

FIRST RECORD OF THE MASKED FINFOOT IN THE GORAI ESTUARY, MUMBAI, WESTERN INDIA

Vidya PADMAKUMAR

Department of Zoology, Bangalore University, Bengaluru, India.

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-3830-4232

ABSTRACT

One of Asia's most vulnerable waterbird species is the Masked Finfoot *Heliopais personatus*. The species is extensively distributed in north-east India, Bangladesh, and South-East Asia, however only a few reports of the species along India's western shore. A sparse population of the masked finfoot was discovered during an assessment of the variety of bird communities in the Gorai Creek area of Mumbai between June 2017 and June 2019. In the whole 12-km-long creek area, the species' estimated population was only 10 individuals. This is the first instance the masked finfoot was spotted along the subcontinent's western coast. The Masked Finfoot is now classified as Endangered. The Masked Finfoot is arguably one of the least well-known waterbirds in tropical Asia, and there are still many unknowns regarding its range and seasonal migrations, particularly in South-East Asia. The estuarine environment in the Gorai area has seldom been studied. An ecosystem's bird population is a good indicator of the area's environmental condition, amount of pollution, safety, and accessibility of food and habitat. The Masked Finfoot and many floodplain waterfowl species are particularly at risk from habitat destruction and degradation because low-lying, wooded wetlands in South-East Asia are being cleared or encroached upon by human activity more and more often. More thorough knowledge of the species might come from focused research on the Masked Finfoot's local nesting ecology.

Keywords: Masked Finfoot; *Heliopais personatus*; Gorai; West coast; India