

Bird count report

Common Bird Monitoring Programme

Team members:

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Birds are good indicators of a healthy environment, but there is increasing evidence published in the news media and scientific papers that even some of the common birds like the ubiquitous House Sparrows are on a decline. There is an acute need to pay attention to our common birds through continuous monitoring and targeted conservation interventions in order to avoid drastic declines in common species, as it happened with *Gyps* Vultures across India in the 1990s.

One such regular monitoring programme is the Common Bird Monitoring Programme (CBMP), a Citizen Science initiative by the Bombay Natural History Society. The objective of the programme is to involve more and more people to observe birds found in their backyard or in locations they visit frequently. In fact, citizen science is the best way to collect data on a nationwide scale. There are several existing good initiatives that are enabling people to record their observations. However, there is a need to accurately monitor trends in the populations of common birds and CBMP works towards fulfilling this need in India.

A simple methodology has been developed to enable volunteering participants to collect data from all corners of the country. BNHS has been organizing workshops from time to time to familiarize the participants with the methodology. The existing Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN) of approximately 800 members and State Coordinators have been roped into this programme.

CBMP encourages participants to conduct surveys throughout the year in the chosen place/grid for longer durations to make the study more meaningful. The bird count is organized three times in a year to cover the monsoon (September), winter (January) and summer (April).

Objectives:

- 1) To understand long-term changes in bird populations for a wide range of common birds across a variety of habitats at pan-India level.
- 2) To promote bird conservation and awareness through the involvement of a large number of volunteer observers in survey work.

Common Bird Monitoring Programme (Three season count - 2017)

In the year 2017, we undertook all three season counts with good participation. The count concluded with a record of 51,095 birds from 101 grids spread across 10 states in India. Maximum observations were recorded in Maharashtra (80 grids). Other states which participated in the count were Assam, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal. The grids were divided into four types of habitats viz., wetland, agriculture, urban area and forest. While 30.69% counts were from agricultural areas, 29.70% counts were from urban area, 26.73% counts from wetland habitats and the remaining 12.87% counts were from forest habitats.

Baya Weaver Count

A part of CBMP is the annual Baya Weaver count, started since 2016 and held in the months of June and July.

Objectives:

- To create a baseline data of the status of Weaver species in India.
- To involve more people to observe Weaver species at the sites they visit regularly.
- To launch a citizen science initiative to identify regions with a high density of nests.
- To locate threats to the nests.
- To monitor the Weavers on an annual basis during the breeding season.

- 1) Baya Weaver Count (June 2016): Birdwatchers from 17 States (Maharashtra, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Punjab, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Odisha, Kerala, Gujarat, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, West Bengal, Uttarakhand, Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh) and one Union Territory (Dadra and Nagar Haveli) participated in the event. A total of 6354 individuals were recorded and 3401 nests were located across India.
- 2) Baya Weaver Count (June 2017): The Baya Weaver bird count for 2017 concluded with 4313 (Baya Weaver *P.p. philippinus* - 4203 and Eastern Baya *P.p. Burmanicus* - 110) individuals from 140 sites. Some participants also specifically reported Black-breasted Weaver *Ploceus benghalensis*. Observations were recorded by birdwatchers across 12 States (Assam, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh) and one Union Territory (Dadra and Nagar Haveli).

Sálim Ali Bird Count

Yet another annual bird count event started by the BNHS is Sálim Ali Bird Count, a single-day event to commemorate the birth anniversary (12 November) of the 'Bird Man of India', Dr Sálim Ali (1896–1987). The only criterion for participation in the event is an interest in birds. Participants can observe and record birds in their chosen area, preferably for over an hour. A checklist of bird species is available on bnhs.org. Participants can download the same and enter their sightings in the checklist. The complete list of all species spotted (ideally with counts of individuals) can be submitted through email to cbmp@bnhs.org.

The Sálim Ali Bird Count is a citizen science initiative, conducted in association with many organizations. Birdwatchers can visit their nearest Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) or any water body or other areas conducive to birds and undertake a diligent count for a long period of time (over an hour) to make it more meaningful. A count is more productive early in the morning; birds generally become quiet and inactive during the middle of the day. Birdwatchers are encouraged to not restrain themselves to the one-day-event but monitor the chosen area consistently over years and also be part of the Common Bird Monitoring Programme.

- 1) Result of Sálim Ali Bird Count of November 2017: The event witnessed participation from 19 states in India. A total of 412 species were recorded through 102 checklists. Maharashtra ranked first with 53 lists. The other States included Andaman and Nicobar Islands (1), Arunachal Pradesh (1), Assam (12), Chhattisgarh (3), Gujarat (3), Himachal Pradesh (1), Karnataka (5), Kerala (1), Madhya Pradesh (1), New Delhi (1), Odisha (1), Punjab (1), Rajasthan (4), Sikkim (1), Tamil Nadu (8), Telangana (2), Uttar Pradesh (1) and West Bengal (2). Of the total count, Lark (Alaudidae family) numbered 2034 followed by Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* (1620), Rock Pigeon *Columba livia* (1435), Ducks (Anatidae family) (1428), Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* (1405), House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* (1346), Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus* (1254), Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* (1224), House Crow *Corvus splendens* (1141) and Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* (1001). Of the 412 species recorded, 23 were found to be occurring under the threatened category of IUCN.