# Avian diversity in the Naliya Grassland, Abdasa Taluka, Kachchh, India



Sandeep B. Munjpara 1 & Indra R. Gadhvi 2

<sup>1,2</sup> Department of Marine Sciences, Bhavnagar University, Bhavnagar, Gujarat 364001 India Email: ¹sandeepmunjpara@gmail.com (corresponding author), ²indragadhvi@gmail.com

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Author Details: Sandeep B. Munjpara is a research scholar with Bhavnagar University and senior research fellow at Gujarat Ecological Education and Research (GEER) Foundation, Gandhinagar. Indra R. Gadhvi is an Associate Professor at department of Marine Sciences, Bhavnagar University, Bhavnagar.

Author Contribution: SBM has carried out the field data collection, data analysis and draft the manuscript. IRG has guided the overall research and analysis. He has also critically assessed the manuscript and finalized the draft.

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Abstract: Naliya Grassland is one of the significant grasslands of Gujarat. In this study the importance of the Naliya Grassland has been explored with special reference to avian diversity. Field work for the study was carried out throughout the year of 2007 on a monthly basis covering three distinct seasons to explore avian diversity. A total of 177 species belonging to 54 families were recorded wherein most species belonged to the family Accipitridae (20 species) followed by Alaudidae (11 species). Of the total families, five were represented by more than seven species, 18 families by 3-7 species and 31 families by one or two species respectively. Among the species observed, 16 species ware globally threatened (three Critically Endangered, four Endangered and nine Near Threatened). Most of the species were chiefly terrestrial (68.2%), about 23.9% species were freshwater dependant and 7.9% utilized mixed habitats. Maximum species richness was recorded in the monsoons and minimum in summer. Constant turnover and fluctuation in species richness occurred because of seasonal immigration and emigration. Maximum emigration took place during February and March and maximum immigration occurred during June and July. Many water dependant birds attracted to the flooded grassland during the monsoons explained the high species richness during this season. In winter, the area was inhabited by resident species as well as many migratory species.

Keywords: Habitat, Naliya grassland, species richness, threatened species.

## INTRODUCTION

Some of the most threatened species of wildlife of India like Blackbuck, Indian Gazelle, Wolf, Indian Bustard and Lesser Florican occur in grasslands and deserts (Geevan et al. 2003; Anonymous 2006). Grasslands are very fragile ecosystems; nowadays this ecosystem is facing major threats of decline due to industrialization, urbanization and agricultural development. Most of the grasslands are being converted into agricultural lands (Rahmani 2001, 2006; Anonymous 2006). The grassland that exists in Abdasa Taluka of Kachchh District in the state of Gujarat is one of the most important grasslands of the state because of its high biodiversity value (Geevan et al. 2003). Being a significant area for avifauna, BirdLife International (2009) has identified this area as an Important Bird Area (IBA). The area is well represented by resident and migratory species of terrestrial and wetland birds. Many of them are categorized as critically endangered as well as being globally threatened. It is also one of the rare breeding areas for the three globally endangered species of bustards i.e. Great Indian Bustard, Lesser Florican and the MacQueen (Geevan et al. 2003). The last surviving population of Indian Bustard of Gujarat is found in this grassland (Rahmani 2006; Pandey et al. 2009). Moreover, threatened wild animals like the Chinkara (Indian Gazelle) and Wolf extensively use this grassland (Geevan et al. 2003).

In spite of its global significance, detailed studies have not been



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Image 1. Google Earth image of the study area

undertaken. A detailed checklist is not available for this area. We documented avian diversity and seasonal variation in bird species richness of the Naliya Grassland.

## Study area

The study has been conducted in the Naliya grassland of Abdasa Taluka and it is situated in the south western province of Kachchh District (between 22°50'-23°15'N and 68°32'-69°91'E) in Gujarat (Image 1). This grassland is spread over more than 100km<sup>2</sup>. The climate is very harsh; in summer the temperature reaches 40-45 °C and in winter it sometimes goes below 5°C. The area falls under the ecological zone 5A/DS 4-dry grassland with a few scattered patches of 5A/DS 2-dry savannah (Champion & Seth 1968). The major habitat types in the area are grassland, scrubland, open land, permanent and temporary water bodies. However, some patches of dense Prosopis and planted shrub-cover also exist. Cymbopogon, Aristida and Dichanthium are some of the major grass genera and Acacia, Zizyphus, Prosopis etc. are major shrub/trees (Anonymous 1999). Many water bodies also exist in the study area. These water bodies include flooded areas, waterlogged areas and small village ponds of Berachiya, Kunathia, Naliya,

Lala, Bhanada, Tera and Bara. This area supports a variety of vertebrate and invertebrate species. Important bird species include the Indian Bustard Ardeotis nigriceps, Lesser Florican Sypheotides indica, MacQueen's Bustard, Chlamydotis macqueeni, Stoliczka's Bushchat Saxicola macrorhynchus, Indian Courser Cursorius coromandelicus, Black Francolin Francolinus francolinus. The mammalian species occurring in the area include Chinkara Gazella gazella, Wolf Canis lupus, Caracal Caracal caracal, Honey Badger Mellivora capensis, Hyena Hyaena hyaena, Jackal Canis aureus, Jungle Cat Felis chaus and Indian Fox Vulpus bengalensis. Apart from the above mentioned birds and mammals, the area is also home to a variety of reptiles.

## **METHODS**

Observations were made by conducting field visits at regular intervals. Fieldwork was conducted from January 2007 to December 2007. Field visits were made every month during the study period, to monitor three distinct seasons (i.e. winter, summer and monsoon). Observations were taken mainly from 0600hr (or sunrise) to 1200hr and 0300hr to 0630hr

(sunset). In addition, many time observations were also taken between the 1200hr and 0300hr time block. The area was explored travelling on vehicles as well as on foot. The observations were carried out with a pair of binoculars (Nikon 10x50) and the species were identified using recognized field guides like those of Ali & Ripley (1983), Grimmett et al. (1998), Rasmussen & Anderton (2005), etc. Data analysis for species richness, diversity and models were carried out in Microsoft Excel 2007.

#### RESULTS

A total of 177 species were recorded in the Naliya Grasslands belonging to 17 Orders, 54 families, and 117 genera (Appendix 1).

#### Family-wise species richness

Maximum species were recorded of family Accipitridae (20 spp.); which is composed of birds of prey (kites, eagles, vultures, buzzards, falcons), followed by Alaudidae [larks, (11 spp.)], Anatidae [ducks, teal, shoveler (10 spp.)], Muscicapidae [wheatear, chats, (9 spp.)] and Scolopacidae [sandpipers, godwit, shank (9 spp.)]. Of the remaining 49 families, 18 were represented by 3–7 species (Fig. 1) and 31 families were represented by one or two species (Table 1 & 2).

#### Threatened Species (as per IUCN 2010)

Of the total recorded species, 16 species of birds (about 9%) were globally threatened as per Red Data

Table 1. Each of other 14 families was represented by two species

SNo	Family	SNo	Family
1	Caprimulgidae	8	Passeridae
2	Ciconiidae	9	Pelecanidae
3	Coraciidae	10	Phalacrocoracidae
4	Emberizidae	11	Podicipedidae
5	Glareolidae	12	Pycnonotidae
6	Gruidae	13	Recurvirostridae
7	Meropidae	14	Tytonidae

Table 2. Each of 17 other families were represented by one species

SNo	Family	SNo	Family
1	Aegithinidae	10	Phoenicopteridae
2	Anhingidae	11	Ploceidae
3	Apodidae	12	Psittacidae
4	Burhinidae	13	Pteroclididae
5	Corvidae	14	Strigidae
6	Dicruridae	15	Timaliidae
7	Estrildidae	16	Turnicidae
8	Jacanidae	17	Upupidae
9	Nectariniidae		

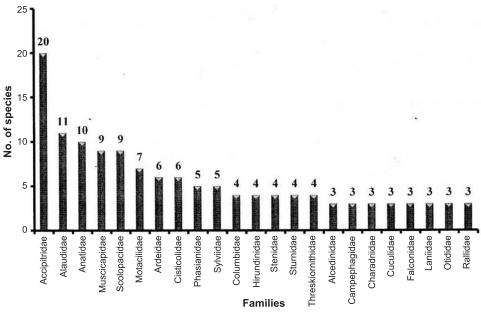


Figure 1. Family wise species richness

Table 3. List of threatened species recorded in the Naliya grasslands

SNo	Common Name	Scientific Name	Status (IUCN 2010)
1	Black-tailed Godwit	Limosa limosa	NT
2	Black-headed Ibis	Threskiornis melanocephalus	NT
3	Painted Stork	Mycteria leucocephala	NT
4	Black-necked Stork	Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus	NT
5	Cinereous Vulture	Aegypius monachus	NT
6	Laggar Falcon	Falco jugger	NT
7	Darter	Anhinga melanogaster	NT
8	Pallid Harrier	Circus macrourus	NT
9	Lesser Flamingo	Phoenicopterus minor	NT
10	Egyptian Vulture	Neophron percnopterus	En
11	MacQueen Bustard	Chlamydotis macqueeni	En
12	Indian Bustard	Ardeotis nigriceps	En
13	Lesser Florican	Sypheotides indica	En
14	Long-billed Vulture	Gyps indicus	Cr
15	Red-headed Vulture	Sarcogyps calvus	Cr
16	White-rumped Vulture	Gyps bengalensis	Cr

NT - Near threatened; En - Endangered; Cr - Critically Endangered

Book (Bird Life International 2010; IUCN 2010). Of these 16 species of birds, three species were Critically Endangered, four species were Endangered and nine species were Near Threatened (Table 3). The details of the status of those species are given in Table 3.

Proportion of terrestrial and water-bird species: Of the total, the maximum species were terrestrial (68.2%) and about 23.9% species were observed to be freshwater dependent. The rest of the 7.9% species were found to be utilizing both types of habitats (Fig. 2).

Seasonal variation in species richness: Species richness was observed to fluctuate seasonally (Fig. 3). The maximum richness of birds was recorded in the mid-monsoon period, followed by winter. The minimum numbers of species were recorded in summer.

Immigration and emigration (local as well as seasonal) of species was observed to be a continuous phenomenon in the area. The Naliya Grasslands bear many local migratory as well seasonal migratory bird species. Although the total number of species did not vary monthly, there was a turnover in bird species richness (Fig. 4). The maximum emigration of the species was observed from February to March and

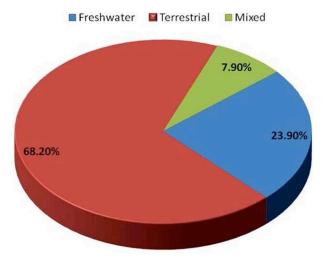


Figure 2. Proportion of bird species with their habitat preference

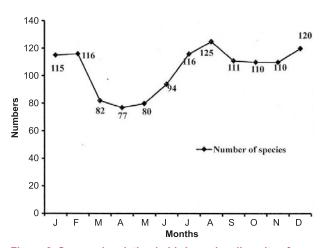


Figure 3. Seasonal variation in bird species diversity of Naliya

maximum immigration was seen from June to July. Immigration and emigration were seen in other months of the year also (Fig. 4).

#### DISCUSSION

The Naliya Grasslands is very rich in avifauna and holds almost 33% bird species of Gujarat (526 sp.) (Parasharya et al. 2004). Varieties of habitat (viz. scrubland, plantations, sparse grassland, dense grassland, open lands, flooded grasslands, temporary water bodies and permanent water bodies) attract many birds to the area. Moreover, some reptilian species like Spiny-tailed Lizard *Uromastryx hardwickii* are abundant in the area (Pandey et al. 2009) which attract

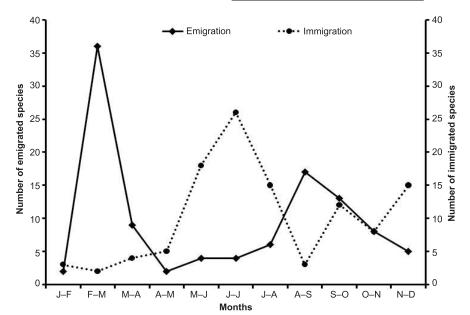


Figure 4. Local and seasonal annual immigration and emigration of birds.

a number of raptor species. The maximum species has been recorded in the mid-monsoon period, probably because of the flooded grasslands which attracts water dependant birds as well. In winter, the area has been observed to be inhabited by resident species as well as migratory species; hence, species richness was reported higher in winter. In summer most parts of area become dry, thus, fewer numbers of species were encountered. The species which were found throughout the year in the Naliya Grasslands are few, most are either passage migrants or migratory. The migration is inducted based on their breeding cycle, food abundance, temperature and day-length. It is evident that the maximum emigration of species is during February-March, which accounts for the end of winter and the start of summer with long and dry days. Immigration peak was observed during the period June-July, probably due to the abundance of food during this period as well as the arrival of some early monsoon showers for breeding birds (eg. Lesser Florican). Most of the birds immigrate to the area for feeding and breeding in the late monsoon period. The number of immigrating birds falls by August and is re-established in late September-October, the onset of winter. Thus, the migratory pattern of the birds in this particular habitat is mainly dependent on the breeding ecology and food abundance as well as due to the dynamic nature of habitats in the area. Another interesting fact that can be determined is most local migratory birds arriving at the grasslands during the

dry season of the year are diurnal, thus the longer days during this season provide them with long duration for feeding and dry land for roosting. Of the total, 16 species are threatened (Table 3), making Naliya Grasslands a very important area for bird conservation.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The grasslands of Naliya support many resident and migratory bird species, of which, some are threatened. Moreover, it is important especially for the birds of prey and larks. In addition, diversity of habitats such as temporary and permanent wetlands (viz., village ponds, flooded area and waterlogged), grassland, scrubland and human habitat supports divers groups of birds. Being an important area for a variety of avifauna it should receive immediate attention for conservation.

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Image 2. Northern Shoveler Anas Clypeata



Image 3. Yellow-wattled Lapwing Vanellus malabaricus



Image 4. Indian Silverbill Lonchura malabarica



Image 5. Cream-colored Courser Cursorius cursor



Image 6. Indian Courser Cursorius coromandelicus



Image 7. Common Stonechat Saxicola torquata



Image 8. Black Francolin Francolinus francolinus



Image 9. Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse Pterocles exustus

Naliya Grassland (Lala Bustard Wildlife Sanctuary), India. Downloaded from the Data Zone at http://www.birdlife.org on 18/10/2010.

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# Annexure 1. Checklist of birds recorded in Naliya grassland, Kachchh

SNo	Common Name	Scientific Name	
Accipitridae (Raptors)			
1	Black-shouldered Kite	Elanus caeruleus	
2	Brahminy Kite	Haliastur indus	
3	Egyptian Vulture	Neophron percnopterus	
4	Cinereous Vulture	Aegypius monachus	
5	White-rumped Vulture	Gyps bengalensis	
6	Indian Vulture Long	Gyps indicus	
7	Red-headed Vulture	Sarcogyps calvus	
8	Eurasian Griffon Vulture	Gyps fulvus	
9	Long-legged Buzzard	Buteo rufinus	
10	Oriental Honey-buzzard	Pernis ptilorhyncus	
11	White-eyed Buzzard	Butastur teesa	
12	Shikra	Accipiter badius	
13	Bonelli's Eagle	Hieraaetus fasciatus	
14	Booted Eagle	Hieraaetus pennatus	
15	Short-toed Snake Eagle	Circaetus gallicus	
16	Steppe Eagle	Aquila nipalensis	
17	Tawny Eagle	Aquila rapax	
18	Eurasian Marsh Harrier	Circus aeruginosus	
19	Montagu's Harrier	Circus pygargus	
20	Pallid Harrier	Circus macrourus	
Alaudid	lae (Larks) Alcedinidae		
21	Black-crown sparrow Lark	Eremopterix nigriceps	
22	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark	Eremopterix grisea	
23	Bimaculated Lark	Melanocorypha bimaculata	
24	Crested Lark	Galerida cristata	
25	Greater Short-toed Lark	Calandrella brachydactyla	
26	Indian Bushlark	Mirafra erythroptera	
27	Rufous-tailed Lark	Ammomanes phoenicurus	
28	Sand Lark	Calandrella raytal	
29	Singing Bushlark	Mirafra cantillans	
30	Sykes's Lark	Galerida deva	
31	Oriental Skylark	Alauda gulgula	
Alcedin	idae (Kingfishers)		
32	Common Kingfisher	Alcedo atthis	
33	White-throated Kingfisher	Halcyon smyrnensis	
34	Pied Kingfisher	Ceryle rudis	
Anatida	e (Ducks, Teal, Wigeon)		
35	Spot-billed Duck	Anas poecilorhyncha	
36	Comb Duck	Sarkidiornis melanotos	
37	Common Pochard	Aythya ferina	
38	Common Teal	Anas crecca	
39	Northern Shoveler (Image 2)	Anas clypeata	
40	Lesser Whistling-duck	Dendrocygna javanica	

SNo	Common Name	Scientific Name		
41	Ruddy Shelduck	Tadorna ferruginea		
42	Gadwall	Anas strepera		
43	Garganey	Anas querquedula		
44	Eurasian Wigeon	Anas penelope		
Apodida	ae (Swifts)			
45	House Swift	Apus affinis		
Ardeida	ne (Egrets & Herons)			
46	Cattle Egret	Bubulcus ibis		
47	Great Egret	Casmerodius albus		
48	Intermediate Egret	Mesophoyx intermedia		
49	Little Egret	Egretta garzetta		
50	Indian Pond Heron	Ardeola grayii		
51	Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea		
Burhini	dae (Thick-knee)			
52	Eurasian Thick-knee	Burhinus oedicnemus		
Campe	phagidae (Minivets)			
53	Small Minivet	Pericrocotus cinnamomeus		
54	White-bellied Minivet	Pericrocotus erythropygius		
Caprim	ulgidae (Nightjar)			
55	Indian Nightjar	Caprimulgus asiaticus		
56	Savanna Nightjar	Caprimulgus affinis		
Scolopa	acidae (Sandpiper)			
57	Marsh Sandpiper	Tringa stagnatilis		
58	Common Sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos		
59	Green Sandpiper	Tringa ochropus		
60	Wood Sandpiper	Tringa glareola		
Charad	riidae (Lapwing)			
61	Red-wattled Lapwing	Vanellus indicus		
62	Yellow-wattled Lapwing (Image 3)	Vanellus malabaricus		
63	Little Ringed Plover	Charadrius dubius		
Ciconiio	dae (Storks)			
64	Painted Stork	Mycteria leucocephala		
65	Black-necked Stork	Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus		
Cisticol	Cisticolidae (Prinias)			
66	Grey-breasted Prinia	Prinia hodgsonii		
67	Jungle Prinia	Prinia sylvatica		
68	Plain Prinia	Prinia inornata		
69	Rufous Fronted Prinia	Prinia buchanani		
70	Tailorbird	Orthotomus sutorius		
71	Zitting Cisticola	Cisticola juncidis		
Columb	Columbidae (Doves)			
72	Laughing Dove	Streptopelia senegalensis		
73	Red Collared Dove	Streptopelia tranquebarica		
74	Eurasian Collared Dove	Streptopelia decaocto		

SNo	Common Name	Scientific Name	
75	Rock pigeon	Columba livia	
Coraciio	dae (Rollers)		
76	European Roller	Coracias garrulus	
77	Indian Roller	Coracias benghalensis	
Corvida	e (Crow)		
78	House Crow	Corvus splendens	
Cuculida	ae (Koels)		
79	Asian Koel	Eudynamys scolopacea	
80	Common Cuckoo	Cuculus canorus	
81	Greater Coucal	Centropus sinensis	
Dicrurid	ae (Drongos)		
82	Black Drongo	Dicrurus macrocercus	
Emberiz	zidae (Buntings)		
83	Grey-necked Bunting	Emberiza buchanani	
84	House Bunting	Emberiza striolata	
Estrildid	lae (Silverbills)		
85	Indian Silverbill (Image 4)	Lonchura malabarica	
Falconic	dae (Falcons)		
86	Laggar Falcon	Falco jugger	
87	Red-necked Falcon	Falco chicquera	
88	Common Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus	
Glareoli	dae (Coursers)		
89	Cream-coloured Courser (Image 5)	Cursorius cursor	
90	Indian Courser (Image 6)	Cursorius coromandelicus	
Gruidae	e (Crane)		
91	Common Crane	Grus grus	
92	Demoiselle Crane	Grus virgo	
Hirundir	nidae (Swallow, Martin)		
93	Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica	
94	Red-rumped Swallow	Hirundo daurica	
95	Wire-tailed Swallow	Hirundo smithii	
96	Dusky Crag Martin	Hirundo concolor	
Aegithir	nidae (Iora)		
97	Marshall's Iora	Aegithina nigrolutea	
Jacanid	ae (Jacanas)		
98	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	Hydrophasianus chirurgus	
Laniidae (Shrike)			
99	Bay-backed Shrike	Lanius vittatus	
100	Rufous-tailed Shrike	Lanius isabellinus	
101	Southern Grey Shrike	Lanius meridionalis	
Sternida	Sternidae (Tern)		
102	Caspian Tern	Sterna caspia	
103	Gull-billed Tern	Gelochelidon nilotica	
104	River Tern	Sterna aurantia	

SNo	Common Name	Scientific Name		
Meropio	Meropidae (Bee-eater)			
106	Green Bee-eater	Merops orientalis		
107	Blue Chicked Bee-eater	Merops persicus		
Motacil	lidae (Pipits, Wagtails)			
108	Citrine Wagtail	Motacilla citreola		
109	Grey Wagtail	Motacilla cinerea		
110	Yellow Wagtail	Motacilla flava		
111	Tree Pipit	Anthus trivialis		
112	Tawny Pipit	Anthus campetris		
113	Long-billed Pipit	Anthus similis		
114	Paddyfield Pipit	Anthus rufulus		
Muscic	apidae (Chats, Wheatears)			
115	Black Redstart	Phoenicurus ochruros		
116	Common Stonechat (Image 7)	Saxicola torquata		
117	Isabelline Wheatear	Oenanthe isabellina		
118	Variable Wheatear	Oenanthe picata		
119	Desert Wheatear	Oenanthe deserti		
120	Indian Robin	Saxicoloides fulicata		
121	Pied Bushchat	Saxicola caprata		
122	Stoliczka's Bushchat	Saxicola macrorhyncha		
123	Spotted Flycatcher	Muscicapa striata		
Nectari	niidae (Sunbirds)			
124	Purple Sunbird	Nectarinia asiatica		
Otidida	e (Bustards)			
125	MacQueen Bustard	Chlamydotis macqueeni		
126	Indian Bustard	Ardeotis nigriceps		
127	Lesser Florican	Sypheotides indica		
Passeri	idae (Sparrow)			
128	House Sparrow	Passer domesticus		
129	Yellow-throated Sparrow	Petronia xanthocollis		
Peleca	nidae (Pelicans)			
130	Dalmatian Pelican	Pelecanus crispus		
131	Great White Pelican	Pelecanus onocrotalus		
Anhingi	Anhingidae (Darters)			
132	Darter	Anhinga melanogaster		
Phalaci	Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants)			
133	Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo		
134	Little Cormorant	Phalacrocorax niger		
Phasia	nidae (Francolins)			
135	Black Francolin (Image 8)	Francolinus francolinus		
136	Grey Francolin	Francolinus pondicerianus		
137	Common Quail	Coturnix coturnix		
138	Rain Quail	Coturnix coromandelica		
139	Indian Peafowl	Pavo cristatus		

SNo	Common Name	Scientific Name	
Phoenicopteridae (Flamingos)			
140	Greater Flamingo	Phoenicopterus ruber	
Sylviida	ae (Chiffchaff)		
141	Common Chiffchaff	Phylloscopus collybita	
142	Lesser Whitethroat	Sylvia curruca	
143	Common Whitethroat	Sylvia communis	
144	Desert Warbler	Sylvia nana	
145	Orphean Warbler	Sylvia hortensis	
Ploceid	ae (Weaver)		
146	Baya Weaver	Ploceus philippinus	
Podicip	edidae (Grebes)		
147	Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis	
148	Great Crested Grebe	Podiceps cristatus	
Campe	phagidae (Woodshrike)		
149	Common Woodshrike	Tephrodornis pondicerianus	
Psittaci	dae (Parakeet)		
150	Rose-ringed Parakeet	Psittacula krameri	
Pterocl	ididae (Sandgrouse)		
151	Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (Image 9)	Pterocles exustus	
Pycnor	otidae (Bulbul)		
152	Red-vented Bulbul	Pycnonotus cafer	
153	White-eared Bulbul	Pycnonotus leucotis	
Rallidae (Coots)			
154	Common Coot	Fulica atra	
155	Purple Swamphen	Porphyrio porphyrio	
156	Common Moorhen	Galliinula chloropus	
Recurv	irostridae (Stilts)		
157	Black-winged Stilt	Himantopus himantopus	

SNo	Common Name	Scientific Name
158	Pied Avocet	Recurvirostra avosetta
Scolop	acidae (Godwit, Shanks)	
159	Black-tailed Godwit	Limosa limosa
160	Common Greenshank	Tringa nebularia
161	Common Redshank	Tringa totanus
162	Eurasian Curlew	Numenius arquata
163	Ruff	Philomachus pugnax
Strigida	ae (Owlets)	
164	Spotted Owlet	Athene brama
Sturnic	ae (Starling)	
165	Bank Myna	Acridotheres ginginianus
166	Common Myna	Acridotheres tristis
167	Brahminy Starling	Sturnus pagodarum
168	Rosy Starling	Sturnus roseus
Thresk	iornithidae (Ibis, Spoonbills)	
169	Black Ibis	Pseudibis papillosa
170	Glossy Ibis	Plegadis falcinellus
171	Black-headed Ibis	Threskiornis melanocephalus
172	Eurasian Spoonbill	Platalea leucorodia
Timalii	dae (Babblers)	
173	Common Babbler	Turdoides caudatus
Turnici	dae (Buttonquail)	
174	Small Buttonquail	Turnix sylvatica
Tytonic	lae (Owls)	
175	Eurasian Eagle Owl	Bubo bubo
176	Short-eared Owl	Asio flammeus
Upupic	ae (Hoopoe)	
177	Ноорое	Upupa epops

