

A Survey of bird diversity in paddy fields in “Kirala-Kele” and Bandaththara, Matara, Sri Lanka

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This study examined avian assemblages of working and abandoned paddy field areas situated in “Kirala-Kele” wetland and Bandaththara marshland area of Matara, Sri Lanka. Birds were observed and recorded along pre-established belt transects (100 m length 50 m width) during 52 visits for two years. Highest number of bird species recorded was 55 from an abandoned paddy field area dominated by *Sonneratia caseolaris* vegetation and lowest number of bird species recorded was 35 from an abandoned paddy field area dominated by grasses. Totally, 48 species of forest birds and 36 species of waders were recorded during the study. Two near threatened species (Painted stork and Black-headed ibis) were recorded from the Paddy field area located outside of the “Kirala-Kele” wetland. Three near-threatened species (Painted stork, Black-headed ibis and Oriental darter) and one restricted-range species (Sri Lanka Hanging parrot) were recorded inside the “Kirala-Kele” wetland. Great egret, Intermediate egret, Little egret, Cattle egret, Indian pond heron, White-breasted water hen, Purple swamp hen, Little cormorant, Jungle crow and House crow were the dominant species recorded from all study areas. Highest bird species diversity was recorded in the paddy field areas of Bandaththara area indicating the importance of these habitats as avian feeding grounds. Mainly omnivorous and carnivorous feeding assemblages were observed in every study site. Roosting assemblages were mainly observed in “Kirala-Kele” study sites. Working paddy fields supported a varying number of species with respect to seasonal cultivation cycle while abandoned paddy fields supported a year-round consistent number of species.

Key words: Birds, diversity, “Kirala-Kele”, paddy fields, wetlands

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