

centred more towards the wing tip. This feature was crucial in the identification of both the birds here.

Wing and body shape: A Sooty Shearwater has a slightly greater wing-length and wingspan than Short-tailed, although any difference would be undetectable on a flying bird due to dimensional overlap. Total body lengths are also similar, but the greatest differences between them are the body bulk and shape. Sooty is usually the heavier bird, and in flight appears to be much bigger-bodied ratio to wing-length than Short-tailed. Moreover, it usually appears flat-bellied, whereas Short-tailed Shearwater is rounder or pot-bellied. In flight, the larger body of Sooty Shearwater creates the impression of it being a smaller-winged bird than a Short-tailed, which appears to have a more substantial wing area. But this difference is subtle and often depends upon the condition of a bird. For example, individuals may be in moult, starving, have a full crop or bloated intestines that may slightly alter their shape and proportions, or a freeze-frame camera could simply catch them in an unusual position or posture. He also pointed out that the wing shape (round vs pointed wing tips) is not useful as both birds have similar primary formula. Bird 1, above, showed a pot-bellied structure, thus supporting its ID as a Short-tailed Shearwater.

Bill size: Bill size is not a reliable feature of identification if the photographs are not sharp enough (as in the case of Bird 1 here).

Toe projection: The legs and feet of a shearwater are not held straight and trailing in normal flight. In normal flight the legs are usually drawn up and concealed within dense ventral feathers, with all joints bent. The tibia run outwards from the knees to the ankles, from where the tarsi turn inwards and downwards to the toes, which are usually angled in line with the body. Thus, with this zigzag positioning of leg and foot bones, the feet can be instantly drawn further inwards by a twitch of the tendons; probably an adaptation to minimise aerodynamic drag on these very fast-flying birds. Their legs are most often extended when a bird is circling, turning, or coming in to land. In flight, both species may exhibit toes extending beyond the tail-tip, but this feature is not really a valid identification criterion for a single bird because the toes can be retracted at will in both species. However, Short-tailed Shearwaters have a shorter tail and usually do have trailing toe-tips, although even in good light they can be extremely difficult to see. For Bird 1, images are not sharp and the tail (and toes?) appears blurred and uniform black, making it impossible to detect if any toes are trailing.

Flight action and jizz: There are really too many physical, physiological, and environmental variables that can greatly affect the shape of a bird in flight, including its actions and rate of wing-beats, and applying generalisations to a single bird can lead to error. He concluded that, since the bird seen in Nal Sarovar is almost certainly a juvenile, lost and nearing exhaustion, its flight action and jizz may not have been normal.

We would like to thank Charles Anderson, David James, Jeff Davies, John Cox, Neil Cheshire, Oscar Campbell, Rohan Clarke for providing the expert comments and a very fruitful discussion on the identification of these birds. Jeff Davies also helped with re-processing the image to bring out the underwing pattern more clearly. In addition, John Cox also provided a detailed note on identification, which is reproduced here. 📷

— Compiled by **Dipu Karuthedathu, Prasad Ganpule & Praveen J.**

Correspondence

Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus* congregating to feed on syrup of pearl millet *Pennisetum glaucum* flour and water, in Jodhpur, Rajasthan

On 12 July 2016, at 0830 hours, Pranjal J. Saikia was driving in Jodhpur city (Rajasthan) when he saw c. 25 Purple Sunbirds *Cinnyris asiaticus* gathered on the footpath of a busy road. All the birds were busy feeding on grain [26] that people had scattered to feed birds, mainly feral Rock Pigeons *Columba livia*. Upon a closer look, he found that the grain comprised of partially ground *bajra* or pearl millet *Pennisetum glaucum*. *Bajra* is popularly fed to seed-eating birds, e.g., Blue Rock Pigeon, House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, and other birds associated with human settlements at prominent places in Jodhpur, as elsewhere in India. It was interesting to watch nectarivorous birds feeding on ground-*bajra*. On closer inspection he noticed that rainwater had drenched the ground-*bajra*, creating a syrupy liquid of its flour; the birds were foraging on that syrup with their long tongue.



Pranjal J. Saikia

26. Purple Sunbirds feeding on pearl millet.

While around 25 Purple Sunbirds were feeding on the footpath, there were an equal number in nearby trees, bushes, and on electricity wires—as if waiting for their turn to feed. They were completely oblivious of the people around them. The feeding frenzy continued for more than 20 mins.

Even though arthropods are an important part of the diet of most, if not all sunbirds, their primary source of nutrition is nectar, and over time their beaks have evolved in order to feed on nectar of a variety of different plants. Sunbirds have also been observed feeding, opportunistically, on invertebrates—gleaning them from off leaves and flowers, as well as by sallying like flycatchers (Cheke & Mann 2001). The Purple Sunbird is known to feed on insects, and the juice of grapes (Ali & Ripley 1999). They have also been observed feeding on the sugary syrup exuding from 'jalebis' in Rajasthan (Sangha 2015).

References

- Ali, S., & Ripley, S. D., 1999. *Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan together with those of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. Flowerpeckers to buntings*. 2nd (Hardback) ed. Delhi: (Sponsored by Bombay Natural History Society.) Oxford University Press. Vol. 10 of 10 vols. Pp. i-xvii+1, 1–250, 9 ll.
- Cheke, R. A., & Mann, C. F., 2001. *Sunbirds: A guide to the sunbirds, flowerpeckers, spiderhunters and sugarbirds of the world*. 1st ed. London: Christopher Helm. Pp. 1–384.

Mason, C. W., & Maxwell-Lefroy, H., 1912. *The food of birds in India*. 1st ed. Calcutta / London: Thacker, Spink & Co. / W. Thacker & Co. Pp. 1–371.

Sangha, H. S., 2015. Purple Sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica* feeding on sugary syrup exuding from 'jalebis'. *Indian BIRDS* 10 (6): 165–166.

– **Pranjal J. Saikia & Harkirat Singh Sangha**

Pranjal J. Saikia, 2A District Shopping Center, Saraswati Nagar, Basni, Pali Road, Jodhpur 342005, Rajasthan, India. E-mail: pranjadib@gmail.com

Harkirat Singh Sangha, B-27, Gautam Marg, Hanuman Nagar, Jaipur 302021, Rajasthan, India. E-mail: harkirat.sangha@gmail.com. Received on 22 August 2017

Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* from Gaidahawa Lake, Rupandehi District, Nepal

The Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* is a local migrant in Nepal and is categorised as 'Critically Endangered' in the country's National Red List (Inskipp *et al.* 2016). Except for one specimen, collected in the Kathmandu Valley in April, in the early nineteenth century (Hodgson 1844), almost all records have been from Koshi Barrage, and Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve, in the south-eastern terai region; except one, sighted in Patana Lake, Chitwan National Park, in March 2005 (Inskipp *et al.* 2016).

We report below the sighting of an immature Spot-billed Pelican during May–July 2017, in Gaidahawa Lake (27.60°N,

83.28°E), Rupandehi District, in the western lowlands of Nepal. The bird was first recorded on 15 May 2017, in the western side of the lake, amidst a flock of Lesser Whistling Ducks *Dendrocygna javanica*. When disturbed, it flew to, and settled upon an adjoining sal *Shorea robusta* tree, where it roosted. The bird mostly foraged in the middle of the lake, and frequently in its southern, and western parts. It appeared to be moulting, and its completely grey wings in May [27] transformed into a whiter plumage by early July [28]. It was last recorded on 10 July 2017. According to a local fisherman, a 'pelican' had been visiting the lake in April–May for the past three years. The timing of our sighting is in line with current knowledge where Inskipp *et al.* (2016) state that the species visits Nepal mainly during February–May, and some stay up to October. The present sighting is c. 400 km west of its regular range in Nepal though it has sparingly also occurred further west in Uttarakhand (Rahmani 2012).

Acknowledgements

We thank the Rufford Foundation, UK, for financial support, and Carol Inskipp and Hem Sagar Baral for their encouragement.

References

- Hodgson, B. H., 1844. Catalogue of Nipalese birds, collected between 1824 and 1844. *Zoological Miscellany* 3: 81–86.
- Inskipp, C., Baral, H. S., Phuyal, S., Bhatt, T. R., Khatiwada, M., Inskipp, T., Khatiwada, A., Gurung, S., Singh, P. B., Murray, L., Poudyal, L., & Amin, R., 2016. The status of Nepal's Birds: The national red list series. Zoological Society of London, UK.
- Rahmani, A. R., 2012. *Threatened birds of India: their conservation requirements*. Mumbai: Indian Bird Conservation Network; Bombay Natural History Society; Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; BirdLife International; Oxford University Press. Pp. i–xvi, 1–864.

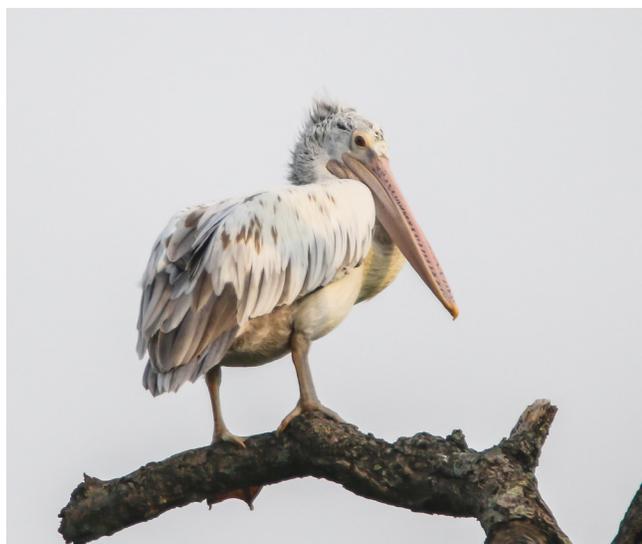
– **Prashant Ghimire***, **Bhuwan Singh Bist**, **Shristee Parthee**, **Bishal Aryal**, **Basant Sharma** & **Nabin Pandey**

Institute of Forestry, Hariyokharka, Pokhara 37700, Nepal
E-mail*: prashant@wildlifeneal.org,
prashantghimire66@gmail.com



Manshanta Ghimire

27. Spot-billed Pelican in July.



Prashant Ghimire

28. Spot-billed Pelican moulting in May.

Colour aberration in Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrike *Lalage melanoptera*

On 30 July 2017, while birding near Yarmal (15.77°N, 74.54°E), a village near Belgaum city in northern Karnataka, I noticed a single pale-coloured bird on a hill slope with scattered small bushes.

I took several photographs of this interesting individual. I identified it as a Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrike *Lalage melanoptera* with the help of Grimmett *et al.* (2011), and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012). Although upon initial observation it seemed like a leucistic bird, careful examination revealed that it was missing some of the characteristics of a what is considered a leucistic condition. It had normal-coloured (black; not red) eyes, but was silvery grey (and not completely white) [30, 31]. Compared to the normal-coloured bird [29], it showed a much fainter eye-stripe, lighter grey upperparts, a lot paler grey wings and tail, and whitish-grey underparts that retained barring.

According to Guay *et al.* (2012), and van Grouw (2013) a plumage with these colour aberrations could be referred to as 'dilution'. Mahabal *et al.* (2015, 2016), who recently reviewed the colour aberrations of Indian birds, did not mention any instance of colour aberrations in this species or any other member of the Campephagidae. So this observation would be the first record of colour aberration in this family from India.