



Natural History Snippets

Sri Lanka Natural History Society

Pages from the Murali Diaries – Part 4

Observations of an ardent birder

Introducing our guest contributor

Dr. Murali Vallipurathan is a Consultant Community Physician and member of the Field Ornithology Group, Sri Lanka. Dr. Murali, as he is generally known, continues to share his observations and photographs of birds, and other wildlife at times. His images are the inspiration for the lucid comments accompanying each image. These images and paragraphs were first circulated privately amongst the members of the Sri Lanka Medical Association's Council. They are reproduced here with his permission.

Part three was to have been the concluding part. But we have decided to continue the series for want of material from others.

A splash of gold among the bamboos! 🌿 ✨



I spotted this juvenile, Black-hooded Oriole (*Oriolus xanthornus*) perching quietly amidst the golden canes at Gampaha.

While the adults are famous for their solid jet-black hoods, crimson eyes, and coral-pink bills, this youngster is still growing into its full colours. Note the dark bill and the pale, mottled streaking on its throat—telltale signs of an immature bird before it acquires the striking contrast of adulthood. Even in youth, that radiant plumage never fails to brighten a walk through the gardens.

📍 Location: Gampaha, Sri Lanka

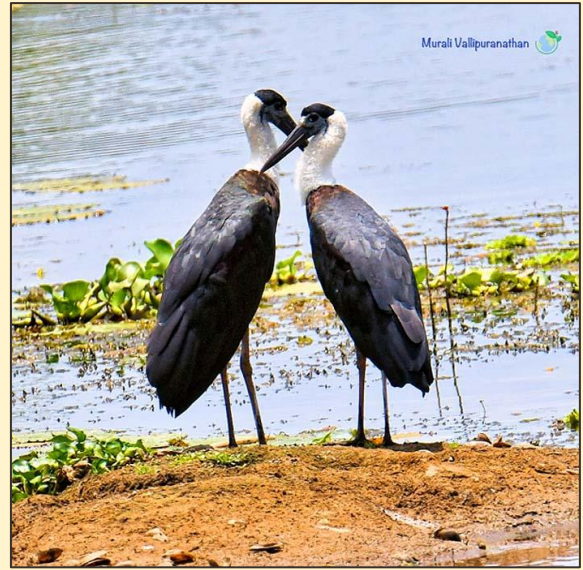
📅 Date: September 16, 2026

Murali Vallipurathan

“The black-hooded oriole is a member of the oriole family of passerine birds and is a resident breeder in tropical southern Asia from India and Sri Lanka east to Indonesia. It is a bird of open woodland and cultivation. The nest is built in a tree and contains two eggs.” [Wikipedia]

The Bond of the Woolly-necked Stork

Ciconia episcopus



A quiet display of affection by a pair of Asian Woolly-necked Storks (*Ciconia episcopus*), caught in a gentle moment of courtship and pair-bonding along the water's edge.

Location: Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka
Date of Observation: September 7, 2026
Murali Vallipurathan

These wetland storks form strong monogamous bonds, often seen standing close, gently touching bills, and engaging in mutual preening to reinforce their partnership ahead of nesting. Set against the serene backdrop of Anuradhapura's historic tanks, this intimate pose shows the tender side of these stately wetland birds.

“The woolly-necked stork, also known as the Parson stork, is a medium-sized stork at 75–92 cm tall. The iris is deep crimson or wine-red. It is found patchily across South Asia and South East Asia. Its range extends from Pakistan (where it is now very rare) through India, lowland Sri Lanka and elsewhere”. [Internet sources]



Striking a pose like it's ready for the runway!

I caught this Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) striking this incredible, dramatic sunbathing posture in Hambantota today (4.9.2026).

While usually seen standing in statue-like patience waiting for a fish, this one decided to throw its wings wide open in a classic "delta-wing" basking stance—soaking up the morning rays and showing off those magnificent grey and black plumes against the scrub jungle backdrop. Nature never fails to put on a show!

Dr Murali Vallipurathan.

4.9.2026

“The grey heron is a long-legged wading bird of the heron family, Ardeidae, native throughout temperate Europe and Asia, and also parts of Africa.

It is resident in much of its range, but some populations from the more northern parts migrate southwards in autumn.”
[Wikipedia]

A Giant Feast for Sri Lanka's Smallest Resident



Weighing barely 4 to 8 grams, the Pale-billed Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*) is officially the smallest bird on the island. Here, one wrestles with the fruit of *Muntingia calabura*—fondly known across Sri Lanka as the "Jam Fruit" (or Jamaica cherry). These birds play an essential role in dispersing its seeds, though this particular berry looks like quite the heavyweight meal!

Location: Anuradhapura District, Sri Lanka

Date: September 7, 2026

Dr Murali Vallipuranathan.

"The pale-billed flowerpecker or Tickell's flowerpecker is a tiny bird that feeds on nectar and berries, found in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and western Myanmar. The bird is common especially in urban gardens with berry bearing trees." [Wikipedia]

"*Muntingia calabura* is native from southern Mexico to Bolivia and Argentina. Its fruit is edible, and it has been widely introduced in other tropical areas." [Wikipedia]

Text and photography by Murali Vallipuranathan

Additional material and design
Malik Fernando
29.9.2026