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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).

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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.



29. Normal coloured female of Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrike.



30. Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrike. Form of dilution resulting in silver-grey plumage.



31. Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrike. Form of dilution resulting in silver-grey plumage.

Pics: Niranjan Sant

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Possible nesting of Pacific Swift in the Nilgiri Hills, Tamil Nadu in 1981

In 1981, I travelled extensively around India. Although this was a 'hippy trail' journey, I did not neglect my birdwatching, and while I mostly saw mundane species for the localities I visited, there is one observation that, in retrospect, appears to be of note. The delay in publishing is due to life pressures causing me to put aside my notebook on returning to the UK; it was subsequently mislaid until I rediscovered it in mid-2017.

In April–May 1981 I spent some time in the Nilgiri Hills based in Ootacamund. On 06 May I travelled to a remote rest house, noted as 'Mukerti Bungalow' in my notebook, where I spent the night prior to climbing Mukurthi Peak (2554 m asl) the following day. At the summit, at 0905 hrs on 07 May, I saw several 'large long-winged white-rumped *Apus*, - ? *pacificus* – going in and out of the cliff below [the] summit'. I added in my notes that this white-rumped swift had a 'moderate tail fork, kept more or less closed (i.e. greater than [Indian House Swift *A.*] *affinis* but less than [Horus Swift *A.*] *horus* [an African species] – in any case wings too pointed for *affinis* and [the] white rump patch doesn't extend more than 1/2-way round flank'. After descending, I then watched from under the summit cliff from 1000 hrs to 1030 hrs, but the birds had mostly gone – I saw only three Alpine Swifts *A. melba* and one large white-rumped swift, though there were occasional swift-like calls from the cliff face. Finally I saw two of the white-rumped birds fly off from the face of the cliff, where they had apparently been perched. After this there was silence, and I returned to the bungalow (possibly what is now, *vide* Wikipedia, called the Mukurthi Fishing Hut). The only other swifts seen in the immediate area were Indian Swiftlets *Aerodramus unicolor*, though I saw Indian House Swifts elsewhere in the Nilgiris.

I was in no doubt then that these birds were Pacific Swifts *Apus pacificus*, and I have no reason to revise this view. I was already familiar with the species in Japan and with the similar Horus Swift in Ethiopia, and with House Swifts widely in Africa and Asia: size, dark underparts, and the forked tail rule out the White-rumped Needletail *Zoonavena sylvatica*. I was travelling light and only had Ali (1968), and Woodcock (1980) with me, which have little information on Pacific Swifts. This species is mainly recorded in southern India in winter (e.g. Grimmett *et al.* 1999; Sashikumar *et al.* 2011; Praveen *et al.* 2016), though there is an old report of its suspected nesting in the hill-caves near Dudhsagar in the Ghats of Uttar Kannada [=Northern Kanara], Karnataka (Davidson 1898), some 475 km NNW of Mukurthi. However, in recent times, there appears to be only one published spring record (Anand 2016) and none in summer. They were not seen in March over the Kerala border in Silent Valley by Vijayan *et al.* (2000). Anand saw and photographed a bird on 09 April 2016 at Jawalikadavu APW Camp in the Nilgiris, significantly only about 31 km NE of Mukurthi Peak. My birds were a month later and clearly interacting with the cliff as if breeding. It seems probable that there is (or was) a