

Breeding and year-round presence of Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher and remarks on Alcedinidae members at Buxa Tiger Reserve, West Bengal

Distribution of nine species of Kingfisher (Family: Alcedinidae) is known from northwestern Bengal (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) and their sightings are well documented from time to time in Buxa Tiger Reserve (BTR) (Inglis et al. 1920; Allen et al. 1996). Here, I report the breeding of the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher, also known as Black-backed Dwarf-Kingfisher *Ceyx erithaca* for the first time from BTR.

On 20 June 2017 at 1250 h while passing by a jungle road, a bright red bird swiftly crossed in front of our vehicle. We stopped and looked for the bird. Soon, a pair appeared that was identified as the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher. The pair had a nest in the bund on the road side, about two feet from ground level.

The area surrounding the nest was covered with common balsam *Impatiens balsamina* and wild turmeric *Curcuma pseudomontana* while the whole habitat was under thick canopy of tall trees. In front of the nest, there was a puddle which was formed due to rainwater. I observed the pair visiting the nest tunnel in turns. They were calling continuously. The male was once sighted carrying a small land crab in the beak to the nest. The pair was hunting along the nullah and perching low on branches half to seven feet tall. On the 6 and 7 July the nest was found deserted, probably the young birds

fledged out. Adults were not sighted but could be heard calling around the nesting site. In 2018, the bund was cut partially during the road repair and widening. The new nest could not be located in the breeding season of 2018 and 2019 though the adults were sighted in same areas during rainy season (June–August).

The Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher was sighted rarely in Buxa Tiger Reserve during my stay and visits from 2005 to 2019. The sightings were during the summer-monsoon season only. Interestingly, a dead bird was noticed and photographed in the peak of winter season on 10 January 2010 at Rajabhatkhawa. It appeared that the bird died due to an accident/collision with window or wall. It suggests the presence of this species throughout the year in the area.

In the Indian subcontinent, the northeastern population of this species is known to visit the foothills of Himalaya – the area ranging from northwestern Bengal to Assam Valley including lower parts of southern Assam hills and northeastern Bangladesh in summer for breeding (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) suggested that the species is perhaps resident to this area and this observation supports it. In the eBird's data documentation, the species is well recorded in north Bengal (Limparungpatthanakij & Hansasuta 2022). BirdLife International (2022)



Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher resting near nest.



Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher – death recorded in winter.



Stork-billed Kingfisher.



Lesser Pied Kingfisher.



Common Kingfisher.



Blue-eared Kingfisher.



White-throated Kingfisher.

Photos © Sachin Ranade.

mentions its population trend is decreasing though the species is yet in the 'Least Concern' category.

Buxa Tiger Reserve has a very crucial location at the confluence of three bio-geographic zones such as the Gangetic plain, central Himalaya, and Brahmaputra Valley (Rodgers & Panwar 1988). During 2005 to 2019, I have observed eight out of nine Kingfisher species - six resident and two visitor in the area.

Opportunistically, the breeding attempts of six species witnessed in Buxa Tiger Reserve were - Stork-billed Kingfisher *Pelargopsis capensis* (Volka Range), White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* (Rajabhatkhawa Range), Himalayan Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle lugubris* (Rydak Range), Lesser Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* (Jayanti Range), Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* (Rydak Range), and recently Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx erithaca* (Jayanti Range). The Blue-eared Kingfisher *Alcedo meninting* and Ruddy Kingfisher *Halcyon coromandra* were sighted just a couple of times, in the Jayanti Range during the 2016–2018.

Out of 13 species of Kingfisher recorded in southern Asia, nine could be sighted in the Buxa Tiger Reserve. Systematic efforts should be carried out to gain knowledge about these beautiful species and their ecology.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the field director of Buxa Tiger Reserve, field staff and Forest Department of West Bengal for their kind co-operation. Also, gratitude is expressed to the Bombay Natural History Society, Mumbai for their constant support and encouragement.

References

- Allen, D., J. Anderton & K. Kazmeirczak (1996).** Report on an ornithological visit to Buxa Tiger Reserve, West Bengal, India 17 February to 6 March 1992. *Forktail* 12: 31–48.
- BirdLife International (2022).** Species factsheet: *Ceyx erithaca*. Downloaded from <http://www.birdlife.org> on 30.vii.2022.
- Inglis, C.M., W.L. Travers, H.V. O'Donel & E.O. Shebbeare (1920).** A tentative list of the vertebrates of Jalpaiguri district, Bengal. *Birds. Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 26: 988–999; 27: 151–158.
- Limparungpatthanakij, W.L. & C. Hansasuta (2022).** Black-backed Dwarf-Kingfisher *Ceyx erithaca*, version 2.0. In: Sly, N.D. & B.K. Keeney (Eds.). *Birds of the World*. Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA.
- Rasmussen, P.C. & J.C. Anderton (2012).** *Birds of South Asia: The Ripley Guide*. 1st ed. 2 vols, 378 pp. & 683 pp. Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Editions, Washington, D.C. and Barcelona.
- Rodgers, W.A. & S.H. Panwar (1988).** *Biogeographical Classification of India*. Wildlife Institute of India, Dehra Dun, India.

Sachin P. Ranade

Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre, Rajabhatkhawa (BTR), Alipurduar, West Bengal 735227, India.
Email: sachinranade@yahoo.com (corresponding author)

Citation: Ranade, S.P. (2022). Breeding and year-round presence of Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher and remarks on Alcedinidae members at Buxa Tiger Reserve, West Bengal. *Bird-o-soar* #179, In: *Zoo's Print* 37(9): 36–38.