



## A visit to Karripode Village

**Karripode, situated on the border with Tamil Nadu, is a sanctuary for the Malabar hornbill and several other colourful birds. ■ by Murli Menon**

**O**ne can have a close encounter with nature at Karripode village, in Kerala state. Karripode is a 30-minute drive from Pallakad, on the fringes of the Neliampathy Hills. The historical vil-

lage of Chittoor lies along the way.

We were welcomed by a group of cattle egrets flying in formation, as soon as we entered Pallakad. We started our jungle safari in an open Jeep and soon found ourselves in the

middle of a thick, evergreen forest, with no habitation as far as the eye could see. After 30 minutes of cruising through the jungle, we came to a large water-body at the distance, which we later discovered is not a





lake but a fresh-water spring surrounded by rocks. The water is crystal-clear and surrounded on all four sides by small, rocky hills.

On the edges of this giant lake, we found hundreds of birds. It was a pleasure to watch them at close quarters, as they flocked to the edge of the water. The water is shallow and swampy and boating is not possible, so we have to be content to watch the

birds from a distance. However, the deep-blue sky, reflected in the clear waters is a joy to behold. Watching the crimson sunset over the *parakund* (Malayalam for 'rocky lake') is memorable.

After a brief stop to watch the birds, we went deeper into the jungle. After an hour of driving through the jungle, we could get a glimpse of the Malabar hornbill. These magnificent birds are black but have two large, elliptical, brown spots, one on each side of their large, yellow beaks, which makes them look incredibly attractive.

Hornbills are shy creatures and fly away at great speed on hearing the sound of an approaching Jeep. Hence, the ideal strategy to spot these gentle birds is to alight from the vehicle at a distance and stealthily trek towards them—and shoot with the camera, as I did! Hornbills live on coconut trees and use their beaks to break open dried coconuts and eat the coconut flesh.

Karripode, situated on the border with Tamil Nadu, is a sanctuary for the Malabar hornbill and several other colourful birds. This extraordinary area gets partly inundated by about two feet of water during the monsoon months (July-September). Once below sea-level, this area was raised by earth movements, which cut it off from the Eastern Ghats. It was broken into flat farmlands by later earth movements (where people can be seen growing rice) and higher

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grounds with sandy, salt-free soil.

The hornbill depends on the thorny scrub of the higher ground for its feed. The other wildlife at Karripode includes blue-bull, wolf, hyena, fox, jackal, wildcat, and caracal.

#### How to get there

Karripode is 15 km from Pallakad town. The non-stop drive from Pallakad to Karripode should not exceed 30 minutes. The nearest airport is at Coimbatore, 44 km away. Coimbatore is connected by direct flights from most Indian cities.

Pallakad railway station is the nearest railhead to Karripode. From Pallakad private buses ply to Karripode. All trains going to Kochi and Thiruvanthapuram via Coimbatore stop at Pallakad.

#### Where to stay

Homestays are the only option for tourists, who want to visit Parakund. A family of four can avail a homestay at Rs 500 per night, exclusive of food. Breakfast, lunch and dinner, which includes traditional Kerala delicacies like *idlis*, *dosas*, *injipuli* (ginger with tamarind), rice and *elisseri* (pumpkin) can be home delivered from the small eateries at Karripode.

#### Where to eat

Lots of small restaurants serving Malayali vegetarian cuisine dot Pallakad. Freshly-steamed vegetables with spices, cooked in coconut milk, with hot, freshly-steamed idlis are available at most roadside *dhabas*. The food in high-profile hotels is only for the gastronomically adventurous, who like greasy food. Vegans can opt for fresh, tropical fruits, including water-melons, papayas, tender coconuts, pineapples, which are available at the local market. ■

