

On May 1997, two chicks of the Sykes's nightjar were located on the bank of River Satluj in Harike, Punjab. The overall appearance of the adults was light sandy/greyish; the head was not streaked heavily as in other *Caprimulgus* species; and the white spots on the outer primaries were clearly visible in flight. The iris was darkish brown with white bristles over the gape. The birds sometimes gave a continuous churring or purring call at dusk. The identity of the birds was further confirmed by comparing the photographs taken with the specimens in the collection of the BNHS.

The nest was located on a sand bank under a sparse *Tamarix* bush (c. 60 cm), approximately 2 km downstream of the Harike Barrage. The nest was observed for three days during the early mornings and late evenings. The parents were observed brooding with their wings spread during the hot hours of the day. The chicks could not be located at the nest site after the third day. However, the adults stayed on in the vicinity of the nest for another five days, and occasionally

did the broken-wing display, indicating the presence of chicks in the area. This is the second confirmed record of the Sykes's nightjar breeding in India, and the first for Punjab, and is worth recording.

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22. SIGHT RECORDS OF THE SAND MARTIN *RIPARIA RIPARIA* IN SOUTHERN INDIA

On February 11, 1998, on a birdwatching trip to the Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh, I came across a congregation of over 100 sand martins *Riparia riparia* flying low over the lush green paddy fields. They were hawking insects in the company of other swallows and flew around uttering *Cherr-Cherr* calls. I am quite familiar with these sand martins as I have seen them on several earlier occasions in the neighbourhood of Madras (now Chennai) (Santharam 1985), near Kaliveli Tank

(Santharam 1987), Sullurpetta marshes on the Sriharikota Road and also at Kavaratti Island, Lakshadweep (Santharam *et al.* 1996). Details of these sightings are presented in Table 1. However, this recent sighting is perhaps most noteworthy as it had the largest numbers present to date. The site was located in the vicinity of Pennakki Village Tank, off the Gudur-Kota road.

The sand martin can be easily told apart from common swallows (*Hirundo rustica*), with

Table 1: Sight records of sand martin *Riparia riparia*

Date	Location	No. of birds
11.iv.1980	Adyar Estuary, Madras	1
12.x.1980	Adyar Estuary, Madras	1
19.x.1980	Adyar Estuary, Madras	1-2
10.xii.1980	Adyar Estuary, Madras	1
31.iii.1985	Adyar Estuary, Madras	15-20
26.x.1986	Kaliveli Tank (near Pondicherry)	2
11.ii.1988	Kaliveli Tank (near Pondicherry)	2-3
06.ii.1990	Sullurpet Marshes (Nellore Dt., Andhra Pradesh)	8
29.x.1990	Kavaratti Island (Lakshadweep)	1
31.x.1990	Kavaratti Island (Lakshadweep)	1
27.xii.1997	Sullurpet Marshes (Nellore Dt., Andhra Pradesh)	3-4
11.ii.1998	Pennakki, (Nellore Dt., Andhra Pradesh)	100+
27.ii.1998	Pallikaranai Marshes, (outskirts of Madras)	10-15

which it often appears to associate, from its size and colouration. It is smaller than the swallow and lacks the long tail feathers. The colouration is distinctly dull, being grey-brown and white in contrast to the glossy steel-blue and pinkish-white of the common swallow. Besides, the sand martin has the grey-brown breast band, which can be easily noticed, even in overhead flight. On a previous occasion, while watching the birds perched on low *Calotropis* bushes at the Adyar Estuary, I could make out that the ear coverts and wings appeared darker, and a faint white mark (arc-shaped) was noticeable over the eye in most of the birds. Their legs were brown and

the bill dark in colour.

According to the HANDBOOK (Ali and Ripley 1983), this species is confined to northern India. It is said to be "widely but sporadically distributed; partly migratory, partly resident; subject also to considerable local movements, as yet little understood". It has been recorded in the Maldives in small numbers, usually between September and November and once in May (Phillips 1963, Strickland and Jenner 1977). All of my sightings have been between October and April.

I am sure the sand martin is commoner in Southern India than it is believed. Possibly, it is often overlooked among flocks of swallows. I hope this note will induce other readers to look out for this bird in their locality, especially in winter.

According to the BIRDS OF THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT (1998) by Grimmett *et al.*, the sand martin has recently been split into two species — pale martin (*Riparia diluta*) and sand martin (*Riparia riparia*) based on minor colour variations and calls. The former has greyer upper parts and less distinct breast band. The birds I had seen had quite distinct breast bands and were more brown in colouration, and hence were presumably *Riparia riparia*.

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