

The Visitors of Gothra Pond

by Sidharthan

In 2016, KVASU-Centre for Wildlife Studies began actively participating in tribal welfare, establishing and executing the 'Gotra Mission'. The project led to the establishment of the Gotra campus which is situated at the key spot of College of Veterinary and Animal Science, Pookode, Wayanad. The center is endowed with stunning and alluring landscape that draws in anyone walking through the grounds. A literally abandoned and useless land full of thorny forest was converted into a land of paradise by the effort of Center for Wildlife Studies, by the supervision of Kerala Veterinary and Animal Science University, Pookode, Wayanad. The small area consists of a small pond and a large pond linked by a small water channel, as well as a small area of land used for various purposes such as 'I-farming,' pisciculture, horticulture, and so on.

The pond is a picturesque enclave nestled within the bustling university grounds, surrounded by a lush canopy of trees, casting a dappled shade over the pond, while their gnarled roots entwine with the soft earth along the banks. The crystal-clear water reflects the verdant foliage creating a mesmerizing tableau. A chorus of bird calls, rustling of leaves, provides a gentle background symphony. Herons and cormorants gliding gracefully across, agile fish dart beneath the surface. It's a haven of peace and beauty, inviting all who pass by to pause and soak in the serenity. The pond is not just a stunning landscape, but also a thriving ecosystem that supports various forms of life. Starting with the Indian pond heron and Indian cormorant, which visit the pond on a regular basis for food and basking, we have the Asian and Chestnut-headed bee eaters, who visit the pond on occasion in the evenings. The white breasted Water hen visits the pond once every three or four days. The pond's patrons are incredibly diverse at first look, and their visits can range from casual gatherings to ferocious pursuits.

Cattle egret



An egret sunbathing around the pond

The Cattle Egret is a fascinating bird that has adapted well to living in close proximity to humans and their domesticated animals. The sole aim of the trip is to sunbathe. Once the college farm's cattle herd is sent to graze, they will enjoy a delicious meal. Once they've had enough to eat, they head to the pond, where they can spend a lot of time sunbathing because they are less likely to be disrupted there and by nearby humans. Sunlight provides warmth, which helps birds regulate their body temperature, which is essential for maintaining their metabolic processes. Basking also allows them to dry and preen their feathers, which improves their insulating and waterproofing capacity.

Indian Pond heron



Pond heron basking in the pond

Small, elegant bird with a long, slender neck and a striking white and brown plumage. With its sharp beak and quick reflexes, the Pond Heron is a formidable hunter, able to catch fish and other aquatic creatures with ease. In the tranquil waters, the graceful Indian pond herons are seen as regular visitors and are considered as an important part of the food web of wetland ecosystems. Although no nesting or roosting has been reported on campus, some of the individuals have been observed frequently visiting our pond. The primary purpose of the visit was observed to be basking, though it was seen feeding from the pond a few times. Normally, they forage in solitude and single individuals were spotted in the beginning of the winter.

Green bee eaters



Bee eaters perching after swooping above the pond

Green bee-eaters (both Asian and Chestnut headed) are small, brightly colored birds found across Asia and Africa. Generally speaking, they don't show any direct relationship with water bodies. But in the Gotra pond, a pair of Asian green bee eaters were observed flying around the pond, swooping downwards and perching on a tree. This behavior was continuously observed and sounded strange as bee eaters feeding on fish wasn't reported anywhere yet. But on close observations, it was found that, the bee eaters were hunting on a kind of insect from the water surface. They are known for their aerial acrobatics, which involve flying high in the air and then swooping down to catch their prey mid-flight. Similar behavior was noticed in Chestnut headed bee eaters also. They can also be seen perching on branches or wires, watching for flying insects to pass by. Once a suitable prey is spotted, the bird will quickly launch itself off the perch and snatch the insect out of the air using its sharp, curved beak. This provides a delicious feast to the eyes of those who pass nearby, in almost all the evenings.

Indian cormorant



Cormorant watching out for preys

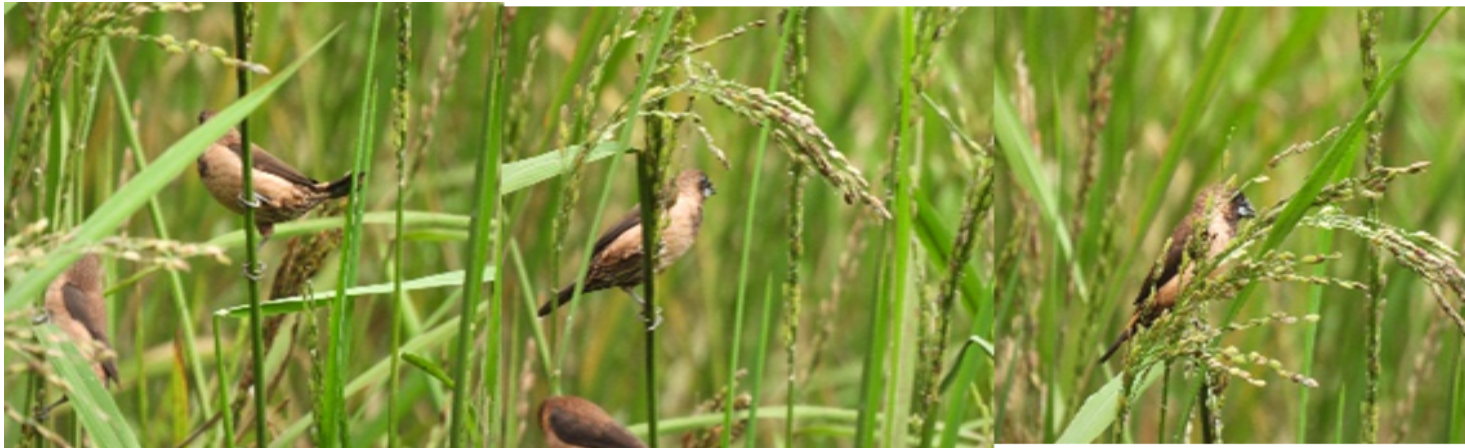
The Indian cormorant is a majestic, black-feathered bird with a distinctive long, hooked beak and a wingspan of up to six feet. With their sleek, streamlined bodies and piercing eyes, these birds are a common sight in the campus pond, where they spend much of their time fishing and basking in the sun.

Munias are a group of small, passerine birds which are also commonly known as waxbills or finches and have short tails and strong, conical bills. They are known for their lively and social behavior and often found in flocks and enjoy interacting with one another. Among 130 species of Munias all over the world, we have Black throated, White rumped and Scaly breasted Munias in our campus. They become regular visitors to the Gotra campus and pond as soon as the paddy harvested in the adjacent field blooms. 4 to 5 individuals were observed visiting the field near the pond, almost daily, to see whether the paddy is ready to eat. Once the paddy was ripened, they visit the field in flocks daily and spend the whole day in the campus around the pond. Each day, a large flock could be seen near the pond, feeding on the paddy, basking in the sun, and perching on nearby bamboo shades.



The Visitors of Gothra Pond

Munias

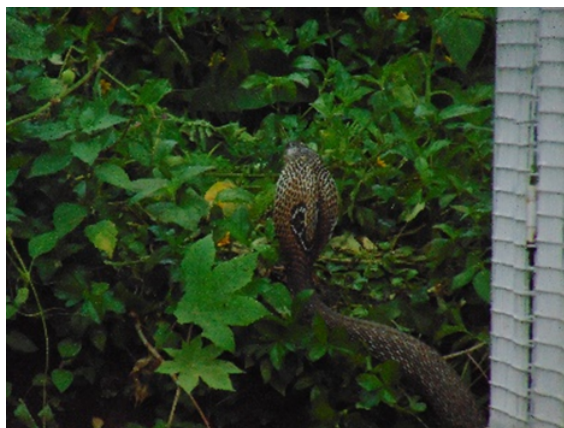


Munias feeding on paddy

Unorthodox visitors



Rat snake



Spectacled cobra



White breasted water hen



A group of monkeys resting on boundary of pond

Visitors to the pond are diverse since it offers many services. There are some unorthodox and infrequent visitors like the regular and frequent visitors. The Bonnet macaques which are resident to the campus visit the pond during their wander for food. It was observed a couple of times that the monkeys use the boundary wall of the pond for their resting. As the pond is inhabited by a lot of fishes and frogs, it attracts some of the real hunters to it. The common rat snake was observed to be feeding on frogs in the pond. Once, it was also observed that a spectacled cobra was in search of the pond. The purpose of visit was not known, but it actually spend nearly an hour in the pond. The White breasted water hen is an infrequent visitor of the pond though it nests in the nearby bamboo groove. A very few observations were made of with its visit.

These are the brief descriptions of the diurnal visitors of the pond, may have missed some of them as monitoring the visitors was compromised to working hours of the campus and obviously, there may be a lot more to be discovered. In this photo essay, we try to showcase the beauty and adaptability of Pond's visitors through a collection of some photographs. Consider this as an open invitation and make your time to take a closer look at these fascinating creatures and appreciate the place in natural world.