

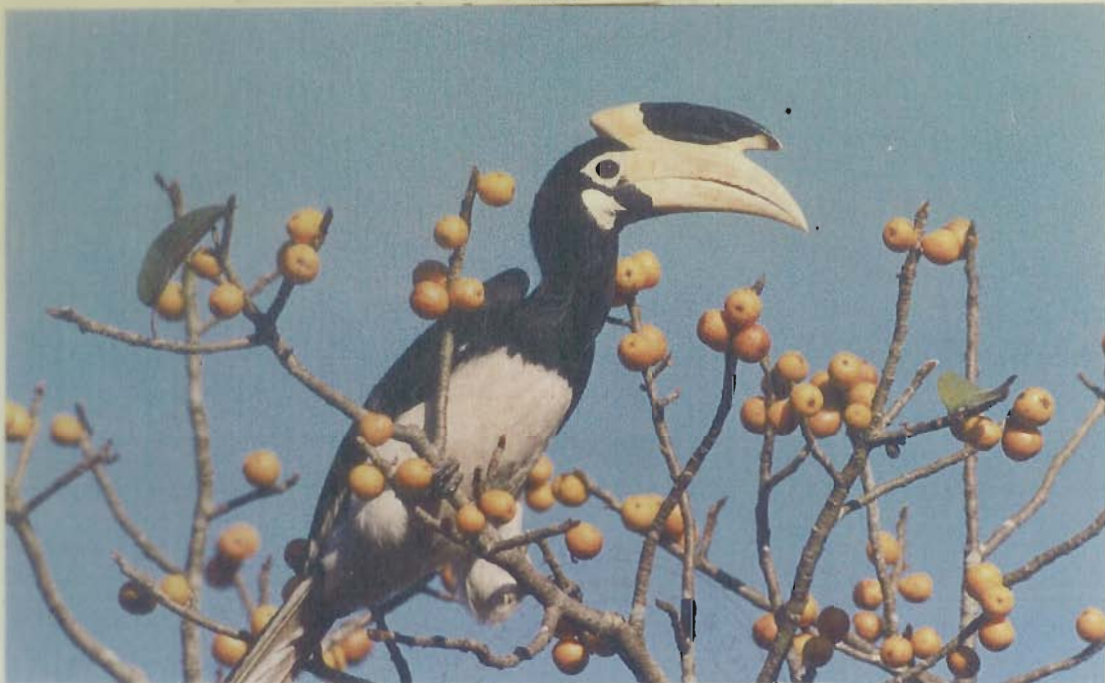
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Status and Distribution of the Hornbills in the Western Ghats

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Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology & Natural History

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SUMMARY

Hornbills are primarily frugivorous and hole nesting birds that depend on large trees in the primary forests. The rapid deforestation and other anthropogenic activities pose a major threat to their very existence in the forests. Although four species are known from Western Ghats, information on their status and distribution was lacking. Hence, the present study was undertaken to find out the distributional status of hornbills and identify their key habitats in the Western Ghats.

The survey was conducted in the Western Ghats covering Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Goa. Line Transect Method was followed to census the hornbills. During the survey, a total of 168 transects were walked covering 30 Protected Areas and 18 Reserve Forests. The habitats surveyed include tropical evergreen, semi-evergreen, moist deciduous, dry deciduous, mixed forests and plantations.

All four species of hornbills namely, Indian Grey Hornbill, Malabar Grey Hornbill, Great Hornbill and Malabar Pied Hornbill known from the Western Ghats were sighted during this study. A total of 536 hornbills of four species were sighted which include 77.8% of Malabar Grey Hornbill, 12.3% of Malabar Pied Hornbill, 7.5% Great Hornbill and 2.4% Indian Grey Hornbill. Across the habitat types, most hornbill sightings were from evergreen forests (42.9%) followed by semi-evergreen forests (27.1%). Along altitudinal gradients, Malabar Grey hornbills were sighted up to 1,500 m, while all other species were below 1000 m.

Most hornbills were sighted in the Protected Areas (76%), with the remaining outside Protected Areas. Most sightings of Great hornbills were restricted to evergreen forests (88%), Malabar Pied Hornbill to lowland riparian forests (100%) and Malabar Grey Hornbill to evergreen and semi-evergreen forests. The Indian Grey hornbills were sighted only in the dry deciduous forests.

Of the 168 transects surveyed, hornbills were sighted in 112 transects. Disturbances were recorded in 95 transects. The occurrence of monoculture plantations (28.75%), and agriculture (18.75%) formed the major disturbances.