

AVIAN ECOLOGY IN THE NORTHERN PROVINCE OF SRI LANKA

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The northern region of Sri Lanka is noted for its waterbird diversity and abundance, featuring at least 115 species of waterbirds. The Ramsar Convention defines 'waterbirds' as birds 'ecologically dependent upon wetlands'. Waterbirds are important indicators of the ecological condition and productivity of wetland ecosystems. Our studies covering the entire Northern Province starting from 2014 to date have indicated that the area harbors well over 170 species of birds (both waterbirds and other species). Several rare species breed only within the northern region. These are Spotted-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*), Crab Plover (*Dromas ardeola*), Indian Courser (*Cursorius coromandelicus*), Sooty Tern (*Onychoprion fuscatus*), Bridled Tern (*Onychoprion anaethetus*), Saunders's Tern (*Sternula saundersi*), Brown Noddy (*Anous stolidus*), and Lesser Noddy (*Anous tenuirostris*). Some of these are critically endangered, and their status has not been evaluated even in the 2012 National Red List. We are also interested in population dynamics of some of the rare species that occur in the region. Furthermore, our 3-year long study has already identified a considerable number of birding areas with a high avitourism potential. Avitourism (meaning "bird-tourism") is a growing sector of the broader ecotourism industry, which is one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism market globally.

Some of the avian specialties that breed only in the Northern Province



Left: Crab Plover (*Dromas ardeola*), Vankalai Sanctuary, Mannar. **Middle:** Indian Courser (*Cursorius coromandelicus*), Delft Island, Jaffna. **Right:** Spotted-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*), Allaipiddy, Jaffna.

All photographs by Chaminda S. Wijesundara.