

## Death of common myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) due to entanglement with kite string and guarding of the carcass by flock mates in an urban green space of Delhi

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### Abstract

Every year, hundreds of birds have been reported injured and died across National Capital Territory of Delhi, India, largely due to entanglement in the kite string. The present report revealed on a case of entanglement of a dead individual of common myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) in a tree with a kite string and conflict between common myna and common crow (*Corvus splendens*) for protecting and snatching the carcass. Although, common mynas are social birds, the incident reveals on a typical social behaviour and response of the species.

**Keywords:** *Acridotheres tristis*, kite string, social behaviour, green space, Delhi

### Introduction

Considering the fatal nature of the Chinese manjha (a synthetic kite string coated with powdered glass, mainly use for kite flying), which not only causes injuries and deaths of birds and animals, but even humans, the National Green Tribunal has completely banned its use in the year 2017. Despite its complete ban, it is being illegally used and serving as a death trap for birds, especially larger birds. Usually, after cutting off of the string of a kite, it drops down and entwine on trees, electric wires and buildings and often birds get entangled in string and sometimes then suspended from them. Many times when the bird tries to get out of the string, the string gets stuck in its feathers and legs in such a way that it would be difficult to disentangle the birds easily. Most of bird entangling cases were reported during the Indian festivals namely, Makar Sakranti, Basant Panchami and Raksha Bandhan, during which flying of kites has been a tradition across different regions.

Common myna is an omnivorous and opportunistic bird species, which is native to central and southern Asia. It ranges from India, Afghanistan, Turkestan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka as well as much of southern China and Indochina, and there are signs of spread into Iran and north into southern Russian states and former Soviet countries (Feare and Craig 1998) [1]. Two subspecies of genus *Acridotheres* have been recognized, viz. *melanosternus*, which is endemic to southern India and Sri Lanka, and the *tristis*, which is known to have widespread distribution. The species is highly capable to adapt to a wide array of habitats, ranging from forests, agricultural fields, coastal areas, wetlands & marsh lands, flood plains, grasslands, foothill dominant areas. Besides, as a highly commensal species the bird lives in close association with human beings and found across the human habitation, roadside and urban parks as well.

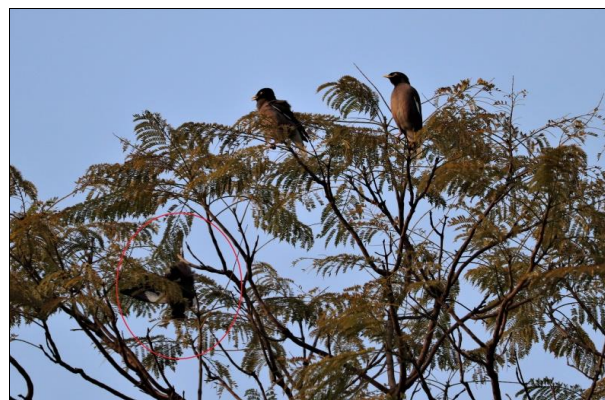
### Materials and methods

The present note reports on an incidence of death of an individual of common myna due to entanglement with kite string and guarding of the carcass by flock mates in the Hudco Park of Delhi. The park is located in south Delhi (28°56.2'23.7" N, 77°22.6'24.5" E; ~215 m) which has a territorial area of 72843.4 m<sup>2</sup>. The vegetation surrounding the site where the sighting occurred includes plant species

such as *Cassia fistula*, *Ficus religiosa*, *Ficus virens*, *Bombax ceiba*, *Bauhinia variegata*, *Callistemon viminalis*, *Polyalthia longifolia*, *Pithecellobium dulce*, *Alstonia scholaris*, *Ficus benghalensis*, *Mimusops elengi* and *Morus alba* (Puri and Joshi 2021) [2]. During the sighting, the behaviour of the common myna was observed with the help of field binoculars (Nikon Action Series, 10×50 CF) and photographs of the incident were taken with a Canon EOS-700D camera.

### Results and discussions

On 22 February 2022 (0410 h), we came across an incident in Hudco Park, an urban green space in the National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCT of Delhi) wherein a dead individual of common myna was found entangled and suspended with a string at the end of a twig of blue jacaranda tree (*Jacaranda mimosifolia*) (Fig. 1). A flock of common crow (*Corvus splendens*), comprising 4-5 individuals was observed on the spot approaching and circling across the carcass of the dead bird and were trying to snatch it. However, about 15-20 individuals of the common myna were chasing those crows to drive them away to protect their dead comrade (Fig. 2). After a while, an individual of rose-ringed parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) arrived there and sat on a branch near the dead bird (Fig. 3). As soon as the parrot arrives over there, suddenly, the two crows that were sitting on the tree and trying to snatch the bird flew away.



**Fig 1:** Two individuals of the common myna guarding the carcass (circled with red colour).



**Fig 2:** A flock of common myna making attempt to drive of an individual of common crow (sitting on a twig near carcass).



**Fig 3:** An individual of rose-ringed parakeet near carcass.

The incident went on for a longer duration and we kept watching the incident until it was a little dark. While examining the cause, it appeared that one of the legs of the bird was entangled with the string and somehow the bird was hanged in one of the thin twig of the tree. A piece of dark grey string was observed hanging from the tree, touching the ground. Regular attempts by the house crow for snatching the carcass and chasing them away by the common myna reveals on the interspecific aggression between species. Although, common mynas are social birds that roost communally, the incident reveals on a typical social behaviour and response of the species. Understanding the consequences of losing individuals from wild populations is a current and pressing issue, yet how such loss influences the social behaviour of the remaining animals is largely unexplored (Firth *et al.* 2017)<sup>[3]</sup>.

Every year, hundreds of birds have been reported injured and died across Delhi, largely due to entanglement in the kite string, which eventually causes clipped wings and blood loss. In October 2021, an individual of Eurasian Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*), a small falcon, was found entangled with kite string at the Okhla Bird Sanctuary (Dixit 2021)<sup>[4]</sup>. Later, in February 2023, an individual of black-winged stilt was found entangled in kite string near the Okhla Bird Sanctuary (Singh 2023)<sup>[5]</sup>. More than 300 birds have been estimated injured in NCT of Delhi during August 2022 due to Chinese manjha and other reasons, of which more than 250 birds were rescued by Delhi Fire Services and some NGOs (Anonymous 2022)<sup>[6]</sup>. A study reported 250

instances of birds being trapped in Chinese manjha strings in the city of Bangalore between November 2010 and June 2014, which comprised of 268 birds belonging to about 10-13 species (Babu *et al.* 2015)<sup>[7]</sup>.

Wildlife SOS, a conservation-based Non-Government Organisation, which has been involved in rescue operations of injured and displaced wildlife and care for rehabilitated populations has rescued nearly 2000 birds in 2021, including some that were injured by manjha (Gupta 2022)<sup>[8]</sup>. Similar cases of bird entanglement with kite string have also been reported from other States as well (Singh 2020; Bommakanti 2022; Parikh 2023; Vaktania 2023)<sup>[9-12]</sup>. Chinese manjha not only harms avian species, but also often leads to human casualties; in fact, in some of the cases premature deaths of people have also been reported by tangling of the string on the neck of the people. It is worth to mention that reports of the overhead electrification system damages in the Uttar Pradesh Metro Rail Corporation, causing disruption in services due to these Chinese kite strings, having traces of metals (Anonymous 2020)<sup>[13]</sup>.

The entangling of common myna in kite strings appears to have not been reported much earlier, however, an instance of rescue of the common myna from nylon kite string near Mayur Vihar in New Delhi was reported in July 2021 (Adnan 2021)<sup>[14]</sup>. A large number of winter and summer migratory birds arrive in Delhi, the capital of India every year as the landscape provides them with suitable habitat to roost. Kite string may pose a risk to the sites where migratory birds arrive and perch especially during the winter. As the use of Chinese manjha is currently one of the great menace and challenges, which need to be addressed, mass scale education and awareness campaigns are needed to be organised. This will enable citizens, especially youth to adopt green habits, to take green social responsibilities, contributing to the reform of the society and sustainability.

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