaldia (Nelson, 1925). Sawarkar (1987) published the first comprehensive checklist of birds of Melghat, which included 252 species. Besides the old records of Fairy Blue-bird (*Irena puella*) and recent record of Great Black Woodpecker (*Dryocopus javensis*), Forest Owlet (*Heteroglaux blewitti*) has been rediscovered in Melghat.

It was Mr. Kamlakar Dhamge (Dy. Conservator of Forest, MTR), who first sighted three Malabar Pied Hornbills near Kolkas rest house on July 20<sup>th</sup> 2003 in the canopy of a Banyan tree *Ficus benghalensis*. These included one immature bird indicating successful breeding. He being a bird enthusiast informed me (RK) of this finding.

Jayant stayed for 4 days from 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> December 2003 at Raipur village rest house in MTR for the study of butterflies. On the afternoon of December 6<sup>th</sup>, he saw two more birds on a fruit laden Banyan tree. The Raipur rest house is a century old building constructed by the British and has three equally aged Banyan trees. During his stay of two more days, Jayant saw the pair visiting the Banyan trees daily around noon.

Raju visited the Raipur range on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> December 2003 for the study of Forest Owlets along Satish Charthal. On 21<sup>st</sup> at 0615hrs., when Raju came out with binoculars for birdwatching, a Malabar Pied Hornbill had just alighted on one of the Banyan trees.

Apart from *A. coronatus*, several Indian Grey Hornbills (*Ocyrceros birostris*), Yellow-footed Green Pigeons (*Treron phoenicoptera*) and Asian Koels (*Eudynamis scolopacea*) were also flocking the tree. Other birds like Eurasian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*), Black-hooded Oriole (*Oriolus xanthornus*), Copper-smith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*), Large Cuckoo Shrike (*Coracina macei*), White-bellied Drongo (*Dicrurus caerulescens*) and Greater Racket-tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus paradiseus*) also visited the trees. We both took photographs of *A. coronatus* separately.

The bird has an axe shaped casque on its bill with a large black patch along the upper ridge of the casque. The outer tail feathers are white and have a white trailing edge to wings and have pink throat patches. The male and female can be differentiated.

It is resident in peninsular hills, from South-West West Bengal and Bihar to North Andhra, Western Ghats (mainly

along the eastern edge), South of South Maharashtra (Ratnagiri) and Sri Lanka (Rasmussen and Anderton, 2005).

It is a near threatened bird species (criterion NT C1) (Islam and Rahmani, 2002) and its population is declining.

The sighting of five birds in Melghat including an immature bird, confirms the presence of a small breeding population of *A. coronatus*. Many expert birdwatchers like Salim Ali, Mr. V.B. Sawarkar, Ms. Prachi Mehta, Mr. Aasheesh Kothari, Mr. Kishor Rithe, Mr. Nishikant Kale etc. have studied the avifauna of Melghat for many years, but had never come across this bird. Moreover, this is not a species to be confused with any other species or which may escape the attention of a good birdwatcher.

We can thence presume that the species is trying to establish itself in a new habitat (Melghat), which is suitable and safe. A few birds might have probably migrated from Pench Tiger Reserve (Madhya Pradesh) in search of a suitable habitat. It is a good sign both for the survival of *A. coronatus* and for the biodiversity of Melghat.

### Additional records for Melghat

Mr. Aashish Kothari (1998) has reported the presence of Stork-billed Kingfisher (*Halcyon capensis*) near Kolkhas rest house. Ms. Prachi Mehta has reported the sighting of Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*) near Sidukund, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike (*Hemipus picatus*) and Blue-bearded Bee-eater (*Nyctornis athertoni*). In addition, Kishor Rithe has sighted Fire-capped Tit (*Cephalopyrus flammiceps*) and Blue-capped Rock Thrush (*Monticola cinclorhynchus*) at Jamoda Padav, Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*) in the Tapi river, and a White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) at Rangubeli. Mr. Nishikant Kale again sighted the Green Munia (*Amandava formosa*) near Raipur village.

Raju Kasambe saw many Indian Silverbills (*Lonchura malabarica*) at Chourakund and a few Little Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax niger*) across Tapi river at Rangubeli. He has also reported (Kasambe, R. 2003) the occurrence of Little Green Heron (*Butorides striatus*), Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), Crested Bunting (*Melophus lathamii*), and possibly a Sparrow Hawk (*Accipiter nisus*) in Melghat.

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