

# Chennai to Mamallapuram - Birding down ECR

by Kailsah

## Layout

The East Coast Road is a North-South road, roughly parallel to the Bay of Bengal. To the West of the road lies the Buckingham Canal. The Canal frequently widens into a big marsh. At a few places, the Buckingham Canal is joined by backwaters from the sea. Mamallapuram is around 40km from Thirvanmayur. This is a guide for the first half of the road, till the Crocodile Bank.

## Transport

Car, motor bikes are ideal. As there are specific birding points along the way, buses would also be very convenient. There are new hop-on hop-off buses that ply on the ECR

## Where

### 1. The Road:

The telephone/electricity wires all along the road are the best birding locations. The following are usually found on the wires

- Sparrows: Just after the toll booth to the right side of the road; usually in the mornings.

- Bee-eaters (Small Green and Blue Tailed)
- Indian Roller
- Black Drongo
- Common Swallow
- Common Hoopoe
- White Breasted King Fisher
- Bush Larks
- Black Shouldered Kite
- Rose Ringed Parakeet
- Ashy Woodswallow
- Pied Bushchat

Usually seen flying overhead:

- Booted Eagle
- Shikra
- Asian Openbill Stork

### 2. Muthukkadu:

The backwaters at Muthukkadu join with the Buckingham Canal forming a big waterway. Famous for its touristy boat house, it is also an excellent birding spot. The usual birds here are

- Pied Wagtail (There are a few that are resident there, near the boats)
- Pied Kingfisher
- Egrets
- Cormorants
- Terns (Whiskered, Little and Caspian)
- Gulls
- Painted Storks
- Grey Pelicans
- Black winged Stilt
- Sandpipers

Taking a boat during low-tide is especially good to spot the waders. An Osprey was once spotted fishing near Muthukkadu.

### **3. Kovalam - Kelambakkam road:**

At Kovalam, a road to the right takes one to Kelambakkam. The road passes through arguably the largest marsh formed by the Buckingham Canal with scrubs bordering the marsh. The entire road from ECR all the way to the start of Kelambakkam on the other side is one of the best places for birding on ECR.

- Grey Pelicans
- Painted Storks
- Egrets
- Cormorants
- Sandpipers
- Terns (Whiskered, Little and Caspian)
- Black Shouldered Kite
- Eurasian Curlew
- Little Ringed Plover
- Shikra
- Kestrel
- Pied Crested Cuckoo
- Marsh Harrier
- House Swallow, Bee-eater, drongo, Rufous Treepie etc.
- Indian Robin
- Sunbirds, Prinias and Warblers

### **5. Crocodile Bank**

Apart from the crocodiles, turtles and snakes, The Madras Crocodile Bank Trust in ECR serves as a big heronry with lots of Egrets, Night Herons, and Cormorants etc. nesting there. It is a nice place to observe the birds. Found here are

- Egrets
- Cormorants
- Black crowned Night Herons
- Small Blue and White Breasted Kingfishers
- Golden Oriole, Koel etc.

## **VERY IMPORTANT:**

Please drive carefully. The driver should not try to look at the birds, but the road. If you spot something interesting, please slow down, park on the side and walk to the bird. ECR is a narrow but very fast road, so please take appropriate precaution.

Please do not disturb the birds. Watch them from a distance.

If you see nesting birds please move away from them, and try not to photograph or crowd around them.

## **Note:**

This is not a complete list of birds spotted there, but the most commonly seen.

The availability of birds depends on the time of the day, the amount of water etc.