

Breeding of White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus* in Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary, Gujarat, India

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The White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus* is a winter visitor across the northern plains of India, at least to Bihar in the east, and to northern Maharashtra; with stragglers elsewhere in southern, and eastern India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It is a summer visitor to Balochistan, and Pakistan (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), and breeds there (BirdLife International 2016). Some populations of this species in the Middle East (Iran, Iraq) are sedentary, while the Central Asian populations are migratory, wintering in India, and Pakistan. These migratory birds breed in Russia (BirdLife International 2016). Recent works do not show it breeding in India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

On 09 April 2016, at 0800 hrs, DM visited Sur Bet (22.58°N 72.00°E) ('Sur Bet' is the name of the island) in Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary, Gujarat, with Ramzan Sama, who is a local guide in Nal Sarovar. Nal Sarovar, spread over 120 sq kms, is a natural shallow lake, with lagoons and numerous small islands. It was declared a 'Ramsar' site in 2012. In March–April, the water level decreases in Nal Sarovar, thus exposing some islands.

DM observed a White-tailed Lapwing pair on a nest [34]. The nest was located on a small island of the lake, comprising mainly dry saline soil on which reeds grew [35]. Normally this island is exposed during summer, from March to June, until the rains begin. One of the birds from the pair was feeding near the nest. DM was able to document this breeding activity with photographs and video footage. A Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* flew above the nest, whereupon the pair began to continually call, and chased the raptor. The nest had four oval-shaped eggs, cream in colour, with large dark-brown blotchy marks [36]. DM observed nests of Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus*, and Red-wattled Lapwings *V. indicus* near the White-tailed Lapwing's nest. Another pair of White-tailed Lapwings was mating at the time, at the same location, and it is possible that that was also a breeding pair. DM could visit only once to observe this nest, and could not go to the area subsequently.

There was an earlier nesting report of the White-tailed Lapwing from Nal Sarovar by KSS in 2002 (Sama 2002), and later in 2010 also. These nests were on Borbet Island, which is about two kilometres from the present sighting at Surbet.

As this species breeds in Balochistan, this could potentially be an extension of its breeding range though further study is needed to verify if the birds are breeding annually. Similar potential habitats for its nesting exist in other parts of Nal Sarovar, like Panwadbet, and Chorakhalibet, which are eight, and a kilometre and a half from Surbet respectively. KSS has noticed this species every summer in Nal Sarovar since the discovery of the nest, and hence a small population could be breeding in this area. We



34. White-tailed Lapwing on nest.



35. Habitat in which White-tailed Lapwing nested.



36. White-tailed Lapwing nest with four eggs.

feel that larger scale surveys are needed in Nal Sarovar during the White-tailed Lapwing's breeding season to assess the size of breeding population, document its breeding biology, and identify potential threats.

Acknowledgments

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Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* in Goa: A retrospective record

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The recent publication on the occurrence of a Pied Wheatear in Kerala in 2015 (Reghuvaran 2016) has prompted me to resurrect my notes on a Pied Wheatear seen in Goa in 2001, with the purpose of documenting the sighting as the first for that state.

On the early morning of 28 October 2001, I was birdwatching around the helipad at Fort Aguada, Goa; an area of open flat rocky ground surrounded by short vegetation and trees up to five meters height. When scanning across the area, I noticed a small chat-like bird perched quite upright on the ground. The bird was clearly a wheatear species, and this immediately rang alarm bells, as I knew all wheatears were rare visitors to Goa. Over the course of the next 30 min, I watched the bird from closer range and took field notes (Newsome 2017). I did not carry a camera, so no photographs are available. The details noted, and summarised below, enabled me to reach the conclusion that it was a female Pied Wheatear in first winter plumage.

Size and shape: A small wheatear, similar in size to (or a little smaller than) Northern Wheatear *O. oenanthe*, which I am most familiar with from England. Quite chat-like proportions and remained horizontal when perched. It never gave the impression of a larger upright 'cocky' wheatear such as Isabelline, or Hooded.

Head pattern: Crown, and hind-neck, grey-brown much like the mantle, with an indistinct paler buff supercilium. Ear coverts a little warmer brown than crown. Throat perhaps a little paler but not white. The absence of any dark feathering on the cheeks, or throat, pointed to a female; a male of this (or any other likely confusion species) would show obvious dark feathering coming through, even in first-winter plumage.

Upperparts: Mantle was a quite dull grey-brown. The wings were mid- to dark brown with obvious paler buff edges to the greater coverts forming a slight wing bar and obvious paler edges to the secondaries giving a slight wing panel effect. The clear pale

edging to the brown wing feathers also pointed to it being a first-year bird; an adult in autumn would show a much plainer, darker wing with little fringing visible.

Underparts: The throat and upper breast were similar to the head, the remainder of the breast, and belly were pale/dirty white but with a hint of warmer breast sides, and warmer buff at rear of flanks.

Tail pattern: The typical wheatear pattern of an inverted black 'T' on a white tail was seen clearly when it took frequent short flights. The black at the tip was narrower than Northern Wheatear but was still a solid bar, the white of the tail not reaching the tip at any point. Noticeably, however, the black did extend up to the tail edges.

Bare parts: Legs all dark and not particularly long. The bill was quite short, fine, and all dark.

Habits: Although the bird spent a considerable amount of time on the ground, and perched in low vegetation, it also flew to higher elevations in neighbouring low trees (as is regularly done on wintering grounds).

Having birdwatched widely in the Western Palearctic for the last 25 years, I was familiar with the likely confusion species. I have seen Pied Wheatear on breeding grounds in Eastern Europe and Russia and in good numbers on wintering grounds in Kenya. I have also seen Variable Wheatear (form *capistrata* being the most likely confusion species in western India) in Rajasthan. Black-eared Wheatear *O. hispanica* (the most similar species based on plumage) is restricted to the Mediterranean basin and has not been recorded on the Indian Subcontinent. The main features, which ruled out Variable (form *capistrata*), were the obvious buff edges to the wing feathers, the paler supercilium, and the tail pattern. The tail pattern, and general plumage colouration, also