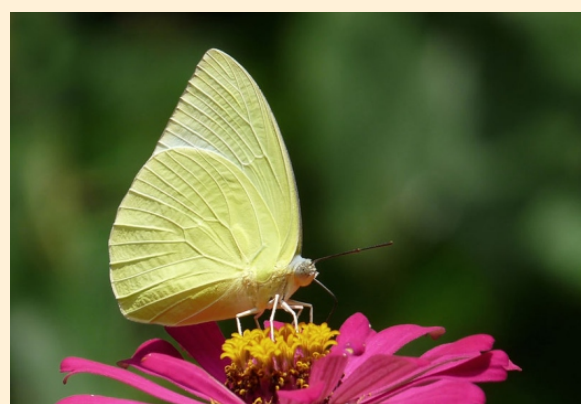


# FAUNA OF THE HILL WETLANDS OF THE NILGIRIS

Wetlands of the Nilgiris region serve as unique habitats for a variety of wildlife & flora and perform a number of important ecosystem services such as water provision, flood control, water purification, supporting biodiversity, recharging groundwater etc. Over the years, there has however been a global destruction of these valuable habitats, the scale of which is unprecedented in human history. Often regarded as wastelands, wetlands continue to be among the world's most threatened regions. The Nilgiris wetlands are no exception. They have been considered obstacles in the path of progress and hence drained, filled, despoiled and degraded for economic gains. The wetland loss has been responsible for bringing to the verge of extinction many species of animals and plants. Inadequate understanding of the crucial role and utility of wetlands is a matter of serious concern.

## COMMON EMIGRANT *Catopsilia pomona*



A very common and variable species of butterfly and a strong migrant. Visits flowers such as Indian Laburnum, Flame of the Forest and Burmese Silk Orchid.

## COMMON ROSE *Pachliopta aristolochae*



Very common and abundant after rains. Visits flowers such as Lantana, Cosmos, Zinnia, Jatropa and Clerodendron.

## COMMON JEZEBEL *Delias eucharis*



Commonly seen in gardens. The host plants are various species of small shrubs and feeds on parasitic plants like *Dendrophthoe elasticus*, *D. scurrula* and *D. falcata*.

## DANAID EGGFLY *Hypolimnna misippus*



Prefers wetlands, woodlands and open areas. Visits flowers such as Country Mallow, Common Purslane and White Barleria.

## ASIAN COMMON TOAD *Duttaphrynus melanostictus*



Asian common toads breed in still and slow-flowing rivers and temporary and permanent ponds and pools. The larvae are found in still and slow-moving waterbodies.

## COMMON SCARLET-DARTER *Crocothemis erythraea*



J.M.Garg via Indiabiodiversity.org (CC-BY)

Found in a wide range of both running and standing waters, except those that are shaded.

## GOLDEN DARLET *Ischnura aurora*



The damselfly species breeds in a variety of habitats, from marshes and tidal mangrove swamps, to ponds and lakes and wet rice fields. It occurs from the lowlands to high altitudes.

## GROUND SKIMMER *Diplacodes trivialis*



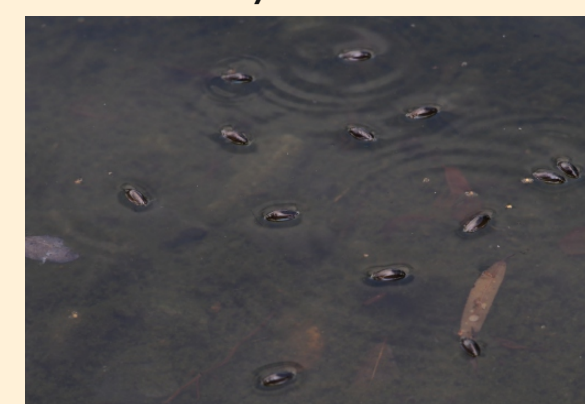
It breeds in ponds, wet fields, shallow lakes, drainage ditches and similar habitats.

## WATER STRIDER *Gerridae*



They walk on water, they devour mosquito larvae get their name from their habit of swimming rapidly in circles when alarmed.

## WHIRLIGIG BEETLE *Gyrinidae*



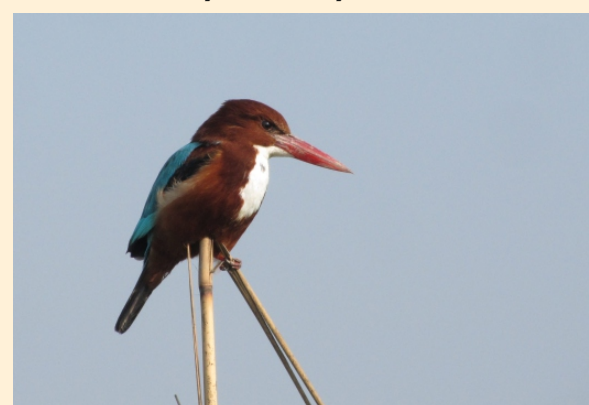
Usually swim on the surface, but go underwater when threatened. They get their name from their habit of swimming rapidly in circles when alarmed.

## GREY WAGTAIL *Motacilla cinerea*



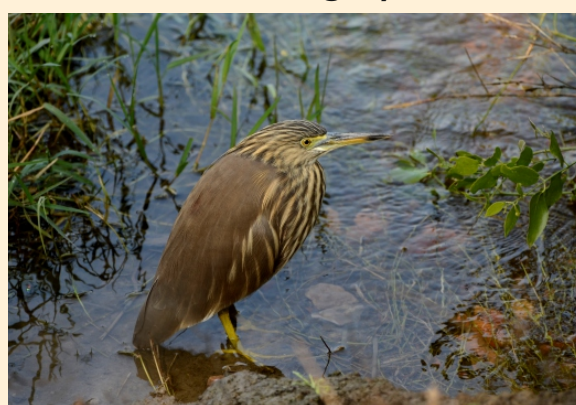
Found by streams, in forested areas and lowland watercourses. While feeding, it wags its long tail in a territorial display. Feeds on insects and water snails and tadpoles from shallow water.

## WHITE-BREADED KINGFISHER *Halcyon smyrnensis*



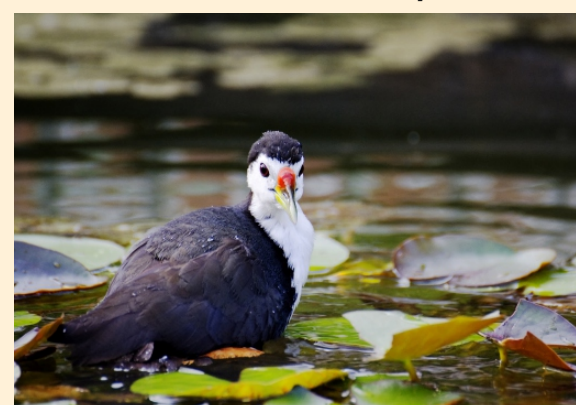
Found in inundated paddyfields, ponds, puddles, wells and on sandy seashores. Mainly feeds on large crustaceans, insects, earthworms, rodents, snakes, fish and frogs.

## INDIAN POND HERON *Ardeola grayii*



Found in a wide variety of habitats including rivers, lakes, marshes, mangroves, streams and paddy fields. Feeds on small fishes and insects.

## WHITE-BREADED WATERHEN *Gallinula chloropus*



Usually seen singly or in pairs as they forage slowly along the edge of a waterbody. They mainly eat insects and aquatic invertebrates.

## RED-WATTLED LAPWING *Vanellus Indicus*



Prefers sites in close proximity to freshwater, such as wet grasslands, rivers, streams, creeks, marshes and pools. Diet includes a range of insects, snails and other invertebrates.

## SOME OF THE THREATS TO THE WETLAND FAUNA



**Pesticide pollution:** Most vegetable growers are located in valleys close to wetlands. Pesticide pollution of wetlands reduces the "crop" of aquatic insects essential for the growth and development of aquatic birds. The use of pesticides on farmlands has further reduced the amount of safe habitat available for birds. Herbicide use, in plantations, may cause ground-dwelling birds to lose the leafy shelters that protect them against predators and bad weather.



**Invasive and exotic species:** Non native plants and trees such as Black wattle, Common grose, Scotch broom, Lantana and Eucalyptus are widespread in the Nilgiris district. Invasives are found growing on the edges of the swamps forming potentially harmful threats to the health of wetland systems.



**Grazing:** Many of the wetlands are subjected to high levels of grazing and in a number of places, pressure from cattle has increased manifold times and a large number of wetlands are shrinking in their biodiversity levels. Grazing stunts the growth of vulnerable plants and wildlife is forced to compete with cattle for the limited amount of fodder available.



**Change in landuse:** Small hill wetlands in the Nilgiris have been converted to other land use such as agriculture, tea plantations, built up area etc. The increasing proliferation of open wells in the district, often in or near wetlands is also likely to lead to the drying up of wetlands. Drastic changes in land use in the catchments of wetlands will also impact the state of the wetlands.