

## SIGHTINGS OF YELLOW-THROATED BULBUL *Pycnonotus xantholaemus* FROM CHINNAR WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, KERALA, SOUTHERN INDIA

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Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary (c. 10°17'N & 77°10'E) has a unique landscape and vegetation compared to all other protected areas in Kerala with extensive scrub and thorn jungles. A series of three bird surveys was organized during 1998-99 in this reserve lead by one of us (LN) with the support of Kerala Forest Department. About 35 bird watchers from Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka participated in these bird surveys, each survey having 15 to 20 participants. A total of 211 species was reported from the study area during the entire period and the most important observation was the discovery of the peninsular endemic and globally threatened Yellow-throated Bulbul (*Pycnonotus xantholaemus*).

The first sighting was made by Thajudheen, K.R. Anoop, Prasad G, Smita G. Nair, Seshagiri and R. Lekshmi on 18.ii.1998 when four birds were seen quite near to the Koottaar area. The sighting, though conclusive, was not reported as it was the first record from Kerala in the 20<sup>th</sup> C and a confirmatory sighting was desirable.

The confirmatory evidence of its presence was obtained a year later when one us (PJ) surveyed areas around Aanakkunnu (c. 900m) during 25.ii.1999 to 27.ii.1999. The main habitat of the area was dry-deciduous and scrub forests with stunted vegetation on the hilly slopes. A single individual was seen perched on a low tree near the edge of a precipice on 26.ii.1999, at 1010hrs. The greenish-orange head and the bright yellow throat were very conspicuous. Breast appeared pinkish and the upperparts were greenish-brown. The bird flew immediately and it could not be shown to other team members, Ramakrishnan and Shaji, who were a few paces behind. In flight, the bird had white (yellow in literature) at the tail tips. The next day was spent in search of this bird and two individuals were again spotted at the same site, at 0950hrs and both of them quickly dived into the valley.

Though there is only a single historical record of Yellow-throated Bulbul from the Anamalais (Davidson, 1887), there has been a spate of records from all over the Anamalai hills in recent years. R. Kannan came across this bird near Monkey falls at Indira Gandhi WLS, Tamil Nadu (Kannan 1993). However, further searches did not come up with any new sighting until it was recently sighted twice by Wolfgang Beisenherz (Beisenherz, 2004). The bird has been repeatedly reported from Bodi Ghat area (BirdLife International, 2001) lying further south

of Chinnar WLS in the Tamil Nadu ghats. K.V. Eldhose (pers. comm., January 2005) who visits this area often (during 2002 to 2005), considers the bird as common. About 100 individuals were seen at Meghamalai, Kambam district, Tamil Nadu between 23.iii.1999 and 27.iii.1999 by K.A. Subramanian, P. Pramod, E. Kunhikrishnan and Aby Varghese during a rapid biodiversity assessment program (Subramanian, 2001).

Initial avifaunal survey of Chinnar WLS had not come across this species (Nameer & George, 1991). K.V. Eldhose who visits the Chinnar frequently off late (during 2002-2005) has also not come across this species there. The three detailed surveys conducted in Chinnar WLS came up with only three sightings so far. However, two recent sightings (iii.2000 & iv.2002) are reported by S. Thejaswi from Chinnar (Thejaswi, 2004). Hence, it seems that the bird has got a denser population south of Chinnar in the hills of Tamil Nadu and its presence in the scrub jungles on the Kerala side and Indira Gandhi WLS further north seems sporadic.

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