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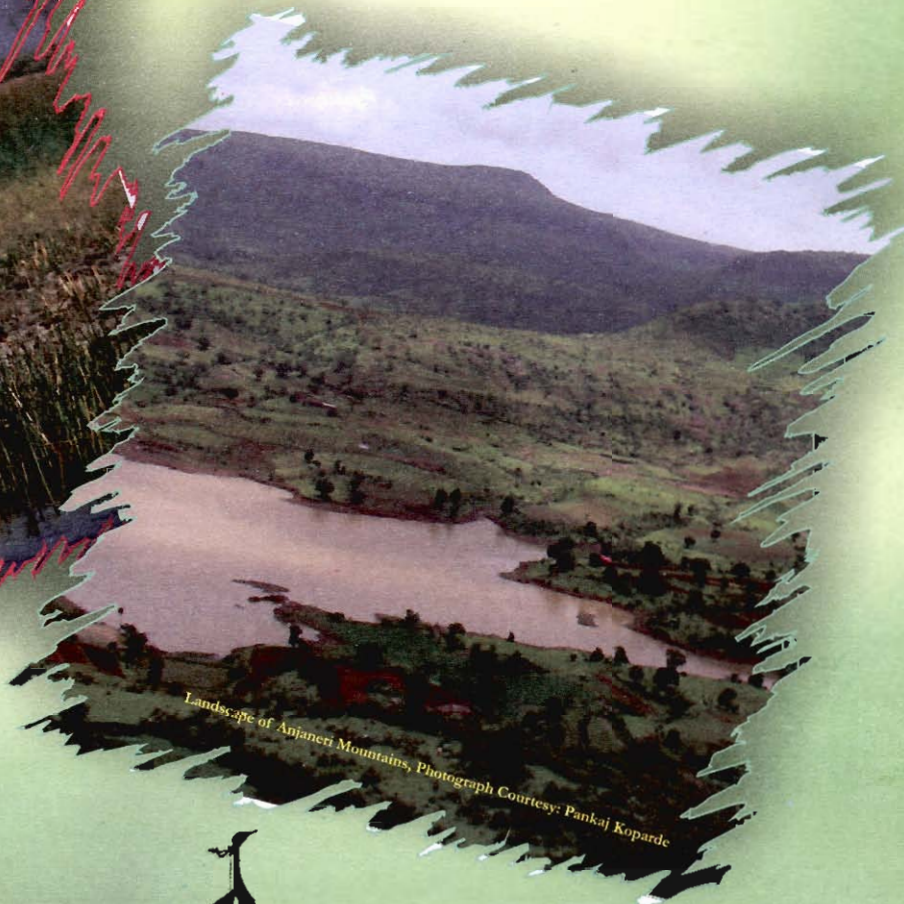
on wetland ecosystems and inland wetlands

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Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary © Bhaunik Gadani



Landscape of Anjaneri Mountains, Photograph Courtesy: Pankaj Koparde



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Occurrence Records of few Wetland Birds and Birds of Prey from Nashik, Maharashtra, India

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Species records over spatio-temporal scales are important to understand species' realized distributional ranges, migration routes and possible threats to their survival. Areas with high concentration of naturalists / researchers who observe and report, generally get attention in terms of species richness and abundance; while other areas get relatively neglected. This gap can be bridged by reporting opportunistic sighting records; especially from areas with low numbers of observers and reporters. Nashik district of Maharashtra, part of which falls in northern Western Ghats of India (Hijmans *et al.*, 2004), is one of the species rich areas, that has been neglected by bird-watchers and researchers. The bird checklists compiled by Lepage (2013a) for Pune and Nashik districts with similar biogeography show considerable differences in species number. According to Lepage (2013a, 2013b), Pune district supports 411 species, whereas Nashik district supports 341 bird species. The scientific studies exploring avifauna of Nashik district are few which include Rane (1983), Goenka *et al.* (1985), Kumar *et al.* (2002), Raha and Gudsoorkar (2002), Raha *et al.* (2004), Raha *et al.* (2005), Koparde *et al.* (2012) and Lepage (2013a). Nandur-Madhyameshwar Bird Sanctuary (NMBS), fly ash ponds (FAP) of Eklahare village, Waghad dam, Gangapur dam, Anjaneri Mountains, and Pandav caves (Fig. 1) are some of the bird-watching hotspots in the vicinity of the city.

NMBS, located at 20°0'51" N and 74°7'1" E, is situated on Nandur-Madhyameshwar dam in Niphad taluk of Nashik. The habitat at NMBS is composed of mainly farm-land adjacent to scrub-land, and grass-land along a shallow water-body (Fig. 2) offering ideal foraging and breeding site for wetland birds.

During 2007-2011 we recorded 199 species at NMBS (Koparde *et al.*, 2012). Although a number of winter migratory avian species can be seen at NMBS, only individual

records of few species listed in table 1 are known from the site and Nashik. Gadag Goose, a rare winter migrant to north-west India (Rasmussen and Anderton, 2012), was seen at NMBS foraging in core area of the sanctuary. The species is a known vagrant to southern parts of India, but is rare (Rasmussen and Anderton, 2012). Common Crane and Indian Spotted Eagle were recorded in 2011. The former species was seen in a large flock (n=53) soaring on thermals (Fig. 3). Lepage (2013a) mentions presence of Common Crane *Grus grus* (Linnaeus, 1758) in Nashik district. A single individual of the latter species, a vulnerable species according to IUCN 2013, was seen being chased by a House Crow *Corvus splendens* (Viellot, 1817). Indian Spotted Eagle *Aquila hastata* (Lesson, 1831) is a rare resident of north Maharashtra (Naoraji 2007), also known in the form of isolated records from Satara (Pawar *et al.*, 2010) and Pune districts (Lepage, 2013b), which are further south to Nashik district, and from Goa (Naoraji, 2007)

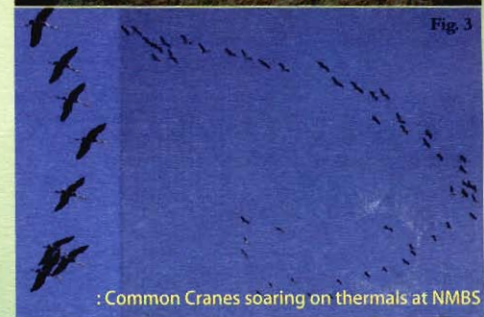
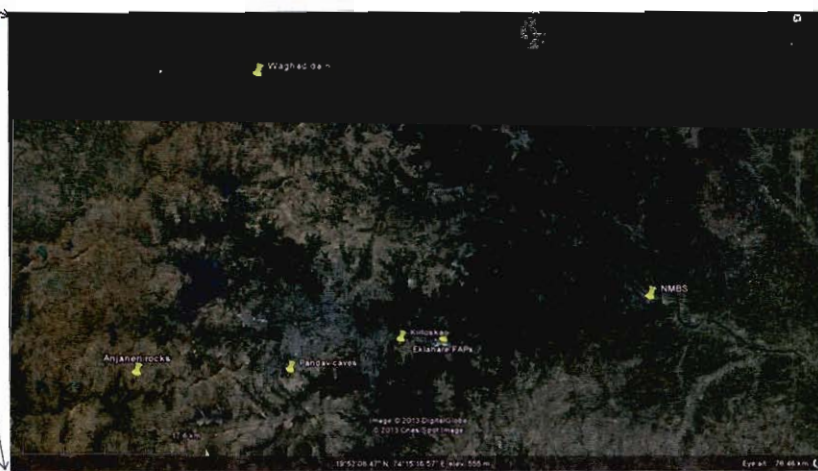


Figure 1. Satellite map of Nashik city and surrounding area showing sampling sites (Hijmans *et al.* 2004, Google Inc. 2013).



and Kerala (Sashikumar, 2004). White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* (Linnaeus, 1758) and Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* (Linnaeus, 1766) were recorded during 2012. Although White Stork *C. ciconia* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Fig. 5) is a common winter migrant to north-west India, its records from south are rare. In 2002, Kumar *et al.* (2002) recorded 100 White Storks at NMBS. Lepage (2013a) also mentions presence of the species in Nashik district. Collared Pratincole (Fig. 6), a common summer visitor to west coast of India (Rasmussen and Anderton, 2012), is not known from any inland freshwater reservoirs, especially from west Maharashtra. This is the first record of the species for Nashik district.

Waghdam dam, located between 20°13'25.90" N and 73°42'55.23" E, falls in Dindori taluk. The dam on Kolwan River is surrounded by farm-land and scrub-land. Flocks of Demoiselle Cranes *Anthropoides virgo* (Linnaeus, 1758) are a common sighting during winter season at this place. During October 2011 three Common Cranes were sighted in a mixed flock with Demoiselle Cranes (Fig. 7). In December 2011 a flock of Bar-headed Geese *Anser indicus* (Latham, 1790) (Fig. 8) was sighted. The species, a widespread winter migrant, is rare in southern part of Indian subcontinent (Rasmussen and Anderton, 2012), and Nashik and Pune districts (Lepage, 2013a, 2013b). The habitat at Waghdam dam is under moderate anthropogenic pressure of habitat disturbance.

Indian Vultures *Gyps indicus* (Scopoli, 1786) and White-backed Vultures *Gyps bengalensis* (Gmelin, 1788) (Fig. 9), both critically endangered species (IUCN, 2013), were sighted at various locations during 2009-2013. After the catastrophic decline in the population of vultures of Indian subcontinent (Prakash *et al.*, 2007) due to ill effects of Diclofenac (Shultz *et al.*, 2004), conservation of vultures has become the top-most priority in Indian conservation scenario. Although the traditionally known vulture colonies have reduced in number and size, small populations are still surviving at mountains of Trimbak, Harihar-gad (Fig. 10), Anjaneri (Fig. 11) and Pandav caves. Considering the wide foraging range of vultures (Naoroji, 2007), it can be speculated that foraging ranges of populations from Trimbak and Pandav caves might be overlapping, given the fact that crow flight distance within Trimbak and Pandav caves is 28 km and that between Pandav caves and Kirloskar hills is 12 km (Google Inc., 2013). This might have resulted in counting same individual at different sites. Recently fifteen nests of Indian Vultures and twenty four chicks were counted at Anjaneri Mountains

(Raha and Agashe, pers. obsrv., 2013). Kirloskar hills, located near Nashik Thermal Power Station, were once vulture abundant sites. In 2005, we recorded over 70 Indian Vultures feeding on live-stock carcass at the base of the hills, along road-side. Although occasional records of vultures soaring on thermals can be recorded at these sites, during 2011-2013 the maximum number of individuals recorded was two. Sighting of White-backed Vulture is relatively rare. During 2012-2013 five White-backed Vultures were sighted at Anjaneri Mountains, in a mixed flock with 31 Indian Vultures (Fig. 9).

The species records compiled in this research note suggests species rich areas in and around Nashik city need to be monitored periodically for obtaining species presence-absence data as well as understanding population status of endangered species such as vultures. We hope that this work helps provide baseline for locality based research and conservation action.

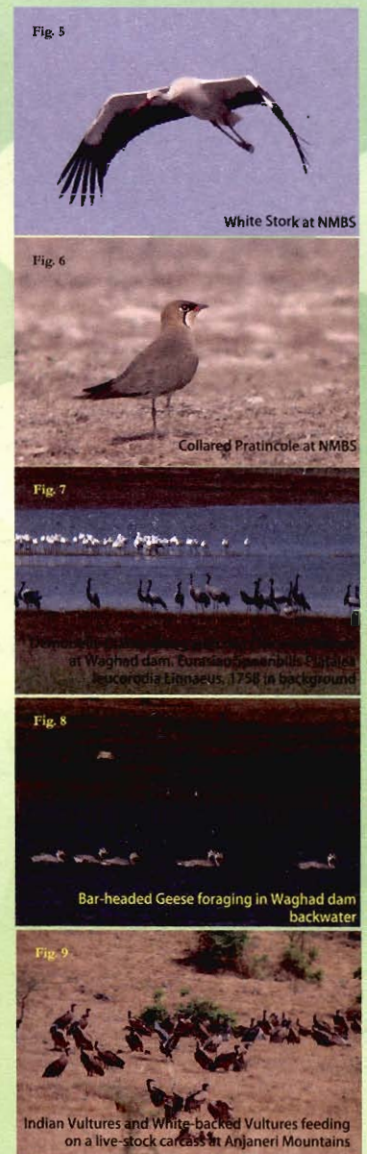
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Table 1. Opportunistic records of few bird species from Nashik city and vicinity

Location	Species Name	Sighting Date	No. of Individuals
NMBS	Greylag Goose <i>Anser anser</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	December 2010 - December 2012	4*
	White Stork <i>Ciconia ciconia</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	1 April 2012	1
	Indian Spotted Eagle <i>Aquila hastata</i> (Lesson, 1831)	1 January 2011	1
	Common Crane <i>Grus grus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	31 January 2011	53
	Collared Pratincole <i>Glareola pratincola</i> (Linnaeus, 1766)	1 April 2012	20
Waghdam dam	Common Crane <i>Grus grus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	October 2011	3
	Bar-headed Goose <i>Anser indicus</i> (Latham, 1790)	October 2011	36
Anjaneri Mountains	Indian Vulture <i>Gyps indicus</i> (Scopoli, 1786)	2009-2012	31*
	White-backed Vulture <i>Gyps bengalensis</i> (Gmelin, 1788)	10 March 2012	5
Kirloskar Hills	Indian Vulture <i>Gyps indicus</i> (Scopoli, 1786)	2005	70
		2011-2012	2
Pandav	Indian Vulture <i>Gyps indicus</i> (Scopoli, 1786)	August 2009	2
Harihar Gad		January 2011	3

*Maximum number recorded



Photographs 3-9 by Purushottam Patil and Photographs 10-11 by Pankaj Koparde