

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THE AVIFAUNA OF MUDIGERE, WESTERN GHATS

Kumar D. Ghorpade

The many insect-hunting explorations I have had the pleasure of undertaking all over India, in connection with my research project, financed by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, New Delhi, have provided splendid opportunities to form impressions (though fleeting) of the bird life of those areas. I have already given an account of my birding in the Pindar Valley (Garhwal Himalaya) and I will deal here with my observations in a little-known area of the Sahyadri Range, more popularly known as the Western Ghats.

Mudigere is a medium sized village with a population of approximately 5,000 people, situated at a height of nearly 2,500 feet and located some 35 km west of the famous temple of Belur, in the Chikmagalur District of Karnataka. It is known mostly on account of the plantations that surround it, mostly of coffee, tea and cardamom, and since it lies on the Bangalore-Mangalore highway. The climate is pleasant even in summer and it receives around 80-100 inches of rain annually, some 40% of it falling in July and August. The soils are acid loams and paddy is the main food crop grown here. Besides coffee, tea and cardamom, citrus, sapota, vanilla, cocoa, mango, pepper, cinnamon, pineapple, banana and jackfruit are also cultivated. The forest is thick and luxuriant, though it is being exploited in some areas, specially around Mudigere. It can be called moist deciduous and abounds in a rich variety of tree species, especially Dalbergia latifolia (rosewood), Pterocarpus marsupium, Artocarpus hirsuta, A. lakoocha, Terminalia paniculata (and several other species of this genus), Santalum album (sandalwood), Trema orientalis, Lagerstroemia lanceolata, Garuga pinnata, Bischoffia javanica, Diospyros melanoxylon, Olea dioica, and several species of Ficus. Teak (Tectona grandis) is not very abundant here. Eucalyptus has been planted and the common shade tree in plantations is Erythrina. A small date palm, probably Phoenix acaulis, occurs commonly on open grassy land, devoid of forest. The Mudramane Forest here is known for its large stands of sandal trees. There are many streams here and the Hemavati and Yagachi Rivers originate from the hills nearby, emptying finally into the Krishnarajasagara Reservoir in Mysore District a few hundred miles to the south-east. The University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore, has a Regional Research Station located at Mudigere. It is about 150 acres in extent and most of the tree crops mentioned above are grown here.

I reached Mudigere on May 21, 1976 around 2 p.m. in the afternoon, having boarded the Dharmasthala bus from Bangalore at 0730 hrs that morning. It was the height of summer, but Mudigere was quite pleasant, and it was a relief once we entered the cool ghat area, called 'malnad' in Karnataka, from the dry heat of the 'maidan' or plains tract. Mr C. Siddappaji, the Assistant Entomologist located at the University Research Station, and an interested naturalist, was waiting to receive me, and soon we were out in the field, having dumped my belongings at the University Guest House. It is always a pleasure to meet planters and others in the ghats, who seem to be genuinely delighted to receive the company of a guest, and no wonder too, since they must feel the pangs of loneliness in their estates, so far from "civilization" as it were.

The insect net was soon swinging away and eyes and ears tuned to any signs of a feathered creature. The research station buildings are besides the main road, the plantation located behind them in a valley with fairly steep

23 MAY 1986

BIRD CALL







