

Heronries of Thrissur District, Kerala 2019

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ABSTRACT

Thrissur District heronry census was carried out during July - September 2019. A total of 2872 nests and 141 nesting trees were recorded from eight heronries. Oriental Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*, Little Cormorant *Microcarbo niger*, Indian Cormorant *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*, Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*, Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*, Intermediate egret *Ardea intermedia* and Great egret *Ardea*

alba were the breeding species in the heronries of Thrissur District. Indian cormorant (31.9%) and Oriental Darter (30.5%) shared the highest percentage of nest abundance. Uprooting the trees and cutting down the branches of nesting trees in heronries were noticed during the survey.

Keywords Heronry, Census, Thrissur, Kerala.

INTRODUCTION

Heronries are the breeding place of waterbirds especially herons, egrets, cormorants, darter, storks which depend heavily on the wetland habitats. Increased availability of feeding ground (Fasola and Barbieri 1978) decreased nest predatory activities (Kelly *et al.* 2005) and improved mate attraction (Draulans 1988) were the major factors which shape out the heronries. About 15 species of resident and breeding water bird nests were recorded earlier from different heronries of Kerala (Sashikumar *et al.* 2015). Presence of Kole wetlands is an important habitat for waterbirds and it abodes the highest bird diversity in Thrissur District (Sivaperuman 2000). Six species of waterbirds in 2016 (Greeshma *et al.* 2018) and eight species of waterbirds in 2017 (Roshnath *et al.* 2017, 2019) were found to breed in the heronries of Thrissur. Continuous efforts were made to monitor the heronries of Thrissur since 2016.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Details regarding all the existing heronries were col-

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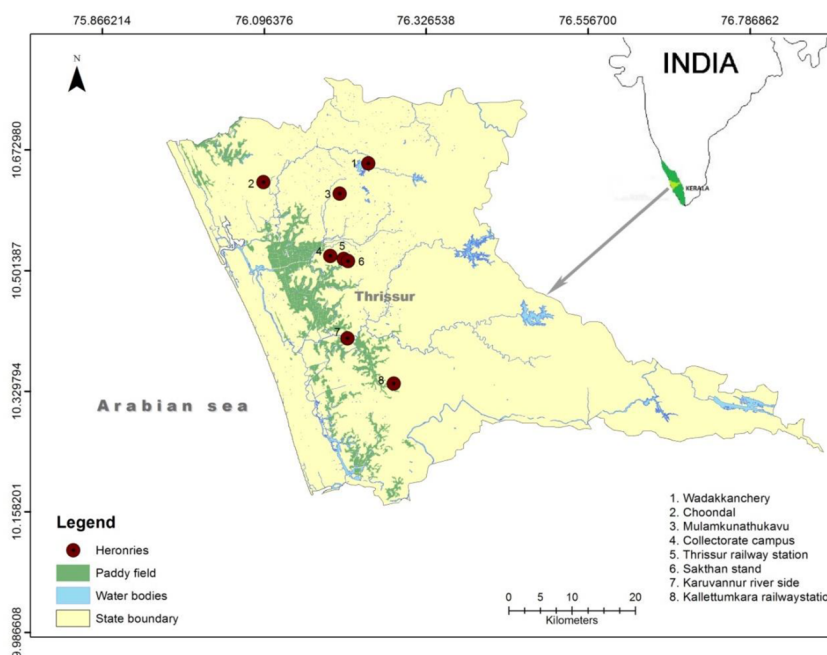


Fig. 1. Location of heronries in Thrissur District during 2019 heronry census.

lected (Greeshma *et al.* 2018) and also with the help of local people during the field survey. Heronry survey was conducted from July -September 2019. Information regarding the location of heronry, nesting bird species, nesting tree, nest number and threats faced by the breeding community was recorded. Bird species were identified using binoculars (10 × 40) and standard field guides (Ali 2003, Grimmet *et al.* 2011).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 2872 nests belonging to eight species

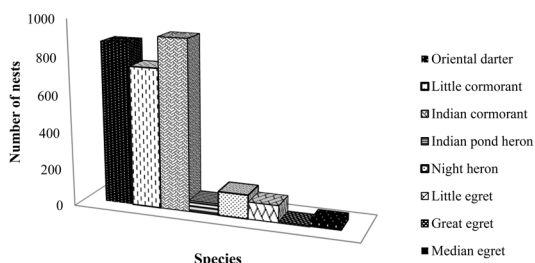


Fig. 2. Heronry birds and number of nests in Thrissur District.

of waterbirds were recorded from eight heronries. Kallettumkara Railway station (KRS), Thrissur Railway station (TRS), Choondal town (CHO), Wadakkanchery Railway Station (WRS), Karuvannur river side (KVR), Mulamkunathukavu (MKV), Thrissur Collectorate campus (TCC) and Shakthan stand (SK) were the location of heronries surveyed during 2019 (Fig. 1). Oriental Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*, Little Cormorant *Microcarbo niger*, Indian Cormorant *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*, Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*, Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*, Intermediate egret *Ardea intermedia* and Great egret *Ardea alba* were the breeding species in the heronries (Fig. 2). The heronries harbored 2872 nests of which, Indian cormorant (31.9%) and Oriental Darter (30.5%) shared the highest percentage of nest abundance (Fig. 3). Heronry at Thrissur Collectorate campus was found to be the largest in terms of nest number whereas heronry at Thrissur Railway station abodes the highest number of species (seven species). Thrissur Railway station, Karuvannur river side, Collectorate campus and Kalletumkara Railway station hold the population of the near threatened

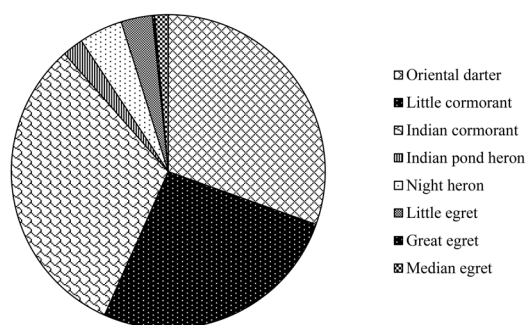


Fig. 3. Percentage of different species of water birds in heronries of Thrissur District.

species *Anhinga melanogaster* (Fig.4). Almost all the heronries faced some or the other kind of threats. A total of 141 trees belonging to 25 species were used by the waterbirds for nesting (Table 1). Oriental Darter selected big trees with large canopy like *Ficus religiosa*, *Mangifera indica*, *Lagerstroemia speciosa*, *Albizia saman* for nesting. They nested in top branches. While little cormorants and Indian cormorants selected almost all available trees.

Compared to 2016, 2017 and 2018 heronry census, there was a drastic change in the number of breeding birds in all heronries. In the heronry at Thrissur Railway station, large number of trees was uprooted for the beautification of the station campus and for parking areas. Breeding population in Collectorate campus was found to be increased (137 nests in 2018 to 553 nests in 2019). All heronries were located in the public places and had a history of more than five years. A major part of the trees

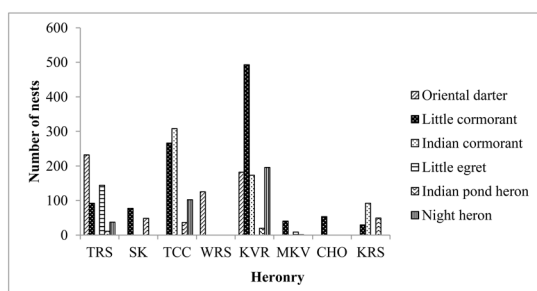


Fig. 4. Species composition in different heronries in Thrissur District.

Table 1. List of nesting trees species in heronries of Thrissur District.

Sl.No.	Tree species	Number of trees
1	<i>Albizia saman</i>	23
2	<i>Bauhinia racemosa</i>	1
3	<i>Ceiba pentandra</i>	1
4	<i>Ficus religiosa</i>	7
5	<i>Bridelia retusa</i>	3
6	<i>Tamarindus indica</i>	5
7	<i>Trema orientalis</i>	3
8	<i>Mangifera indica</i>	6
9	<i>Delonix regia</i>	1
10	<i>Alstonia scholaris</i>	1
11	<i>Artocarpus heterophyllus</i>	10
12	<i>Myristica fragrans</i>	2
13	<i>Swietenia macrophylla</i>	24
14	<i>Tectona grandis</i>	24
15	<i>Annona reticulata</i>	1
16	<i>Acacia mangium</i>	4
17	<i>Azadirachta indica</i>	1
18	<i>Lagerstroemia speciosa</i>	3
19	<i>Peltophorum pterocarpum</i>	9
20	<i>Pinus strobus</i>	3
21	<i>Acacia auriculaeformis</i>	1
22	<i>Polyalthia longifolia</i>	1
23	<i>Pongamia pinnata</i>	3
24	<i>Spathodea campanulata</i>	2
25	<i>Terminalia catappa</i>	2
Total		141

in heronries was located along the road sides, busy market places, bus stands and railway station compounds. Pungent smell of bird droppings and left out food materials are the major issues faced by the public. As birds are considered to be the ecological indicators of ecosystem health, care should be taken to conserve the population of water birds.

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