

## BIRDS OF DHARMAPURI DISTRICT, TAMILNADU, INDIA

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### INTRODUCTION

There is practically no information on the avifauna of Dharmapuri district of Tamil Nadu. As a matter of fact, it was realised that the district had been faunistically ignored, even with respect to several lower groups of animals. With this in mind, the Southern Regional Station of the Zoological Survey of India at Madras sent two parties during 1985 and 1986 to survey the district intensively and collect various animal groups (except mammals and birds), with a view to building up a faunal inventory of the district. The present author, who was associated with both the surveys utilised the opportunity to make a field study of the birds of the district, and list them. A total of 105 species of birds were identified on the basis of field sighting, and these are listed in this paper. No bird specimen was examined in the hand. No claim is made that the list presented is complete or near complete. Only the northwestern, western, southwestern, southern and southeastern regions of the district were surveyed. The duration of study was of only 19 days in April, 1985, and 17 days in February-March, 1986. Since most of the major forest areas were surveyed, it is felt that the present list comprises a substantial number of bird species which are actually to be found in the district.

The present study has revealed that the majority of the birds sighted are resident species. Only nine species (c 8.5% of the total sighting) are winter visitors to the whole or most of India, while two more are winter visitors to Tamil Nadu. The Chestnutbellied Nuthatch, *Sitta castanea* Lesson, is recorded for the first time from the district; it has been previously recorded in Tamil Nadu from the Nilgiri Hills. The flock of over 25 Whitenecked Stork, *Ciconia episcopus* (Boddaert), is perhaps the largest ever recorded. The present study has also shown that in the Dharmapuri district, the Streaked Weaver Bird, *Ploceus manyar* (Horsfield), breeds in the period between the NE and SW monsoons. This raises the question whether its breeding season is as dependent on the monsoons, in this district, as it has been stated to be in the Himalayan foothills. Further, the Ashy Wren-Warbler, *Prinia socialis* Sykes, was also found breeding a little earlier than previously recorded in Tamil Nadu. The Franklin's Ashy-Grey Wren-Warbler, *Prinia hodgsoni* Blyth, was also observed breeding much earlier than known so far. A single dubious sighting of the Grey Shrike, *Lanius excubitor* Linnaeus, would make it the first record of this species from Tamil Nadu. However, this would require confirmation by further investigation.

There is a view, and a sound one too, that restricting the study of any group of animals, especially one with as great a mobility as the birds, to a small political region with no distinctive geographical features, is artificial and undesirable. But, such a study has a two-fold significance. First, it tells us about the wealth and variety of a particular group of animal in the district. This aspect, apart from being of academic interest, is of importance when one takes a long-range view; a similar study conducted twenty or thirty years hence will, on comparison with the present one, show us the status, abundance and intra-district distribution of the animal in question. The second aspect of studies such as the present one, is that these aid the state governments concerned to formulate methods to conserve their faunal wealth. This aspect is of paramount importance today when environmental degradation is rapid and rampant and unless we know what we have, we will never know what we lost.

Admittedly, there is ample scope for further studies, and this paper would have served a very useful purpose, even if it were only to arouse other ornithologists to make more intensive efforts to study the birds of the district.

#### LOCATION AND AREA

Dharmapuri district is situated between 11° 45' and 12° 55' North, and 77° 28' and 78° 50' East in the state of Tamil Nadu. On the north, it shares its borders with Andhra Pradesh and Karanataka, and on the west with Karnataka and Coimbatore district, Tamil Nadu. On the south, it is bounded by Salem district, Tamil Nadu, and its eastern borders are shared by South and North Arcot districts, Tamil Nadu. The district has a total area of about 9615.89 Km<sup>2</sup>, and comprises four taluks, viz., Hosur, Krishnagiri, Dharmapuri and Harur.

#### TOPOGRAPHY

Topographically, Dharmapuri district could be distinguished into two parts: (1) a poorly wooded, rocky, undulating plateau on the north and east, with denser forests in the south and west. Its average elevation is about 915 m above m.s.l., dipping to the southwest towards the Cauvery river; (2) a basin intermediate between the Karnataka table-land and the plains. The general elevation is about 395m above m.s.l. This basin is bounded on the north and west by the Karnataka plateau, on the south and east by the hill ranges of Javadi, Teertamalai, Chitteris, Shevroys and Manukondamalai.

#### RIVER SYSTEMS

Two major rivers, the Ponnaiyar and the Cauvery, and their tributaries, drain the northern and eastern portion of Dharmapuri and Harur taluks. Although they are perennial rivers, the flow is scanty during the dry season.

The Cauvery and its tributaries drain the southern portion of Hosur and Dharmapuri

taluks. The Cauvery receives the Chinnar river at Hogenekal. The falls at Hogenekal are c' 585m above m.s.l.

### RAINFALL

The northern plateau, comprising the Hosur taluk and a part of Krishnagiri taluk, depends on the southwest monsoon, while the rest of the district depends mostly on the northeast monsoon. Annual rainfall varies from 680mm to 980mm.

### VEGETATION AND FOREST

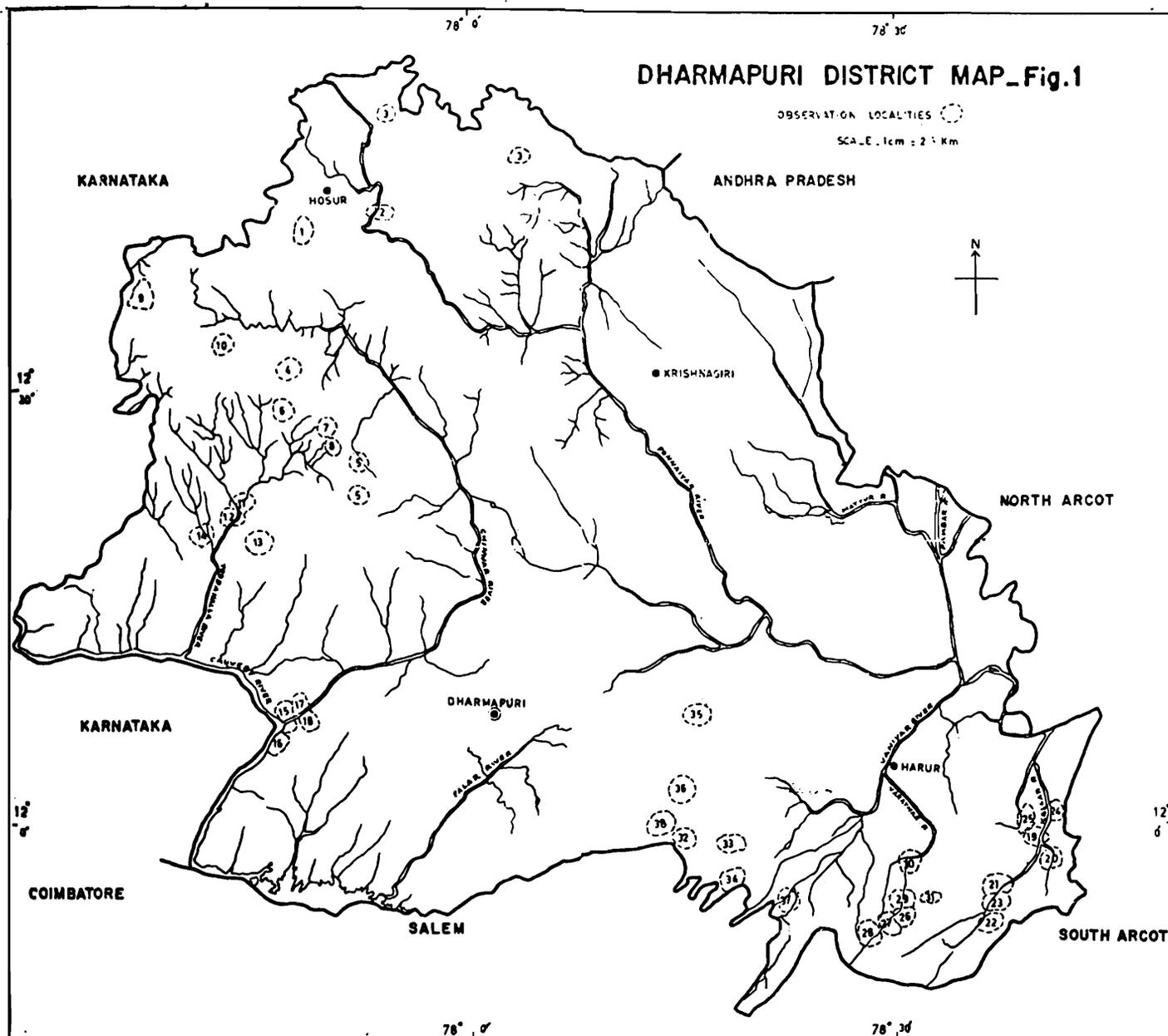
About a fifth of the total area of the district is under forest cover. Due to scant rainfall, over-grazing, human interference and impoverished soil, trees are of poor quality. The chief forest type in the district is the Tropical Dry Deciduous Forest. Further details of the major features of vegetation are given below against the various localities where field study was conducted.

### LOCALITIES

(Fig. 1)

1. *Hosur Cattle Farm campus* : Located at Mathigiri, about 6 Km from Hosur town, the area is full of grassy pastures with scattered trees. Some large shady trees are found in the Farm Guest House compound.
2. *Perandapalli* : Located on the Hosur-Krishnagiri road, just outside the boundary of the industrial area. Vegetation is mainly thorny scrub.
3. *Berikai Reserve Forest* : Thorny scrub vegetation, with large boulders and rocks.
4. *Denkanikotta Forest Rest House compound* : Fairly wooded area - chiefly planted trees.
5. *Sameri, Aiyur Reserve Forest* : Mixed dry deciduous and thorny scrub, with abundant *Lantana* thickets; a muddy *jheel*; area supporting elephants (one was sighted in the distance).
6. *Nogancor Reserve Forest* : Dry deciduous scrub, with *Lantana*, Bamboo.
7. *Namaleri* : Paddy fields; *jheel* on roadside.
8. *Dadikal Dam* : Shallow muddy reservoir with scattered shrubs in its vicinity; paddy fields not far away.
9. *Tali Reserve Forest* : Bordering Karnataka; very dry, predominantly scrub.
10. *Keesan Kuppam* : On way to Tail Reserve Forest ; *Jheel* on roadside with grassy surroundings.
11. *Panai Reserve Forest* : Mixed dry deciduous and scrub.

12. *Anchetty Forest Rest House compound and vicinity* : Some garden trees, with open uncultivated fields down to Toddahalla river on eastern side; *jheel* on western side.
13. *Anchetty Reserve Forest, c 5 Km on Natrapalayam Road* : Mixed dry deciduous and scrub.
14. *Kulumuru pallam* : WSW of Anchetty; predominantly dry thorny scrub, with some open uncultivated fields.
15. *Hogenekal Forest Rest House compound and vicinity* : Dry deciduous forest.
16. *Bevanurmala Reserve Forest, on east bank of Cauvery river* : Rocky area; mixed dry deciduous and scrub.
17. *Forest around Chinnar river* : Deciduous forest - denser close to the river, with abundant leaf litter.
18. *Forest along Hogenekal - Pennagaram road* : Mixed dry deciduous and thorny scrub.
19. *Kottapatti Forest Rest House compound* : Planted trees, some very large and shady.
20. *Vannathipaarai, along Chinnar river* : Dry deciduous forest, well-wooded in some portions.
21. *Kottapatti-Sittilingi road* : Open cultivated and uncultivated fields.
22. *Malaihaangi, c 1-2 Km ahead of Sittilingi* : Partly dry scrub, with *Lantana* shrubs and thorny thickets, and partly deciduous with tall trees (near stream).
23. *Chettigutta (Ammapetta Aru)* : Deciduous forest.
24. *Naagamarathu pallam (Eluvani Aru)* : River at the foot of a hill and at the forest edge. Forest is deciduous and scrub with a good number of tamarind trees, bamboo, and thick undergrowth of thorny plants.
25. *Singleri* : A *jheel* with a bund made of large stones on one side. some parts of the *jheel* edge with rotting vegetation emanating a pungent foul odour. Surrounding areas with scattered thorny plants.
26. *Sitteri Forest Rest House and vicinity* : Sandalwood and *Eucalyptus* trees (both planted) in front of the Rest House. Surrounding area with deciduous forest. Abundant *Lantana* thickets.
27. *Forest between Sitteri and Thombakkal aru* : Deciduous forest with abundant *Lantana* thickets and leaf litter.
28. *Nochikuttai* : Deciduous forest - quite dense.
29. *Maamarathu odai* : Rocky stream with a little water here and there, in deciduous forest with plenty of *Lantana* shrubs, *Bryophyllum*.



Map indicating observation location

30. *Sitteri-Harur road, c 12 Km from Sitteri* : Scattered light deciduous forest, with a large number of tamarind trees and *Calotropis*.

31. *PererilPudur* : No forest worth the name. Large areas under cultivation, with human habitation here and there. Scattered groves of tamarind, mango and coconut trees.

32. *Bommidi Forest Rest House and vicinity* : Rest house close to railway line. Other than planted trees in the garden of the Rest house, surrounding areas open with fewer trees. Hillock behind Rest house with scrub vegetation.

33. *Kavaramalai* Typical open, dry, rocky, thorny scrub.

34. *Shevroy hills (foothills area)* : Dense deciduous forest.

35. *Mookanur Reserve Forest, ahead of Kadathur on Bommidi-Dharmapuri Road* : Dry, rocky, thorny scrub.

36. *Mookanur Panchayat Forest, off Bommidi-Dharmapuri road, near Kadathur* : Paddy and uncultivated field, giving way to stony, thorny scrub towards base of hillocks.

37. *Papireddipatti, Vaniyaru Dam* : A large irrigation reservoir. Forest in the vicinity dense in places with plenty of *Lantana*, Cactus and other thorny plants.

38. *Gajakulam* : Open uncultivated and cultivated fields, the latter with castor, cotton, paddy and *ragi* crops. As one proceeded towards the hills, the fields gave way to *Lantana* shrubs and a surfeit of *Babool*, and farther ahead to tamarind and other trees, with thick undergrowth.

The serial number given for the various localities are used within parentheses, in the notes under each bird species, so as to facilitate easy reference.

Abbreviations used in the paper are as follows: FRH: Forest Rest House; GH: Guest House, RF: Reserve Forest.

#### SYSTEMATIC LIST

Order PELECANIFORMES

Family PHALACROCORACIDAE

##### 1. *Phalacrocorax carbo* (Linnaeus)

LARGE CORMORANT

A lone bird was sighted sitting still on a dry branch of a submerged leafless tree in the middle of the shallow reservoir on 8.iv.1985 at Dadikal Dam (8). Judging by its colouration, it appeared to be an immature bird.

Order CICONIIFORMES

Family ARDEIDAE

##### 2. *Ardea cinerea* Linnaeus

GREY HERON

Only two sightings were made: one was of a small, scattered group of three birds in the Cauvery river at Hogenekal on 16.iv.1985. One of these birds flew away, apparently disturbed by the author's presence, although it appeared to be at least 300 m away. The second record was of a single bird in the middle of the reservoir at Vaniyaru Dam, Papireddipatti (37) on 11.iii.1986.

##### 3. *Ardeola grayii* (Sykes)

POND HERON

A common bird in the slushy banks of ponds and tanks; sighted at various places. It

was conspicuously absent in the Cauvery river at Hogenekal although the Little and Cattle Egrets and the Grey Heron were recorded there.

4. *Bubulcus ibis* (Linnaeus)

CATTLE EGRET

Commonly found in association with grazing cattle. At Hogenekal, one bird was seen in the Cauvery river close to the bank near three buffaloes which were also wallowing in the shallow awater.

5. *Egretta garzetta* (Linnaeus)

LITTLE EGRET

A common resident seen near many water bodies. One bird was seen in the company of three buffaloes and a Cattle Egret in the shallow water near the bank of the Cauvery river at Hogenekal. Another was seen in a drying reservoir between Berikai and Bagalur in the company of a Pond Heron and a White Stork.

Family CICONIIDAE

6. *Ciconia episcopus* (Boddaert)

WHITENECKED STORK

This bird was recorded on only two occasions, feeding in meadows in the cattle farm campus at Hosur (1). On the first occasion (3.iv.1985) only four birds were seen, while a flock of over 25 birds was sighted on the second occasion (4.iv.1985). Ali and Ripely (1983) state that a flock of 15 birds is the largest recorded by them.

7. *Ciconia ciconia* (Linnaeus)

WHITE STORK

A single bird was recorded in a dry reservoir between Berikai and Bagalur on 4.iv.1985. According to Ali and Ripley (1983) this winter visitor to India is less common in the Deccan than in the northern parts of India, and it returns to its summer breeding grounds by March/April.

Order FALCONIFORMES

Family ACCIPITRIDAE

8. *Elanus caeruleus* (Desfontaines)

BLACKWINGED KITE

One solitary bird recorded at about 8 AM on 1.iii.1986 perched on a telegraph pole on the Kottapatti-Theertamalai road.

9. *Milvus migrans* (Boddaert)

PARIAH KITE

A common kite especially near human habitation. A nest of this bird was seen in a

tree at a height of about 10m in the Anchetty FRH compound (12). An adult (possibly female), and a young one, which were constantly found in the vicinity of the FRH, were seen occupying the nest, separately, on one or two occasions. The young one was fairly advanced, and was found frequently on the wing uttering a shrill cry. On a couple of occasions it was also found perching in a *Eucalyptus* tree very close to the FRH, and it was not easy to chase it away by disturbance. The adult was observed perching on a telegraph pole for long durations.

10. *Haliastur indus* (Boddaert)

BRAHMINY KITE

Although not as commonly met with as the Pariah Kite, this kite was also not very difficult to find. At Bommidi (32), on 6.iii.1986, a Brahminy Kite was sighted being chased by a Pariah Kite. Two Brahminy Kites were recorded sitting on the bank of the Cauvery river at Hogenekal on 16.iv.1985. One of them was also observed swooping down over the surface of the river occasionally, thereby frightening the numerous fish (*Periophthalmus*) which were found in the river. The kite was not observed catching any fish.

11. *Accipiter badius* (Gmelin)

SHIKRA

Recorded on six occasions between 25.ii.1986 and 5.iii.1986, always solitarily, except on the latter date at Bommidi (32), when an adult and an immature bird were observed flying in circles over the FRH area.

12. *Spizaetus cirrhatus* (Gmelin)

CRESTED HAWK-EAGLE

Only one record in the deciduous forest on the way to Thombakkal river from Sitteri FRH (27). The bird was probably a subadult, and it was seen perched in the top canopy overlooking an area with abundant shrubs, but few trees.

13. *Neophron percnopterus* (Linnaeus)

SCAVENGER VULTURE

Recorded only once at Gajakulam (38). The bird was observed soaring high above the hills which were rocky and had abundant scrub vegetation.

Order	CHARADRIIFORMES
Family	CHARADRIIDAE
Subfamily	CHARADRIINAE

14. *Vanellus indicus* (Boddaert)

REDWATTLED LAPWING

One bird was sighted sitting near a small embankment in an open uncultivated field,

about 150m from a streamlet, at Kulumuru pallam (14). It later took to wing uttering its distinctive call. Another was seen in a similar situation at Vannathipaarai (20). A third one was sighted at the margin of the *jheel* at Singleri (25).

15. *Charadrius dubius* Scopoli ?

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER

A single bird, almost certainly of this species, was seen on the shingly bank of the Cauvery river at Hogenekal. As the bird flew away after a moment's observation, an element of doubt remains as to its exact specific identity.

Subfamily SCOLOPACINAE

16. *Tringa ochropus* Linnaeus

GREEN SANDPIPER

Two birds were seen on 11.iii.1986 towards the far end of the reservoir at Vaniyaru Dam (Papireddipatti) (37), in the company of Common Sandpiper.

17. *Tringa glareola* Linnaeus

WOOD SANDPIPER

About eight of these birds were seen feeding at the *jheel* at Singleri (25) on 28.ii.1986. No other sandpiper could be observed at this place. Other waders found in that location were Pond Heron, Little Egret and Blackwinged Stilt.

18. *Tringa hypoleucos* Linnaeus

COMMON SANDPIPER

At Papireddipatti (37) three birds were sighted on the same date and in the same situation as described for *T. ochropus* Linn. One bird was also recorded at Namalери (7) where it was seen flying low in a wide circle around a paddy field, all the while uttering its characteristic call, finally coming to settle on the margin of a slushy, grassy *jheel* in the company of Pond Heron and Yellow Wagtail.

Family RECURVIROSTRIDAE

19. *Himantopus himantopus* (Linnaeus)

BLACKWINGED STILT

Four of these distinctive pied black and white birds with disproportionately long legs were recorded at the *jheel* at Singleri (25).

Order COLUMBIFORMES

Family COLUMBIDAE

20. *Streptopelia chinensis* (Scopoli)

SPOTTED DOVE

The bird was heard and seen in the Bevanurmalai R.F. (16) adjacent to the Cauvery river at Hogenekal, and also close to the Vaniyaru Dam (37), and in the deciduous forest at Vannathipaarai (20).

21. *Streptopelia senegalensis* (Linnaeus)

LITTLE BROWN DOVE

This dove was sighted at four localities, viz., Kavaramalai (33), Mookanur RF (35), Vaniyaru Dam (37) and Gajakulam (38). It was always associated with scrub forest.

Order PSITTACIFORMES

Family PSITTACIDAE

22. *Psittacula krameri* (Scopoli)

ROSERINGED PARAKEET

This parakeet was found in the vicinity of villages and light deciduous forest. It was not seen in Sitteri where *Psittacula cyanocephala* (Linnaeus) was the common species.

23. *Psittacula cyanocephala* (Linnaeus)

BLOSSOMHEADED PARAKEET

Three to four of these parakeets were seen frequenting the tall *Eucalyptus* trees in the Sitteri FRH compound (c 920m) (26) around 7.00 to 7.30 AM. This parakeet was also recorded at Nochikutlai (910m) (28). At the latter locality, a nesting pair was seen at a hole in a tree trunk.

Order CUCULIFORMES

Family CUCULIDAE

24. *Clamator jacobinus* (Boddaert)

PIED CRESTED CUCKOO

This black and white cuckoo was found in considerable numbers in a fairly large clearing with sparsely distributed trees about 5 Km from Anchetty on the Natrapalayam road (13). This clearing was surrounded by scrub and dry deciduous forest.

25. *Cuculus varius* Vahl.

COMMON HAWK-CUCKOO

The call of this bird was heard almost incessantly at Hogenekal (15) from 16-18.iv.1985, but not even once could the bird be sighted here. A solitary bird was,

however, sighted perched high up on a tree in the dry deciduous forest near Natrapalayam on the Anchetty-Hogenekal road.

26. *Eudynamys scolopacea* (Linnaeus)

KOEL

The Koel was sighted at the Hosur cattle farm GH compound (1), Pereri (31), Kottapatti FRH compound (19) and Vannathipaarai (20). Of these localities, the first three had human habitation, and gardens and groves of large, leafy trees to which the Koel is attracted. At the first locality, the Koel was seen in association with Golden Oriole, Jungle Crow and Indian Myna, all three of which have been recorded as fosterers of the Koel, although the Jungle Crow and the House Crow are the principal fosterers (All and Ripley, 1983).

27. *Rhopodytes viridirostris* (Jerdon)

SMALL GREEN-BILLED MALKOHA

Three of these shy birds were located within Cactus and *Lantana* thickets close to the road skirting the reservoir of Vaniyaru dam at Papireddipatti (37). Another was seen inside thorny scrub at Malaithaangi (22) near Sittilingi.

28. *Centropus sinensis* (Stephens)

COUCAL OR CROW-PHEASANT

One bird was seen at each of the following places - Kulumuru pallam (14) deep within the scrub, Vaniyaru dam (37) within *Lantana* bushes, and Pereri (31) close to human habitation.

Order STRIGIFORMES

Family STRIGIDAE

Subfamily STRIGINAE

29. *Bubo zeylonensis* (Gmelin)

BROWN FISH OWL

Two of these owls were seen in the daytime, perched on a high bough of a large tree just overlooking a stream in a wooded area at Malaithaangi (22). Both the birds flew away when approached.

30. *Athene brama* (Temminck)

SPOTTED OWLET

A pair was seen on a mango tree very close to the Cattle farm GH at Hosur (1), regularly between 3 & 5.iv.1985, and another pair was found at the entrance of a hollow in a tree trunk in the FRH compound at Anchetty (12).

Order APODIFORMES

Family APODIDAE

Subfamily APODINAE

31. *Cypsiurus parvus* (Lichtenstein)

PALM SWIFT

A bird commonly sighted in open country with palm trees of the genus *Borassus*.

Subfamily HEMIPROCNINAE

32. *Hemiprocne longipennis* (Tickell)

CRESTED TREE SWIFT

Sighted only in one locality, viz., Sameri (5) in the deciduous and scrub Aiyur RF, where several of these swifts were observed flying in small loose parties over the *jheel* (*eri*). They were noticed diving occasionally at great speed and sipping water from the surface of the *jheel* before flying away. The crest was clearly visible when the birds settled on the trees.

Order CORACIIFORMES

Family ALCEDINIDAE

33. *Ceryle rudis* (Linnaeus)

PIED KINGFISHER

This kingfisher was always found associated with a body of water such as a *jheel* or river. It was sighted at a *jheel* near Anchetty FRH (12), near a bund on a river (Eluvani aru), at Naagamathu pallam (24), at the reservoir at Papireddipatti (37) and at the Cauvery river at Hogenekal. At the last locality one bird was frequently seen perched on a wooden pole jutting out of the middle of the swift-flowing waters of the river. These birds were also seen hunting fish in the river. They would hover about 7-10m above the water surface, and dive vertically down to catch the fish. Every bout of hovering was not followed by a dive.

34. *Alcedo atthis* (Linnaeus)

SMALL BLUE KINGFISHER

Only two records during the present study - one at Chetugutta (23), and the other at the foothills of Shevroy Hills (34) - both in forested areas, near a stream. At the latter locality, this kingfisher was seen with a fish in its bill.

35. *Halcyon smyrnensis* (Linnaeus)

WHITEBREASTED KINGFISHER

Very common bird, sighted at several places, singly, often far away from water.

## Family MEROPIDAE

36. *Merops philippinus* Linnaeus

## BLUETAILED BEE-EATER

This bee-eater was seen at two places only - one bird at Mookanur Panchayat forest (36) off the Bommidi-Dharmapuri road where it was perched on a telegraph wire in a paddy field, and a pair at Hogenekal. This pair was seen sitting on the sandy bank of the Cauvery river. Every now and then, either of them, or both, would rise to catch an insect and come gliding down very gracefully.

37. *Merops leschenaulti* Vieillot

## CHESTNUTHEADED BEE-EATER

Only one bird was seen at the roadside at Vaniyaru dam reservoir (37).

38. *Merops orientalis* Latham

## SMALL GREEN BEE-EATER

The most common of the three species of bee-eaters observed. Very often met with, perched on telegraph wires in open fields, every now and again flying out to capture an insect and returning to its perch. At the Hosur Cattle farm (1) a bee-eater was seen on an earth mound from where it was noticed making aerial sorties and returning to the mound. It was not possible to approach the mound, but as it was the breeding season (3.iv.1985), it is possible that the bird had a nest in the mound.

## Family CORACIIDAE

39. *Coracias benghalensis* (Linnaeus)

## INDIAN ROLLER

A very common bird met with in several localities. It appeared to show a preference for sparse human habitation and open cultivated and uncultivated fields, where it could be seen perched on telegraph poles and wires, or on some tall tree, uttering its monosyllabic raucous call once in a way. It was, nevertheless, sighted in deciduous forest too. At Singleri (25), 2-3 birds were seen on rocks on the ground at the edge of the *jheel*. The bird appeared to avoid congested village areas. Near the Anchetty FRH (12), one bird - apparently a male - was observed indulging in aerial displays for extended periods. No female could be located nearby.

## Family UPUPIDAE

40. *Upupa epops* Linnaeus

## HOOPOE

A pair was observed building its nest on 5 & 6.iv.1985 in a hole in an earthen wall of a house near the Denkanikotta FRH (4); the pair was seen bringing rubbish to the nest every now and then. Not recorded elsewhere.

Family BUCEROTIDAE

41. *Tockus birostris* (Scopoli)

GREY HORNBILL

One bird was recorded in an isolated tree in the middle of a meadow in the cattle farm campus at Hosur (1), one in flight over an open field at Naagamathu pallam (24), and three in the Bevanurmalai RF (16) at Hogenekal, close to the Cauvery river.

Order PICIFORMES

Family CAPITONIDAE

42. *Megalaima viridis* (Boddaert)

SMALL GREEN BARBET

The call of this bird was abundantly heard in several places, especially in the Chitteri Hills where the forest resounded with its call. It was sighted at three places viz., Hosur cattle farm campus (1), Denkanikotta (4) and Shevroy Hills (34). One bird (or, perhaps a pair) was seen visiting a nest in the trunk of a tree about 4m from the ground in the grove of trees in front of the Denkanikotta FRH (4).

43. *Megalaima haemacephala* (P.L.S. Müller)

CRIMSONBREASTED BARBET

A common resident bird, much more easily heard only during the breeding season. One bird was observed for a few minutes from fairly close range (c 8m) at Perandapalli (2).

Family PICIDAE

Subfamily PICINAE

44. *Dinopium benghalense* (Linnaeus)

GOLDENBACKED WOODPECKER

Not very commonly seen. Sighted in four localities - Hogenekal FRH compound (15), Hogenekal-Pennagaram road (18), near Singleri (25) and Vaniyaru dam (37).

45. *Picoides mahrattensis* (Latham)

YELLOWFRONTED PIED OR MAHRATTA WOODPECKER

Although this is supposed to be one of our commonest woodpeckers, it was sighted only in two localities during the present study — in the forest on the Anchetty - Natrapalayam road (13), and on a tall tree at the edge of the reservoir at Vaniyaru dam (37). At the latter locality a nesting pair was seen, the female tapping out a hole about 15-20m from the ground, while the male watched from nearby. Ali and Ripley (1983) state that the nest hole is one to 10m from the ground, usually under 4m.

Order PASSERIFORMES

Family PITTIDAE

46. *Pitta brachyura* (Linnaeus)

INDIAN PITTA

This colourful bird was spotted only once for a few seconds on the ground close to a barbed wire fence enclosing a grove of trees in front of the FRH at Denkanikotta (4). On sensing that it was being observed, it flew away.

Family ALAUDIDAE

47a. *Mirafra assamica* Horsfield

MADRAS BUSH LARK

OR

47b. *Mirafra erythroptera* Blyth

REDWINGED BUSH LARK

As no bird could be examined in the hand, it was not possible to ascertain the exact specific identity of the birds sighted. This is why both the species have been taken together.

The birds appeared to show a distinct liking for stony scrub and bush jungle, and open dry deciduous forest. As it was the breeding season of these birds, all the males sighted showed the characteristic display-flight almost tirelessly.

48. *Eremopterix grisea* (Scopoli)

ASHYCROWNED FINCH-LARK

This finch-lark was common in the vicinity of open fields, and also dry stony scrub jungle. In a couple of localities, the males were observed indulging in aerial display.

49. *Ammomanes phoenicurus* (Franklin)

RUFOUTAILED FINCH-LARK

Only one bird was seen at Mookanur RF (35) - typical dry stony scrub and bush country.

Family HIRUNDINIDAE

50. *Hirundo rustica* Linnaeus

COMMON SWALLOW

This swallow was sighted hawking insects on the wing in several localities.

51. *Hirundo daurica* Linnaeus

REDRUMPED SWALLOW

The Redrumped Swallow was seen at Tali RF (9), Keesan kuppam (10) and Panai

RF (11) along Toddahalla river. At the first site a single bird was observed for over five minutes flying in a small restricted area. Once in a while, it would descend and go below some large over-hanging rocks only to emerge again within seconds. At Keesam kuppam these birds were sighted perched on small thick-stemmed plants, about 3 m - 4 m above the ground level, not far from a *jheel*. Now and then, the birds would take off and return to the same perch, possibly after capturing some insect.

Family LANIIDAE

52. *Lanius excubitor* Linnaeus ?

GREY SHRIKE

Only one bird, presumably belonging to this species, was sighted in the dry stony scrub jungle at Kavaramalai (33). This species has not been recorded so far from Tamil Nadu; the two records mentioned by Ali and Ripley (1983) as being from this state are actually from Cuddasapah district, which is in Andhra Pradesh.

53. *Lanius vittatus* Valenciennes

BAYBACKED SHRIKE

A pair was sighted in the mixed dry deciduous and thorny scrub jungle along the Hogenkal-Pennagaram road (18), about 2 Km from Hogenkal.

54. *Lanius schach* Linnaeus

GREYBACKED SHRIKE

One bird was spotted perched on an electric wire in an open field not far from a river and deciduous forest at Naagamathu pallam (24).

Family ORIOLIDAE

55. *Oriolus oriolus* (Linnaeus)

GOLDEN ORIOLE

This bird appeared to be preferentially attached to gardens with large trees; it was seen around rest houses *viz.*, at Hosur cattle farm (1), Denkanikotta (4), Kottapatti (19) and Bommidi (32), all of which were surrounded by gardens with large trees. Not seen after 6 April.

56. *Oriolus xanthornus* (Linnaeus)

BLACKHEADED ORIOLE

A pair was noticed flying across the Toddahalla river in the Panai RF (11), and a single male was seen in a tree in the deciduous forest in the Shevroy hills (foothills) (34).

## Family DICRURIDAE

57. *Dicrurus adsimilis* (Bechstein)

## BLACK DRONGO

A very common resident met with in gardens, uncultivated and cultivated fields, scrub and light deciduous forests.

58. *Dicrurus caerulescens* (Linnaeus)

## WHITEBELLIED DRONGO

Although not as commonly seen as the Black Drongo, the present species was very common. It was sighted in dry deciduous forest in several localities. At one place a bird was seen eating an insect.

59. *Dicrurus aeneus* Vieillot

## BRONZED DRONGO

Sighted only where the forest was quite dense, viz., Nochikuttai (28) in the Chitteri hills, and in the foothills of the Shevroy hills (34). In the former locality, two of these birds were sighted perched on the branch of a tree, every now and then making sorties to catch insects.

60. *Dicrurus paradiseus* (Linnaeus)

## LARGE RACKET-TAILED DRONGO

One bird was seen in flight in the light deciduous forest by the side of the Sitteri-Harur road (c 500 m) (30). Another was seen in the heavier forest in the foothills of the Shevroy hills (34).

## Family STURNIDAE

61. *Sturnus pagodarum* (Gmelin)

## BRAHMINY MYNA

Although sighted in several places, this myna was never seen in such great numbers as the Common myna.

62. *Acridotheres tristis* (Linnaeus)

## COMMON MYNA

A very common myna. A resident encountered both near and away from human settlement, in gardens, open fields and in scrub and wooded scrub jungles.

63. *Acridotheres fuscus* (Wagler)

## JUNGLE MYNA

Much less common than the Common Myna. In the large trees near the Hosur cattle farm GH (1), this myna was seen in the company of the Common Myna, Koel, Golden

Oriole and Black Drongo. One pair was found nesting in a hole in a tree trunk about 10 m above the ground near the Denkanikotta FRH (4). On one occasion, one of the birds was seen taking a piece of polythene sheet about 15cm x 10cm into the hole. This species of myna was also seen at Nochikuttai (28) in the Chitteri hills.

Family CORVIDAE

64. *Dendrocitta vagabunda* (Latham)

INDIAN TREE PIE

Met with in several localities, but not in any great numbers.

65. *Corvus splendens* Vicillot

INDIAN HOUSE CROW

Common near human settlements only. It was conspicuously absent in localities removed from human habitation. This crow was found in larger numbers where filth resulting from human dwellings was greater. At Anchetty, House Crows were not seen in the vicinity of the FRH which is located about 1 Km to the south of the village. At the latter location these crows were found in plenty. At about 4 or 4.30 PM the crows were noticed flying very high, in flocks, from the direction of the village northwards over the FRH. The return trip took place around 6 or 6.15AM. It is possible that many of the crows made this daily journey to and from their communal roosts.

66. *Corvus macrorhynchos* Wagler

JUNGLE CROW

More commonly met with than the House Crow in places with less human interference. Around the Anchetty FRH (12) the Jungle Crow was found, while it was absent in the Anchetty village.

Family CAMPEPHAGIDAE

67. *Coracina novaehollandiae* (Gmelin)

LARGE CUCKOO-SHRIKE

Only one sighting from a moving jeep, of a solitary male on a tree by the side of the road from Bommidi to Vaniyaru dam.

68. *Coracina melanoptera* (Ruppell)

BLACKHEADED CUCKOO-SHRIKE

Both sexes recorded in trees in gardens, thorny scrub and deciduous forest.

69. *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus* (Linnaeus)

SMALL MINIVET

This species was always sighted in parties of 4-8 birds. These birds appeared to show a preference for dry scrub forests.

## Family IRENIDAE

70. *Aegithina tiphia* (Linnaeus)

## IORA

A bird which was not uncommonly seen, usually in pairs. It was generally located by its pleasant sweet whistles. A bird was once seen clinging to a branch upside down with its tail pressed to the branch as if for support.

71. *Chloropsis aurifrons* (Temminck)

## GOLDFRONTED CHLOROPSIS

Only one bird of this species was seen in the foothills of the Shevroy hills (34). It was seen in the upper canopy of a tree in the forest, sipping nectar from flowers.

72. *Chloropsis cochinchinensis* (Gmelin)

## JERDON'S CHLOROPSIS

This chloropsis was sighted in only two places, viz., in the open area surrounded by dry deciduous forest on the Anchetty-Natrapalayam road (13) and in the tall *Eucalyptus* trees in the Sitteri FRH compound (26). The birds were very noisy.

## Family PYCNONOTIDAE

73. *Pycnonotus jocosus* (Linnaeus)

## REDWHISKERED BULBUL

This bulbul was much less common than either the Redvented Bulbul or the Whitebrowed Bulbul. It was found in several localities in the Chitteri hills. On the whole, it appeared to show a preference for denser, more shady forests.

74. *Pycnonotus cafer* (Linnaeus)

## REDVENTED BULBUL

By far, the most commonly seen bird along with the Whitebrowed Bulbul, the Redvented Bulbul was abundantly found in gardens, scrub, light and denser deciduous forests.

75. *Pycnonotus luteolus* (Lesson)

## WHITEBROWED BULBUL

An abundantly-present bird, this bulbul was more easily heard than seen. It showed less preference for gardens than the previous species of bulbul.

## Family MUSCICAPIDAE

## Subfamily TIMALIINAE

76. *Dumetia hyperythra* (Franklin)

## WHITERHROATED BABBLER

A group of about five birds was seen rummaging for insects in the masses of dry

leaves accumulated in the dry sandy bed of a stream in the deciduous scrub forest close to the Anchetty-Natrapalayam road (13). On being approached, they disappeared into the undergrowth, only to reappear after a while. Another flock of a larger number of these babblers was found deep within dense scrub undergrowth at Gajakulam (38).

77. *Turdoides malcolmi* (Sykes)

LARGE GREY BABBLER

Sisterhoods of this babbler were seen in four localities, viz., Anchetty FRH compound (12), Vannathiparai (20), Maamarathu Odai (29) and Sitteri-Harur road (30).

78. *Turdoides affinis* (Jerdon)

WHITEHEADED BABBLER

A common resident found in several localities.

Subfamily MUSCICAPINAE

79. *Muscicapa tickelliae* (Blyth)

TICKELL'S BLUE FLYCATCHER

Single males were seen on two instances, once deep inside the thickets in an overgrown dry *nallah* at Nochikutai (28), and at another time in a shady area near a stream in the foothills of the Shevroy hills (34).

80. *Terpsiphone paradisi* Linnaeus

PARADISE FLYCATCHER

Although males under three years and females were seen in quite a few localities, no adult male was sighted.

81. *Monarcha azurea* (Boddaert)

BLACKNAPED MONARCH FLYCATCHER

One female of this species was seen on a tamarind tree in light deciduous and scrub forest not far from open fields and a dry stream at Kulumuru pallam (14). It flew away from its perch every now and then to catch an insect only to return to it soon after.

Subfamily SYLVIINAE

82. *Prinia hodgsoni* Blyth

FRANKLIN'S ASHY-GREY WREN-WARBLER

This species was found in the thorny bushes in scrub jungle in several localities. Almost all the males were noticed indulging in the breeding song. All observations

were between 7 March and 13 April, suggesting that this might be a part of the breeding season of this species in Dharmapuri district. Ali and Ripley (1983) state its breeding season as from middle of June to October, chiefly July and August. Dharmakumarsinhji's observation in Gujrat, as quoted by Ali and Ripley (*op.cit.*) is that the season is February-March.

83. *Prinia socialis* Sykes

ASHY WREN-WARBLER

This wren-warbler was found in several localities in bushes and shrubs. On 9.iii.1986 one bird was seen nesting in an inundated paddy field. This was evidenced by the fact that the bird was seen to hop into the paddy at a certain specific spot, flying away on sensing danger, returning to the same spot every time. Ali and Ripley (1983) describe three types of nests which these birds are known to build. As it was impossible to approach the nest in the present study, its shape, size, location, constituent materials and contents could not be ascertained.

84. *Orthotomus sutorius* (Pennant)

TAILOR BIRD

A common resident, which was sighted in gardens and in light deciduous and thorny scrub forests.

85. *Acrocephalus dumetorum* Blyth

BLYTH'S REED WARBLER

A winter visitor that was met with widely in the district.

86. *Phylloscopus trochiloides* (Sundevall)

GREENISH LEAF-WARBLER

This leaf-warbler, which winters in peninsular India, was found in several places, affecting gardens, light and a little denser deciduous forests. It appeared to be more abundant in the southeastern part of the district between 25.ii.1986 and 11.iii.1986 than in the western and southwestern part between 3.iv.1985 and 16.iv.1985.

Subfamily TURDINAE

87. *Copsychus saularis* (Linnaeus)

MAGPIE-ROBIN

Sighted in many places, the Magpie-Robin was also frequently seen perched on top of some tall exposed branch of a tree, or some similar vantage point, and pouring forth its song.

88. *Copsychus malabaricus* (Scopoli)

## SHAMA

The Shama is a beautiful songster which was sighted only on one occasion in the wooded Panai RF (11) on the banks of the Toddahalla river near Anchetty. This bird, a male, allowed the present author to observe it for an extended period of time from a distance of about 20m, and also treated him to a wonderful repertoire of rich, melodious song. Only when the author attempted to get closer to the singing bird did the latter exhibit shyness by flying away.

89. *Saxicola caprata* (Linnaeus)

## PIED BUSH CHAT

This bush chat was seen on only two occasions - once on 4.iv.1985 at Berikai RF (3), and again on 12.iv.1985 at Kulumuru pallam (14). On both occasions, only a male was sighted, and it was found close to a stream. In the first-mentioned locality, the male was seen exhibiting the characteristic 'display' flight.

90. *Saxicoloides fulicata* (Linnaeus)

## INDIAN ROBIN

An extremely common resident species, seen almost everywhere, usually in pairs. The present author stumbled upon a nest of this bird on 11.iv.1985 (around 7.30 AM) in one of the numerous little "islands" in the Toddahalla river in the Panai RF (11). The nest from which the sitting female was accidentally disturbed was cup-shaped and made of grass. It was built on the side of a boulder about 50 cm from the ground, shielded on the other side by tall grass. The nest contained a single egg. After about an hour, during which period no observation was made, the nest revealed a second egg, which must have been laid in the interim period. Ali and Ripley (1983) state that the eggs are laid in the early morning at 24-hour intervals. In that case, the first egg had, perhaps, been laid the previous day. The nesting birds were not sighted anywhere, although they were perhaps keeping watch from a safe distance.

Family      PARIDAE

Subfamily    PARINAE

91. *Parus major* Linnaeus

## GREY TIT

A pair of these birds was found, apparently nesting, in a hollow in a stump of a tree c 5m above the ground on the bank of the Toddahalla river. The birds flew away on disturbance, and did not return during the 10-minute duration when the tree was watched.

Family SITTIDAE  
Subfamily SITTINAE

92. *Sitta castanea* Lesson  
CHESTNUTBELLIED NUTHATCH

This nuthatch was seen only in one locality viz., Sameri (5) in deciduous forest mixed with thorny plants and *Lantana*. It appears to be unrecorded so far from Tamil Nadu except from the Nilgiri Hills.

A pair of these birds was found nesting in a hollow in a tree trunk about 10m above the ground, not far from the *jheel*. The female was observed bringing into the nest mud balls, blob by blob, from the margin of a puddle about 70m away. On her return journey with the mud balls, she stopped once or twice in some nearby trees, as though it was difficult for her to fly directly to her nest with her burden. The male was observed bringing some bark-like material to the nest.

93. *Sitta frontalis* Swainson  
VELVETFRONTED NUTHATCH

Seen only in the deciduous forest at Nochikuttai (28) in the Chitteri hills.

Family MOTACILLIDAE

94. *Motacilla flava* Linnaeus  
YELLOW WAGTAIL

Two to three of these winter visitors to India were seen feeding on the moist grassy margin of the *jheel* at Namaleri (7) in the company of Pond Heron and Common Sandpiper.

95. *Motacilla caspica* (Gmelin)  
GREY WAGTAIL

This wagtail, which winters in the Indian Peninsula, was sighted singly in a few localities, generally among rocks in streams. On 16.iv.1985 one male was seen in the Hogenekal FRH compound (15), which showed a darkening chin, throat and upper breast that were not entirely black, as in the summer plumage.

96. *Motacilla maderaspatensis* Gmelin  
LARGE PIED WAGTAIL

The most common of the three species of wagtail seen in Dharmapuri district. It was sighted very often in the vicinity of water bodies, wading in shallow water, feeding in the damp grassy river bed, and in the banks of rivers, streams and *jheels*. One bird was seen perched atop a large tamarind tree on the bank Toddahalla river at a height of 20-25m. In Madras, the present author has never seen this wagtail (which is quite common) on a tree top, the bird appearing to prefer, as a perch, some tall "man-made" object, which offers a good view, like a water tank, or TV antenna, to trees.

## Family DICAETIDAE

97. *Dicaeum erythrorhynchos* (Latham)

## TICKELL'S FLOWERPECKER

Only three records in the present study - one at Denkanikotta, and two in the Chitteri hills.

## Family NECTARINIIDAE

98. *Nectarinia zeylonica* (Linnaeus)

## PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD

A common resident species of sunbird, met with not infrequently. At the Denkanikotta FRH compound, on 6.iv.1985, a male was observed feeding a young one which had left the nest.

99. *Nectarinia asiatica* (Latham)

## PURPLE SUNBIRD

Another common sunbird. All males sighted were in breeding plumage. On 16.iv.1985, a male was seen perched on a barbed wire fence in the Hogenekal FRH compound, singing with raised head, and fluttering his partially opened wings, displaying his bright yellow pectoral tufts in the process. But, in contrast to this kind of 'display' described by Ali and Ripley (1983), no female could be sighted near the displaying male.

## Family ZOSTEROPIDAE

100. *Zosterops palpebrosa* (Temminck)

## WHITE-EYE

A party of 10-12 of these birds was sighted in the open light deciduous forest at Noganoor near Denkanikotta. White-eyes were also seen in the Chitteri hills.

## Family PLOCEIDAE

## Subfamily PASSERINAE

101. *Passer domesticus* (Linnaeus)

## HOUSE SPARROW

A sparrow which was commonly found near human settlements, especially in villages and towns. It showed a preference for grain godowns. This species of sparrow was not encountered in the scrub or deciduous forests in the district.

102. *Petronia xanthocollis* (Burton)

## YELLOWTHROATED SPARROW

The present author did not come across this species in the southeastern part of the

district between 25.ii.1986 and 13.iii.1986. The bird was sighted in three localities in the southwestern part of the district between 10.iv.1985 and 16.iv.1985. In one of the localities, viz., Anchetty FRH compound (12), a solitary male was observed during the hotter part of the day for four days, chirruping monotonously for long periods, perhaps indicating the presence of a nest nearby, but this was not possible to confirm because dense thorny thickets barred approach to the vicinity of the tree where the sparrow perched and sang.

Subfamily PLOCEINAE

103. *Ploceus manyar* (Horsfield)

STREAKED WEAVER BIRD

A noisy colony of more than 60-80 males and females was found one evening (12.iv.1985) among reeds in a marshy pool which was close to paddy fields and a large *jheel*. Some nests in the "helmet" stage, were seen. On disturbance, the birds flew away, *en masse*, only to settle among other similar reeds at a distance, thus disappearing from view. After sometime, they returned. No copulation was witnessed.

Crook (1983) has stated that all weavers breed in the monsoon. Ambedkar (1972) has identified the breeding season of this weaver bird in the Kumaon terai as coinciding with the SW monsoon, usually between June and September. It appears from the present study that in Dharmapuri district *P. manyar* completes its breeding cycle by about the middle or the third week of May. So, perhaps in this region it is not as dependent on the monsoon as it is in the Himalayan foothills.

Subfamily ESTRILDINAE

104. *Lonchura malabarica* (Linnaeus)

WHITETHROATED MUNIA

Four birds of this species were sighted perched on electric wire over open fields at Naagamathu pallam (24) on 27.ii.1986. This was the only sighting of this munia during the course of the present study.

Family FRINGILLIDAE

Sub family CARDUELINAE

105. *Carpodacus erythrinus* (Pallas)

ROSEFINCH

The Rosefinch was recorded only at Nochikuttai (28) in the Chitteri hills; a pair was seen perched on a tree at the edge of the dense deciduous forest on 3.iii.1986.

SUMMARY

105 species of birds identified by field sighting are listed from Dharmapuri District of Tamil Nadu. Brief field notes are given for each species.

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