

First record of Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* from Kerala

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This note describes the sighting of Collared Pratincoles *Glareola pratincola* from Madayipara, Kannur district, Kerala. Madayipara (12°01'N, 75°15'E) is a laterite hillock, situated at Madayi village near Payangadi town in Kannur district of Kerala. Situated about 23 km from Kannur, it is a small plateau, almost dry, with a few trees and shrubs and lots of weeds and few monsoon rocky pools and two large ponds.

Madayipara is known for its rich diversity of endemic and endangered flora and migratory birds (Palot & Radhakrishnan 2005). The overwintering of some migrants here, like Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*, Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*, Lesser Sand Plover *C. mongolus*, Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*, Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*, etc., is noteworthy. Both, Oriental- *G. maldivarum*, and Small Pratincole *G. lactea* are occasionally seen here.

While searching for the Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis* on 3 November 2011 at 0615 hrs (Rajeevan & Thomas 2012), PCR and JT saw two pratincoles along with 200 Lesser Sand Plovers. Dawn was breaking and the pratincoles were seen occasionally resting and feeding on the ground, plover-like in behaviour. The birds were not too shy and hence a couple of good photographs, and a video, were also taken of the resting bird by JT. We could approach up to 12 m from the birds. The birds were there for 30 min, and when they flew away PCR noticed a deeply forked tail; he could not appreciate any white trailing edge on the wings. PCR doubted whether these could be Collared Pratincoles. Then suddenly the Buff-breasted Sandpiper turned up and we were glued to it.

The photographs [42-44] were put on the back burner. Later, when they were scrutinised, it appeared that the tail streamers touched the tip of the wings. It was then that we decided to contact Praveen J. There was much discussion regarding the pratincoles on the "Kerala Birder" Yahoo e-group but the identity of the bird remained inconclusive.

The bird was the size of a Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*. Its bill was black, short, on a red base, with a down-curved tip. The legs were dark olive. The bird has pale brown upper parts, buffy sides, and white belly. It had a conspicuous buff throat patch bordered by a narrow black line. The tail tip reached the tip of closed wings when the bird was resting on the ground. In flight it had a pronounced forked tail.

Subsequently, we contacted Gerald Driessens, the Belgian authority on pratincoles (Driessens & Svensson 2005). He replied, "The pratincole is definitely a (female) Collared. Indeed it looks somewhat compact and the nostril shape looks oval, which fits Oriental. But nostril shape is difficult to use in field. The pale plumage fits Collared much more, and the length of the outer tail feathers reaching more or less to the tip of the folded wings rules out Oriental. I also see that the bleaching of the outer and inner webs of the innermost visible primaries is large on the inner than on the outer webs, what we see on Collared but (probably) never on Oriental." (Gerald Driessens *pers. comm.* June 2012).

Unlike what is mentioned in field guides, apparently there is considerable overlap of features between Collared-, and Oriental pratincoles (Driessens & Svensson 2005) hence, in the absence of in-flight photographs, identification is certainly difficult. The



42. Collared Pratincole *G. pratincola* in Kerala.



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Table 1. Records of Collared Pratincole from India outside Gujarat

Location	Date	Reference
Unknown locality in Punjab	Undated	Rasmussen & Anderton 2012
Ratnagiri, Maharashtra	22 August 1879	Prasad 2004
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu	28 December 1955	Abdulali 1956
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu	9 January 1956	Abdulali 1956
Shey iron bridge, Ladakh	25 August 1997	Pfister 2001
Carambolim, Goa	22 November 1998	Lainer 2004
Divar-Navelim, Goa	9 September 1999	Lainer 2004
Madayipara, Kerala	3 November 2011	Current record

tail-to-wing length ratio is clearly visible in the photographs [42] and is considered one of the best features to tell the species in the field. Apart from that, the bleach pattern on the primaries, visible in one of the pictures [44] is another good identification pointer for Collared. Nostril shape (slit vs. egg-shaped), though a good feature to separate the two, is seemingly not considered reliable in the field (Gerald Driessens *pers. comm.* June 2012) and as seen from the photographs, the nostrils tend to appear more egg-shaped than slit. Other features, mentioned in bird-guides, like extent of red on the base of the bill, are probably not absolute differences reliable in field for perching birds (Driessens & Svensson 2005).

In South Asia, the species is a breeding visitor to the Indus Valley in Pakistan (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) and winters mainly in Africa. There have been a number of recent records from Gujarat (Himmatsinhji 1999; Himmatsinhji & Varu 2002) including several recent photographs in www.orientalbirdimages.org. However, outside Gujarat there are only few records from India (Table 1) including specimens from Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu (Abdulali 1956), and Ratnagiri, Maharashtra (Prasad 2004). The only two specimens of this species from India in the collection of the Bombay Natural History Society, Mumbai (Abdulali 1970), both from Coimbatore, were examined and photographed recently by Rajah Jayapal and their identity as *G. pratincola* confirmed beyond doubt (Praveen J., *pers. comm.* Sept. 2012). There are two sight records from Goa (Lainer 2004). Pfister (2004) indicates it as a rare passage migrant in spring and autumn over Ladakh with 'single sightings' but provides no further specific details. However, he indicates



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sighting two birds from Shey near Leh (Pfister 2001) – perhaps there are more unpublished sightings from Ladakh from the banks of the Indus. The record from 'Indian Punjab' mentioned in Rasmussen & Anderton, 2012 could not be traced, but probably is from Harike (Mike Prince *pers. comm.* Aug. 2012). A pratincole, photographed by Sanjay Adak at Mangaljodi, Chilika, Odisha in February 2011 appears to sport a well-forked tail reaching the folded wing tips (<http://www.indianaturewatch.net/displayimage.php?id=218646>). Manoj V. Nair, commenting on this picture, indicated he also has sightings of this species from Nalaban Is., Chilika – however, the same is awaiting photo-documentation (Praveen J. *pers. comm.* Sept. 2012).

As this would be the first record of the bird from the eastern coast of India, we await better documentation of these observations and hence do not include them in our table of sightings. It is noteworthy that some of the old records which refer to this species are compounded with the commoner Oriental Pratincole, both being sub-species then, only being elevated to full species status recently. Since most of the records are from August–November (Table 1), it is safe to assume that this species is probably a rare autumn passage migrant across most of India except perhaps Gujarat where it is more regular. This also happens to be the first record from Kerala as it is not included in the current checklist (Sashikumar *et al.* 2011).

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