

RESEARCH NOTES

(I)

THE PREDATION ON THE NESTLINGS OF LITTLE CORMORANT (*MICROCARBO NIGER*) BY BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON (*NYCTICORAX NYCTICORAX*) IN SHEIKHA JHEEL, ALIGARH, UTTAR PRADESH, INDIA

The Black-crowned Night heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) belong to the family Ardeidae and distributed in Asia, Africa, Europe and America (Kushlan, 1978). Black-crowned Night heron stand on the water edges and wait to ambush prey mostly at night or early morning, and remains inactive during the day and rest on the trees (Ali and Repley, 1968). Black-crowned Night heron mainly feed during night (Delacour and Jabouille, 1931). While in India this bird also reported to feed during day hours (Bent, 1926 and present study). The food habits of Black-crowned Night herons as reported from many parts of the world are notably variable. Although fish generally make up the bulk item in their diet, they are also reported to eat frogs, toads, salamanders, snakes, rats, mice, leeches, worms, several kinds of molluscs, crustaceans, and aquatic insects and small amounts of vegetable matter (Baynard, 1912; Wetmore, 1920; Gross, 1923; Palmer, 1962; Nickell, 1966 and Collins, 1970). In addition, herons have been reported to feed on the young of colonial nesting birds, particularly herons and ibises (Beckett, 1964; Kale, 1965; Stronach, 1968), and have been seen feeding on the eggs of Common Terns when nests were left unattended at night (Marshall, 1942).

During the study on Nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*) in Sheikha jheel (27° 51' 28" N, 78° 12' 58" E) Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, India (Khan, 2014) I detect a heronry which was situated on plantation of *Syzygium cumini* in Sheikha jheel. Black-crowned Night herons make their nests in the colonies along with the Little Egrets (*Egretta garzetta*), Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*), Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*), Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*), Little Cormorant (*Microcarbo niger*), Black-headed Ibis

(*Threskiornis melanocephalus*) and Oriental Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*) on *Syzygium cumini* plantation.

During day time males of Black-crowned Night herons were observed resting apart from their nests while females were attending the nests providing care to eggs and nestlings.

The nests of Little Cormorants are widely held in this Heronry. The parent takes care of the eggs during breeding season. At least one of the Cormorants (male/female) takes care of the hatchling till 2-3 week, after then both are engaged in the food bringing activity. The competition for the food is very high among the nestlings. Whenever the parent cormorant returns in their nests, nestling of the neighbour nests start food begging call, become excited for getting food and often accidentally fall from the nest. As several nests of the Cormorants and Ibis were on the same *Syzygium* grove and sometimes the disturbance made by the ibis during the take off flight or landing also causes the fall of nestlings of Little Cormorant from the nest. The fallen nestling's either directly drop in water or hang from lower tree branches. Taking the advantage, the resting male Black-crowned Night herons quickly pick the fallen nestling, and feed upon it. The male herons tightly chock the neck of nestlings till death. The occurrences of this predation by Black-crowned Night herons on Little Cormorant nestlings were very frequent. The nest of Black-crowned Night heron and Cormorants were in very close proximity and sometime within 20-40 cm apart but they were never observed during our study period to predate on the nestling of other herons or even Little Cormorants directly from the nests.



Heronry in Sheikha Jheel



Black-crowned Night heron with the Nestling of Cormorant

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