

On the Yellow-throated Bulbul in Tamil Nadu, and a plea for more self-explanatory titles

Ragupathy Kannan & Douglas A. James

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Ragupathy Kannan, Department of Biology, University of Arkansas at Fort Smith, Fort Smith, Arkansas 72913, U.S.A.

Douglas A. James, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701, U.S.A.

S reekar & Srinivasulu (2010) erroneously state that Kannan's (1993) record of the Yellow-throated Bulbul *Pycnonotus xantholaemus* was from Kerala. In fact, as pointed out in the note, the sighting was near Aliyar Dam near Valparai (which is a tea-town in the Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu), right by a roadside waterfall along the busy Pollachi-Valparai highway. The authors apparently saw the word "Anaimalais" in the title and assumed, as some people do, that the location was in Kerala. A large portion of the Anaimalai Hills (including the 1,250 km² Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary, within which Kannan's sighting occurred) lies in Tamil Nadu.

This brings into issue the need for more self-explanatory titles, especially for short notes. In this age of the information super highway with ready access to titles and citations, but often not whole documents, authors often yield to the temptation to cite from titles without reading the whole paper. Sometimes authors are unable (or simply too busy or lazy!) to look up the original papers and therefore resort to citing from secondary sources. The aforementioned error could have been avoided had Kannan titled his note "Yellowthroated Bulbul in the Anaimalai Hills of Tamil Nadu" (italics applied now for emphasis). Instead, he left it dubiously, without the italicised part, thus leaving it open to be misconstrued. Similarly, Mehta's (2010) "Possible sighting of an Oriental Honey-Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus orientalis*" could have ended with "... near Jalpaiguri, West Bengal."

Some authors in apparent haste merely glance at a title and jump into egregiously erroneous conclusions. Sengupta (1976: 340, 1982: 71) incorrectly cited Inglis (1910: 985) as having "found the Common Myna feeding on Pied Myna (*Sturnus contra*)." In fact, Inglis had reported, "Common Myna feeding young of Pied Myna" (italics ours). We reported this in our monograph on the Common Myna (Kannan & James 2001).

Sometimes titles can just be wrong and the error can only be found upon close inspection of the papers. Darwin (1871: 778), quoting Horne (1869) reported, "The Female Horn-bill (*Buceros*)... plasters up with her own excrement the orifice of the hole in which she sits on her eggs." Horne however was actually referring to the Indian Grey Hornbill, *Meniceros birostris* (now *Ocyrceros birostris*), but which he erroneously named *M. bicornis*. Darwin perpetuated the error when he incorrectly assumed Horne was describing the Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*! (James & Kannan 2007).

Most titles that start with "Unusual nest of ..." could be reworded to reflect how unusual the nest was. Bhardwaj *et al.* (2008) could have titled their paper simply, and more effectively, "Crested Bunting *Melophus lathami* nesting in a low bush." If the author(s) feels compelled to refer to the anomalous nature of the nest in the title, some clever choice of words may help, like "An unusual bush-nest of the Crested Bunting ..." See Bradley & Cooke (2001) for an example of such a title in the literature.

Errors that enter published literature are very difficult to

expunge or rectify. Titles that convey the gist of the findings are more likely *not* to be misinterpreted. "Wild Great Hornbills do not use mud to seal nest cavities" (James & Kannan 2007) is much better than a nebulous, "On the nest sealing material used by wild Great Hornbills". Similarly, "House Sparrows associated with reduced Cliff Swallow nesting success" (Leasure *et al.* 2010) is much less likely to be misconstrued than the standard, "Effect of House Sparrows on the nesting success of Cliff Swallows." Both these papers do not force the researcher to hunt down the entire paper. Although reading the whole paper is always advisable, stating the main finding unequivocally, whenever possible, in the title, reduces the likelihood of the paper being misinterpreted by someone who did not (or could not) access the entire document.

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