

Stray dog *Canis familiaris* preying on Threatened Birds in Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary, Tamil Nadu

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Predation is one of the important factors, which limits the reproduction in colonial birds (Urfi 1993). The intensity of predation varies in relation to number, spacing and synchrony of nests (Ali & Ripley 1969; Meganathan & Urfi 2009). In waterbird colonies, the concentrated activities of a few individual predators can result in large-scale nest loss and abandonment (Rodgers *et al.* 1987). Hence, it is important to identify potential predators in the breeding colonies of birds.

More than fifteen species of water birds have been breeding at Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary (VBS) every year between November and April (Paulraj 1984; Santharam & Menon 1991; Krishnan 1993, 2001; Santharam 1981, 2000, 2004). Among them, Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*), Spot-billed Pelican (*Pelecanus philippensis*), Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*) and Oriental Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*) are Near-Threatened birds (BirdLife International 2013), which has been breeding since 1930 (Santharam 1985, 1986; Paulraj & Gunasekaran 1988; Kannan & Manakadan 2005; Subramanya 2005; Muralidharan *et al.* 2008).

On 5th June 2013 at 16:00 hrs, a black female stray dog was sighted; we followed the track and found that the dog was feeding on the carcass of juvenile Spot-billed Pelican (Figure 1). Later, during the same day a thorough survey around the park revealed that six immature Spot-billed Pelican and two immature of Painted Stork carcass were partially eaten by the dogs. Thus, the above incidences add to the proof that the stray dogs hunting on immature of Painted Stork and Spot-billed Pelican in the sanctuary in addition to the well known predators *viz.*, House Crow (*Corvus splendens*), Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*), Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) and Indian Rat Snake (*Ptyas mucosa*) in the sanctuary (Muralidharan *et al.* 2008).

Although VBS is protected by Forest Department, it does not have proper earthen bund and fencing around. Further, in summer most of the waterlogged areas shrink into small



Figure 1. Stray dog preying on Spot-billed Pelican (Photo by M. Mahendiran)

pools. Therefore, dogs can find their way to enter and hunt immature birds, particularly during the end of the breeding season. Construction of boundaries, deepening the corners, monitoring of threats and killing of problem dogs would warrant the future conservation of these threatened birds in the sanctuary.

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