

Threats to Indian Thick-knee in West Medinipur, West Bengal

Indian Thick-knee also known as Indian Stone-curlew *Burhinus indicus* is mystifying bird found distinctively in dry, deciduous and thorn forest in India. They are widespread resident species in most parts of India (Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharastra). They live in chalky soils or steppe like grasslands and dried out riverbeds for breeding (Gupta & Kaushik 2012; Grimmett et al. 2013). This shy bird can easily be identified by their characteristic sandy brown colour, with long yellow legs, yellow and black bill with typical large yellow eyes.

The prominent black and white wings bars, which help them to camouflage with background habitat (Ali 1996; Green & Taylor 1995). They used to feed on invertebrates,

earth worms, insects, dung beetles, small frogs & toads (Green et al. 2000).

West Medinipur is a district in West Bengal, the average temperature in hot and cold seasons are 35°C and 20°C, with an average rainfall of 150 mm between June and September months. During our study in March 2025 (22.4436° N, 87.2567° E) we found six pairs of Indian Thick-knee.

This area is mixed up with unfertile hard lateritic and loam soil with mixed vegetation of Sal forest along with Mahua *Madhuca* sp., Jamun *Syzygium* sp., Tal *Borassus* sp., Khejur *Phoenix* sp. trees, small grasses scattered on abandoned agricultural land, and a water body.



Indian thick knee sitting at ground level



Indian thick knee standing curiously.

In our study, we observed that during daytime all birds were vanished in Sal forest. But in the evening, they slowly come out into the open fields and makes loud call. They are generally more active in dark. When they are terrified by humans or any wild animals, they crouch down and hide in a dry leaf or grass, very difficult to detect the camouflaged bird.

Their major threats are from wild predators. In this area we observed boost in the number of Golden Jackals during last few years. Jackals continuously disturb them during resting and incubation. This area is also used for cattle grazing which is also affecting their breeding.

On the contrary their prime threat is man-made forest fires. During our last visit in the end of April we observed burned forest floor (consuming the surface litter and underbrush); adjacent grassland has been severely affected by forest fires. As a result, all birds used to move in different places. We talked with local people and informed them about the presence of the bird, its importance in environment and how human activities (forest fires) and random

use of non-specific pesticides wiping out their feeding ground. We tried to convince them not to set fire at least during breeding months. The presence of Indian Thick-knee indicates environmental health of this habitat.

References

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Pabitra Mahata¹ & Suman Pratihar^{2*}

¹&²Department of Zoology, Sukumar Sengupta Mahavidyalaya, Keshpur College, West Medinipur, West Bengal 721150, India.

^{2*}pratihar_vu@rediffmail.com

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