

Pied Avocet and Demoiselle Cranes: First Report for Heggeri Lake in Haveri District

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Introduction

Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) members of Haveri and Asian waterfowl (mid-winter) census conducted by ornithologists of the area led by late Dr. Uttangi revealed that 44 species of birds belonging to the 14 families before 2002 are reported from the area. Two years study from 2004 - 06 conducted by researchers revealed only 30 species of birds belonging to 10 families are reported from Heggeri lake [1]. Since 20 years, the survey on the birds visiting the lakes of Haveri district is recorded. As part of minor research project entitled "A survey of birds in and around Haveri" sanctioned to KLE Society's Gudleppa Hallikeri college Haveri, surveying the lakes of Haveri for the birds species is under progress since January 2014.

Assessment of the current status of bird species and habitat would benefit from the past bird surveys [2,3]. Hence the studies are underway to list the birds found in and around Haveri. Wetlands are extremely important areas throughout the world for wildlife protection, recreation, sediment control etc. [4]. The diversified vegetation of the wetlands of central Karnataka attracts large number of aquatic avifauna, but the reports on aquatic birds occurring in plains of central Karnataka is not available [5]. This article is report about the first record of two birds in Heggeri wetland. We noticed a single pied avocet and demoiselle cranes amidst painted storks, spoon bills in February 2014.

Study Area - Heggeri Lake

Heggeri lake is owned by Minor irrigation department of Government of Karnataka state. According to the history, the lake is constructed by King Nala in 1134. Lake is surrounded by four villages; one on the south-east, one on the south-west and the other two on eastern side. It is wholly rain fed and no canal is connected to it for traditional supply of water. The earthen embankment runs about a kilometer and is still strong. The catchment area on the far western-side connects small nallahs to the tank to feed water during the rainy season. The tank is semi-permanent and gets dried up when the rains suddenly drop during winter. The depth of water when it is full is 12 feet.

This lake is about 683 acres and a source of irrigation to about 600 acres of fertile land. In terms of its size, this lake is one of the biggest lakes in Karnataka. Recently the minor irrigation department as per government order (GO) MID/86/KGD2008 dated January 1, 2009 has transferred the lake to City Municipal Council Haveri for the supply of drinking water to the city during summer season (Figure 1).



Figure 1: A view of Heggeri lake found in Haveri district, Karnataka State, India.

According to the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF : Annexure VII A) annual report (2007-08), 94 wetlands (found in 24 states and union territories) are recognized under national wetland conservation programme. Of the 94, seven wetlands of Karnataka State, Like Magadi, Gudavi, Bonal, Hidkal and Ghataprabha, Heggeri, Ranganathittu and K G Koppa are reported under national wetland conservation programme.

Pied Avocet (Family *Recurvirostridae*) *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Pied Avocet, a wader, migratory species, breed in temperate Europe, Western and Central Asia. The Pied Avocet is one of the species to which the *Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Water birds* applies. The author noticed the far-crying call (*kluitt kluitt*) of the Avocet. A single bird was foraging in the shallow water and on mud flats in the lake. It was often scything its bill from side to side in water, a unique feeding technique of avocets (Plate 1).

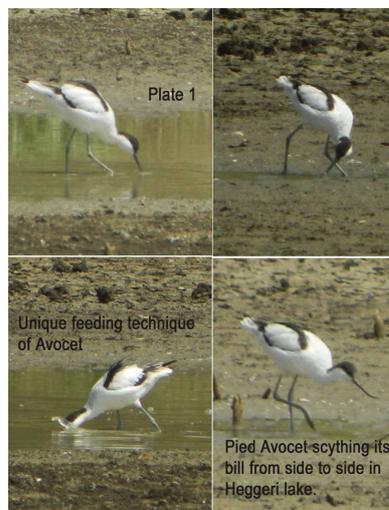


Plate 1: Pied Avocet, a wader, migratory species, breeding in temperate Europe, western and Central Asia was found scything its bill from side to side in water in Heggeri lake near Haveri.

Distributed mainly in coasts of Kokan and Malabar, rarely on inland waters in passage. It's only known breeding site in India is in the Great Rann of Kutch. It is found wading in sewage water, near Shirwal on the banks of Neera river (Satara district) in the company of Spoonbills [3]. Piet avocet is also reported in a second largest mangrove ecosystem of India – Bhitarkanika [2], Channagiri taluka of Davanageri district [5], Kaziranga national park in Assam district [6], Manipur - North-east India [7], largest river Upper Ganges [8], a marine national park – Gulf of Kachchh in Jamnagar district of Gujarat state [9] a biosphere reserve – Indian sunderbans [10] Nigade, Raigad district in Konkan, Maharashtra [11]. There is a report of pied avocet as a occasional winter visitor to Koshi barrage, constructed across Nepal's largest river – Sapta Koshi [12]. This sporadic migrant bird which was last said to have been seen in the year 1987 is resighted by Vijay Siredesai in February 2009 at Hussainsagar lake, Hyderabad [13] and also in mangroves of Kolak estuary in Gujarat state [14].

Demoiselle Crane (Family *Gruidae*) *Anthropoides virgo*

It is found distributed in the Deccan, up to Belgaum, unrecorded in Kokan and Malabar. The Demoiselle Crane is a species of crane found in central Eurasia, ranging from the Black Sea to Mongolia and North Eastern China. There is also a small breeding population in Turkey. These cranes are migratory birds. Birds from western Eurasia will spend the winter in Africa whilst the birds from Asia, Mongolia and China will spend the winter in the Indian subcontinent. However, Demoiselle cranes became extinct in Western Europe early in the 20th century [15]. A recent estimate of the USSR population of demoiselle crane is 45,000 to 50,000 [16].

Kheechan is a village in the Jodhpur district of the Indian state of Rajasthan that in recent years has established a tradition of feeding wild birds, including Demoiselle Cranes that winter here every year [17]. Kheechan village now hosts over 20,000 Demoiselle Cranes from as early as August each year to as late as March of the following year. Kheechan is the second most abundant population of the world's

cranes [18]. Demoiselle crane is one among the few long distance migratory bird. These cranes are appreciated for undertaking rarest of the longest journeys from one corner of the world to the opposite of the earth, so much so that today, we know about the truthful existence of “International flyways” adopted by variety of migratory birds across the continents of the earth [19].

The smallest (of the world's 15 crane species) and second most abundant among the world's crane species, Demoiselle cranes are reported from Great Rann of Kachchh (GRK), Gujarat state [20] and at Mahi right bank canal system, Gujarat state [21]. There is a report of demoiselle cranes migrating through Pakistan between their breeding and wintering grounds [22]. More abundant species among the cranes, Demoiselle cranes are reported from Ranchi district [23]. There is a report of demoiselle crane as an occasional winter visitor to Koshi barrage, constructed across Nepal's largest river – Sapta Koshi [12]. First ever sighting of Demoiselle Crane (single bird) was reported on 3rd November 2012 from Haripura Reservoir, in Uttarakhand [24].

After 2003, these had almost stopped visiting Hidkhal dam for few years. Hardly 40 to 50 Demoiselle cranes at Hidkhal dam catchment area were sighted until 2010. According to Niranjan R. Sant of Belgaum, the number of Demoiselle cranes at Hidkhal dam catchment area for the years 2011 and 2012, was only 200 to 300. During 2013, these 2,000 winged beauties were found camping on the banks of the dam [25].

There are also reports about the sightings of demoiselle cranes in Dharwad district and some parts of North Karnataka [26-28]. According to an ornithologist, there has been 90% reduction in the number of cranes coming to Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka. One of the reasons for this could be the change in crop pattern. Gram crop is now being replaced by sugarcane. Also, over the years, the number of birds has reduced [29]. Three demoiselle cranes were found amidst painted storks and spoon bills at Heggeri lake on February 8th and 9th, 2014 (Plate 2).

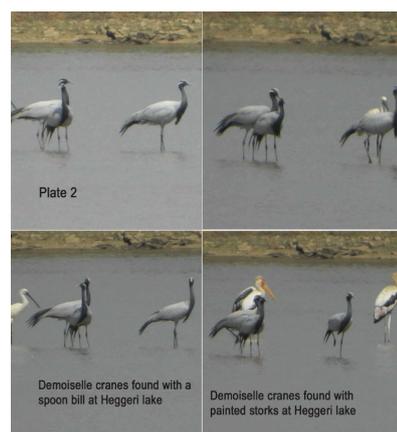


Plate 2: The smallest (of the world's 15 crane species) and second most abundant among the world's crane species Demoiselle cranes seen in Heggeri lake near Haveri.

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