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From sporadic records to probable establishment of the Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* in Katima Mulilo, Zambezi Region, Namibia, in 2024–2026

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Abstract

The Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* is an adaptable invasive passerine which is closely associated with human environments. In the Zambezi Region of northeastern Namibia, earlier published records indicated sporadic occurrence. Here, we document opportunistic observations of Common Mynas in Katima Mulilo between 2024 and 2026, revealing persistent daily presence, town-wide distribution, breeding-related behaviour, and nocturnal activity associated with artificial lighting. A total of 371 observations was recorded during this period. Birds were repeatedly observed across residential and commercial suburbs, with nesting activity and prolonged occupancy concentrated at two service stations. Individuals were observed carrying nesting material, food to presumed young, and remaining active at night under artificial light from service stations. An additional nesting attempt was recorded in a damaged streetlight, with subsequent nest loss following detachment of the bulb cap. These observations suggest probable local establishment facilitated by urban infrastructure and regular human activity. Continued monitoring is recommended to assess population size, breeding success, and potential ecological impacts in the Zambezi Region.

Introduction

The Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* is among the world's most successful avian invaders, thriving in urban and peri-urban landscapes where food availability, nesting cavities, artificial lighting, and human tolerance are high (Lowe et al. 2000; Hart et al. 2020) Across southern Africa, the species has shown a capacity for range expansion and population growth following establishment, as illustrated by comparing the records from the First and Second Southern African Bird Atlas Projects (Figure 1; SABAP2 2026).

In Namibia, the Common Myna was historically rare and localised, with early records from the Zambezi Region indicating sporadic presence rather than confirmed establishment (Peacock et al. 2007). Such intermittent occurrence is typical during early invasion stages, when small founder populations may persist briefly, fail to establish, or remain undetected for extended periods (Lowe et al. 2000).

This short note documents new observations from Katima Mulilo (17°30'06"S, 24°16'43"E) between 2024 and 2026, providing evidence for a transition from occasional presence to probable local establishment, including breeding-related behaviour and nocturnal activity associated with artificial lighting.

Methods and data sources

Observations were made opportunistically between 2024 and 2026 in Katima Mulilo, Zambezi Region, Namibia. Records were collected during routine daily activities and were not part of a structured survey. For each observation, date, time, locality, number of individuals, behaviour, and geographic coordinates were recorded where possible using handheld or mobile GPS devices. In total, 371 observations were compiled over the study period. Observations were made mainly

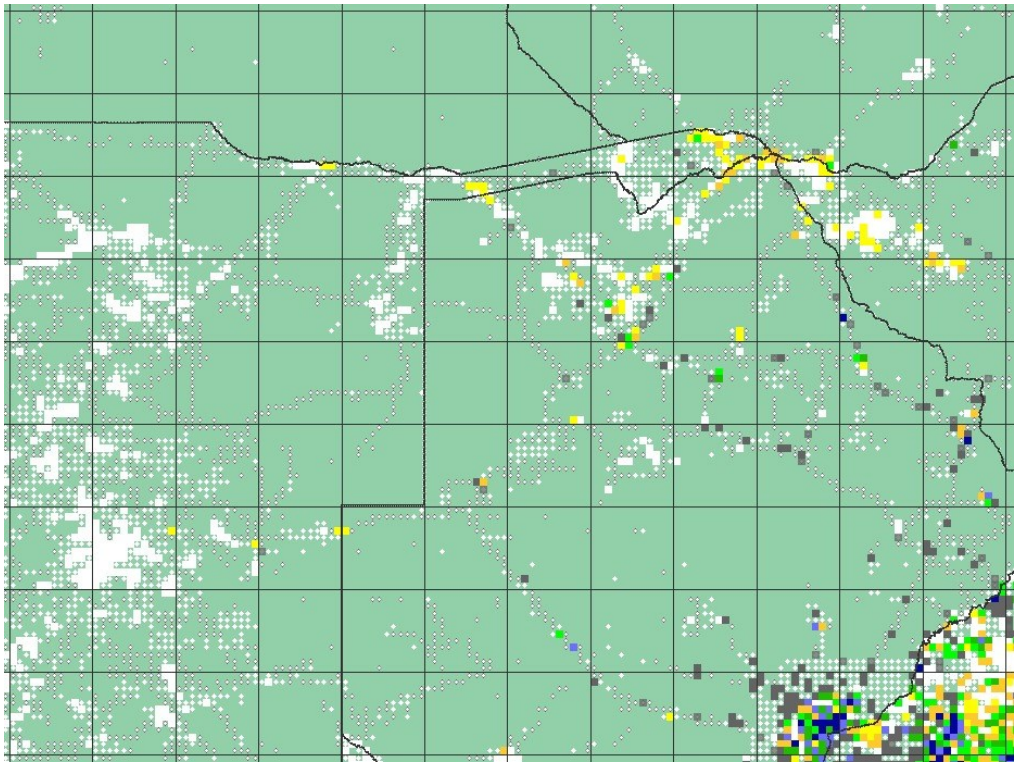

Figure 1: SABAP2 distribution map (April 2026) for the Common Myna in the Zambezi Region of Namibia and adjoining areas. Pentads shaded yellow have four or more checklists and reporting rates less than 11%; orange, 11%–26%; light green, 26%–47%; dark green. 47%–68%; light blue, 68%–85%; dark blue, greater than 85%. Common Mynas have been reported in pentads shaded grey, but have fewer than four checklists. See Underhill & Brooks (2016) for discussion of interpretation.

in urban environments, including residential suburbs, commercial zones, and along major roads. Behavioural notes included foraging, perching, vocalising, carrying nesting material, food provisioning, and activity under artificial lighting at night. A summary of observations and associated coordinates is provided in tabular form.

Results

Occurrence and spatial distribution (2024–2026)

From 2024 onward, Common Mynas were recorded daily throughout Katima Mulilo, including residential suburbs, commercial areas, and roadside environments. Birds were observed moving across multiple parts of the town rather than being restricted to single localities. Group sizes during individual observations were typically small, most commonly one or two birds.

Despite this broad spatial occurrence, repeated observations of prolonged occupancy and nesting-related behaviour were concentrated at two service stations, which appeared to function as important focal sites. At these service stations, a minimum of three individuals was consistently observed during most visits.

Habitat use and breeding-related behaviour

Common Mynas frequently used a wide range of urban structures for perching and foraging across Katima Mulilo. However, breeding-related behaviour was documented primarily at the two service stations, where birds repeatedly carried nesting material such as grass and twigs into concealed cavities within built structures (Figure 2d).

Adults were also observed transporting food items and taking turns visiting presumed nest sites, behaviour strongly suggestive of provisioning dependent young. Although nests and nestlings were not directly inspected, the frequency and consistency of these behaviours indicate active breeding. On rare occasions, larger groups were observed, with a maximum of eight individuals recorded during a single observation event.

Nesting in a streetlight

In addition to nesting at service stations, a Common Myna was observed carrying nesting material into a damaged streetlight in Katima Mulilo (MSL pers. obs). The bird repeatedly entered the light fixture through an opening in the housing, while the bulb itself remained in place. Nest material appeared to be supported by the bulb cap within the fitting (Figure 2c).

Figure 2: (a) Adult Common Myna walking and foraging on a wet urban surface. (b) Common Mynas foraging on the ground adjacent to a roadside near a service station, an area characterised by frequent vehicle movement and human activity. (c) Streetlight used as a nesting site; the bulb cap that previously supported nesting material had detached, resulting in apparent nest loss (d) Nest material protruding from a cavity beneath the roof structure of a service-station building, indicating use of built infrastructure for breeding.

On 21 January 2026, the bulb cap was found detached from the streetlight, resulting in the apparent loss of the nest. It was not possible to determine whether the detachment occurred due to the increasing weight of accumulated nesting material or as a result of deliberate removal by the electricity utility, potentially because the nest obstructed the functioning of the light (Figure 2c).

Nocturnal activity

Common Mynas were observed feeding and walking on the ground at night under artificial lighting, particularly within illuminated forecourts (MSL pers. obs). Night-time activity coincided with strong illumination and continuous disturbance from parked and refuelling heavy trucks (Figure 2b). Birds were seen moving between lit areas and perching on low structures well after sunset (19h30). No nocturnal activity was observed in unlit residential areas

Discussion

The widespread daily occurrence of Common Mynas across Katima Mulilo, combined with repeated breeding-related behaviour and site fidelity, indicates a transition in status from transient presence to probable local establishment. This pattern is consistent with invasion dynamics documented elsewhere, where urban infrastructure and human activity facilitate colonisation (Lowe et al. 2000, Peacock et al. 2007, Underhill et al. 2014)). In Jordan, where the Common Myna was first reported in 2010, urban expansion and access to food waste were viewed as key drivers in its subsequent range expansion (Eid & Khoury 2025).

Service stations in this region appear to function as core activity hubs, providing nesting cavities, predictable food resources, shade, artificial lighting, and tolerance of disturbance (Peacock et al. 2007, ISSG 2004). Birds likely range widely across the town during daily foraging movements while returning to these focal sites for roosting and breeding.

Although 371 observations were recorded, the total number of individuals present in Katima Mulilo remains uncertain. Most observations involved one or two birds, with occasional larger aggregations of up to eight individuals. This pattern may reflect repeated observations of a

small number of highly mobile birds, a growing local population, or a combination of both. Without marked individuals or systematic surveys, it is not possible to distinguish between these alternatives.

The use of a streetlight as a nesting site further illustrates behavioural flexibility but also highlights the risks associated with nesting in managed urban infrastructure, where maintenance activities or structural instability may reduce breeding success (ISSG 2024). A comparison of breeding success in rural and urban populations of Common Mynas using nest-boxes in Pakistan found that, although fledging success was greater for urban birds, the nestlings had lower growth rates and poorer body condition than rural fledglings (Sadam et al., 2026). On the University of Cape Town campus, Red-winged Starling *Onychognathus morio* chicks fed primarily "cafeteria food" also showed reduced growth rates compared to nestlings fed mainly insects (Risi et al. 2021). This suggests that dependence on anthropogenic food sources may not be ideal for urban starlings.

In addition to Katima Mulilo, Common Mynas have been observed around shop complexes in Ngoma, located approximately 68 km east of Katima Mulilo near the international border with Botswana. Current data from the Southern African Bird Atlas project (Figure 1) show low frequency of records in adjoining areas of Botswana, Zimbabwe and Zambia (SABAP2 2026). Although current observations from Ngoma are limited, continued monitoring will be important to determine whether similar patterns of establishment develop elsewhere in the Zambezi Region.

Inter-specific interactions were also observed within the urban bird assemblage. A Fork-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis* was recorded engaging in an aggressive interaction with a Common Myna over insect prey, suggesting potential competition for inverberate food resources in open urban foraging site. Northern Grey-headed Sparrows *Passer griseus* appeared to respond strongly to nesting disturbance; Common Mynas were repeatedly observed visiting sparrow nest sites and were subsequently chased, in some cases over extended distances back toward the myna's own nesting areas. Such behaviour is consistent with reports of mynas interfering with or displacing smaller cavity-nesting species through nest predation, usurpation, and competitive exclusion in urban environments (Pell & Tidemann 1997, Peacock et al. 2007, Grarock et al. 2012).

Marico Sunbirds *Cinnyris mariquensis* nesting in nearby service station canopy did not appear visibly disturbed by myna presence. This apparent tolerance may reflect differences in nesting requirements. For example, Marico Sunbirds can utilise small cavities, narrow pockets, or finely concealed nesting spaces that may be less accessible to the larger-bodied Common Myna. These observations suggest that nest-site architecture and body-size constraints may mediate the intensity of interspecific conflict in urban habitats (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Northern Grey-headed Sparrows occupying a narrow cavity beneath the service station canopy in Katima Mulilo, Zambezi Region, Namibia. The restricted entrance width and confined nesting space may reduce accessibility to larger-bodied Common Mynas, potentially limiting nest-site interference in urban environments.

Conclusion

Opportunistic observations from 2024–2026 indicate that Common Mynas now form a regular component of the urban avifauna of Katima Mulilo. Town-wide distribution, nesting activity, and nocturnal behaviour under artificial lighting suggest probable local establishment. Continued documentation and structured monitoring are recommended to clarify population size, movement patterns, and ecological impacts.

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