

Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis* from northern Kerala : a third record for India

P. C. Rajeevan & Jayan Thomas

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 P. C. Rajeevan, Pandanchira, Kizhuthally, Kannur, Kerala, India. Email : p.crajeevan@yahoo.in [PCR]
 Jayan Thomas, Cannanore Eye Hospital, Kannur 670001, Kerala, India. Email: jayanthoms7080@yahoo.in [JT]

This note describes the sighting of a Nearctic vagrant, the Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis* from Madayipara, Kannur district, Kerala. Madayipara (12°01'N, 75°15'E) is a laterite hillock on the south-western coast of India, situated in Madayi village near Payangadi town in the Kannur district of Kerala. The area is largely a plateau with grassy meadows and rocks interspersed with very few trees or shrubs. There are several small pools amidst the rocky spots apart from two large artificial tanks.

This small area is rich in biodiversity (Palot & Radhakrishnan 2005) and is one of the best over-wintering areas in Kerala for migrants like Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*, Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*, Lesser Sand plovers *C. mongolus*, Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*, and Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* (Sashikumar *et al.* 2011). Reports of the first sightings from Kerala of birds like Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* (Sashikumar *et al.* 2011), and Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* (Rajeevan *et al.* in press) were also from Madayipara.

Details of the Sighting: While watching waders at 1115 hrs on 30 October 2011, PCR spotted a small wader that looked different in plumage and structure from the accompanying Lesser Sand Plovers; it had yellow legs and pearly-edged wings. The bird was smaller and slimmer than the accompanying sand plovers, with a short, pointed, stint-like bill, and seemed more like a small Pacific Golden Plover in general plumage. PCR recollected seeing a bird with yellow legs on 28 October 2011, also in the same area at 0830 hrs, but was unable to watch it at close quarters then. On this day, while the bird was under close observation by PCR, JT inched closer to get some photos of the bird. The bird was observed for about 30 min, from as close as 15 m. The bird was also spotted on 1 and 2 November by PCR, and was last seen on 3 November by JT & PCR when it was filmed. The

bird could not be located after this date despite several visits and detailed searches by PCR. Hence, it seemed to have been around for at least three days and possibly a few more days earlier prior to 30 October.

Behaviour: The bird was feeding on a small patch of burnt-out grass by the side of a pool near a rocky area. It was actively feeding, a little away from the plovers, with its head bobbing while feeding. The bird was silent at all times and had striking sun-flower yellow legs. At times a plover would butt this bird with its head and the bird would flee to a side and start feeding again. The bird was not shy as we could approach as close as 15 m, without flushing it. Whenever the plovers took off, this bird also would join them, but was usually the last one to take to the air.

Field features: The bird was a generally drab, buff-coloured, wader with scalloped upper-parts. Its crown, nape, hind-neck, and upper mantle were streaked with fine blackish lines. It had a dove-like plain buff head with a dark eye and a pale eyering that stood out in an otherwise non-descript buff face. The bill was short, black, and straight, and was nearly equal to the length of the head measured across the eye. Mantle, scapulars, wing coverts, and tertials had black-centred feathers. The breast was buff with small black spots on its sides. The chin seemed paler brown than the face and fore-neck. The neck and breast were buff in colour and the rest of the under parts gradually faded to a whitish colour from rear belly, and vent to the under-tail coverts. In flight, the bird showed white on the under-wing, but no hint of white on the upper-wings, tail, or rump.

Photographs (Figs. 1 & 2) showing all the field features were widely circulated for expert opinion. Though the plumage showing pale eye-ring, unmarked face, and spots on the sides of breast was convincing enough for identifying a Buff-breasted Sandpiper, photographs of lone birds are liable to be confused



Fig. 1. Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis*.



Fig. 2. Buff-breasted Sandpiper *T. subruficollis* amidst *Eriocaulon* sp.

Table 1. Table of past records of Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis* from South Asia

Date	Location	Observer(s)	Reference
5 March 1960	Kalameiya Lagoon, near Hambantota, Southern Province, Sri Lanka	TSE De Zylva	Norris 1960
November 1974	Trincomalee, Sri Lanka	JC Sinclair	Phillips 1978
19–23 January 1985	Bundala Sanctuary, Sri Lanka		Hoffman 1992
18 May 1996	Harike, Punjab, India	Per Undeland	Robson 1996
18 November 2000	Santa Cruz, Goa, India	Rick Heil, Paul Holt & other birders	Holt & Heil 2003

Photos: Jayan Thomas



Fig. 3. Buff-breasted Sandpiper *T. subruficollis* with Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*.

for a juvenile Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*, as there is no indication of size in such pictures. However, the picture (Fig. 3) showing the bird next to a Lesser Sand Plover enabled size comparison and clearly helped in clinching it as a Buff-breasted Sandpiper, one of the rarest of the South Asian vagrants. It happens to be the first time that this species has been photographed from this region.

Breeding in the northern Nearctic, and wintering in the southern Neotropics, this species is frequently vagrant nearly worldwide (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). However, it has been reported just five times from South Asia, one record per decade, and twice within Indian limits (Table 1). This autumn

was particularly interesting for this species with several birds windblown to the coast of United Kingdom due to hurricanes in the West Atlantic (Mike Prince *pers. comm.* November 2011).

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Feeding record of the Green Cochoa *Cochoa viridis* in Pakke Tiger Reserve, Arunachal Pradesh

Nandini Velho

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Nandini Velho, Junior Research Fellow, National Centre for Biological Sciences, GKVK campus, Bangalore, Karnataka, India. Email: nandinivelho@gmail.com
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The Green Cochoa *Cochoa viridis* is a shy, arboreal, and frugivorous bird. It is fairly widespread in north-eastern India and South-east Asia (del Hoyo *et al.* 2005). Little is known of its diet though it is reported to feed broadly on berries, insects, and molluscs (del Hoyo *et al.* 2005). Bishop (1999), recorded two instances of Green Cochoa foraging in the mid-storey of subtropical forests at 1,000 m, and on exposed tops of tall trees within a mosaic of partially degraded subtropical forest at 1,400 m. On both those occasions, there were no details on what the cochoas fed on.

In 2010, I sighted the Green Cochoa in the foothill forests

(150 m ASL) of Pakke Tiger Reserve (26°54'–27°16'N, 92°36'–93°09'E; 862 km²), in eastern Arunachal Pradesh. As part of a larger study on avian frugivory in the area, fruit tree watches on several bird-dispersed tree species were conducted from 0600 hrs to 1100 hrs. Focal tree watches were conducted on a *Litsea* sp. which was seen to be fruiting in February–March. Fruits of these species are drupaceous, occur in clusters, and have a diameter of 9.09 mm. This tree species belongs to the predominantly bird-dispersed Lauraceae family (Datta & Rawat 2008).

On 14 March 2010 at 0748 hrs a Green Cochoa was observed feeding on the fruits of a *Litsea* sp. The bird spent nearly three