

breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata* (23.13%), Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus* (29.33%), and Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus* (22.76%).

In the present study, Red-vented Bulbuls were also observed feeding on a number of animal species (88 observations in total). These were as follows: small-sized insects, including mosquitos and mayflies (caught in flight), dipteran larvae, aphids, ants (56.8%); large-sized insects, including crickets, cockroaches, winged termites, grasshoppers (37.5%); vertebrates (7 to 9 cm in length), including house lizards, skinks (5.7%). Birds were also observed to feed upon discarded sweets and over-ripe fruits in garbage.

Bulbuls are dominant or important frugivores and seed dispersers of open secondary vegetation throughout tropical and subtropical Asia (Lever 1987, Corlett 1998). Until now very little information was available on the feeding behaviour of the Red-vented Bulbul (Parasharya *et al.* 1995, Dhamke 1997). The consumption of leaves of *Medicago sativa* was an interesting observation because leaf consumption is rare in birds. Recently, we also observed Red-vented Bulbuls feeding on petals of the flowers of *Bauhinia variegata*, *Tecomella undulata* and *Pisum sativum* in an agricultural area outside the study area.

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Observations on the Oriental Bay Owl *Phodilus badius* and range extension in the Western Ghats, India

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The Oriental Bay Owl *Phodilus badius* is a poorly known species restricted to the tropical moist forests of south and south-east Asia. Three disjunctly distributed subspecies are known from the Indian subcontinent (Ali and Ripley 1983). In Sri Lanka, the subspecies *assimilis* occurs in the wet zone and hills up to 1,200 m (Henry 1955, Liyanage 1972, Ekenayake 1994). The species has also been reported from the Nelliampathy and Anamalai hills of the southern Western Ghats mountains of India (subspecies *ripleyi*, Hussain and Khan 1978, Kannan 1993, Mudappa 1998). These two subspecies are quite distinct in plumage from the other forms that occur in Nepal, the eastern Himalaya, and north-east hill states of India (subspecies *saturatus*), and in South-East Asia (King *et al.* 1975, Ali and Ripley 1983, Boonsong Lekagul and Round 1991). The distributional pattern

corresponds roughly to the distribution of tropical evergreen rainforest, the habitat to which this species is mostly confined (Ali and Ripley 1983).

Oriental Bay Owls were seen on three occasions between February and June 1998 in Sengaltheri (8°31'N 77°26'E) within the Kalakad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve, Tamil Nadu, India. All sightings were in tropical wet evergreen forest at an altitude of 1,040–1,050 m above sea level.

The first sighting was on 19 February 1998. At 20h15, an unfamiliar three-noted whistle was heard from rainforests near the base camp at Sengaltheri. Four observers (Divya Mudappa, N. M. Ishwar, the author, and a field assistant) located the calling bird at 20h30. The bird was spotted in mid-storey vegetation, perched on a branch 8–10 m above the ground. Its flight was

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The bird was spotted in mid-storey vegetation, perched on a branch 8–10 m above the ground. Its flight was silent and it flew adroitly through dense vegetation and stands of saplings, tall shrubs, trees and climbers. The bird was observed with a powerful 4-cell flashlight and 7x50 binoculars for nearly 30 minutes from a distance of between 8 and 20 m. While the bird was calling, its beak hardly moved. Only a small movement of the throat was noticeable, and the call had a slightly ventriloquial effect. We verified that the bird we were watching was indeed the calling bird by close observation of bill and throat movements. Also, the bird was observed calling from its perch and once as it flew to another perch, where it again resumed calling. The call was a three-noted whistle, not very loud, but carrying for at least 100–150 m on a quiet night. The whistle sounded like *weeou-wee-youu*, with the accent on the second note, which was the softest note and inaudible from a distance. The third note tapered off slightly at the end. The calls were repeated once or twice a minute, punctuated by longer gaps after about two or three minutes. Another individual was heard calling from over 100 m away, apparently in response to the bird under observation. This call was heard only at night several times in January and February, and then again only in December.

The second sighting was made by Divya Mudappa on 20 April 1998 at 21h45. The bird was perched on a low branch above a stream in the rainforest. The species was seen again at the same place on 19 June 1998 (by D. Mudappa, Kaberi Kar-Gupta, and the author) and photographed at close range.

The call described in this article seems similar to that noted by H. E. McClure, quoted in Ali and Ripley (1983): 'A loud 3-noted whistle reminiscent of someone calling his dog, the birds answering each other in the forest'. Different races of Oriental Bay Owl may, however, have very different calls, which need to be ascertained through sonagram analyses. The call of *P. b. saturatus* has been variously described as 'a succession of loud, musical whistles with an upward inflection' (attributed to J. T. Marshall in King *et al.* 1975), and as 'a series of eerie, musical, upward-inflected whistles' (Boonsong Lekagul and Round 1991). A different call, also of this race, is rendered as *kwankit-kwankit-kek-kek-kek*, heard most when birds are flying in complete darkness (attributed to J. Cairns in Ali and Ripley 1983).

The subspecies *P. b. ripleyi* was first reported from a single specimen taken in wet evergreen biotope at Periasolai in the Nelliampathy hills of the Anamalais (10°28'N 76°50'E, Hussain and Khan 1978). It has since been recorded from Karian Shola in the Anamalai hills (Kannan 1993, Mudappa 1998). Kannan (1993) predicted that the species might occur further south, in

sanctuaries such as Kalakad and Periyar that contain wet evergreen forest.

In 1996, an Oriental Bay Owl was seen and photographed in the snake park of Cannanore city in Kerala (at 12°N). A local newspaper carried two close-up colour photographs of the bird, which was undoubtedly *P. badius*. The bird was said to have come from Bhoothan in Koluvali, near Cherupuzha (Anon. 1996). This record seems to indicate that the bird's range might extend north of the Palghat Gap to at least 12°N (Cannanore and adjacent wet forests of Kodagu district in Karnataka state). This must, however, be considered tentative in the absence of information on habitat around the area and on whether the bird was an escaped captive or a vagrant. The above records suggest a patchy distribution, but the owl may have been overlooked from intervening areas that contain evergreen forest. It would be worthwhile surveying evergreen forests of Karnataka and areas such as the Nilgiris for the species.

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