

## Unsuccessful rearing record of White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus* at CSIR-IIIM Campus, Jammu, India



Image 1. White-breasted Waterhen searching for food (25 May 2019, Day 1). © Rahul Vikram Singh.

The former state of Jammu & Kashmir has a rich biological heritage owing to its location in the northern part of the Indian subcontinent which has been reorganised as two new Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh region. About 554 bird species belonging to 13 different orders have been recorded in both the regions (Khuroo et al. 2020). Out of these, 262 species have been reported from the Kashmir Valley, and 225 species from Ladakh. Around 183 species have been recorded from the plains of Jammu region (Singh 2020; <http://jktourism.org>). White-breasted Waterhen of Rallidae family is a common resident wetland bird of the area. The species is widely distributed across southern and southeastern Asia and their breeding habitat is marshes across tropical Asia from eastern Pakistan to Indonesia (Grimmett et al. 2013).

This is the first report to document a case study on the unsuccessful breeding of White-breasted Waterhen at campus of the Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine (IIIM), a national institute of the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), Jammu (32.732° N, 74.851° E). At 15.00h on 25 May 2019, during a photography session at the campus of CSIR-IIIM Jammu, we found a White-breasted Waterhen carrying a food item (Image 1).

Following that direction for approximately five minutes, we located its probable destination near the freshwater stream. Further, after 10 minutes of observation, a nest with another White-breasted Waterhen hatching the eggs was observed. We tried to record the number of eggs with the help of binoculars but failed due to low visibility in the nest cavity. After



**Image 2. New born White-breasted Waterhen chick resting on the ground (Day 8). © Rahul Vikram Singh.**



**Image 3. Dead Waterhen chick (Day 10). © Rahul Vikram Singh.**



**Image 4. Predator Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsii* near the nest (evening, Day 10). © Rahul Vikram Singh.**



**Image 5. White-breasted Waterhen searching for its chicks (Day 15). © Rahul Vikram Singh.**

a gap of seven days, the identified pair of White-breasted Waterhen was found roaming with three chicks searching for food at the same site. The chicks seemed to be 5–6 days old. On the next day, a chick was found resting on the ground (Image 2).

When we approached the chick, it suddenly got up and started running towards the bush. After two days of this incident, the chick was found dead on the ground (Image 3) at the same site, for some unknown reasons. That evening, a Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsii* (Image 4) was seen roaming at the same location.

After 35 minutes of observation, suddenly the White-breasted Waterhen pair started calling (krr-kwak-kwak). After a few seconds, we saw that two chicks were killed by the mongoose that immediately ran from the bushes to its cave carrying the dead chicks in its mouth. Due to low visibility in the cave region, we could not capture the image. The same pair of birds were seen searching for their chicks continuously for five days (Image 5) and after the sixth day, they left and were never seen again in that place.

Predation can limit breeding success in ground-nesting birds (Fletcher et al. 2010). Field predators like mongoose, snakes, cats, Black Kite, Common *Shikra*, Jungle Crow, etc. are threats to ground-nesting birds in the study area. This is the first report on unsuccessful rearing of White-breasted Waterhen in the campus of CSIR-IIIM Jammu region.

## References

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