

On 6 March 2000, while we were surveying the periphery of the island from a boat, we saw a pair of White Terns *Gygis alba* hovering by the seashore near a partially submerged rock. It took us some time to identify the birds, which were new to us, but the species is quite unmistakable, being the only tern with completely white plumage, and with a blue-based black bill (Harrison 1987). On 28 March we saw 11 birds on a different beach, and watched them calling and hovering near shore for some time.

This species has a pantropical distribution, breeding on many islands throughout the subtropical oceans, including Addu Atoll in the Maldives, and further south in the Chagos Archipelago (Harrison 1987). A specimen collected over a hundred years ago by Hume (1878) is the only record in the Bay of Bengal or indeed anywhere within Indian limits (Ali and Ripley 1987). As we observed several birds on two different dates, it is possible that the species is extending its range. We recommend further searches elsewhere in the Bay of Bengal.

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# New records of birds from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands

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The Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal represent the peaks of a submerged mountain range, arcing from Myanmar to Sumatra, between 6°45'N and 13°41'N, and 92°12'E and 93°57'E. The group comprises over 560 islands and rocks, with a total coastline of about 1,962 km. The main forest type is tropical evergreen, with some grassland areas inland, and mangroves occur on a significant proportion of the coast (Thothathri 1962, Balakrishnan 1989).

We carried out a study on the ecology of the Nicobar Scrubfowl *Megapodius nicobariensis* on Great Nicobar Island between 1995 and 1998. During this period 57 species of birds were recorded out of a total of 128 species known from the islands (Abdulali 1964, 1967, Das 1971, Ali and Ripley 1983, Sankaran 1998). Of the species we recorded, three were new records to the Nicobar group of islands and one was new for both the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

### LESSER FRIGATEBIRD *Fregata ariel*

A flock of 28 birds were sighted daily during 3-30 June 1997 off the southern tip of Great Nicobar Island (6°76'N 93°82'E). The flock contained seven adult males, 12 adult females and nine immatures. Another flock of 11 birds was sighted at Wandoor (12°23'-12°30'N, 92°70'-92°72'E) on 3 July 1997. This flock comprised three adult males, five adult females and one immature.

None were seen during subsequent field trips in 1998. These individuals were distinguished from other frigatebird species by the conspicuous white patch extending onto the inner underwing. This species is recorded as a visitor to the coasts of the Indian mainland, Sri Lanka and the Maldives (Ali and Ripley 1983, Grimmett *et al.* 1998), and as a scarce to locally common non-breeding offshore visitor to south Thailand and Peninsular Malaysia (Robson 2000). These records represent the first for the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

### LARGE HAWK CUCKOO *Hierococcyx sparverioides*

Singles were seen on 18 dates during Jan-May 1995-1998 on the east coast of Great Nicobar Island (6°76'-6°79'N, 93°81'-93°84'E). All sightings were of single individuals feeding on caterpillars in *Macaranga peltata* trees. This species breeds in the Himalayas from Himachal Pradesh to Arunachal Pradesh, with winter records south to Tamil Nadu (Ali and Ripley 1983, Grimmett *et al.* 1998) and in Thailand, Peninsular Malaysia and the Greater Sundas (Robson 2000).

### ASHY DRONGO *Dicrurus leucophaeus*

Pairs were recorded on 23 February, 27 February and 4 May 1997 from the Galathea river, Great Nicobar Island (6°83'N 93°85'E). These records may have referred to the same individuals. They were noted to be

slim, glossy black, with a long, deeply forked tail, conspicuous crimson eyes, and duller unglazed grey underparts. This species breeds in the Himalayas and north-east Indian hills, and winters south through most of peninsular India, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Peninsular Malaysia (Ali and Ripley 1983, Grimmett *et al.* 1998, Robson 2000).

#### EYEBROWED THRUSH *Turdus obscurus*

Several flocks of 40-200 individuals feeding on the ground were seen during Jan-Feb 1995-1998 on the east coast of Great Nicobar Island (6°76'-6°79'N, 93°81'-93°84'E). In India, this winter visitor is reported mainly from the Himalayas, especially in the north-east, but there are also records in the south and Sri Lanka (Ali and Ripley 1983, Grimmett *et al.* 1998), and it is a fairly common winter visitor in Thailand, Peninsular Malaysia and the Greater Sundas (Robson 2000).

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## A large roost of Eurasian Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus* at Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur, India

ASHOK VERMA

The Keoladeo National Park in Rajasthan, India (27°7'-27°12'N, 77°29'-77°33'E) is a World Heritage Site, famous for its wintering palearctic waterfowl. The total area of the park is about 29 km<sup>2</sup>, of which 8.5 km<sup>2</sup> is wetland, and the remainder is woodland, savanna-type grasslands and savanna with thickets (Ali and Vijayan 1986).

Of 16 species of harrier worldwide (Simmons 2000), six winter in the Indian subcontinent (Ali and Ripley 1983): Pallid *Circus macrourus*, Hen *C. cyaneus*, Montagu's *C. pygargus*, Pied *C. melanoleucos*, Eastern Marsh *C. (aeruginosus) spilonotus* and Western Marsh *C. aeruginosus* Harriers. In Keoladeo National Park all except Eastern Marsh Harrier have been recorded wintering (Prakash 1988).

Harriers are known to roost communally in tall grasses and reeds outside their breeding season (Newton 1979). Large harrier roosts in India have been reported at Velavadar National Park, Gujarat (up to 3000: Clarke *et al.* 1998) and Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary: Andhra Pradesh (>1000, Rahmani and Manakadan 1987) where Marsh Harriers are greatly outnumbered by Montagu's and Pallid Harriers. Roosts largely of Eurasian Marsh Harriers (<100) have been reported from the Banni grasslands of Kutch, Gujarat (Samant *et al.* 1995).

During the day in winter around 10-30 Eurasian Marsh Harriers are present in Keoladeo National Park,

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**Table 1.** Monthly peak counts of Marsh Harriers roosting in Keoladeo National Park.

Month	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000
October	80	72	54	77
November	125	132	48	80
December	119	52	22	60
January	33	23	14	60
February	22	10	1	13
March	7	6	0	9

but large numbers arrive each evening from outside the park to roost. Samant *et al.* (1995) first reported these large concentrations of up to 50 Eurasian Marsh Harriers. During October to March 1996-2000, harriers coming to the roost in Keoladeo National Park were counted in flight from a vantage point by team of two persons. The highest counts were 132 harriers during 1997-98, followed by 125 (1996-97), 80 (1999-2000) and 54 during 1998-99 (Table 1). During all the study years, juveniles predominated in the counts (maximum number of juveniles = 80, males = 30, females = 20).

The roosting population increased rapidly from October, attained a peak in November, and was stable until January provided there was no disturbance to the