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Significance of Halgolla Forest, Danture, as a Bird Habitat

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Abstract

Halgolla Forest (N7°18', E80°31', 536 m above sea level), located close to the historic town of Danture, Sri Lanka, consists of mixed evergreen tropical plant species spanning over an area of about 20 ha. Despite its small size, the forest reserve is home to a large number of bird species, numbering over 50. Present study was conducted from the beginning of June to mid-August 2013. The objective of the present study was to document the bird fauna of this forest. Peak observation hours were between 0600-0900 h and 1,600-1,830 h. Observations were done on a weekly basis. Among the notable species were endemics such as the Sri Lanka gray hornbill (*Ocyrceros gingalensis*), Sri Lanka lorikeet (*Loriculus beryllinus*), yellow-fronted barbet (*Megalaima flavifrons*), Sri Lanka scimitar babbler (*Pomatorhinus melanurus*), and brown-capped babbler (*Pellorneum fuscicapillum*). The endemic Sri Lanka gray hornbill was observed nesting inside the forest. Several proposed endemic species, such as Sri Lanka green pigeon (*Treron pompadora*), Sri Lanka small barbet (*Megalaima rubricapillus*), and Sri Lanka wood shrike (*Tephrodornis affinis*) were also observed. Raptors such as the crested hawk-eagle (*Spizaetus cirrhatus*), crested serpent eagle (*Spilornis cheela*), shikra (*Accipiter badius*), and owls such as the brown wood-owl (*Strix leptogrammica*) and collared scops-owl (*Otus bakkamoena*) have also been recorded. According to the information from local residents, the forest eagle-owl (*Bubo nipalensis*), which is a rare and local species in Sri Lanka, is a resident bird in this forest. Other notable species included the yellow-browed bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*), Indian hill myna (*Gracula religiosa*), Oriental white-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*), emerald dove (*Chalcophaps indica*), and alexandrine parakeet (*Psittacula eupatria*). The populations of all these except the yellow-browed bulbul are suspected to be on the decline due to habitat loss. The fact that the reserve supports a comparatively high number of birds of prey indicates that it is rich in biodiversity since these species are at the top of the food chain in any ecosystem. Given the importance of this forest as a watershed area for nearby tea and paddy cultivations, and the large number of bird species it supports, Halgolla Forest is undoubtedly an important area for biodiversity conservation.

Keywords: Avifauna, Biodiversity, Endemic species