

Thattekad Bird Sanctuary, Kerala Southern India

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Sri Lanka Bay Owl

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All the pictures taken by Szilvia Molnár and András Vasas.

Introduction

In January 2009 we spent 13 days in Southern India. We followed the classical birding route, Mudumalai, Ooty and Munnar. After reading the trip reports we decided to go to Thattekad instead of Top Slip and Periyar. This decision seemed to be right, as we managed to see almost all of our target species here in just 3 full and 2 half days. We don't want to discuss the well known sites, but as Thattekad is rich in birds and is not very well known we think it's worth to write a few things about it.

General information

Thattekad lies about 60 kms from Kochi, so you can fit it easily into a Southern India birding trip as first or last site. To reach the more remote parts of the Thattekad Bird Sanctuary and the Idamalayar Power Plant it is necessary to have *own car. You can enter the Sanctuary only with guide. Our guides were K. V. Eldhose and his young assistant Sudeesh. Both of our guides knew the area very well, their help in orientation, getting permits and finding birds was essential. Eldhose is building a lodge, 3 huts are ready and he is planning to build 3 more. The lodge lies a bit further from the Bird Sanctuary, on the edge of a plantation. Thanks to the wise planning we can enjoy the sight of some common species like Stork-billed Kingfisher, Rufous Treepie, Jungle Owlet from the terrace. Due to Eldhose's regular feeding the shy Red Spurfowl can be regularly seen on a grassy area behind the lodge. The roosting place of the Mottled Wood Owl can be reached easily on foot as it is very close to the lodge. Based on our personal experiences we can strongly recommend both the western style lodge and the excellent guiding of Eldhose. You can find Eldho on the Internet on the following homepage: <http://www.birdingsouthindia.com>, or you can e-mail him on: eldhose.kv@gmail.com.

Accommodation, food and other costs

A hut in Eldho's lodge for 2 people with full board cost 2800 Rs per day. Guiding fee was 1000 Rs for a day. Entrance fee into the Sanctuary was 100 Rs per entrance for 4 people (*arranged by Eldho).



Eldho's lodge



Sri Lanka Frogmouth

Diary

We arrived from Munnar on 18th January, in the afternoon. We met with Eldho in the settlement and he took us to the lodge, where we were greeted with fresh cold

fruit juice. We had an excellent lunch with several Indian dishes then we went birding to a more remote area of the Bird Sanctuary, near Orullathanny. Previously we gave Eldho our wish list, so he quickly made a plan and started to realize it. We came across our first **Flame-throated Bulbuls** the moment we got out of the car. Started walking on a forest road and Eldho spotted the first **Malabar Trogon**, **Rusty-tailed Flycatcher** and **Brown-breasted Flycatcher** quickly. Eldho disappeared in the forest and soon we could observe a pair of **Sri Lanka Frogmouth** on roost. We ended the afternoon with great views of **Malabar Barbet** and **White-bellied Woodpecker**. While we enjoyed our dinner we all agreed that it was a very good start and were excited about the next morning.



Malabar Trogon



Malabar Barbet

Next morning we met with Eldho and his young assistant Sudeesh. First we were searching for a pair of Spot-bellied Eagle Owls which they saw a few days back, but without any success. Eldho had to leave so we continued with Sudeesh. Next to a drying riverbed we saw a smaller group of **Wynaad Laughingthrushes** and **Indian Scimitar Babblers**, in the riverbed next to a small remaining pond we disturbed a **Malayan Night-Heron**. In the bamboo we saw a **White-bellied Blue Flycatcher**.

In the heat of the day we visited some rice fields nearby where we managed to see **Black-throated Munias**, another tick on our wish list. We started the afternoon birding with two more ticks, one was a **Mottled Wood Owl** and the other a **Fork-tailed Drongo Cuckoo** on a plantation. We visited a drier area of the Sanctuary where we came across our first group of **Red Spurfbwls** and a pair of **White-bellied Treepies**. In the evening we went back to Orullathanny where we heard a Spot-bellied Eagle Owl calling from the distance, then suddenly we heard a Sri Lanka Bay Owl calling nearby. Although we managed to record the call (probably the first recording of this subspecies), we didn't see the bird.

Next morning we birded around the Idamalayar Power Plant, where we saw **Legge's Hawk Eagle**, **Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrike** and **Rufous Babblers**. Dusk found us on the same clearing as the day before, only this time after playing the tape we managed to see a **Spot-bellied Eagle Owl** as it flew in onto a tree next to us. Bay Owl was heard again.



Mottled Wood Owl



Spot-bellied Eagle Owl

On our last full day we realized that we already saw almost all of the species we had on our wish list. We observed a roosting **Indian Scops-Owl**, took pictures of an **Indian Pitta**, checked on the Laughingthrushes once more and had **Grey-headed Bulbul** also. However we left the most excitement for the last morning.

Started at 4 a.m. to Eldho's favourite Bay Owl site. The bird didn't call when we reached the place, but after playing the recording we made, it responded immediately. We tried to go as near to the bird as possible, in my estimation we were about 15-20 metres from it, but Eldho suggested not to play the call *or not to search with the spotlight. So we sat there and waited for the last calls of the owl and for the dawn. After the first lights Eldho went off alone to search for the bird. He returned after two hours to tell us that he didn't find it and suggested to return to the lodge for breakfast. We were pretty upset and thought that we lost our last chance to see this species. After breakfast we returned to the same place. After another hour spent with searching we heard Eldho's voice "Tamás, Tamás". Rushed to him and soon we had excellent views of *this rarely observed, mysterious **Sri Lanka Bay Owl**. We managed not just *record its call for the first time, but had *very good look on a bird. Fantastic!

After lunch we made an attempt to find Nilgiri Trush, without success, but we were very happy with the Sri Lanka Bay Owl observation. Left the lodge in high spirits towards the airport and continued our trip to the Andamans.

Trip list

The South Indian endemic species are written in bold, near-endemics in bold and italics. The species in brackets were only heard.

1. ***Red Spurfowl*** *Galloperdix spadicea*
2. ***Grey Junglefowl*** *Gallus sonneratii*
3. Lesser Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna javanica*
4. Malayan Night Heron *Gorsachius melanolophus*
5. Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*
6. Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus coromandus*
7. Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*
8. Eastern Great Egret *Ardea modesta*
9. Yellow-billed Egret *Egretta intermedia*
10. Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*
11. Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*
12. Oriental Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*
13. Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*
14. Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela*
15. Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus*
16. Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*
17. Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis*
18. Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*
19. ***Legge's Hawk-Eagle*** *Spizaetus kelaarti*
20. White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*
21. Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*
22. Bronze-winged Jacana *Metopidius indicus*
23. River Tern *Sterna aurantia*
24. Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*
25. Feral Pigeon *Columba livia f. domestica*
26. Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*
27. Common Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica*
28. Green Imperial Pigeon *Ducula aenea*
29. Mountain Imperial Pigeon *Ducula badia*
30. Vernal Hanging Parrot *Loriculus vernalis*
31. Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*
32. Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*
33. ***Blue-winged Parakeet*** *Psittacula columboides*
34. Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis*
35. Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopaceus*
36. [Banded Bay Cuckoo *Cacomantis sonneratii*]

37. Fork-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo	<i>Surniculus dicruroides</i>
38. Common Hawk-Cuckoo	<i>Hierococcyx varius</i>
39. Sri Lanka Bay Owl	<i>Phodilus assimilis</i>
40. Indian Scops Owl	<i>Otus bakkamoena</i>
41. Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo nipalensis</i>
42. Mottled Wood Owl	<i>Strix ocellata</i>
43. Jungle Owlet	<i>Glaucidium radiatum</i>
44. Brown Hawk-Owl	<i>Ninox scutulata</i>
45. Sri Lanka Frogmouth	<i>Batrachostomus moniliger</i>
46. Great Eared Nightjar	<i>Eurostopodus macrotis</i>
47. Jerdon's Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus atripennis</i>
48. Crested Treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>
49. Indian Swiftlet	<i>Aerodramus unicolor</i>
50. Brown-backed Needletail	<i>Hirundapus giganteus</i>
51. Asian Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>
52. Malabar Trogon	<i>Harpactes fasciatus</i>
53. Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
54. Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>
55. White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
56. Blue-eared Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo meninting</i>
57. Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
58. Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
59. Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>
60. Malabar Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyrceros griseus</i>
61. White-cheeked Barbet	<i>Megalaima viridis</i>
62. Malabar Barbet	<i>Megalaima malabarica</i>
63. Speckled Piculet	<i>Picumnus innominatus</i>
64. Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos nanus</i>
65. White-bellied Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus javensis</i>
66. Streak-throated Woodpecker	<i>Picus xanthopygaeus</i>
67. Lesser Goldenback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
68. Greater Goldenback	<i>Chrysocolaptes lucidus</i>
69. Heart-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Hemicircus canente</i>
70. Indian Pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>
71. Malabar Woodshrike	<i>Tephrodornis sylvicola</i>
72. Ashy Woodswallow	<i>Artamus fuscus</i>
73. Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
74. Black-headed Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina melanoptera</i>
75. Orange Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>
76. Indian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus kundoo</i>
77. Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>

78. Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
79. Ashy Drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>
80. Bronzed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>
81. Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>
82. Black-naped Monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>
83. Asian Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
84. Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>
85. White-bellied Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta leucogastra</i>
86. House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
87. Indian Jungle Crow	<i>Corvus culminatus</i>
88. Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
89. Dusky Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne concolor</i>
90. Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>
91. Grey-headed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus priocephalus</i>
92. Flame-throated Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus gularis</i>
93. Red-whiskered Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>
94. Yellow-browed Bulbul	<i>Acritillas indica</i>
95. Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>
96. Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>
97. Large-billed Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus magnirostris</i>
98. Puff-throated Babbler	<i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>
99. Indian Scimitar Babbler	<i>Pomatorhinus horsfieldii</i>
100. Dark-fronted Babbler	<i>Rhopocichla atriceps</i>
101. Rufous Babbler	<i>Turdoides subrufa</i>
102. Jungle Babbler	<i>Turdoides striata</i>
103. Wynaad Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax delesserti</i>
104. Brown-cheeked Fulvetta	<i>Alcippe poioicephala</i>
105. Asian Fairy-bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>
106. Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta frontalis</i>
107. Southern Hill Myna	<i>Gracula indica</i>
108. Jungle Myna	<i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>
109. Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
110. Malabar Starling	<i>Sturnus blythii</i>
111. Malabar Whistling Thrush	<i>Myophonus horsfieldii</i>
112. Orange-headed Thrush	<i>Zoothera citrina</i>
113. Indian Blackbird	<i>Turdus simillimus</i>
114. Indian Blue Robin	<i>Luscinia brunnea</i>
115. Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
116. Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>
117. Brown-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa muttui</i>
118. Rusty-tailed Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa ruficauda</i>

119. White-bellied Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis pallipes</i>
120. Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>
121. Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis rubeculoides</i>
122. Jerdon's Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis jerdoni</i>
123. Golden-fronted Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>
124. Nilgiri Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum concolor</i>
125. Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma zeylonica</i>
126. Little Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera longirostra</i>
127. Black-throated Munia	<i>Lonchura kelaarti</i>
128. [Forest Wagtail	<i>Dendronanthus indicus</i>]
129. Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
130. White-browed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla madaraspatensis</i>
131. Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>