

Avifauna at Warathenna-Hakkinda Declared Environmental Protection Area (EPA) in Kandy, Sri Lanka

K.G.D.D. Thilakarathne¹, P.H.T. Lakkana², G.N. Hirimuthugoda¹ and N.P.S. Kumburegama^{1*}

¹*Department of Zoology, Faculty of Science, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka*

²*Faculty of Science and Technology, Uva-Wellassa University, Badulla, Sri Lanka*

Sri Lanka has vast diversity and endemism of both flora and fauna. The Mahaweli River is the longest river and it originates from the central highlands and flows through the wet, intermediate and dry zones of the country. It helps sustain a rich biological diversity. However, large extents along the river are yet to be explored for its rich biodiversity. One such area along the Mahaweli River at Gatambe, Warathenna in the Kandy District appears to harbor a rich biodiversity and hence recently declared as an Environmental Protection Area (EPA). The present study was carried out to investigate and prepare a comprehensive checklist of the avifauna in this declared EPA which may be used for future conservation efforts. The study was carried out from June 2016 to May 2017 along an approximately 2 km stretch of the Mahaweli River in the declared EPA starting from the Gatambe main bridge (7° 27'21.3"N, 80° 6'04.63"E) to Dodangwela Suspension Bridge (7° 28'7.15"N, 80° 6'08.63"E). Field sampling was carried out once a week during the study period in the declared EPA and sampling was conducted to encompass all habitat types. A point count method was carried out along 100 m transect to identify the birds and a maximum of 30 minutes was spent at each point. Birds were identified using direct observations with the aid of a 10 × 42 binocular and through birdcalls. Bird guides were used to confirm the identifications. A total of 74 bird species belonging to 61 genera were encountered from the study site. Among these, seven species were endemic while seven were migratory. Five percent of the birds recorded were raptors and most of them were canopy and sub canopy dwellers associated with riverine forests and islands. Most of the birds encountered use this area as their roosting and nesting areas. According to the National Red List (2012), 62 of the species recorded during the study are categorized as "Least Concerned", two species as "Vulnerable" (Sri Lanka wood pigeon, Sri Lanka Hill mynah), three as "Near Threatened" (Oriental dwarf kingfisher, Cinnamon Bittern and Black crown night heron), one as "Endangered" (Alpine swift) and another as "Critically Endangered" (Rock Pigeon) in their natural habitats. According to the Global Conservation Status, 72 of the species recorded during the study are categorized as "Least Concerned" while one species as "Vulnerable" (Sri Lanka wood pigeon) and one as "Near Threatened" (Sri Lanka Hill mynah). These habitats along the Mahaweli River at Warathenna appear to aid in sustaining a rich bird community so future conservation of this declared EPA will help create a safe haven for the avifauna.

Keywords: Avifauna, Mahaweli River, Diversity, River islands, Environmental Protection Area