



Birds in the City

Summer observations

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Landscape Environment Advancement Foundation, LEAF

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Birds in the city

Birds are a reminder of nature to every city-dweller. Because of their ability to fly, even a multi-storeyed apartment resident is familiar with their presence and their connection to nature. In spite of being a densely packed city, various birds seem to have found suitable habitats within Ahmedabad. Some of the habitats include:

- Agricultural lands on the fringes of the city or along the *Chandrabhaga nalah* in the north-western part of the city – the food-grains available in large quantity, nesting areas in hedges surrounding the fields, fallow lands with insects tilled out from the soil, are some reasons for the presence of birds in this area.
- Industrial area on the eastern end of the city – some closed industries lying in the core of the industrial areas left untended have become a good habitat for many birds.
- Riverside vegetations on the northern and southern ends of the city – with the banks of the river covered with reeds or *kikar* bushes, birds get sufficient food and many hidden spaces to nest successfully.
- Riverfront development cutting through the city – even with the river banks developed over, groves of trees in certain areas and river islets formed with the water level going down form perfect feeding spots for some water birds.
- Wooded institutional areas – the provision of shelter and food throughout summer brings in a lot of birds in this area.
- Infrequently used railway tracks turned scrublands – with minimal human intervention along these tracks, the scrubs have provided food and nesting spots for smaller birds.
- Different lakes of the city, seasonal or with fronts developed – groves of trees along the lakes or small puddles of water yet to dry are the reasons for the presence of some water birds around these lakes.
- Huge open grounds surrounded with trees – open grounds give ample space and vision for birds which depend on their flying manoeuvres to catch their prey.
- Dumping ground in the south of the city – The city dump invites birds to feed on various human leftovers and insects brought in with it.

The bird community in all these areas is rich and varied. If observed closely, each of these habitats would have further divisions in terms of bird habitats. The reasons for such differences between various habitats of the city have been the basic intent of this study.

During the summer months in Ahmedabad, migratory bird species leave the city for their home countries. The ones that we see during these months are generally resident birds, that breed and stay in their respective areas. Local migrations happen for some birds which leave for other parts of the country. Some migratory ones that are left behind are called vagrants.

There are three main ways of finding out the variety of animals and plants in a study area: area searches; transect searches; and point searches. Animals that move around a lot or which might be easily disturbed, such as birds, can be studied with point searches. To do this, each searcher is given a place in the study site where they sit still. They then record the animals that they can see or hear during a set period of time.

Initially to locate the sites for study, I went around the city on a particular road or along the river with promising differences in the habitats

flanking it. After stopping at various sites along these transects and studying them, I came up with three transects and their thirteen sites for the following reasons:

- For the presence of a high bio-diversity or variety of bird species (as compared to all the sites I studied)
- For the presence of a high number of a particular population of bird species either because of their roosting, nesting or feeding preferences.

For example: Kalupur railway station happens to invite a high number of Rose-ringed parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) on its old trees to roost in the evening. On the contrary, Vasna barrage having a high biodiversity caters to Bank mynas (*Acridotheres ginginianus*) to nest along the slopes of dug ditches in a very high number. The river bed around Sabarmati Bridge in the northern part of the city brings in a huge flock of Asian open-billed storks (*Anastomus episcopus*) that feed along the banks of the river.

Different point transects in the site were considered after it was studied and the one with the maximum apparent bird movements (for various reasons like the presence of water body, food availability, point transect falling on the edge of two or more habitats) was chosen for further study.

The study for the site involved the following:

Neighbourhood map -The intent was to map out various habitats in and around the site selected. Different habitats cater to birds in different ways. Some prefer open grounds to just forage for food, while some would even nest in open. Birds nesting and roosting on trees might spend their predominant time foraging on the ground. Various birds spotted in the site and surroundings have been mapped with their activities in various habitats at their respective heights from the ground

Sightings along a section -In a bird watcher's diary, the location of bird, the activity of the bird while it was sighted etc are jotted down. Similarly the next part of study involved looking at a particular section of the site and plotting various locations where the birds were sighted for most part of the study time. The activity of the bird is listed. This gives us an idea of the niche where the bird is most active.

Bird map - Sitting at a particular point transect, the movements and activities of the birds were recorded at following times:

Morning: 0600-0800 hrs.

Afternoon: 1100-1300 hrs.

Evening: 1730-1930 hrs.

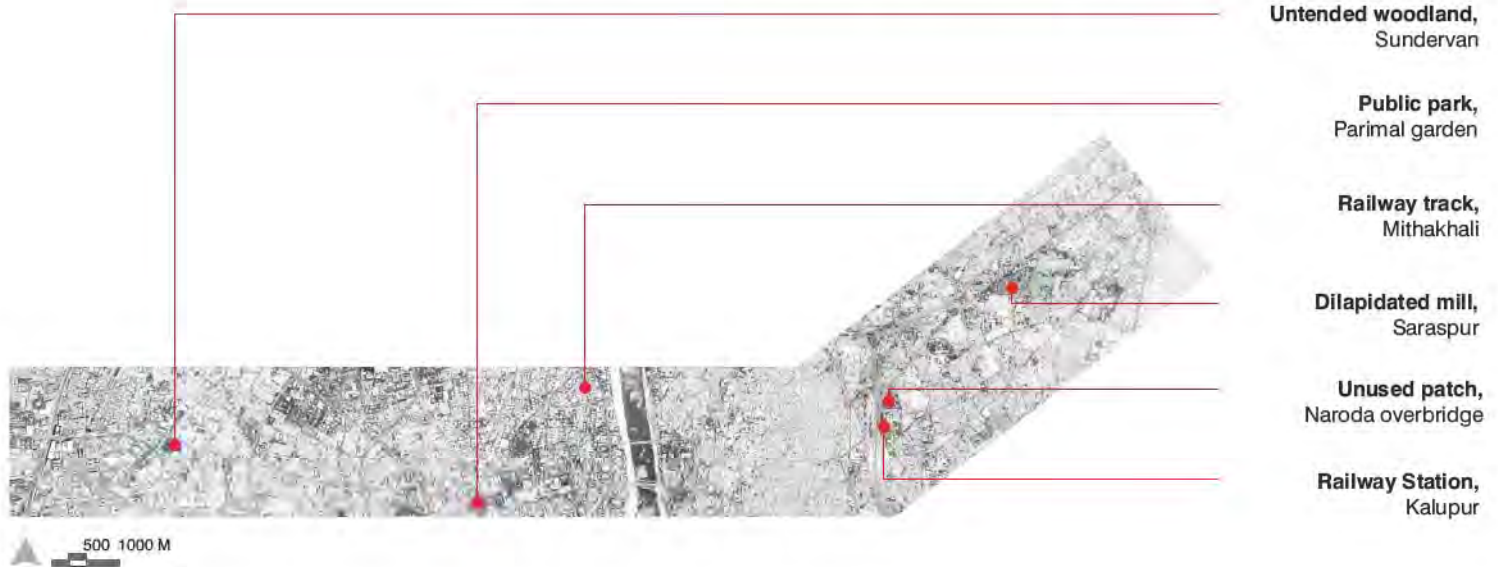
Their activities have been outlined to four activities - foraging (searching for food), nesting (building and inhabiting a nest), roosting (perching to rest or sleep) and perching(sitting, as on a branch). A perching point has been added to involve other activities like calling for possible mates, looking out for prey, seeking shelter from hot summer sun etc.

Inferences - The bird population has been approximately listed down. The various reasons for the presence and flourishing of birds in the particular site are also listed down based on the studies carried out.

Crepuscular (twilight) activities of nocturnal birds have been studied and mapped but study focuses mainly on the diurnal (active during day) birds.

Roosting and nesting points represented in the map are the ones observed on the site. They might not be exhaustive for the site.

WESTERN FRINGE TO EASTERN INDUSTRIAL AREA, Transect a



This transect contains six varied habitats all within a dense fabric. It starts from the western fringes of the city with a small but densely wooded pocket surrounded by high-rise buildings. The road goes on to reach the center of the city to Parimal garden which has high tree canopies above and heavy human traffic below. As the road cuts across a railway track, the adjacent residential buildings and the neglected strip of land creates yet another environment for the birds. Across the Nehru Bridge, and beyond the Old city, amongst heavy traffic zone lies Kalupur railway station that invites a huge flock of Rose-ringed Parakeets daily to roost on its old *Ficus* trees. The road runs further beside a tract of unused land with groves of *peepal* trees. The industrial area starts as you go further on the road and amidst all the noise is a dilapidated and silent cotton mill, quietude broken occasionally by a peacock cawing or *koels* cooing.



N.T.S. ▲

SITES ALONG THE TRANSECT



Eurasian Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) perching on the branches of *Azadirachta indica*



White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*) feeds walking on the leaves



Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*) basking on the branches of *Thespesia populnea* tree



Jungle Babbler (*Turdoides striatus*) feeding on the lawn grass



Asian Koel (*Eudynamus scolopacea*) perching on *Polyalthia longifolia* tree



N.T.S. ▶



Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*) flock to roost on *Ficus benghalensis*



Indian Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) roosting between the leafy branches of *Ficus benghalensis*



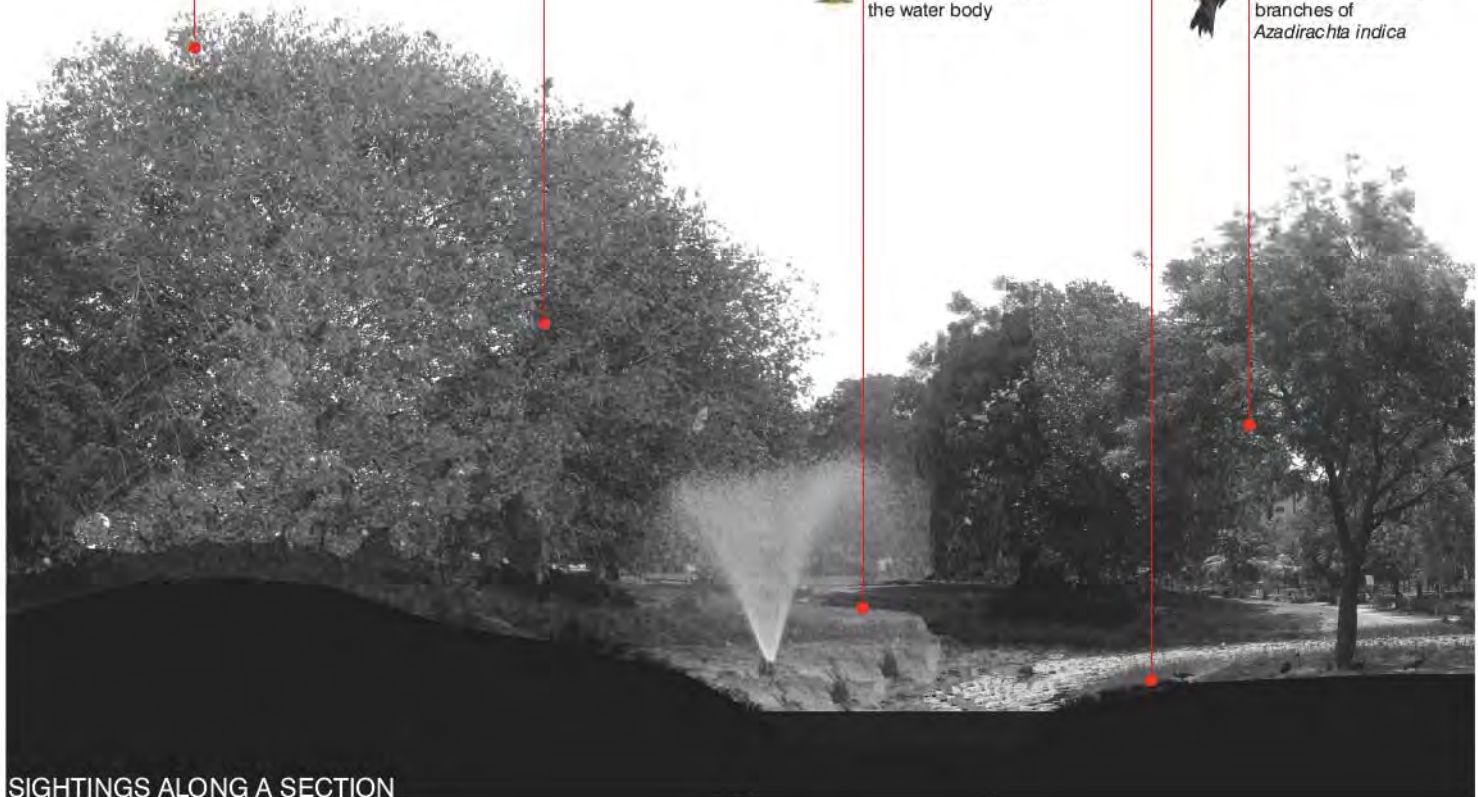
Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*) feeding on the reedy edges of the water body



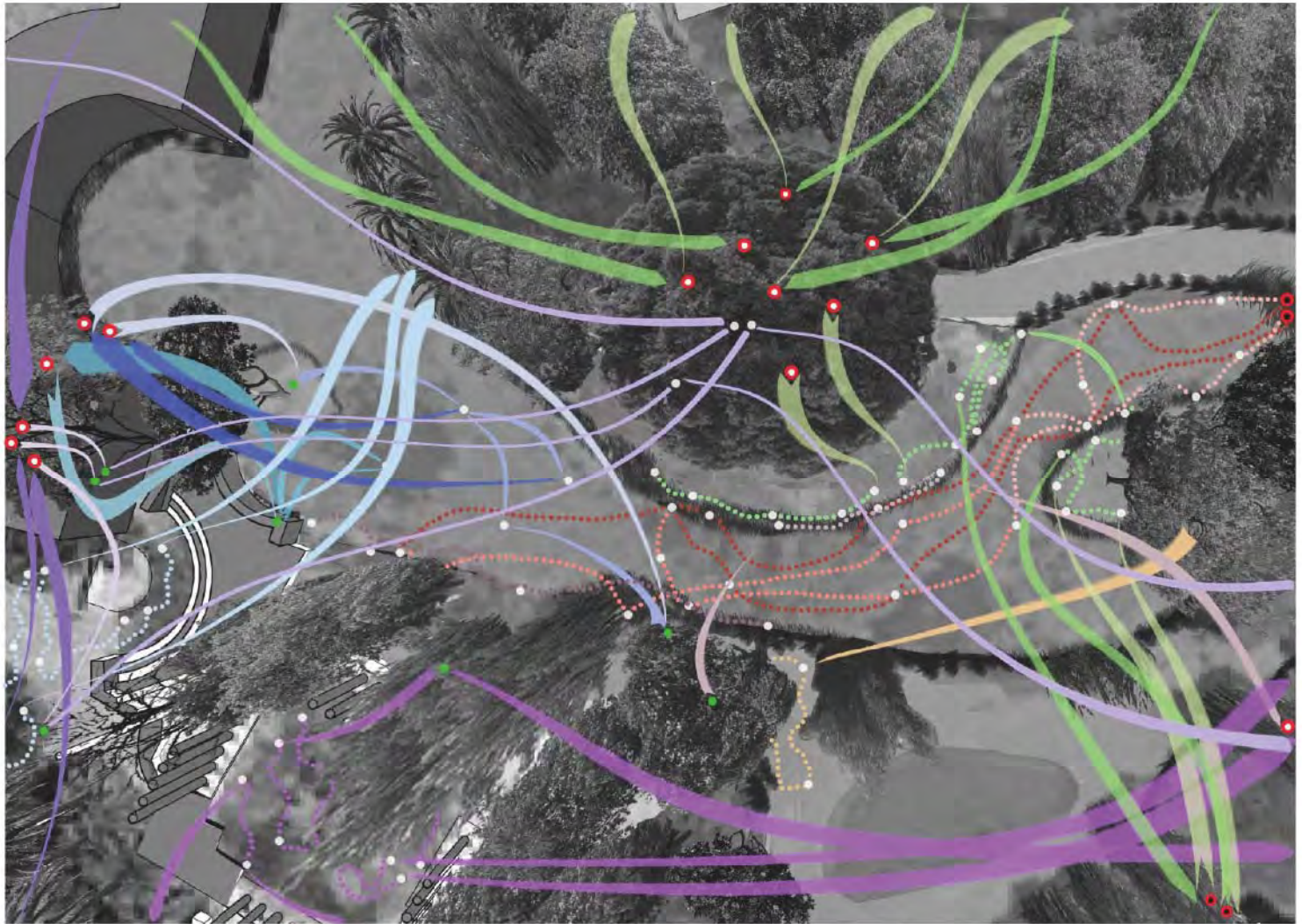
Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*) feeding on the reedy banks of the water body



Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) perches among the branches of *Azadirachta indica*



SIGHTINGS ALONG A SECTION



BIRD MAP ▲



White-breasted Kingfisher
(*Halcyon smymensis*)



Little Cormorant
(*Phalacrocorax niger*)



Rock Pigeon
(*Columba livia*)



Black Ibis
(*Pseudibis papillosa*)



Indian Pond Heron
(*Andreola grayii*)



Indian Myna
(*Acridotheres tristis*)



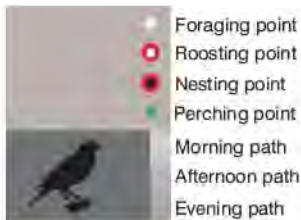
Yellow-footed Green Pigeon
(*Treron phoenicoptera*)



White-breasted Waterhen
(*Amaurornis phoenicurus*)



Eurasian Collared Dove
(*Streptopelia decaocto*)



Black Ibises fly onto the central *Ficus benghalensis* by the day fall and roost there. They fly in small groups in the morning. In the afternoon, a horde of birds take protection from the summer sun near the pond under trees. Birds like Little Egrets, White-breasted Waterhen, Pond Heron, Black Ibises continue feeding at various parts of the ponds, the former two near the centre of the ponds and the latter two at the edges. The Little cormorants dive and feed in the pond and start roosting much earlier than the other birds, initiating with an evening sun bask.



N.T.S. ▶



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