

to the middle storey in the canopy along with the oriole and fed moving along thin branches.

The Ashy Minivet is probably a rare winter visitor to the Subcontinent (Grimmett *et al.* 1998, Thejaswi and Shivaprakash 2004) rather than "accidental winter vagrant" (Ali and Ripley 1987). There have been records from Madras (now Chennai), in Tamil Nadu (regular in Guindy National Park) and Sriharikota in the Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh (Santharam 1988, 1990), Periyar National Park (Robertson 1992), Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary (Thejaswi and Shivaprakash 2004) and Trivandrum (Kumar 1995) in Kerala. This is the first record of the bird from Karnataka state and hence of interest.

July 29, 2002

S. THEJASWI  
639, "Sibia House", 16<sup>th</sup> Cross,  
'B' Block, Vijayanagar 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage,  
Mysore 570 017,  
Karnataka, India.  
Email: dumaketu@rediffmail.com

M.C. MANOHARA  
114 (1<sup>st</sup> Floor), 2<sup>nd</sup> Main,  
Opp. Panduranga Temple,  
Vivekanandanagar,  
Mysore 570 023,  
Karnataka, India.

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#### 20. NEW SITES FOR THE GLOBALLY THREATENED YELLOW-THROATED BULBUL *PYCNONOTUS XANTHOLAEMUS* (JERDON) IN KARNATAKA, KERALA AND TAMIL NADU, SOUTHERN INDIA

The Yellow-throated Bulbul *Pycnonotus xantholaemus* is a globally threatened, "Vulnerable" species (Collar *et al.* 1994, BirdLife International 2001), locally occurring over parts of eastern and southern Karnataka, south-western Andhra Pradesh, and northern and western Tamil Nadu with stony foothills scrub as its favoured habitat (Ali and Ripley 1987, BirdLife International 2001). This rare peninsular endemic has recently been the subject of studies on status assessment and habitat preference (Subramanya *et al.* 1995). The breeding biology of the bird has been studied only recently (Venkataswamappa and Chaitra 1999) although much more needs to be known (BirdLife International 2001).

Most of the sites for the Yellow-throated Bulbul in Karnataka are located in the Bangalore Rural district (BirdLife International 2001). A limited survey conducted in 2001-2002 of selected areas with suitable habitat in Chamara Nagar, Hassan, Kodagu, Mysore and Mandya districts of southern Karnataka resulted in seven new localities for the species, including the first from the Western Ghats of Karnataka. Opportunistic bird watching has added a site each at the Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary in Kerala and Dimbum in Tamil Nadu.

The Yellow-throated Bulbul was located at Arasanakatte State Forest, Arsikere hills (Hirekal State Forest), Bandipur National Park, Bettadapura hill, Chamundi hill, Melkote Temple Wildlife Sanctuary, Nagamangala and Bettadahalli near Somwarpet, all in Karnataka.

**Arasanakatte State Forest:** The Arasanakatte State Forest (12° 11' N, 76° 28' E) is a reserve forest situated some 20 km southwest of Mysore city on the Mysore-H.D. Kote road (Manandavadi road) in Mysore district. It is some 20 sq. km of dry deciduous scrub with *Capparis divaricatus*, *Cadaba fruticosa*, *Dichrostachys cinerea*, *Lantana camara* and *Pterolobium hexapetalum* as the dominant species along with *Canthium parviflorum*, *Randia dumetorum*, *Ziziphus oenoploea* and a few trees of *Acacia nilotica*, *Acacia leucophloea*, *Ficus benghalensis* and *Atalantia* sp. apart from a grove and scattered trees of the ubiquitous *Eucalyptus*.

Six Yellow-throated Bulbuls were located on an isolated rocky hillock known as Bettadabeedu, located in the western end of the forest, on June 19, 2002. The bulbuls were seen, separately, in the foothills of this hillock in dense scrub.

**Arsikere Hills:** The Maale Kallu Tirupati (Amaragiri)



hills are located in the Hirekal State Forest, a 250 sq. km scrub forest near Arsikere (13° 30' N, 76° 15' E), in north-eastern Hassan district. They are an isolated chain of high rocky outcrops with a maximum height of 1,275 m. A thick scrub jungle covers the slopes and western foothills, but is denuded at several places. Vegetation is concentrated in relatively inaccessible and steep valleys and ravines and is primarily *Ziziphus*, *Capparis*, *Chomelia*, *Pterolobium* and *Canthium* interspersed with trees like *Morinda*, *Cochlospermum* and *Ficus*.

The Yellow-throated Bulbul was noted fairly frequently in these jungles in December 2001 and May 2002. Ten birds were seen and three heard late in the afternoon, c. 1630-1800 hrs on May 27, 2002.

**Bandipur National Park:** Several sightings in dry deciduous scrub in the northern boundaries of the Bandipur National Park (11° 20'-11° 40' N, 76° 20'-76° 32' E) — in November 1997 (two seen), June 1999 (six seen, one heard) — and in the Moyar gorge area in the western end of the park in June 2001 (seven seen, three heard) and January 2002 (two seen, four heard). The species has been recorded in the neighbouring Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary (Gokula and Vijayan 1997).

**Bettadapura hill:** The Bettadapura hill (12° 28' N, 76° 5' E), an isolated, conical and symmetrical rocky peak, is located in the Periyapatna taluka on the western end of Mysore district. Only two sightings of single birds, one each in December 2000 and 2001, in the hill precincts, with most of the foothills vegetation destroyed to a great extent. Surviving vegetation include *Ziziphus*, a few *Canthium* bushes, *Erythroxylon monogynum*, *Euphorbia antiquorum* and *Synedinium grantii*, the latter two bordering paths and agricultural fields in the immediate neighbourhood.

**Chamundi hill:** The Yellow-throated Bulbul was heard in the Chamundi hill (12° 18' N, 76° 33' E) of Mysore city in March 1992 (S. Subramanya *per* BirdLife International 2001). Regular sightings have been along a foothill road leading left from near the foot of the 1000 steps, along the steps at different points, in the so-named "Horse-shoe valley" in the eastern part of the hill, along the Uttanahalli road from the Nandi monolith and evergreen scrub around Nandi. The sightings have been in different vegetation types: the birds in the foothills and along the Uttanahalli road were seen in *Canthium-Capparis-Dichrostachys-Pterolobium-Dodonea-Erythroxylon-Lantana-Scutia* scrub with scattered trees of *Cassia siamia*, *Flacourtia montana*, *Plectronia didyma*, *Boswellia glabra*, *Cochlospermum religiosum*, *Chloroxylon swietenia*, *Morinda tinctoria*, *Azadirachta indica*, *Acacia auriculiformis*, several *Ficus* sp. and *Eucalyptus* sp. Around Nandi, individuals were seen in vegetation composed of

*Acacia coccinea*, *Acacia suma*, *Atalantia* sp., *Citrus* sp., *Schefflera* sp., *Santalum album*, *Plectronia didyma*, *Wrightia tinctoria*, *Ficus* sp. and interspersed by bushes of *Stachytarpheta mutabilis* and *Cymbopogon* grass on rocky slopes. The species, though encountered on most visits to the area, is nevertheless uncommon when compared to the Red-vented, Red-whiskered and White-browed Bulbuls with an average sighting of three individuals per visit. It has been observed feeding on the berries of *Azadirachta indica*, *Scutia* sp., *Flacourtia indica*, *Lantana camara*, *Erythroxylon monogynum*, *Cocculus hirsutus*, *Pachygone ovata* and *Azima tetracantha*.

**Melkote Temple Wildlife Sanctuary:** The species is well-distributed over this 49.82 sq. km Sanctuary (12° 36' N, 77° 30' E), found in thick jungle around the three principal hills, Narayanadurga, Karikallgudda and Melkote betta. It was first observed in June 2000 at Karikallgudda, where two birds were seen and many more heard. Narayanadurga is the best place to observe this species and up to twenty-five individuals have been observed in an hour of birding. It has been recorded here since August 2001. The vegetation in the foothills is denuded scrub of chiefly *Dichrostachys cinerea* and *Ziziphus* sp. overrun by thickets of *Lantana camara* and interspersed with trees of *Terminalia chebula*, *Strychnos potatorum*, *Acacia* sp., *Plectronia didyma* and stunted *Ficus* trees in rocky crevices. The bulbul was also observed in the Narayanadurga valley in fairly thick deciduous forest of *Shorea roxburghii*, *Mallotus philippensis*, *Wrightia tinctoria*, *Schefflera* sp., *Gmelina arborea*, *Gardenia* sp., climbers of *Stephania* sp. and *Pachygone ovata* and a dense undergrowth of *Lantana camara* and *Securinega* sp. The vegetation at Karikallgudda is broadly similar to Narayanadurga without as many trees, but that at Melkote betta is overrun by *Lantana camara* and afforested with *Eucalyptus* sp. Birds were seen feeding on berries of *Lantana camara*, *Cissus quadrangularis*, *Scutia* sp., *Stephania* sp. and *Cissampelos pariera*. Isolated sightings of single birds have been in vegetation near and overhanging dry streambeds and light forest in undulating areas away from the hills.

**Nagamangala:** Two birds were observed at Aalathi Betta, a small hill c. 2 km from Nagamangala (12° 50' N, 76° 45' E) on April 3, 2002 (M. Mohan Kumar, *pers. comm.*) in *Lantana-Pterolobium-Ziziphus-Scutia* scrub.

**Bettadahalli, near Somwarpet:** This is the first record of the species in the Karnataka Western Ghats and incidentally the first record of the species west of 76° E. The species was observed in scrub that separated a degraded coffee estate from nearby rice-fields some 20 km northwest of Somwarpet and close to a small settlement called Bettadahalli in Kodagu (Coorg) district on March 16, 2001. Only one bird was seen in



the area which is in the Western Ghats foothills and composed primarily of moist deciduous vegetation with some border scrub of Acanthaceae and Rubiaceae species.

**Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary:** The Yellow-throated Bulbul was observed in dry deciduous scrub in eastern and north-eastern parts of the Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary situated in the Idukki district of Kerala. Four birds were seen in March 1998 (B.R. Sheshagiri, *pers. comm.*), three birds each in March 2000 (A. Shivaprakash, *pers. comm.*) and April 2002 (*pers. obs.*). The species has been recorded once at Monkey falls area in the neighbouring Annamalai hills (Kannan 1992) and more frequently in Bodiayakanur, on the road to Munnar (BirdLife International 2001).

**Dimbum:** Eighteen birds were observed in degraded dry deciduous forest near Dimbum on June 14, 2002 and 24 birds were seen in evergreen scrub on the steep Satyamangalam Ghat downhill towards Satyamangalam on June 15, 2002. Dimbum (c. 1,250 m) is a settlement of a few huts located on the southern end of the Biligirirangan hills c. 10 km from Satyamangalam (11° 31' N, 77° 15' E) in the Periyar district of Tamil Nadu. The vegetation at Dimbum is the interface between a degraded dry deciduous forest of teak (*Tectona*), bamboo (*Dendrocalamus*) and *Lantana* thickets and evergreen scrub of *Plectronia didyma*, *Schefflera* sp., *Canthium* sp. and *Ziziphus* sp. The typical vegetation on the Satyamangalam ghat slopes can be characterised as the same evergreen scrub, but a few deciduous trees of *Ailanthus excelsa*, *Boswellia glabra*, *Chloroxylon swietenia* and other species. At the foothills, most vegetation is *Dodonea*, *Erythroxylon*, *Lantana*, *Ziziphus* etc., rapidly replaced by the mesquite, *Prosopis juliflora* away from the hills.

The bulbuls were fairly common both along and away from roadside bushes in middle elevation and higher elevation on the Ghat, at a maximum of c. 1,250 m around Dimbum. This is probably an altitudinal record for the species. The species has been previously documented from the northern parts of the Biligirirangan hills (Karthikeyan *et al.* 1995).

**Discussion:** The species appears to be common in only two of the nine sites listed here, parts of the Melkote Temple Wildlife Sanctuary and the Satyamangalam Ghat jungles, although regular surveys in the Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary may result in more encounters.

An interesting feature of isolated populations like those of Chamundi hill, Arsikere hills, Arasanakatte State Forest,

Melkote hills and Bettadapura hill is the absence of intervening hills or suitable habitat from the nearest relatively contiguous habitat in the Eastern Ghats of south-eastern Karnataka. This could suggest that the species was once more widespread than it is today and could have been found in scrub jungles away from hills. The gradual conversion of the plains jungles into agricultural lands limited most relatively undisturbed scrub forests to the hilly areas and the bulbul could have then been restricted to hill and foothills scrub. Birds observed away from hills at Melkote appear to support this premise, but more studies are required to prove it for certain.

The bird observed near Somwarpet is indicative of a relict, possibly a small population. Foothills areas with good scrub were also surveyed in the vicinity in March 2001, but did not yield any bird of the species. Moreover, with the great reduction in forest cover in the area and the subsequent replanting with coffee to the lowest slopes has forced the bird to vegetation bordering the coffee estates as in the Shevaroys (Karthikeyan 1995).

In the isolated and fragmented habitats like the Arasanakatte State Forest, Arsikere hills, Bettadapura hill, Chamundi hill and Aalathi Betta, the pressure on foothills forest is immense and rising. While land in the former three sites is being diverted for agriculture, the latter site is facing encroachments from nearby ashrams and residential localities. Forests at all sites including the scrub jungles in the northern boundaries of the Bandipur National Park face the danger of vegetation loss to fuel wood collection by residents of nearby villages. This reaches a peak in summer when the vegetation is dry, just before the breeding season of the birds that coincides with the onset of the monsoons. The Melkote Temple Wildlife Sanctuary, an important site for the species, is severely affected by a shortage of staff for effective monitoring and prevention of encroachments and vegetation loss. The bulbul survives in good numbers in the remote areas of the Park, relatively away from human habitations and disturbances.

July 29, 2002

S. THEJASWI

639, "Sibia House", 16<sup>th</sup> Cross,  
'B' Block, Vijayanagar 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage,  
Mysore 570 017,

Karnataka, India.

Email: dumaketu@rediffmail.com

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## 21. OBSERVATIONS ON THE RUSTY-RUMPED GRASSHOPPER-WARBLER *LOCUSTELLA CERTHIOLA* (PALLAS) AT MYSORE, KARNATAKA

The Rusty-rumped Grasshopper-Warbler *Locustella certhiola*, formerly known as the Pallas' Grasshopper Warbler, was observed at Lingambudhi lake (12° 16' N, 76° 37' E), in Mysore (12° 18' N, 76° 39' E), between November 1999 and March 2000. It was first noted on November 10, 1999 in a two acre plot of tall grass near the lake. The bird, an adult, was identified by the presence of a rufous rump, a greyish crown heavily striped with black, a distinctive white supercilium and dark brown tail with white-tip. Bold, black streaks on the back were restricted and did not extend to the rump which was relatively clear of marks. Throat and underparts were white and unmarked, with a rufous wash on the flanks and vent. The Streaked Grasshopper-Warbler *Locustella lanceolata* and Pale Grasshopper-Warbler *Locustella naevia* are both heavily streaked on the chest, flanks, undertail coverts and rump, and lacking the rufous rump and white-tipped tail. The former also differs in being smaller and having streaks on throat while the latter is more or less the same size, but much paler and less accentuated streaks.

Over five months of surveillance resulted in the almost daily observation of the bird in the same locality and we familiarized ourselves with its activities. The bird was not difficult to observe in the early morning between 0700 hrs, around when it would first appear, and 0830 hrs. It would move through the grasses during the rest of the day, seldom making an appearance on the top or elsewhere. It would be visible again in the evenings, but for a short period, between 1715 to 1745 hrs that advanced further with the season and daylight conditions. Although the *Locustella* warblers are known to be "great skulkers" (Ali and Ripley 1987), the bird would often rise to the top of tall grasses and keep a look-out for a few seconds before disappearing deep into the grass again. It would do this quite often, and would sometimes hunt keeping to the top of the grasses. It was twice observed to go up to c. 8 m on a *Casuarina* tree to feed, although this was unusual and infrequent. On the whole, the bird could be observed fairly well, once located, as it was restricted to a small area in the grassland.

Ali and Ripley (1987), on the vocalization of the species, note "In winter only an occasional "chi-chirrr" is uttered." But the bird was noted to have three other calls; a low "tit, tit" occasionally heard when feeding, a babbler-like chatter "kat kat kat kat" repeated in a frenzy when excited, especially once when the bird was seen chasing a Indian Great Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus*, and an occasional, somewhat loud "chirrr". The second of these calls was heard towards mid-March when the bird was noticed to become somewhat territorial, chasing other large warblers and even bushchats from the grass patch.

The Rusty-rumped Grasshopper-Warbler is recorded as a locally common winter visitor (Ali and Ripley 1987). It has been recorded only once from southern India, a specimen netted at Kuttanad in the Alleppey district of Kerala in May 1963 (George and Matthew 1965). Sugathan and Varghese (1996) record it from the Thattakad Bird Sanctuary in Kerala, but see Santharam (2000). The Streaked Grasshopper-Warbler is recorded as a scarce winter visitor from parts of eastern and northern India (Ali and Ripley 1987) with a recent record from Sri Lanka (Hoffmann 1996), while the Pale Grasshopper-Warbler is a widespread winter visitor in India, especially the Western Ghats and has also been observed at the same site as the Rusty-rumped in Mysore. This observation from Mysore is the second from southern India and provides details of vocalization hitherto not recorded.

July 27, 2002

S. THEJASWI

639, "Sibia House", 16<sup>th</sup> Cross,  
'B' Block, Vijayanagar 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage,  
Mysore 570 017, Karnataka, India.  
Email: dumaketu@rediffmail.com

A. SHIVAPRAKASH

# 478, 3<sup>rd</sup> Cross Road, 8<sup>th</sup> Main Road,  
'H' Block, Ramakrishna Nagar,  
Mysore 570 022, Karnataka, India.  
Email: adavanne2004@yahoo.com



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