

A HITHERTO UNRECORDED SIGHTING OF THE COMMON POCHARD *AYTHYA FERINA* (LINNAEUS, 1758) (AVES: ANSERIFORMES: ANATIDAE) IN VEDANTHANGAL BIRD SANCTUARY, TAMIL NADU, INDIA

Samidurai Jayakumar¹, Subramanian Muralidharan² & Santhanakrishnan Babu³

¹A.V.C. College (Autonomous), Mannampandal, Mayiladuthurai, Tamil Nadu 609305, India

²Division of Ecotoxicology, ³Division of Ornithology, Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Anaikatty, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu 641108, India

¹jayakumar.msv@gmail.com (corresponding author),

²ecot_mur@yahoo.com, ³sanbabs@gmail.com

Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary (12.5449°N & 79.8564°E), located 85km south-west of Chennai City, with 30ha of water spread area has been home to around 30,000 birds during the peak breeding season (November to March) for over two centuries. As part of a long-term waterbird survey in the sanctuary, on 10 January 2009 at 1430hr, we came across a duck that had red head with grey banded bill in a small patch of open water. To our surprise, we identified it as the Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*. Before the bird flew away from the sanctuary, the first author managed to get the bird trapped in his camera (NIKON D50 with 300 mm NIKOR Tele lens) (Image 1). Perusal through the available

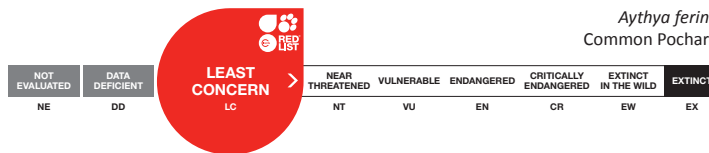
records on the Common Pochard's occurrence in Tamil Nadu revealed that the bird has been sighted for the first time in Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary.

Common Pochard is one of the four species of the genus *Aythya* that winters in India. The global population of this species is estimated at 22,00,000–25,00,000 individuals (BirdLife International 2013) and it has been categorized as Least Concern by IUCN. The breeding range of this species spans across the temperate regions of Eurasia, south-east Russia and north east China. It is a winter visitor to India and arrives by late October and departs by the end of March. It is quite common in northwestern India and more sparsely in Assam and Manipur. However, it is irregular in the south (Ali & Ripley 1969; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005; Rahmani & Islam 2008; BirdLife International 2013). None of the earlier studies have recorded the Common Pochard in Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary. However, there exist a few records from other parts of the state viz., Red Tank in Coimbatore District (Pillay 1962), Kunnathur, Orappanur and Vellari Tanks in Madurai District (Narayanan 1994), Thermal camp II in Tuticorin District (Wesley 1997), Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary in Perambalur District (Rahmani & Islam 2008) and Chenbarambakkam, Enathur and Madurantakam tanks in Kanchipuram District (Rahmani & Islam 2008) (Table

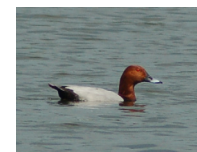


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Image 1. Photographic evidence of Common Pochard in Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary, Tamil Nadu

1, Fig. 1). Ten out of 12 sightings in Tamil Nadu during the last 23 years were outside protected wetlands such as tanks, lakes and ponds during the post-monsoon period (January). Koonthankulam Bird Sanctuary is yet another important breeding and foraging grounds for several species of wetland associated birds in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu. However, during an intensive study in this area between 2009 and 2010, the Common Pochard was never sighted (Jayakumar 2013). The available published records on this species indicate that the southernmost and southwestern winter distribution ranges for this species in India are respectively Tuticorin (8.7349°N & 78.1207°E) and Coimbatore (10.9805°N & 76.9610°E). There is no record of this species from

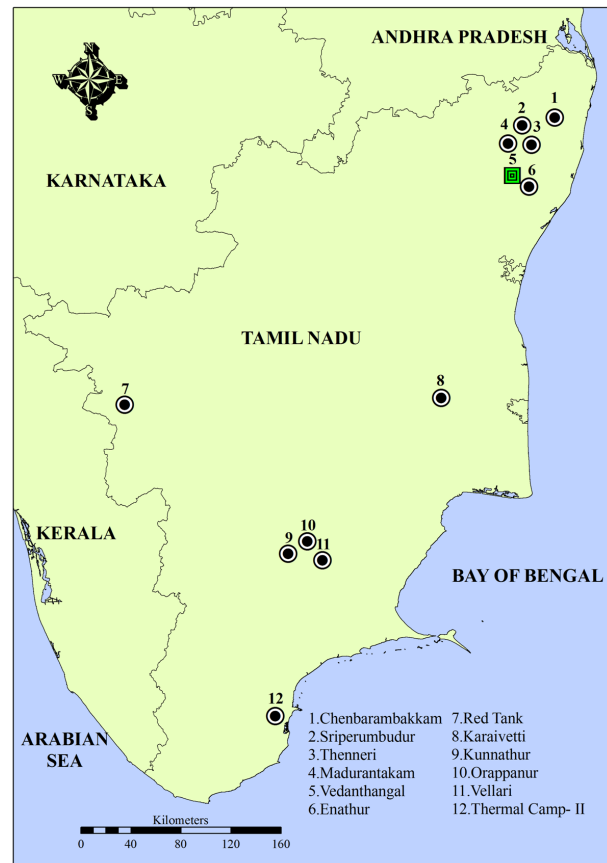


Figure 1. Map showing the distribution of Common Pochard in Tamil Nadu.

Kerala (Sashikumar et al. 2011).

According to Ali & Ripley (1969), the Common Pochard is one of the commonest diving ducks which

Table 1. Sighting records of Common Pochard in Tamil Nadu

	Location	Month & Year of sightings	Area status	Source	No. of individuals
1	Red Tank, Coimbatore	November 1961	Unprotected	Pillay 1962	6
2	Chenbarambakkam Lake, Kanchipuram	October 1984	Unprotected	Rahmani & Islam 2008	4
3	Enathur Tank, Kanchipuram	January 1984	Unprotected	Rahmani & Islam 2008	300
4	Vellari Tank, Madurai	1990	Unprotected	Narayanan 1994	-
5	Sriperumbudur Lake, Kanchipuram	January 1991	Unprotected	Rahmani & Islam 2008	108
6	Thenneri Tank, Kanchipuram	January 1991	Unprotected	Rahmani & Islam 2008	52
7	Madurantakam Lake, Kanchipuram	January 1991	Unprotected	Rahmani & Islam 2008	915
8	Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary, Perambalur	-	Protected	Rahmani & Islam 2008	-
9	Kunnathur Tank, Madurai	1991	Unprotected	Narayanan 1994	400
10	Orappanur Tank, Madurai	1991	Unprotected	Narayanan 1994	-
11	Thermal Camp- II, Tuticorin	January 1991	Unprotected	Wesley 1997	-
12	Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary, Kanchipuram	January 2009	Protected	Present study	1

prefers open water of jheels and reservoirs with submerged vegetation. Earlier sightings of this species from Tamil Nadu summarized in Table 1 also indicate that they are habitat specialists. Although Vedanthangal serves as a potential habitat for nesting birds, it has limited open water area with submerged vegetations. Therefore, it could be said that due to non-availability of suitable open water habitat, the Common Pochard did not frequent the Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary. As its occurrence was documented through a single sighting, further monitoring and surveillance in and around the sanctuary during winter is needed to elucidate the fact whether its occurrence at Vedanthangal was accidental or is regular.

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