Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis* feeding on chir pine *Pinus roxburghii* needles

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As part of a wildlife assessment program in the western Himalaya, we undertook a status survey of birds along the Bhagirathi River valley in Uttaranchal during October–November 2005. On 28.xi.2005, we saw a Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis* feeding on needles of chir pine *Pinus roxburghii* at about 08:55 hrs, along one of our monitoring trails between Dhauldhar and Badni villages, the former being situated around 15 km from Deoprayag town. The altitude of the trail ranged between 1038–1088 m. The vegetation was mainly chir pine mixed with scrub, with species like *Cordia myxa*, *Lantana camara*, and *Carrisa* sp. On that particular morning, we saw a vulture perched on top of a chir pine at about 10–12 m from us on the trek. As the day was clear with no mist in the air and the morning sun was behind us, we had a clear view of the vulture. The bird was quite large with a greyish head and cream-coloured ruff; its bill was noticeably yellowish and there were striking whitish streaks on the under parts. We confirmed the identity of the vulture as a Himalayan Griffon from Grimmett et al. (1998). Even as the bird was basking, it plucked a few chir pine needles and started feeding on the more tender needles. This lasted for about five minutes. Since vultures are known to feed mainly on carrion, we wonder if this unusual behavior of feeding on vegetative matter helps the bird in procuring nutrient supplement and / or roughage to aid in digestion, as practised by mammalian carnivores.

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Grey-headed Lapwings *Vanellus cinereus* extend range into coastal Tamil Nadu, India

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In recent years, sightings of Grey-headed lapwing *Vanellus cinereus*, have become frequent in coastal Tamil Nadu. We summarise all the recent sightings below:

Pallikaranai (South-east of Chennai)

In early 2003, *c*17 birds were observed here (A. Rajaram, verbally).

11.xii.2003: Four birds in mixed group with other waders (Ramachandran 2004).

26.xii.2003: 30+ birds seen (Ramachandran 2004).

26.i.2004: 28 birds seen. (V. Santharam, pers. obs.)

In January 2004, 35–40 birds were seen on three occasions (K. V. Sudhakar & K. Sathasivam, verbally).

19.xii.2004: 80 birds seen (Rajaram 2005).

24.i.2005: 80 birds seen (V. Santharam, pers. obs.).

Pallikaranai is a marshy area with open grassy patches and reed beds. The birds were seen in open grassy meadows.

The earliest sightings in the vicinity of Chennai date back to 1987 at Adyar Estuary (Santharam 2003b). Twelve birds were seen around Machlipatnam, Krishna district, Andhra Pradesh in February 2001 and a few more birds were sighted on later dates up to April 2001. (Conroy 2003).

Kaliveli

Sundar (2000) reported a single bird from Kaliveli in January 1997. The species was filmed here in 2003 during the preparation of a documentary film on Kaliveli by FERAL (V. Srinivas, verbally).

Point Calimere

On a recent visit to Point Calimere on 11.i.2004, RA and PP, along with Shantikar Reddy and Aurosylle Bystrom, saw a flock of around 20 birds at Ramya Lake. These birds were with *c*40 Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus* and a few Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, and contained males, females and juveniles. The list maintained here by the forest department does not mention this lapwing. This is probably the most southern record for this species.

Discussion

The Grey-headed Lapwing is a conspicuous and easily identified species, and it would be interesting to plot any further increases of its range over time.

Two of the wetlands in this note are threatened. Pallikaranai was an extensive wetland about 50 km^2 or more once, but is now greatly fragmented and disturbed. It forms part of an extensive network of over 90 wetlands whose runoff it drained. The typical habitat consists of *Typha* reeds, often over 3 m in height, open grassy patches and pools of water. Over a hundred species of birds have been recorded here since 1978 (Santharam 2003a). However in recent years reckless and thoughtless "development" of the area for building housing colonies, industrial and educational institutions, railway yard and garbage dump have caused irreparable damage to the ecosystem. Not only has the city lost a valuable wildlife habitat, but also a reliable source for recharging ground water.

Kalivelli tank and Yedayanthittu estuary are part of the Kalivelli wetlands, which are situated about 20 km to the north of Pondicherry along the East Coast. The wetland swamps cover an area of about 70 km^2. This tank forms an important wintering site for birds among the migratory habitats along the East Coast, and is part of the flyway leading to Point Calimere and Sri Lanka. During winter (October–March), 71 species of water birds have been recorded here, the total number exceeding 60,000 birds. These include threatened species such as the Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippinus*, and large populations of the Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*. It fits many of the criteria required to become a Ramsar site.

There are strong commercial interests opposing its declaration as a sanctuary. Salt mining and shrimp farming interests have encroached on the wetland. Industrial concerns wish to acquire the land to establish salt production units, and a thermal power plant has apparently also been suggested.

Salim Ali proposed Kalivelli as a bird sanctuary in 1983. No action has been taken on this proposal; district officials who act against the shrimp farmers and attempt to have it declared a sanctuary get transferred.

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An instance of the Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea* destroying the nest of a Black-headed Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus*

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On the morning of 7.v.2005, we were observing birds in agricultural fields (one out of four habitat elements we are studying for avian biodiversity estimation) of Haridwar district (29°55'N 78°8'E), Uttaranchal (India). On the margin of one agricultural field, in a mango tree *Mangifera indica*, there was a nest of a Black-headed Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus* that had been under our observations since its commencement. One individual of the pair was sitting in the nest, in an incubating posture, and the other individual was perched on a nearby branch of the same tree. Suddenly we heard very harsh and continuous calls from the tree where Black-headed Oriole was nesting. We reached the tree and noted that the Black-headed Oriole, which was outside the nest, was very fidgety. It was hopping from one branch to another and spreading its wings while calling. Through binoculars, we saw that the Black-headed Oriole's calls were directed towards a female Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea* that was sitting in an adjacent jackfruit tree *Arthocarpus heterophyllus*. After a minute or so, the incubating Black-headed Oriole also started producing the harsh calls like that of the other bird. Unexpectedly, the Asian Koel attacked the incubating Black-headed Oriole and chased it off the nest. Consequently, the Black-headed Orioles, which were by now, extremely agitated, aggressively attacked the Asian Koel, though keeping at least two feet away from her. Meanwhile, the latter, reached the nest and was warily inspecting it. The next moment it held the edge