

OCCURRENCE OF KNOB-BILLED DUCK *SARKIDIORNIS MELANOTOS* (PENNANT, 1769) (ANATIDAE) FROM SOUTHERN KERALA

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Abstract

Sarkidiornis melanotos (Pennant) is a regular visitor in small numbers in Kerala. The earlier records of this species are from the Kole Wetlands of Kerala's North and central districts, i.e. Thrissur and Malappuram. Here we report the first record of *S. melanotos* from three locations of Southern Kerala: Polachira wetlands (Kollam district), Akkulam and Punchakari wetlands (both in Thiruvananthapuram district).

Keywords: *Sarkidiornis melanotos*, Anatidae, first record, South Kerala, a regular visitor.

Introduction

The Knob-billed Duck, *Sarkidiornis melanotos* (Pennant, 1769), is a resident, shifting locally with water conditions. The bird is rare in southern and eastern Sind and not found elsewhere in W. Pakistan. It is widespread practically throughout India, Bangladesh, Nepal's lowlands, and East Pakistan (Ali and Ripley, 1987; Grimmett et al., 2011).

In Kerala, all the reported sightings are from the Kole Wetlands (Thrissur and Malappuram districts). Most of the sightings were made in Marancherry, Malappuram: four birds were spotted on 17th January 1993, three on 21st February 1993, two on December 1993, sixteen on 15th January 1995, four on 8th February 1995 and one on 1st January 1996 (Neealakantan et al., 1993; Ravindran, 1998). Two ducks were also spotted at Kunnamkulam in December 1993 (Ravindran and Susanth Kumar). One male was seen at Pazhanji on 25th January 2003. One male was spotted at Uppungal on the 8th January 2004 and four birds on 22nd February 2004 (Sasikumar et al.,

2011). There are no published reports of Knob-billed Duck elsewhere in the state, particularly from the Southern districts of Kerala.

Material and Methods

The present reports of the species from Southern districts of Kerala are based on observations made during Annual Waterfowl Census, conducted by Warblers and Waders and Bird Watchers and Nature Lovers Forum, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala during January 2017 at Polachira wetlands Kollam district, Kerala. An additional survey was conducted in the Punchakari wetlands adjoining the Vellayani Lake, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, on 22nd November 2020. The details of the new sighting of the species from various locations of South Kerala are given in Table 1 and Fig. 1.

Observations

On 22nd January 2017, during the Annual Waterfowl Census, a solitary male of *S. melanotos* was found along with a mixed flock of *Anas acuta*, *Anas crecca*, *Anas zonorhyncha*, *Anas querquedula*,

Maramaronetta angustirostris and *Dendrocygna javanica* in a waterlogged marshy place (Fig. 2). The bird was spotted after 12 years in Kerala; all earlier records were from Central Kerala (Sasikumar et al., 2011).

On 26th January 2017, during the Annual Waterfowl Census, two individuals of *S. melanotos* were sighted at Akkulam Lake (8°31'11.4"N; 76°33'57.9"E) in Thiruvananthapuram, the southernmost district of Kerala. The lake is part of the Akkulam-Veli Lake system, one of the southernmost lakes on the southwest coast of the Indian peninsula. Finally, three Knob-billed ducks were sighted and photographed (Fig. 2) from Akkulam Lake on 27th January 2017 (Smt. Resmi Varma, personal communication).

On 22nd November 2020, while conducting an avian study at the Punchakari wetlands adjoining the Vellayani Lake (8°26'44"N; 76°59'33"E), Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, a flock of 11 individuals of *S. melanotos* were seen (Fig. 3). They were flying very low over the waterlogged areas of the wetlands, crossing over the marshy places. The flock circled over the wetlands for more than five minutes and landed in a west - south direction, out of the range of visibility. This is the highest count of *S. melanotos* recorded from southern Kerala.

Conclusion



Fig. 1: Map showing new sightings of *S. melanotos* from South Kerala.

The occurrence of Knob-billed Duck, *S. melanotos* from the wetlands of southern Kerala is noteworthy, given its habit of preferring central Kerala in earlier records (Sasikumar et al., 2011). The observation reported here is the first confirmed sighting and occurrence of Knob-billed Duck from Southern Kerala. The recent sightings point towards an increased preference of the species for wetlands in Southern Kerala. Anyhow coordinated and synchronised surveys across Kerala need to be conducted to ascertain the trend.

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Fig. 2: *S. melanotos*, male, sighted at Polachira wetlands, Kollam district, South Kerala.



Fig. 3: *S. melanotis*, male, sighted flying at Akkulam Lake, Thiruvananthapuram, from South Kerala.



Fig. 4. Flock of *S. melanotis*, sighted at Punchakari wetlands, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.