

First records of Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* and Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus* from Kerala

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During regular bird monitoring on 19 September 2013, at Madayippara (12°02'N, 75°16'E; c. 40–47 m asl), a laterite hillock overlooking the Arabian Sea in Kannur district, Kerala, PCR spotted a strikingly plumaged wader with longish neck, short legs and a medium length bill slightly decurved at tip. It was among a flock of Lesser Sand Plovers *Charadrius mongolus*, Little Stints *Calidris minuta*, Curlew Sandpipers *C. ferruginea*, and Broad-billed Sandpipers *Limicola falcinellus*. PCR tentatively identified the bird as a Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris/Ereunetes melanotos* with the help of field guides (Dunn & Alderfer 2006; Grimmett *et al.* 1998). After a short while, another wader flock landed at a certain distance and another unfamiliar plover was seen in it. This bird was of the size of a Greater Sand Plover *C. leschenaultii* with pale brown plumage, long and dull greenish-yellow legs, a broad white supercilium, black bill, faint breast-band, and a white wing-bar in flight. PCR could not identify this plover. KMK and JT joined the birding in the afternoon and took photos of both the birds. On 20 September 2013, PCR and JT surveyed Madayippara but could not locate the birds. That same day Muhamed Jafer Palot and K. V. Uthaman joined PCR at 1000 hrs and found the Pectoral Sandpiper feeding with Lesser Sand Plovers, and took more photographs.

C. Sashikumar and HSS independently examined the photographs taken by KMK and K. V. Uthaman on 21 September 2013 and confirmed that the species was indeed a Pectoral Sandpiper [69]. The identification was fairly straightforward as

the only other calidridines in this size range, with yellow legs, are Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*, and the vagrants—Sharp-tailed *C. acuminata* and Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis*—but neither have the strong breast demarcation of the Pectoral.

On 21 September 2013, PCR and KMK again visited Madayippara at 0800 hrs and found both birds at different locations and could take more photographs. The plover was feeding alone, away from a flock of Lesser Sand Plovers [72]. When approached, it moved away slowly, keeping a distance. In flight, the bird uttered a single-note “kek” call. Later the Pectoral Sandpiper was found feeding with a flock of Lesser Sand Plovers, Curlew Sandpipers, and Little Stints.

That day, at 1300 hrs, HSS along with a group of birdwatchers, including Praveen J., Dipu Karuthedathu, Manoj Sharma, Muhammed Jafer Palot, and K. V. Uthaman, visited Madayippara to look for the Pectoral Sandpiper but they were unaware of the plover seen on the previous day. However, the team picked up the unidentified plover quickly from the wader flock and HSS readily identified it as a Caspian Plover *C. asiaticus*. More birding revealed at least six different Caspian Plovers and several photographs of different individuals were taken by the photographers in the group. Within c. 30 min, the Pectoral Sandpiper was found by the group in a flock of waders. Unfortunately, it took off quickly, before everyone could observe it, and soon after it started raining. After a brief interruption, the birdwatchers were once again out in the field and Dipu Karuthedathu located the Pectoral Sandpiper

Photos: K. Chowva



69. Pectoral sandpiper.



72. Caspian Plover.



70. Pectoral Sandpiper.

again enabling everyone to observe the vagrant closely and take photographs.

On 22 September, PCR, KMK, and JT visited Madayippara at 0800 hrs and saw a single Caspian Plover feeding away from the flock of Lesser Sand Plovers. The Pectoral Sandpiper was found feeding with another flock of Lesser Sand Plovers.

After 22 September, there was a gap of sightings for a few days despite regular visits by PCR. However, on 29 September, PCR, KMK, and Jainy Kuriakose visited Madayippara at 0800 hrs and found the Caspian Plover feeding a little away from a flock of Lesser Sand Plovers but could not trace the Pectoral Sandpiper despite a thorough search.

On 01 October 2013, PCR observed a single Caspian Plover feeding with Lesser Sand Plovers but there was no trace of the Pectoral Sandpiper.

Field characters of Pectoral Sandpiper

General jizz

The Pectoral Sandpiper at Madayippara had flatish back, potbelly, short legs, rather long rear end and smallish head on a neck which appeared short while it was feeding but longish when it was 'worried' [70].

Head and crown

Forehead, crown, and nape were buffish, streaked dark brown; conspicuous off-white supercilium; dark brown eye-stripe. Rest of the face buffish, streaked brown; brownish smudge on ear-coverts.

Other upper parts

Feathers of upper parts brown with blackish-brown shaft-streaks and brown/buffish fringes. Breast washed buff, heavily streaked dark brown, and sharply demarcated from unmarked white belly. Upper flanks, vent, and under tail coverts with three-four dark streaks.

Under parts

Dark blackish-brown streaks on off-white background, across the entire width of the breast, forming a uniform gorget contrasting sharply with the white belly. This 'pectoral band' was conspicuous, even in flight. The remaining under parts were white, although two or three streaks extended below the gorget at the extreme



71. Pectoral Sandpiper in flight.

sides of the breast.

Bare parts

The slightly decurved bill was blackish with the basal third brownish yellow; legs dull yellow; iris blackish.

Other features

Its flight appeared swift. It resembled a Reeve in flight and appeared larger in the air than on the ground. In flight it appeared quite dark brown except for the white belly [71]. The wing stripe was almost inconspicuous or faint but with prominently broad black center to the rump and tail. The toes did not project beyond tail-tip. The dark breast or 'pectoral' was always very prominent [69]. The under wing coverts and auxiliaries were whitish contrasting with dark breast band.

Behaviour

As already noted, the bird was loosely associating with other waders and feeding in wet grassy areas. The presence of many birders did not seem to worry the bird.

Field characters of Caspian Plovers

There were probably five or six birds at Madayippara on 21 September. At least two birds were seen well and these two were juveniles. Both these birds had feathers of upper parts very distinctly edged sandy buff giving them a 'scaly' appearance [73]. The forehead and broad supercilium were white; crown



73. Caspian Plover.

Photo: K. Chouva



74. Caspian Plover in flight.

scalloped with white fringes; ear-coverts darkish brown and no lores except for a small variable smear in front of the eye. Very faint buff smudge on breast and white belly were distinctive. In flight, from above, brownish with dark wings and sides of tail. The narrow wing bar formed by white on inner primaries was quite prominent as was the white shaft on outer primaries [74]. Toes projected just beyond tail. The bill was black and legs appeared dull greenish yellow.

Discussion

Pectoral Sandpiper occurs in Taymyr east through the Chukotskiy Peninsula to western and northern Alaska, north-central Canada, western Hudson Bay, the Yamal Peninsula, and north-western Siberia (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). Thus the breeding range of Pectoral Sandpiper is almost as extensive in northern Siberia as in North America (Hayman *et al.* 1986), yet the vast bulk of the population migrates to South America, and small numbers regularly migrate to south-eastern Australia, and New Zealand (Geering *et al.* 2007). Vagrants have reached Africa, the Middle East, East Asia, India (Hayman *et al.* 1986; Urban *et al.* 1986; Shirihi 1996; Eguchi *et al.* 2000; Carey *et al.* 2001; Undeland & Sangha 2002), Kuwait (www.birdsofkuwait.com/blog/), UAE (www.uaebirding.com/olduaenews.html), and Oman (www.birdquest-tours.com/pdfs/.../Oman), reinforcing the status of this species as a truly global wanderer.

The migratory routes of Pectoral Sandpipers in North America are relatively well understood. However, the migratory strategy of their Siberian breeding population adds a "twist to the story" (Lees & Gilroy 2004). Their breeding range in Siberia is almost as extensive as that in North America, suggesting that a surprisingly high proportion of the world population may breed in the Old World (Hayman *et al.* 1986). This population apparently uses the same South American wintering grounds as the Nearctic population, since there have been recoveries in Siberia of birds ringed in Saskatchewan and Kansas during autumn migration but few birds may migrate through eastern Asia, south to Japan and Korea (Cramp & Simmons 1983) on their way to Australia and New Zealand.

It is also possible that few birds migrate via Europe, perhaps spending the non-breeding season in Africa (Chandler 2009). However, the recent occurrence of a Pectoral Sandpiper in Mauritius provides evidence in support of the idea that at least some of the birds arrive directly from Siberia (Hockey & Douie 1995). A surprising number of records do exist from the African region. For example, Sinclair *et al.* (1993) describe Pectoral Sandpiper as a 'rare but regular (austral) summer visitor' to southern Africa.

Elsewhere, there are records of Pectoral Sandpipers from several sub-Saharan West African nations, including Mauritania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Ivory Coast, Ghana, and Gabon and Principe, from between October and March (Borrow & Demey 2001). Vagrants have also occurred in East Africa, with at least two records from Kenya and one from Burundi (Stevenson & Fanshawe 2002).

The occurrence of the rare vagrant at Madayippara possibly resulted from autumn movements as noted above. However, due to paucity of records it is difficult to speculate on the destination of the bird. It is not implausible that it belonged to the Siberian population that regularly migrates to Australia on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. On the other hand, if we accept that there is a potential of small, but viable, populations of Pectoral Sandpipers wintering in Africa, based on several records as already mentioned, it could be heading to Africa. This explanation holds well for Caspian Plover as non-breeding birds occur in eastern and southern Africa. Their migratory routes are not well understood; autumn migrants probably move across Red Sea to pass through Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, and Zambia to Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa (Urban *et al.* 1986). Some individuals and small flocks that have drifted outside their normal range to the Indian Subcontinent spend winter here, but others could be flying directly to Africa after 'hopping' in the Indian Subcontinent. One might speculate that migration to Africa via the Indian Subcontinent could be a secondary route, followed by a small fraction of the overall population that has drifted eastwards. The large number of records (Sangha *et al.* 2010), the consistency of arrivals, especially of small flocks, is perhaps also a strong indicator of a regular migration.

The Pectoral Sandpiper is a vagrant to the Indian Subcontinent (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Kazmierczak 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) on the basis of a single sight record from Harike, Punjab (31°13'N, 75°12'E) on 10 and 11 May 1998 by HSS and Per Undeland (Undeland & Sangha 2002). Although occurrence of the Pectoral Sandpiper at Madayippara is the second record for the Indian Subcontinent, and first record for Kerala and peninsular India, this is the first photographic record of the species from the Indian Subcontinent.

The Caspian Plover, though considered a vagrant to the Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Kazmierczak 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), is probably an overlooked species (see Sangha *et al.* 2010). Although this is a first record of this species from Kerala, as it is not listed by Sashikumar *et al.* (2004, 2011), it is not unexpected, as it has been recorded a few times in peninsular India and Sri Lanka (Kazmierczak *et al.* 1993; Balachandran 1994; Elamon 2013), and Goa (Lainer 2004).

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Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* recorded in Rajasthan, India in 2001

Magnus Ullman

Ullman, M., 2014. Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* recorded in Rajasthan, India, in 2001. *Indian BIRDS* 9 (3): 67–68.

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On 03 February 2001, I visited the river junction at Sangam with a group of Swedish birdwatchers. Sangam is south-east from Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan (25°50'N, 76°33'E).

While walking along the river shore we got very bad views of a gull flying off at eye-level. My own reaction was, "There is no gull with such a wing pattern in this area," concluding that it was stained or aberrant (it was obviously larger than a Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*). Only afterwards did I learn that someone actually had mentioned Kittiwake.

Well, the odd gull was entirely forgotten as we enjoyed great views of c. 80 Small Pratincoles *Glareola lactea* as well as Black-bellied Terns *Sterna acuticauda*, Brown-headed Gulls *Chroicocephalus brunnicapillus*, and Great Black-headed Gulls *Ichthyophaga ichthyophaga*.

After lunch we resumed our birding when I suddenly, at 1430 hrs, spotted a first-winter Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* leisurely flying south along the river. The others' attention was immediately drawn to the gull and at a distance of c. 200 m we could follow it in our telescopes as it continued south in steady flight with somewhat stiff wing beats, typical of the

species. The visibility was good, and we had the sun from behind for at least 30 seconds, after which the bird was flying towards the sun, but still being lit from the side.

Description

Pale grey saddle and inner fore-wing. Well-defined, narrow black hind-neck band. Obvious black upperwing W-pattern with approximately four outer primaries solidly black and gleaming white "triangle" covering secondaries, greater coverts and inner primaries. Underwing white. Tail with very shallow fork and black terminal band. Bill black [Fig. 1].

Identification

The bird was immediately identified, simply because there was no alternative! The only regular gull with a similar W-pattern in the area is first-winter Little Gull, which, however, has more dark grey and less pitch black in primaries, dark bar along the base of the secondaries, sooty crown, and different and more fluttering flight apart from being obviously smaller. Little Gull was not even considered at the time of observation.