

The upper limit of the species is variously recorded as 1,800 m (Ali and Ripley 1981), 2,500 m (Ali 1996) and 1,372 m (Fleming *et al.* 1984) for the Indian subcontinent. Interestingly, the site where the birds were observed is at an elevation of c. 3,500 m, considerably exceeding the record from Rara Lake in Nepal on April 1, 1976 at 3,050 m (Inskipp and Inskipp 1991).

Feb. 7, 2001 HARKIRAT SINGH SANGHA  
B-27, Gautam Marg,  
Hanuman Nagar,  
Jaipur 302 021, Rajasthan, India.  
Email: sangha@datainfosys.net

RISHAD NAOROJI  
Godrej Bhavan,  
4-A, Home Street,  
Fort, Mumbai 400 001,  
Maharashtra,  
India.  
Email: rnaoroji@vsnl.com

MAAN BARUA  
107, M.C. Road,  
Uzan Bazaar,  
Guwahati 781 001,  
Assam,  
India.

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## 3. SIGHTING OF LESSER FRIGATEBIRD *FREGATA ARIEL* GRAY IN THE KOLE WETLANDS OF THRISSUR, KERALA

(With one plate)

Kole wetland in Thrissur district is one of the important wintering grounds for migratory birds coming to Kerala. The area lies in between 10° 20' - 10° 40' N and 75° 58' - 76° 11' E, extending to about 11,000 ha. Kole wetlands are situated below sea level and paddy is cultivated during the months of October to April, after draining water. During monsoon (June to September) the whole area is inundated. As a part of ecological studies on wetland birds initiated in 1998, we have been surveying the area regularly. During the period, a lesser frigatebird *Fregata ariel* Gray was recorded from Guruvayur, Thrissur district on June 16, 2000. The place is situated on

the west coast and is about 4 km away from the sea. Local people noticed a live bird and brought it to the Thrissur Zoo. On examination, the bird was identified as an adult female of the lesser frigatebird. The bird had a black head and red eye rings, black throat and white breast extending into a complete collar around the neck. The bird stayed alive for a week in the zoo, after which it was skinned and preserved.

Only a few sighting details of the lesser frigatebird are reported from Kerala State. Ferguson and Bourdillon (1904) recorded it from Trivandrum. Ali (1984) has not reported the species from Kerala. Faizi (1985) reported the



species from Quilon, based on a museum specimen. This is the first report of the species from central Kerala and also from the Kole wetlands of Thrissur. The individual seems to be an accidental straggler that landed in the coastal zone due to the heavy monsoon winds prevalent in June.

November 25, 2000

\*E.A. JAYSON

C. SIVAPERUMAN

Division of Wildlife Biology  
Kerala Forest Research Institute

Peechi 680 653,

Kerala, India.

\*Email: jayson@kfri.org

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#### 4. INDIAN POND-HERONS *ARDEOLA GRAYII* FEEDING ON DRAGONFLIES

Following the failure of monsoon in our area in 1999-2000, Rishi Valley (Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh) wore a drab look with the drying up of ponds and other waterbodies. Even the percolation tank, which usually harbours water even in the lean period, was reduced to a muddy puddle.

I was out on a walk along the road lined with trees such as *Ficus* and *Spathodea* outside the school campus, on the evening of March 5, 2000, when I noticed three Indian pond-herons (*Ardeola grayii*) perched on a banyan tree *Ficus bengalensis*, c. 8 m above the ground. It was too early for them to roost and there was no major disturbance that might have forced them to fly to a tree. I paused to look around, and within a few minutes was able to find the reason.

Just above the Indian pond-herons was a small group of dragonflies, flying close to the foliage of the banyan tree. Even as I was watching them, an Indian pond-heron attempted to snap at a dragonfly that was just a few inches above it. This and the attempts that followed were all unsuccessful for the few minutes that I observed them. A little later, the dragonflies moved away from the tree and the Indian pond-herons flew to forage in the dry, barren fields. A few days later, I noticed another Indian pond-heron on a

tamarind tree outside my house attempting to catch dragonflies in flight.

With the disappearance of waterbodies, the Indian pond-herons had to change their foraging strategies and had taken to vantage points on trees to catch dragonflies. A few others were seen stalking insects in dry fields and, following cattle and goats just like cattle egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) which were also occasionally seen with the herons. I had, on an earlier instance, noticed Indian pond-herons attempting to catch dragonflies from the ground at Adyar Estuary in Chennai when the insects were flying low over the islets and water. Prasad and Hemanth (1992; *JBNHS* 89: 246) have reported Indian pond-herons perched on a 7 m willow tree in Bangalore, feeding on bees that came to the flowers. Jose noticed (1999; *NLBW* 39(2): 39) cattle egrets feeding on insects visiting flowerheads of mango *Mangifera indica* and *Carissa* trees. These observations show how birds adapt their behaviour to changed circumstances to survive.

April 16, 2000

V. SANTHARAM

Institute of Bird Studies & Natural History,  
Rishi Valley Education Centre,  
Rishi Valley 517 352,  
Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh, India.





Jayson, E A and Sivaperuman, C. 2003. "3. Sighting of Lesser Frigatebird Fregata Ariel Gray in the Kole Wetlands of Thrissur, Kerala." *The journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 100, 107–108.

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