THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

BIRD RACE

2023
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*Thiruvananthapuram Bird Race 2023*
INTRODUCTION

Birds are often the foremost attraction for anyone interested in exploring the natural world. 'Bird Race' is an activity in which the sighting of a particular bird species at a particular place is counted in a single day and the exercise is carried out at several locations by several teams on a specific day. The increasing popularity of the HSBC India Bird Races, ever since they began in December 2005 in Mumbai, bears testimony to this simple truth. From that single city one-off event, it has expanded to a pan-India programme, held across at least 14 cities every year. Such birding events play a crucial role in raising awareness about bird species, promoting conservation efforts, and fostering a sense of community among nature enthusiasts.

The 17th Kerala Bird Race was held on Sunday, 19th November 2023 in Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi and Kozhikode. As in every previous year, the Kerala event marks the start of the season of the India Bird Races, and is often held on a Sunday around the birth anniversary of Dr. Salim Ali, popularly known as the Birdman of India.

WWF-India, Kerala State Office has been organizing the Bird Race in Thiruvananthapuram since the past 16 years. It was conducted during the pandemic also, following all the COVID-19 containment protocols. In 2023, the State Office and Yuhina Canopy coordinated the HSBC Bird Race 2023 in Thiruvananthapuram with local support from the Department of Museums and Zoos, Kerala Forests and Wildlife Department, and CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Nodal Office Vazhuthacaud.
ACTIVITY REPORT

The 17th Kerala Bird Race at Thiruvananthapuram was held on Sunday, 19th November 2023. Participants were invited through the network of WWF-India Volunteers & other birding groups and were asked to register in advance. An orientation was given to the participants on Bird Race and Bird Monitoring on Friday, 17th November at the Thiruvananthapuram Museum & Zoo Auditorium. The sessions were led by Dr. Sujith V. Gopalan and Govind Girija. Teams consisting of 5 to 6 members were formed with a Team Lead for coordination, a bird expert for accurate identification, a good photographer with experience in bird photography, and budding birders.

Indemnity forms were signed by those present at the orientation session and forms were given away for team members which was collected after the Bird Race.
The locations in Thiruvananthapuram for the Bird Race 2023 included twelve sites, i.e., Thiruvananthapuram City, Punchakkari Wetlands, Akkulam Lake including NCESS Campus, Veli Lake and Beach, Kadinamkulam Lake, Poovar Beach, and forest areas, Kallar-Ponmdiri, Bonacaud, Palode, Kottoor, Arippa and IISER Campus at Vithura.

The teams of 5-6 birders were led by experts namely Praveen J, Govind Girija, Dr Sujith V. Gopalan, Arun C.G., Jaichand Johnson, Suraj S.R. Choodal Palode, Anoop S.S., Azhar Aerath, Vinod Thomas, Thrinisha T.U., Jayakrishnan S. and Anuraag Avadhany. A total of sixty-six Volunteer birders including newcomers and experts observed a total of 189 species, the highlights being the Great Hornbill, Oriental Turtle Dove, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Great Eared Nightjar, and Green Imperial Pigeon.

The evening get-together for experience sharing and data compilation was held at the Nodal Office of CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Vazhuthacaud. A.K. Sivakumar, Senior Education Officer of WWF-India spoke about Bird Races and its role as a stepping stone for citizens towards nature conservation. Shri. J.R. Ani, Wildlife Warden, Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary was the Chief Guest for the occasion. He appreciated WWF-India and the Volunteers for the efforts taken for the conservation of bird species through which he hopes the common man will understand better about the natural world which will lead to fewer human-wildlife conflicts in Kerala. Felicitation was given by Godwin V.P., Program Coordinator of CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Nodal Office, Vazhuthacaud. Govind Girija consolidated the data from the day’s Race and presented the results, and Dr. Sujith V. Gopalan gave the vote of thanks. Ms. Anushreedha S S was the Emcee for the program.

This was followed by an experience-sharing session. The very keen observation skill of Ms. Bhadra J.K., the Youngest Birder of the Day enabled the team to identify the Lesser Black-backed Gull (Heuglin’s Gull) at Veli Beach, which would have otherwise gone unrecorded. The teams also mentioned that the rain throughout the day played spoilsport for birding activity. Some teams that went to the forest areas noticed the presence of invasive plant species like Lantanta and Mikania.
Thiruvananthapuram Bird Race 2023

Shri J R Ani addressing the audience

A K Sivakumar on Bird Races

Govind presenting the consolidated observations of TBR 2023

Anushreedha - Emcee of the Program

Godwin felicitating the function

Dr. Sujith V Gopalan delivering the Vote of Thanks
Feedback sessions by teams

Chief Guest presented with the Memento

Volunteers at the closing ceremony
Memento for participants

Group Photo

In the news..........

Thiruvananthapuram Bird Race 2023
The five-member team started birding by 6.30 am and covered a track of about 6 km around the Akkulam Lake. Akkulam Lake and its surrounding are known for harbouring a rich diversity of wetland birds. The Campus of the National Centre for Earth Science Studies (NCESS), which lies contiguous to the Akkulam wetlands is now a haven for the waterbirds. It is home to hundreds of Lesser-Whistling Ducks, the largest congregation seen within the Thiruvananthapuram City.

The Find of the Day for the team was a Striated Heron and the Dip of the Day was absence of waders like Sandpipers and Moorhens.
## List of Birds observed

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**Thiruvananthapuram Bird Race 2023**
2. VELI BEACH

Team:
1) Jayakrishnan S (Team Lead)
2) Bhadra J K
3) Arjun Kurup
4) Chandana T R
5) Kavya V Gopal
6) Sajeev S

Veli beach is a major tourist attraction in Thiruvananthapuram City limits. The Akkulam Lake opens up into the sea at Veli. It is also a fish-landing centre for local fishermen. The team comprising of six members, including the youngest participant of the Bird Race, and they covered around 4-5 km across the Veli beach towards the north. They observed 34 species of birds here including some pelagic birds.

The Find of the Day were the Oriental Turtle Dove and two species of gulls - Brown-headed Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull. The Dip of the Day was in the number of Sandpipers and Plovers.
# List of Birds observed

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**Thiruvananthapuram Bird Race 2023**
The team comprised of eight members and Steffin Babu contributed to birding from his homestead. Together they covered a distance of 6 km and noted 53 species. The Thiruvananthapuram City team includes Museum and Zoo Compound, Palayam, Marappalam and Kesavadasapuram Paddy Fields. The little patch of green in the City is home to many migrant species of birds. It is a good example of urban biodiversity and the importance of maintaining green spaces in urban areas.

The Find of the Day was the Flycatchers observed at the Zoo – Indian Paradise Flycatcher, Asian and Brown-breasted Flycatchers along with the Orange-headed Thrush. The Dip of the Day was the lack of Orange-breasted Green Pigeon which are usually seen in the Museum compound or near Akkulam.
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Thiruvananthapuram Bird Race 2023
The Kallar-Ponmudi team comprised of six members and they covered a distance of around 20 km covering Kallar and Ponmudi area. They started birding around 7 am and was accompanied by two Kerala Forest Department staffs at the Ponmudi hills. The habitat they covered included forest area, grasslands and shola forests. As in the other locations, light rains made visibility poor in Ponmudi and Kallar also.

They were able to observe 42 species of birds. The Highlight of the Day was the sighting of a pair of Great Indian Hornbill, Black Eagle, and two pipit species which are typical of the high-altitude grasslands. The Dip of the Day was they could not able to hear or see the painted bush quail whose sighting is sort after by avid birders.
## List of Birds observed

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*Thiruvananthapuram Bird Race 2023*
Bonacaud team comprised of ten members including the Forest Watcher. The youngest member of the team was Miss Shredha, who thoroughly enjoyed the experience. The team started recording the birds from Marathamala, which is in the vicinity of Bonacaud forests and covered around 22 km. The abandoned tea estate remains a relic amidst the surrounding forests. The team enjoyed the wild gooseberry at the Bonacaud Picket Station and this is also where the team observed the White-bellied Treepie found near human settlements. A total of seventy-six species were observed here along with two unidentified Swift species and white Egret species. The habitat was fairly maintained without too much plastic pollution, but there was the presence of invasive alien species like Lantana and Mikania.

The Find of the Day was spotting the Great Indian Hornbill and the Dip of the Day was that it was raining throughout, so visibility was low and also could not hear the birds properly.
List of Birds observed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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Vernal Hanging Parrot

**Thiruvananthapuram Bird Race 2023**
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**6. ARIPPA**

**Team:**
1. Arun C G (Team Lead)
2. Biju P B
3. Thomson Saburaj
4. Anju Junu
5. Dr. Anjali
6. Navin P Mathew

The six-member Arippa team started birding at 6.50 am from the pathway next to Ammayambalam Siva Temple. Since it was a forest pathway with tall dense trees and less sunlight, identification of birds was mostly by listening to bird calls during the initial hours.
They spotted 79 bird species in total from Arippa. Additionally, they even spotted pugmarks of wildcat species, Indian Gaur and Dholes and also Elephant dung and three Indian Giant Squirrels. Highlight of the day were two Great Eared Nightjars and the Black Baza! And the Dip of the Day was they could not spot the Ceylon Frogmouth.

“We passed through a Myristica Swamp and noticed the efforts by the Government to conserve it. Compared to previous years, the forest paths seemed to have widened as people took the path to reach a small temple inside the forest. Even though we walked a few kilometres into the forest, we were still able to hear the music from the loudspeakers at the entrance of the temple! The area near forest entrance seems to have been further cleared to accommodate the temple expansion. From the main road, it was clear that encroachments are happening as the forests seem to have become less dense compared to yesteryears,” opined the team members.
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</table>
The team comprised of five members and they covered a distance of 15 kms through the forested areas of Palode and Oduchuttapadukka areas from 7.00 am onwards. They also covered the Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (JNTBGRI) and Botanical Garden because it hosts a diversity of flora and fauna in an area of 3000 acres. The habitat type is mostly forested areas and the weather was generally cloudy with light showers. The team observed sixty species of birds in the day.

The Find of the Day was the sighting of five species of Woodpecker. The Dip of the Day was that they were not able to sight the Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, which was the highlight of Thiruvananthapuram Bird Race 2022.
## List of Birds observed

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<tr>
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The Kottoor team consisted of four members and they started birding at 7.00 am. They travelled around 15 km and observed forty-three species of birds. The cloudy weather made it slightly difficult to see and hear the birds clearly. The habitat is forest area.

The Find of the Day was the sighting of the Black Baza towards the last leg of their race. They also observed three species of Orioles.
## List of Birds observed

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<td>43</td>
<td>White-browed Wagtail</td>
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</table>
Poovar is a beach and estuary that supports many shorebirds and water bird species. Enroute to the beach are also good patches of paddy fields and well wooded areas. The team comprising of 4 members covered an area of 15 km in the region and they observed 42 species of birds. The beach area was comparatively devoid of discarded plastics and this might be due to the intervention of the local Police and Tourism Department taking efforts to keep the beach clean.

The Find of the Day was the observation of around 150 Northern Pintail Ducks and the waders like Plovers and Sandpipers.
# List of Birds observed

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<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Tibetan Sand Plover</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Team:  
1) Vinod Thomas (Team Lead)  
2) Ratheesh NEST  
3) Amina Shahab  
4) Husna Nazeer

Kadinamkulam team comprised of four members. They observed thirty-one species of birds.

The team members did not have cameras, so they were not able to take photos of any birds. They opined that the number of birds were fewer here and the area was highly polluted with plastic waste.

The Find of the Day was the Eurasian Curlew and the Dip of the Day was that there were very few Sandpiper species, both in diversity and numbers.

List of Birds observed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Black-crowned Night Heron</td>
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<td>Little Egret</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Indian Pond-Heron</td>
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</table>
11. VELLAYANI-PUNCHAKKARI WETLANDS

Team:
1) Thrinisha T U (Team Lead)
2) Sambu Chandran
3) Rajeej Kumar C P
4) Devipriya Gowri
5) Kailas
6) Niranjini T B
7) Thomas
8) Mathew
9) Mark
10) Keerthi

The Punchakkari team consisted of ten members led by Ms Thrinisha T U and they started birding around 6:30 am.

The habitat is mostly wetland and some wooded area on the fringes of the lake and paddy field. This is a favourite birding hotspot in Thiruvananthapuram and there are birders visiting this location almost every day. The team observed sixty-three species of birds.

The Find of the Day was the Oriental Turtle Dove and the Cotton-Pymy Goose. Since the area was flooded for some period in the recent past, the diversity and number of birds were less.
Team:
1) Vinod Thomas
2) Ratheesh NEST
3) Amina Shahab
4) Husna Nazeer

Thiruvananthapuram Bird Race 2023

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Punchakkari Team

Brown Shrike

Spotted Owlet

Oriental Turtle Dove

Team selfie

Thiruvananthapuram Bird Race 2023
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<td>Western Yellow Wagtail</td>
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</table>
Three students participated in the Thiruvananthapuram Bird Race 2023 by observing the birds in their own campus. They covered a distance of about 2-3 km within the campus from 6:30 am to 12:00 noon. They also observed night species late into the evening.

The campus is a good patch of evergreen forests and lies contiguous to Bonacaud Forests.

"Despite exams happening in the campus, we were still able to assemble a few people to take part in the BirdRace. We were able to spot nearly 40 species in campus. It is a lower count than last year, but we also had a smaller team this time. Although, the positive news is the increase to overall 136 spotted species from 96 last year, coming from a greater number of birders in campus, allowing for better monitoring." - Anuraj Avadhany.
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NEXT STEPS

Following the Thiruvananthapuram Bird Race 2023, the imperative is to maintain the momentum by actively taking steps and making a steadfast commitment to bird conservation initiatives to increase the impact and get more people involved in nature conservation.

01 — Action : Regular Monitoring
"Implementing a comprehensive strategy for bird conservation in Thiruvananthapuram involves regular monitoring of key birding sites, engaging local residents, students, and other volunteers to actively participate in the observation and protection of avian habitats."

02 — Action : Birding Meetups
"Establishing regular birders' meetups will serve as a platform for enthusiasts to convene, fostering discussions, and facilitating the planning of birding activities, thereby promoting knowledge exchange, community engagement, and collaborative efforts for effective bird conservation initiatives."

03 — Commitment : Increase Awareness
"To enhance awareness on birds, concerted efforts will be made to spread awareness through various channels, including organizing training sessions specifically designed for budding birders, empowering them with the knowledge and skills needed to appreciate, observe, and contribute to the conservation of avian species."
CONCLUSION

In summary, the Bird Race 2023 emerged as a triumph marked by substantial volunteer participation, particularly with the enthusiastic involvement of numerous college students. The event not only significantly contributed to citizen science but also fostered valuable collaborations with like-minded institutions, including government departments and academic establishments. This success underscores the collective dedication to bird conservation, exemplifying the positive impact that collaborative efforts can have on advancing scientific understanding and promoting environmental stewardship.

HIGHLIGHT 1
Observation of Keystone Species from 2 sites
- Great Indian Hornbill

HIGHLIGHT 2
In 2023, twelve sites were covered as compared to 8 sites in first Bird Race conducted in 2008.
- Amateur birders who joined the Bird Race in 2008 are now experts and leading teams.

"Citizen science plays a pivotal role in bird conservation efforts, empowering individuals to contribute valuable data and insights that aid researchers in monitoring avian populations and implementing effective conservation strategies."
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thiruvananthapuram Wildlife Division and Thiruvananthapuram Territorial Division,
Kerala Forests and Wildlife Department
  I S Suresh Babu, Wildlife Warden
  K I Pradeep Kumar, Divisional Forest Officer
  Field staff

Department of Museum and Zoos, Thiruvananthapuram
National Centre for Earth Science Studies
CHRIST (Deemed to be University) Nodal Office

Experts and Team Leads
  Govind Girija
  Dr. Sujith V Gopalan
  Praveen J
  Arun C G
  Jaichand Johnson
  Suraj S R Choodal
  Anoop S.S
  Azhar Aerath
  Vinod Thomas
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All the participants in the eleven teams including budding birders
WWF-India, Kerala State Office Team

We thank you for your continued support in our efforts to contribute to conservation and protection of Avifauna...
To stop the degradation of the planet’s natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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