

A rapid survey to ascertain the presence of Bastar Hill Myna (*Gracula religiosa peninsularis*) in the proposed Bailadila Iron Ore Deposit-4 Mining Site, Bacheli Village, Dantewada District, Chhattisgarh

Report Submitted to
NMDC-CMDC Ltd. (NCL), Chhattisgarh

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Technical Report No. PR-295

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Executive Summary

NCL - a joint venture of NMDC (National Mineral Development Corporation) Ltd. and CMDC (Chhattisgarh Mineral Development Corporation) Ltd., has been allocated the Bailadila Iron Ore Deposit-4 in Dantewada District, Chhattisgarh for iron ore mining. During the appraisal of the Environmental Clearance proposal (44th EAC meeting, 16 May 2025), the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) directed NCL to consult Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) regarding the presence of the Bastar Hill Myna (*Gracula religiosa peninsularis*), the State Bird of Chhattisgarh, within the proposed mining lease area and buffer zone, and to prepare a conservation plan if significant populations were to be found. Subsequently, SACON was commissioned by NCL and SACON undertook a study with the objectives of ascertaining the presence of the Bastar Hill Myna in the proposed mining area and preparing conservation plan if significant numbers were to be found.

The study combined literature review, analysis of eBird data, and two phases of field surveys (July and August 2025) across 26 trails within the lease, its buffer, and adjoining reserve forests. Surveys were conducted by walking along existing trails supported by call playback experiments, systematic recording of birds and habitat assessment. Despite intensive efforts, no Bastar Hill Mynas were recorded in either the core or buffer areas. Earlier reports (Bharos 2017; Bharos & Mandavia 2017) indicate scattered records from Bailadila and Dantewada, but no major congregations, and the nearest recent eBird records were from Kanger Valley National Park, 85 km to the east.

Our surveys recorded only a total of 44 bird species in the landscape. Although suitable fruiting and roosting trees (*Ficus spp.*, *Terminalia spp.*) were present, bird activity appeared much lower than expected for the habitat. Our enquiries and interviews with local communities revealed that hunting and trapping using catapults and airguns remain widespread. The hunting/trapping pressure may explain the apparent scarcity of frugivores and the absence of the Bastar Hill Myna.

The study infers that the Bailadila landscape is likely peripheral to the main distribution range of the Bastar Hill Myna, which is concentrated in Kanger Valley and adjoining regions, and it also concludes that no resident population of the species occurs in Deposit-4 or its 10 km buffer zone.

However, hill mynas are known to undertake local movements in search of fruiting trees. It is, therefore, recommended that regular monitoring be continued over multiple seasons by the forest department and NCL Ltd, especially during fruiting peaks with the active participation of local conservation organizations.