

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE OF COMMON COOT (*Fulica atra*) AND COMMON MOORHEN (*Gallinula chloropus*) IN THE JAFFNA PENINSULA, SRI LANKA

P. Rajkumar^{1*} and C.S. Wijesundara²

¹Wetland Conservation Society, Jaffna, Sri Lanka

²Department of Zoology, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

*vpkuma82@gmail.com

The Common Coot (*Fulica atra*) is a less common breeding resident in the lowlands of the Northern part of Sri Lanka, while the Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) is a locally rather common breeding resident in the lowlands throughout the country. The significant extents of mangroves, lagoons, and ponds in the Jaffna Peninsula provide ideal habitats for both these species. Their distribution and abundance have not been studied in the area, and this may hinder the conservation activities of these species. Hence, the objective of the present study was to determine the distribution and abundance of these species in the Jaffna Peninsula. Point counts are used in this study, which was undertaken from 2013 to 2018. To observe birds, binoculars (8×40 and 10×42) and a spotting scope (25×50) were used. Peak observation hours were between 0630-0830 h and 1530-1830 h, and counts of these birds were taken monthly. Each of the 12 sites was visited multiple times throughout the study period. The total number of individuals averaged 1,724 for the Common Coot and 116 for the Common Moorhen from the 12 sites during the study period. The main sites frequented by these birds included mangrove areas such as Sarasalai, Anthanathidal, Nagar Kovil, Kudarappu and Mamunai-Chempiyanpattu, and paddy areas associated with ponds such as Nunavil, Maravanpulavu, and major ponds in the Jaffna town. The highest number of common coots (532) was recorded from the Anthanathidal area. These two species have also been recorded in the Island areas of Jaffna. The study showed that both are rare resident birds in the Jaffna Peninsula compared to other waterbird species. However, the Jaffna breeding population of both species does not currently appear to be exposed to any serious threats. The wetland areas of the Jaffna Peninsula are potentially good birding destinations, which provide opportunities for ecotourists to enjoy many rare resident species like these. Hence, more attention should be given to the conservation and ecology of such species.

Keywords: Common Coot, Common Moorhen, Jaffna Peninsula, Waterbirds