



IMPORTANCE ,THREATS AND CONSERVATION STRATEGIES OF TELANGANA STATE BIRD, PALAPITTA.

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ABSTRACT:

Birds are excellent indicators of the state of our natural world. This year's State of India's Birds report, which was recently released, highlights 942 bird species that need conservation priority. Of these, 178 classified as High Conservation Priority and 14 species. Surprisingly the Indian Roller, or called the palapitta in Telugu or the Blue Jay, has been recommended for International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List reassessment. The palapitta (also known as the Blue Jay) is Telangana's state bird and sighting it on Dasara day is considered auspicious. People believe it as auspicious to see Palapitta (*Coracias benghalensis*) on Dussehra day. Poachers and traders take advantage of the common belief that they capture the birds starting a month before the festival. They tie their legs with thread, trim their wings and stick them with glue to stop them from flying. More cruelly they do not even feed these birds till the day of Dusshera and kept in small cages for public viewing. Even though they leave them after Dussehra, most of these birds die in captivity or immediately after being released. The State Animal Welfare Board and the Telangana State Biodiversity Board along with Humane Society International (HSI) are trying to end this cruelty. Telangana government has decided to take bold step to save the state bird, Palapitta. The government had directed temple managements not to entertain display of Palapittas during Dusshera on the temple premises or environs. They clarified that these birds are protected under Schedule IV of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and any violation of this protection will attract a penalty of Rs. 25,000 and up to three years of imprisonment. The State of India's Birds report is a periodic assessment of the distribution range, trends in abundance, and conservation status for most of the bird species in the country. This comprehensive, national-level assessment report based on observations, observation trends and distribution by over 30,000 birdwatchers from across the country points the way towards the conservation needs of India's birds. Ashwin Viswanathan of Bengaluru-based Nature Conservation Foundation says, "Rapid reduction of grasslands, landscapes and a natural ecosystem is the reason for the decline in the number of Indian rollers. Rollers eat rodents and small insects which means these too are on a sharp decline. The birds have a great association with the grasslands where cows and goats graze. With the steady approach of planting trees, we are destroying the grazing lands and the ecosystem."

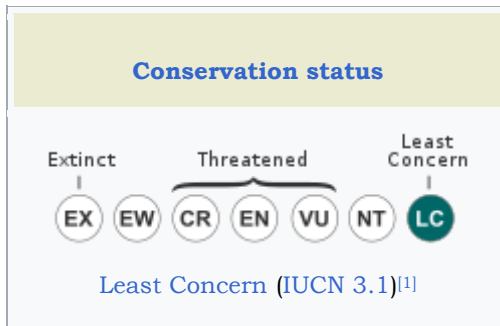
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INTRODUCTION :

The **Indian roller (*Coracias benghalensis*)** is a bird of the family Coraciidae. It is 30–34 cm (12–13 in) long with a wingspan of 65–74 cm (26–29 in) and weighs 166–176 g (5.9–6.2 oz). The face and throat are pinkish, the head and back are brown, with blue on the rump and contrasting light and dark blue on the wings and tail. The bright blue markings on the wing are prominent in flight. The sexes are similar in appearance. Two subspecies are recognised. Indian rollers are distributed across Asia, from Iraq and the United Arab Emirates in southwestern Asia through the Indian Subcontinent, including Sri Lanka, Lakshadweep islands, and the Maldives. The main habitat of these

birds includes cultivated areas, thin forests, and grassland. They can also be found in parks and cities.





The Indian roller occurs widely from West Asia to the Indian subcontinent. Often found perched on roadside trees and wires, it is common in open grassland and scrub forest habitats, and has adapted well to human-modified landscapes. It mainly feeds on insects, especially beetles. The species is best known for the aerobic displays of males during the breeding season. Adult males and females form pair bonds and raise the young together. The female lays 3–5 eggs in a cavity or crevice, which is lined with a thin mat of straw or feathers. The roller is the state bird of three Indian states. It is listed as a species of least concern on the IUCN Red List.

IN CULTURE:

According to popular belief, Lord Rama is said to have seen the neelkanth before setting on his journey to fight Ravana. Folklore says that sighting a neelkanth on Dussehra helps absolve people of their sins. To exploit this sentiment, poachers hunt the India roller and "exploit" the faithful by organising 'darshans' in lieu of money -- which is illegal.

The Indian roller is associated with Hindu legends and said to be sacred to Vishnu; it used to be caught and released during festivals such as Dussera or the last day of Durga Puja. Adding its chopped feathers to fodder for cows was believed to increase the latter's milk yield, giving it the Telugu name of "paala-pitta" (*pālapitta*), meaning 'milk bird'. Hindustani name is "neelkanth" (Hindi: *nīlkañṭh*), meaning 'blue throat', a name associated with the deity Shiva due to a legend

that he drank the Halahala poison emerging from Samudra Manthana to save the world but stopped it from going past his throat, turning it blue.

The Kol people traditionally considered a sighting of an Indian roller as a good omen as did people in Bengal who, upon seeing the bird, would chant a couplet showing devotion to Vishnu and seeking a vision of the bird at the time of their death. A nomadic tribe of fortune-tellers from the Vishakapatnam area wore feathers of the Indian roller on their head utilizing the folk belief that the bird could foretell events. The Indian roller is the state bird of the Indian states of Odisha, Telangana, and Karnataka. At the height of the plume trade in the early 20th century, the Indian roller was sought for export of its colourful feathers, and was among the most widely killed bird species in India.

THREATS:

The numbers of Indian roller sighted along the highway between Aligarh and New Delhi decreased between the mid 1960s and mid 1980s, as traffic increased during that time. Its habit of feeding near roadsides sometimes results in collisions with traffic. Its habit of utilizing powerlines puts it at risk of electrocution. In Rajasthan, it was found to be the second most commonly electrocuted bird after the house crow (*Corvus splendens*). Palapitta or the Indian Roller bird, which is the state bird of Telangana, is being sold for as little as Rs 50, with poachers in Hyderabad and different parts of the state exploiting the belief that sighting the bird during Dasara is considered good omen. In Hyderabad Mahboob Chowk located at a short distance from the Laad Bazar to the west of Charminar is still the hotspot of this illegal trade. A walk through the lanes of Mahboob Chowk will break our heart. helpless animals and birds are imprisoned in tiny, dirty, smelly cages without even enough

space to turn or fly; their sad eyes plead to us set them free.”



Sighting the Palapitta during Dasara is considered good omen

Palapitta or the Indian Roller bird, which is the state bird of Telangana, is being sold for as little as Rs 50, with poachers in Hyderabad and different parts of the state exploiting the belief that sighting the bird during Dasara is considered good omen. People believe it as auspicious to see Palapitta on Dussehra day. Poachers and traders take advantage of the common belief that they capture the birds starting a month before the festival. They tie their legs with thread, trim their wings and stick them with glue to stop them from flying.

According to animal welfare organisations, the birds are captured at least a month before the festival, their legs tied, wings trimmed or stuck with glue to prevent them from flying.

P Teja of Humane Society International said, “The birds are usually starved till Dasara and kept in small cages for public viewing. Most of these birds die in captivity or immediately after being released. On the day of Dasara, many devotees pay to buy these birds from local markets and release them as a good deed which they believe will absolve them of their sins. They don’t realise that this ritual is actually killing hundreds of birds every year.” The Indian Roller is protected under Schedule IV of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, which makes its capture, hunting and trade illegal. The penalty is Rs 25,000 or imprisonment.

Palapitta (Indian Roller or Blue Jay) or *Coracias Benghalensis*, is protected under Schedule IV of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 which makes its capture, hunting and trade illegal.

Ms Navamita Mukherjee of Humane Society International said, “The birds are usually starved till Dasara and kept in small cages for public viewing. Most of these birds die in captivity or immediately after being released. During Dasara, many devotees pay to buy these birds from local markets and release them as a good deed which they believe will absolve them of their sins.” Destruction of grass lands is also one of the reason for decrease these birds.

CONSERVATION:

In India, the Indian roller received legal protection in 1887, when hunting it was banned under the Wild Birds Protection Act of 1887 and later under the Wild Birds and Animals Protection Act of 1912. Telangana government has decided to take bold step to save the state bird, Palapitta. The government had directed temple managements not to entertain display of Palapittas during Dusshera on the temple premises or environs. They clarified that these birds are protected under Schedule IV of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and any violation of this protection will attract a penalty of Rs. 25,000 and up to three years of imprisonment. As of 2016, the Indian roller was listed as a species of least concern on the IUCN Red List, due to its wide range and apparent increasing population. The total population size is unknown, but it appears to be common in most of its range.

CONCLUSION:

Indian Roller bird, which is the state bird of Telangana, is being sold for as little as Rs 50, with poachers in Hyderabad and different parts of the state exploiting the belief that sighting the bird during Dasara is considered good omen. The government has launched a 10-year plan to help in the conservation of birds and their habitat. Capturing and displaying Indian rollers

is illegal. They are protected under Schedule IV of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 which carries a penalty of Rs 25,000 and imprisonment. India is also the president of the Bonn Convention (Conservation of Migratory Species of Wildlife, CMS) under the UN. Nearly 370 species of migratory birds visit India through three flyways - Central Asian Flyway (CAF), East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF) and the Asian-East African Flyway (AEAF). India has been working through many programmes for the protection of these species. Destruction of grass lands is also one of the reason for decrease these birds. These are a boon for farmers as they eat insects and worms from farmlands. These birds are natural pest controllers.

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