

Malabar Whistling Thrush: a new addition to the avian diversity of Savitribai Phule Pune University

The Malabar Whistling Thrush, *Myophonus horsfieldii* (Vigors, 1831) is a member of the family Muscicapidae and a resident of the Western Ghats. The species is also known to occur in the Eastern Ghats (Ananth 1982) and hills in central India (Grimmett et al. 2011). It is commonly called ‘the whistling schoolboy’ owing to the resemblance of its calls to human whistling (Grewal 2000; Grimmett et al. 2011).

The Malabar Whistling Thrush is not migratory, but its movement to far away areas have been observed during winter season (Praveen 2006; Panda et al. 2017). It is usually observed near rocky hill streams, and well-wooded areas (Grimmett et al. 2011). *M. horsfieldii* has shiny patches of blue colour on the forehead and shoulder which become visible in oblique lighting. The species does not exhibit sexual dimorphism.

Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU) located in Pune city (Maharashtra) has a sprawling lush green campus spread over 411 acres containing gardens, plantations, a nursery, fragmented patches of open dry deciduous forest, farmland, evergreen patches, and a pond. These together provide a fascinating habitat that attracts several birds of diversified food habits (e.g., raptors, insectivores, frugivores, omnivores). The



Malabar Whistling Thrush at SPPU campus, Pune, Maharashtra. © Abhishek Verma.

university campus is among the most popular birding spots within the city limits and its avian diversity has been well documented. In 1976, 91 bird species were recorded from the university campus (Goel 1976).

The avifauna of the campus has undergone considerable change in the last four decades. In a study conducted between 2014 and 2018, 16 new bird species have

been observed in SPPU, leading to 106 bird species listed from the university campus (Choudaj & Wankhade 2021).

On 21 October 2021 at 0815 h, I heard the typical whistling call of the Malabar Whistling Thrush while surveying the area near Alice garden located within the premises of SPPU. I followed the call and spotted an individual perched on a tree amidst dense vegetation.

The glistening blue colour on the forehead and shoulder patch was clearly visible. The wings and tails were edged with glistening blue. The bird soon disappeared into the shady undergrowth of the garden. The identification features and call confirmed it to be of Malabar Whistling Thrush.

There is no record of the occurrence of Malabar Whistling Thrush in SPPU campus and the species has not been listed in previously published SPPU bird checklists (Goel 1976; Choudaj & Wankhade 2021). eBird database search also revealed that the bird has not been observed in the SPPU campus earlier (eBird 2021). Therefore, this is the first sighting of the Malabar Whistling Thrush from SPPU campus.

The present sighting is a new addition to the avian diversity of SPPU and can serve as a valuable information for researchers studying this bird species. Further studies need to be undertaken to track and map the occurrence of this species during all months in SPPU campus.

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Citation: Verma, A. (2022). Malabar Whistling Thrush: a new addition to the avian diversity of Savitribai Phule Pune University. Bird-o-soar #117, In: *Zoo's Print* 37(4): 33–34.