

A photographic record of Nilgiri Marten from Avandur, Kodagu District, India

The Nilgiri Marten *Martes gwatkinsii* is a 'Vulnerable' mustelid endemic to the Western Ghats (Mudappa et al. 2015). It is a semi-arboreal species and the only marten species native to southern India. On 11 February 2023 at 0800 h, a pair of Nilgiri Martens were observed climbing up a Warty Marble Tree *Elaeocarpus tuberculatus* which was ~25 m tall. They appeared to be looking for food and we later noticed an empty bird's nest in the tree which possibly drew the martens there. The pair were photographed at the canopy of the tree. They then descended and proceeded west on the ground towards the denser forest area.

The location of the sighting (12.3950 N, 75.6560 E; 1,023 m) had a mix of wild vegetation (including established endemic trees such as *Artocarpus lacucha* and *Lagerstroemia microcarpa*, along with *Musa* spp.) with several coffee trees (Robusta and Arabica) below.



A pair of Nilgiri Martens seen on an *Elaeocarpus tuberculatus* in Avandur, Kodagu District, India. © Romit Shilpe.



Nilgiri Martens perched together before descending the tree. © Romit Shilpe.

There is a natural stream that flows ~40 m west of the *Elaeocarpus* tree on which the martens were spotted. That area is a thick wooded

forest along with steep hills and no coffee plantations. This forested portion of the land is also relatively less disturbed by humans. Nilgiri



One Nilgiri Marten of the pair seconds before the descent. © Romit Shilpe.

Martens are known to frequent *Elaeocarpus* trees perhaps due to the hollows often found on them (Balakrishnan 2005); however, it could be beneficial to understand these species-habitat associations to help inform conservation. There are high levels of tree felling in the area surrounding this land which could have contributed to the sighting.

Previous sightings of the species from this region in the state of Karnataka range from 15–25 km aerial distance away from Avandur (Sreehari & Nameer 2013; GBIF 2023). Habitat loss and fragmentation have been considered as the main drivers in the limited

distribution and sightings of this species (Mudappa et al. 2015). Local hunting could also be a key threat to martens (Mudappa 2013), especially in this region where humans believe that Nilgiri Martens raid bee hives and are considered pests (Kumara & Singh 2007). It is an elusive mammal which is often captured more frequently on camera traps (Shameer et al. 2023); however, the recent increase in human modifications is likely to push various species like the marten into this estate which is safe from development and pesticide use. This record appears to fall within the Brahmagiri habitat cluster

which also include a multi-use area with key niche features required by the species (Shameer et al. 2023). According to local residents, Nilgiri Martens (referred to as ‘tree dog’ in the translated local language) have not been spotted around this location for many years. In the last five years of occupying this coffee estate, this is the first sighting of a Nilgiri Marten.

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