

Our elders say it's time to celebrate the New Year, when the Koha cries out loud. Ornithologists tell us that it's their breeding season to charm mates, which has nothing to do with any festivity. Twitchers have something to say too: Koha makes that sound mostly from March to August. Koha's mating call, in Sri Lankan culture, beckons us to rejoice over the prosperity in April.

Asian Koel essential info

Kingdom : Animalia
Phylum : Chordata
Class : Aves
Order : Cuculiformes
Family : Cuculidae
Genus : *Eudynamis*
Species : *E. scolopacea*

Also known as :
Eudynamis scolopacea
Cuculus scolopaceus
Eudynamis honanensis
Eudynamis scolopacea



An injured koel

Asian Koels drive people mad with their insistent early morning calls that actually sound like their namesake 'Koel'. The Asian Koel was a common sight in Singapore only sometime back and they gradually migrated down to the Malay peninsula with the crows.

My good friend called me one evening to say that there was this hawk like bird sitting injured on the ground while being mobbed by crows. This happened on the grounds of a church so the scene was almost metaphorical like the story in the gospels of the adulterous women caught in the act by any angry mob of Pharisees or in this case crows.

Now perhaps with the biblical phrase "Let he who has not sin cast the first stone", my gallant friend knocked the angry crows away and rescued what turned out to be an injured female Koel. Could it be that the female Koel was feeling the scene in haste after laying her egg and banged right into the church building?

My friend wrapped up the injured bird and placed it in a box. He drove the passenger to the a resident vet who nursed the injured bird back to health. He should have said: "Go and sin no more"

- From a birdwatcher in Singapore.

Cuckoo

The myth and legend

The cuckoo was the lingy bird of the Phoenicians and was mounted on their scepters. In Greece it was one of the transformations of Zeus to win Hera and it figured on her scepter.

In Hindu mythology the cuckoo represents the sun hidden by the clouds and thus the fertilizing rains. A Cuckoo and bees accompany Rama, god of love. Cuckoo folklore and superstitions abound and are often tokens of the bird's popularity as a herald of spring. There are many old rhymes and proverbs about this bird, one says:

In April the cuckoo shows his bill;
 In May he sings all day;
 In June he alters his tune;
 In July away he'll fly;
 In August go he must.

- Brewer's Myth and Legend

The crow and the koel

In times of yore, the crow and the koel had very good family links. They were interdependent. The crow was engaged in more social charity, and koel was not that efficient in social activities. Whenever the crow has to go out, koel would take care of the nest and the crow's babies. Sometimes crow doesn't show up for months. One day the koel thought of nestling against her friend by laying down her eggs in the absence of the crow. Since the koel's eggs do not take that long to hatch, she would then be able to get rid of crows. The good-hearted crow didn't notice what happened in the first place, but she realised how she had been tricked. Being a good hearted creature she made up her mind to fly remote as much as possible and never to come back. Since then koels are never said to build their own nests, but lay eggs on crows' nests.

How koel became a rain bird

There was a koel and a mother settled down close to a beach. The koel did not care about his mother the way she did about him. Whenever his mother wants him to do something, he would always do it the other way around. When the mother asks him to sit down, he stands up. When she asks to tidy up the place, he makes it an utter mess. When she wants him to bring something, he would take something away from her. Time went by so fast and the koel mother reached old age. She had enough reasons to get worried about her graveyard. She did not want her grave to be in beach, and if she expresses her consent, the son would definitely carry out what she dislikes.

She grew feeble day by day, and this made the koel son softer. Actually he was already regretting of what he had been doing to mother. So he determined to carry out mother's last wish, at least.

Koel mother who was now on the verge of death, told her son: "Son, I have something to tell you. I want you to build my grave on beach and nowhere else, please."

The mother died before she could see her son's nod. Koel laid wept bitterly. He dug the beach, laid the mother to rest and prayed for her.

He was relieved that he could at least carry out his mother's last wish. But still something made him anxious whether rain will take his mother away. But he had no option. Ever since, so says the legend, the koel would cry out loud whenever he feels signs of rains.

HARK The Koha's call!

Sachitra Mahendira

It's not so hard to locate the Koha when you travel the Google with keywords 'Asian Koel'. Koel belongs to Cuckoo family, most of the cuckoos have migrated from Singapore to settle down here.

The Asian Koel is quite welcome, because we like to hear its call to feel the *Avurudu* in.

Towards March and we can see scarlet coloured *Erabadi*, *erythrina indica* blossom.

to lure the Koha to make his announcement. Who knows, possibly the songbird knows its voice has such a melodious tone to charm the would-be significant other.

You may hear its sound, but still as ornithologists say, its slight might be thin on the ground. Because Koha is such a coy creature. It's sometimes seen settled down in deserted areas with its partner. The counterfeits that it frequents are mostly India, South China, Australasia.

The male koel sings to charm the female and the female sings at a stretch to stay away from

other males. Once settled down, they need space to themselves, after all.

The koel has a bad name for its nesting habits. Ornithologists call the poor creature a brood parasite. Which means he never builds his own nest but lays eggs on others. Its hosts - the victims of coyness - are always jungle crow and house crow in Sri Lanka, because their eggs look quite similar on the surface. A koel egg is grayish green with red brown flecks.

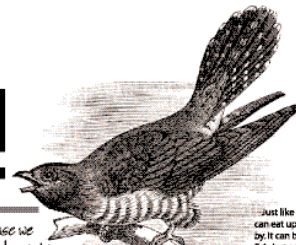
The crow egg however has a brighter brown colour. The koel is born with that knack for making the maximum of the other bird's charity. It has a

very good sense of 'nest': it lays only one or two eggs in some nests and seven or eight in most.

For the koel, doing away with the crow's eggs is easy as pie. Koel's eggs hatch much earlier than those of the crow's. It's a menace for the crow, but pity, it can't help. Sometimes the crow will fly far away never to come back. So the koel has more free time to think big on other affairs.

But, credit where credit is due, some koels are believed to build their own nests close to those of crows. Nowadays it turns out to be a different kettle of fish.

The Asian Koel is quite welcome, because we like to hear its call to feel the *Avurudu* stepping in. Towards March's end we can see scarlet coloured *Erabadi* blossom to lure the Koha to make his announcement. *2* We know, possibly the songbird knows its voice has such a melodious tone to charm the would-be significant other.



Just like the crow, the koel can eat up anything it comes by. It can be an insect, egg or a fish, but adults are mostly frugivores, creatures fed on fruits.

They in fact help trees produce more fruits chasing away other creatures.

The koel is called as 'nightingale' in India mainly because of its call sweet to the ears.

The male koel mostly seems as black as a crow, but it's mixed with glossy blue.

The female is more brownish. Underside of the both birds are striped white. Other birds of the family differ in complexion.

experts. With this long remnant of the dry weather, the crows sense a food shortage, hence they have to think better of nesting.

The folklore sees the koel as a weather bird too. Some twitches believe rain and the koel's call have a link.

But then again ornithologists argue this call is purely for the sake of breeding season and nothing else.



The Asian Koel was originally identified as *Cuculus scolopacea* based on a specimen in the Malabar region. Some subspecies are recognised as follows:

- Eudynamis scolopacea scolopacea* (Linnaeus, 1758): Pakistan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Laccadives, Maldives.
- Eudynamis scolopacea chinensis* (Cabanis and Heine, 1863): southern China, continental Indochina.
- Eudynamis scolopacea horneri* (Ingram, 1912): Hainan.
- Eudynamis scolopacea malayana* (Cabanis and Heine, 1863): S. Burma, Thailand, Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Borneo, Lesser Sundas, Lombok, Sumbawa, Sarawak, Komodo, Flores, Selayar, Palau, Iriomote (This may include the race *diola* described from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands).
- Eudynamis scolopacea mindonensis* (Linnaeus, 1766) (includes *E. s. paraguana* (Schachis, 1934) from Palawan, and *E. s. corvina* (Stresemann, 1931) from Hainan); the Philippines (including Palawan and Babuyan Islands), islands NE of Sulawesi (Talaud Islands (Karakelong, Iruang), Sangihe, Siau, Rung, Mantawai, northern Moluccas (Morotai, Halmahera, Ternate, Tidore, Most, Bacan).
- Eudynamis scolopacea affinis* (Lesson, 1830): New Guinea (except southern Irian Jaya).
- Eudynamis scolopacea minima* van Oort, 1911: southwestern New Guinea.
- Eudynamis scolopacea salvadorii* Hartert, 1900: Bismarck Archipelago.
- Eudynamis scolopacea hybrida* Diamond, 2000: Long Island, between New Guinea and New Britain.