Birds of the Sirumalai Hills
Long-tailed Jaeger
Baikal Bush-warbler

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**Photographer:** Ranjan Kumar Das.

# Birds of the Sirumalai Hills

V. Santharam, Kumaran Sathasivam, T. Badrinarayanan & K. V. Sudhakar

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## Introduction

The Sirumalai Hills, or Sirumalais, are a range of hills in southern India. They are outliers of the Western Ghats, one of the biodiversity hotspots of the world. The point on these hills closest to the Western Ghats is just 15 km or so to the east of the Palni Hills. The Palnis run west to east, perpendicular to the Western Ghats proper. The Sirumalais and the Palnis both arise from the plains of Tamil Nadu. According to Foote (1883), the Sirumalai Hills (along with a few other hills near them), 'may be regarded geologically as an extension of the gneissic beds forming the Palani mountains.' The Sirumalais extend over an area that is *c.* 20 km long and 13 km wide, located in Dindigul district of Tamil Nadu, southern India. They are located to the north of Madurai and extend east from the vicinity of Dindigul. The Sirumalais are centered roughly at 10°13'N, 78°15'E (Fig. 1). The highest peaks in the Sirumalais rise to nearly 1400 m. However, most of the Sirumalais are of comparatively lower altitude. A plateau *c.* 1000 m high is a significant feature of the hills, and the slopes are fairly steep. The Sirumalais are one of the largest and highest hill ranges independent of the Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu. There are a few bird specimens from the Sirumalais at the Government Museum in Chennai, with no details such as their collection date or location. E. G. Nichols mentions, in passing, some birds seen here in his series of three articles (Nichols 1944a,b, 1945). Except for these records, we were not able to find any material on the birds of the Sirumalais. This lack of ornithological work in the Sirumalais motivated us to carry out a survey.

Through our survey we wished to draw up a checklist of birds of the Sirumalais and look at how the avifauna was distributed. We also wanted to compare the birdlife of this region with that of the adjacent Palni Hills (Sathasivam 2006).

Just when we began our survey, an article dealing with the avifauna of the Sirumalai Hills was published in *Indian Birds* (Swami 2006). And subsequently, we came across two other articles on the birds of the Sirumalais (Bundell 2010; Kumar 2007). Except for what may be gleaned from the four sources we have cited, no information is available about the bird life of the Sirumalai Hills.

## History of study site

Historically, the Sirumalais have been noted for their great fertility. The great variety of fruits produced in abundance in these hills is said to be mentioned in the earliest Tamil poems (Francis 1906). But in the 19th century, the climate was known to be 'very malarious' (Francis 1906). This stood in the way of attempts to settle on these hills. A fever swept through the area in 1809–1810, causing such havoc that at one point only 89 people were left on the Sirumalais. American missionaries based in Madurai built two bungalows in the Sirumalais with the intention of establishing a sanatorium there, but they abandoned the idea in 1845.

In the early years of the 19th century, timber trees of great size and height grew upon the Sirumalai Hills. But these were 'recklessly denuded' over the years. William Elliott, who was Judge of Madura from 1838 to 1840, introduced coffee in the Sirumalais. He obtained seeds and young plants from Mysore, and the labourers came up the hill every day to work, returning to their villages in the plains at night. The coffee grown in these hills was considered to be superior to that of the Palnis. In 1870, one Capt. E. A. Campbell experimented with mulberry trees and 'exotic cotton' in the Sirumalais on behalf of the Cotton and Silk Supply Associations.

In 1877–1878, Madura district experienced great damage on account of floods. Roads, the railway, and 950 tanks in Melur taluk alone were breached, and the District Collector attributed the destruction to the total bareness of the slopes of the Sirumalais.

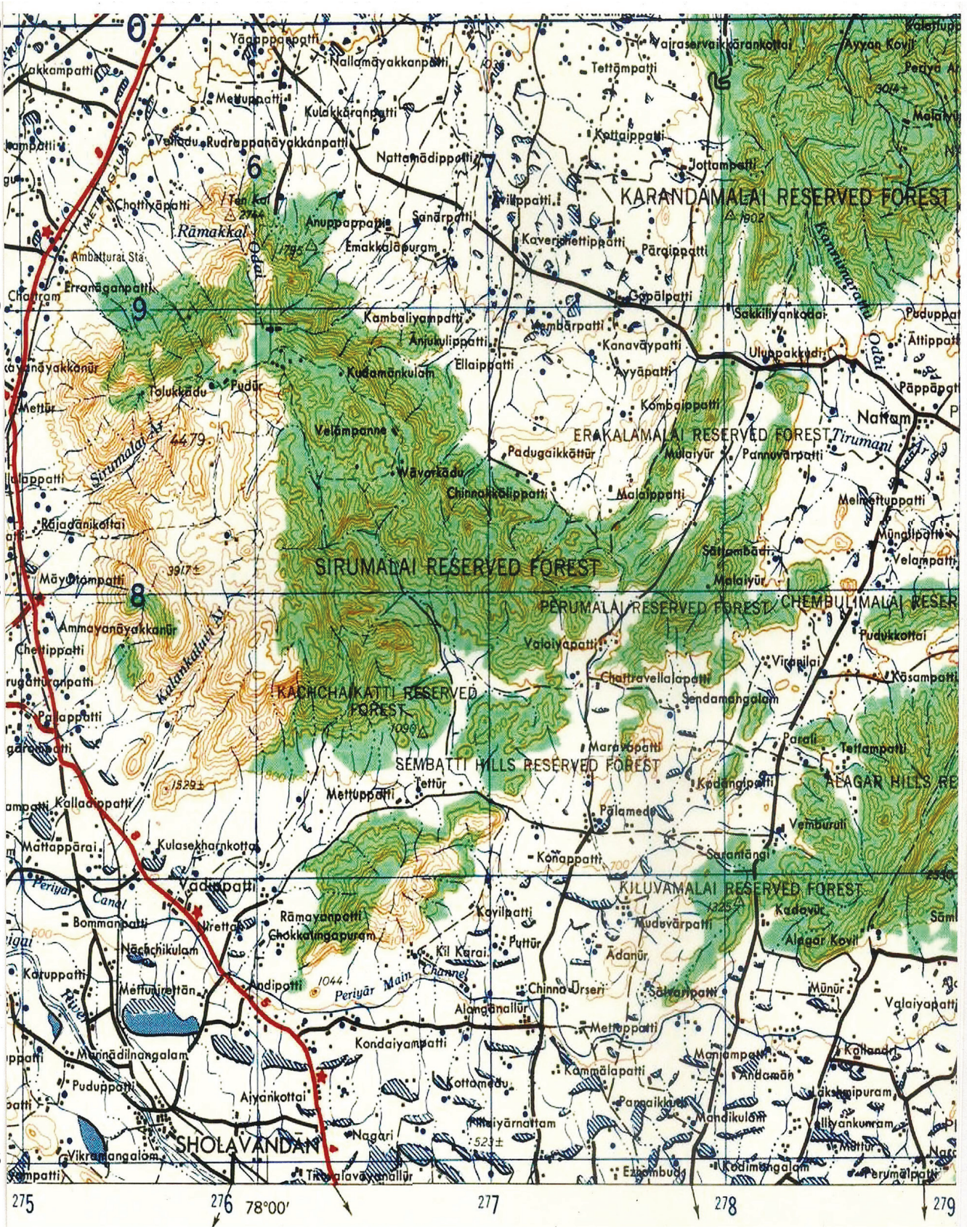
By the beginning of the 20th century, the Sirumalais were famous for their plantains, which were said to be 'vociferously hawked at all the neighbouring railway-stations,' coffee, and cardamom (Francis 1906). All the fruit trees cultivated in the Lower Palnis were grown in the Sirumalai Hills as well. It might be mentioned that the 'hill banana' continues to be sold at Dindigul railway station to this day (Francis 1906).

## Study area

The major human activity in the Sirumalais today is agriculture. The crops cultivated include coffee, banana, vegetables, and spices. Road connectivity is rudimentary. A single motorable road provides access to the villages of Pazhaiyur and Sirumalai Pudhur on the Sirumalai Plateau. There is a simple network of unmetalled roads branching off this road to the various hamlets and estates on the plateau. There is only a footpath to the settlement of Tholukadu. There are some infrequently used bridle paths running from the top of the Sirumalais to the plains.

The vegetation of the Sirumalais has been studied by J. M. Pallithanam (2001), who divided the vegetation of the Sirumalais into two groups: (1) that of the outer slopes; and (2) that of the plateau and hilltops.

The vegetation of the outer slopes, which rise from 250 m to 1000 m, consists of scrub forests, dry deciduous forests, savannah woodlands, dry evergreen forests, and riparian forests. The features observed with regard to the vegetation of the plateau and hilltops include semi-evergreen forests, dry deciduous forests, savannah woodlands, wet rocky slopes, ponds,




Website: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/ams/india/nc-43-08

Fig. 1. Map of the Sirumalais. [After University of Texas at Austin's 1:250,000 Map "NC43-8 Dindigul"].

streamlets, estates, and cultivated fields.

The months from February to August are mostly dry. There are a few showers in April and May. There is a little rainfall in September, followed by the showers of the north-eastern monsoon, from the middle of October till the end of December. March to June or July is the hottest period. The temperature drops significantly with the arrival of the north-eastern monsoon. The average annual rainfall is 132 cm on the plateau and 120 cm on the slopes (Pallithanam 2001).

## Survey dates

We chose the fieldwork dates so as to survey the area round the year, with emphasis on those periods when maximum bird movement within and outside the hills may be expected. Inclement weather during the north-eastern monsoon disrupted the schedule somewhat. Eventually we carried out six surveys, on the following dates:

- 13–15 August 2006
- 15 November 2006
- 9–11 February 2007
- 2–4 April 2007
- 4–6 July 2007
- 3–5 September 2007

## Survey locations & methods

Using Pallithanam's description of the flora, we chose a set of sites that we believed would cover the Sirumalais well and had a representative range of habitats and altitudes (Appendix 2). We also used topographical maps and made enquiries with local residents to choose the survey sites. The list of locations we surveyed reflects these factors and the accessibility of the sites.

We recorded birds at each site and from the footpaths and roads. We identified birds on the basis of unambiguous sightings and calls.

## Results & discussion

Considering the extent and height of the Sirumalai Hills, and their proximity to the Western Ghats, we had expected the Sirumalais to have a bird fauna typical of this biodiversity hotspot. However, the birdlife is relatively impoverished. This may be due to the fact that the Sirumalais rise to only about 1500 m, whereas the altitude of the Western Ghats is more than 2000 m in places, including in the Palnis. The other factors could be related to the theory of island biogeography, which states that fewer species are present on islands farther away from mainlands and on smaller islands (MacArthur & Wilson 1967). The Sirumalais, being isolated from the main Western Ghats ranges, although by only a short distance, are likely to have a smaller number of species compared with the Western Ghats and the Palnis. The latter are contiguous with the Western Ghats and are considerably larger in extent than the Sirumalais. They also have greater altitudinal and habitat ranges. Besides, the Sirumalais receive less rainfall than the Palni Hills, which get 90–190 cm (Balachandran & Rahmani 2005), being located on the leeward side of the southwest monsoon winds. As a consequence, there is more deciduous vegetation in the Sirumalais. The vegetation of the Sirumalais is also highly degraded, particularly on the plateau. Notwithstanding this, we recorded a total of 159 species (Appendix 1). Additional species recorded by other authors are discussed in the notes following the appendix.

The commoner birds include the Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*, Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis*, Grey Junglefowl *Gallus sonneratii*, Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis*, Malabar Parakeet *Psittacula columboides*, Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*, Black-headed Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus*, White-browed Bulbul *P. luteolus,* Purple-rumped Sunbird *Nectarinia zeylanica* and Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosa.* Commensals of man such as crows *Corvus* spp., mynas *Acridotheres* spp., and the House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* were not very common or were absent on the slopes and at the top of the hills. Also absent from the Sirumalais are waterbirds, and this is mainly attributable to a lack of significant wetlands in the hills. We did not come across any hornbill species, whereas at least two species occur in the adjacent Palni hills (Sathasivam 2006). The woodpecker assemblage also seems highly impoverished, with just four species recorded. Three Western Ghats endemics occur in the Sirumalais: the Malabar Parakeet, the Indian Rufous Babbler *Turdoides subrufa,* and the Nilgiri Flowerpecker *Dicaeum agile.* We also found the Indian Swiftlet *Collocalia unicolor,* and the Yellow-browed Bulbul *Iole indica,* which are endemic to the Western Ghats and Sri Lanka. However, it is intriguing that we did not find birds such as the Malabar Small Barbet *M. malabarica* and the Jungle Myna *A. fuscus* though suitable habitats were available and these birds are found in the Palni Hills (Sathasivam 2006), so close by. We believe that some of the high altitude endemics, such as the Nilgiri Pipit *Anthus nilghiriensis*, are unlikely to occur in the Sirumalais.

Our checklist includes various rare and threatened species. The occurrence of the Mountain Hawk-eagle *Spizaetus nipalensis*, Northern House-martin *Delichon urbicum*, Indian Blue Robin *Luscinia brunnea*, Pied Ground Thrush *Zoothera wardii*, and Yellow-throated Bulbul *P. xantholaemus*, in the Sirumalais, is noteworthy.

Our discussions with residents of the Sirumalais indicated that hunting is prevalent in these hills. Birds may be threatened by this, as well as by habitat loss to plantations. It is possible that the use of pesticides in the plantations has an adverse effect on the bird life. The periodic occurrence of forest fires in the Sirumalais may also pose a threat to bird populations here.

## Recommendations

On account of the limited access to suitable sites in the foothills and the slopes, our findings are somewhat biased towards the plateau (a list of locations surveyed by us is provided in Appendix 2). On the instances that we traversed footpaths going down the mountainside, we found them overgrown or unfamiliar to our guides, so that some altitudes were inaccessible to us at the times of the day when birds are most active. To survey these altitudes, it may be necessary to camp there in the future. Use of mistnets will help locate skulking birds.

The time spent by us at the few waterbodies of the Sirumalais was limited. It may be productive to spend greater effort at these places, namely Kadamankulam, Periapannai Kulam, and Sathiar Reservoir, particularly during the months immediately after the rains. We also need to monitor these hills on a regular basis as they may host passage migrants like the Pied Ground Thrush and several warbler species.

The Kanavaypatti foothills appeared promising in terms of relatively undisturbed stretches of vegetation. This section of the Sirumalais deserves ornithological attention for species that may occur in the open scrub and dry deciduous vegetation.

We believe that eventually the checklist of the Sirumalais will grow to exceed 200 species since as explained earlier above, we have not been able to survey all the habitats thoroughly and over all seasons during this survey.

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## Appendix 1: Annotated checklist of birds seen at Sirumalai Hills, 2006–2007.

### Podicipedidae

Dabchick or Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* Seen at Sathiar Reservoir.

### Phalacrocoracidae

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* Seen at Sathiar Reservoir.

Indian Cormorant or Shag *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis* Sathiar Reservoir.

### Ardeidae

Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii* Recorded in the foothills, at Sathiar Reservoir and Kolinjipatti. Not seen at the Kadamankulam pond. They were seen at Periapannai in February (2–3 birds), and in April (3–4 birds).

Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus coromandus* Seen with other egrets at Sathiar Reservoir.

Great Egret *Egretta alba* Recorded only at Sathiar Reservoir. None of the egrets were seen at the waterbodies in the plateau.

Intermediate Egret *E. intermedia* Sathiar Reservoir.

Little Egret *E. garzetta* Sathiar Reservoir.

### Accipitridae

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus* Recorded at the Kolinjipatti foothills.

Oriental Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* Fairly common. Encountered at all altitudes.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* A flock seen near the foot of the hills from the Dindigul-Pazhaiyur road (July 2007).

Shikra *Accipiter badius* Common. Seen at all elevations and in different habitats.

Legge's Hawk Eagle *Nisaetus kelaarti* A single record on the track to Tholukadu. Mr. Narayan Swami found this species common in the Sirumalais. Also seen by Kumar (2007).

Crested Hawk Eagle *S. cirrhatus* Two records from Kolinjipatti; seen once at Namaste Estate.

Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus* A few records, all from the higher altitudes. Juvenile birds noticed in flight in July.

Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis* Very common. Recorded at practically all habitats and elevations.

Short-toed Snake-Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* Recorded a few times, always at the lower elevations.

Crested Serpent-Eagle *Spilornis cheela* Several records, from most habitats.

### Falconidae

Shaheen Falcon *Falco peregrinus perigrinator* One unconfirmed sighting near Kamakoti Estate.

Common Kestrel *F. tinnunculus* Seen once on the track to Tholukadu.

### Phasianidae

Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus* Fairly common at the foothills. Not found anywhere up the slopes.

Red Spurfowl *Galloperdix spadicea* Recorded at various altitudes, but more often at the higher elevations.

Grey Junglefowl *Gallus sonneratii* Common at all altitudes as evident from the calls.

Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* Apparently common everywhere in the foothills. A couple of records from the plateau.

### Turnicidae

Yellow-legged Button Quail *Turnix tanki* A few records from the savannah.

### Rallidae

White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus* A single record from Periapannai pond.

### Charadriidae

Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus* Recorded only from Kolinjipatti.

Redwattled Lapwing *V. indicus* We recorded this bird only at Sathiar Reservoir.

### Scolopacidae

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* Found at Periapannai pond.

### Columbidae

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia* Seen in the Kolinjipatti foothills area.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* We have one record from the Kolinjipatti foothills and we heard the calls once from the Dindigul-Pazhaiyur road, but were not able to confirm this.

Spotted Dove *S. chinensis* Not very common. We have records from Kamakoti and Namaste estates and from the Horticultural Station and Kolinjipatti.

Little Brown Dove *S. senegalensis* Not common. A few records from the foothills.

Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica* We found this species only at Namaste Estate, in riverine forest.

### Psittacidae

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* Fairly common in the foothills and lower elevations.

Plum-headed Parakeet *P. cyanocephala* We recorded this species at various locations, all at the higher elevations except for Kolinjipatti.

Malabar Parakeet *P. columboides* Relatively common at the higher altitudes, but not

particularly numerous.
Vernal Hanging Parrot *Loriculus vernalis* Found everywhere in moist forest. Especially fond of flowering *Erythrina*.

## Cuculidae

Pied Crested Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus* One record, from the Kolinjipatti foothills.
Common Hawk-Cuckoo *Hierococcyx varius* Widespread. We recorded this bird at all altitudes and habitats.
Banded Bay Cuckoo *Cacomantis sonneratii* This appears to be a sparse resident of the plateau. Three records. Heard calls at the foothills in august 2006.
Grey-bellied Plaintive Cuckoo *C. passerinus* Our records are all from the higher elevations. It is easily overlooked outside the season when it vocalises. Vocal in April 2007.
Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea* Very uncommon. We heard it once near Periapannai pond.
Bluefaced Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus viridirostris* Common at the lower elevations, but we have one sighting from higher up at Aralikkadu in moist forest and cultivation, which is somewhat surprising for this species.
Sirkeer Malkoha *P. leschenaultii* This appears to be a widespread species. We saw it at both the lower and higher elevations, including in the savannah.
Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis* Common and widespread.

## Strigidae

Oriental Scops-Owl *Otus sunia* Apparently widespread at the higher elevations. We heard it in the night at Kamakoti and Namaste estates and at sunset at Vellimalai Koil.
Indian Scops-Owl *O. bakkamoena* We heard the calls at Vellimalai Koil and at Kamakoti Estate.
Jungle Owlet *Glaucidium radiatum* Less restricted to the higher elevations than the Scops and Collared Scops owls. We recorded it at Kolinjipatti.
Brown Hawk-Owl *Ninox scutulata* Our only record of this species is from Namaste Estate, where we heard the calls in February 2007.
Spotted Owlet *Athene brama* This bird seems to be restricted to the plains. We heard it calling from the foothills once.

## Caprimulgidae

Jerdon's Nightjar *Caprimulgus atripennis* Widespread on the plateau.

## Apodidae

Indian White-rumped Spinetail *Zoonavena sylvatica* Recorded in September.
Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba* Three records. More than 25 birds seen in September 2007.
Little Swift *Apus affinis* Seen once at Periapannai pond and once at Kolinjipatti in a heavy shower of rain.
Asian Palm Swift *Cypsiurus balasiensis* Our only record is from the foothills near Kodai Road.
Indian Swiftlet *Collocalia unicolor* Seen once in August and several times the next July.

## Hemiprocnidae

Crested Tree Swift *Hemiprocne coronate* A few records covering all altitudes including the foothills.

## Alcedinidae

Lesser Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* Recorded at Sathiar Reservoir.
Small Blue Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* Found at Sathiar Reservoir, Kolinjipatti and Periapannai pond.
White-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* Widespread; found at all altitudes.

## Meropidae

Chestnut-headed Bee-eater *Merops leschenaultia* Widespread at the higher elevations.
Little Green Bee-eater *M. orientalis* Not uncommon; our records are from the plateau and from the Kolinjipatti foothills.

## Coraciidae

Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis* Only one record: from the foothills near Kodai Road.

## Upupidae

Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops* Seen at various habitats including the savannah and the Kolinjipatti foothills.

## Capitonidae

Brownheaded Barbet *Megalaima zeylanica* Commonly heard in the lower elevations.
Whitecheeked Barbet *M. viridis* Very common in the moister vegetation of the higher elevations.
Coppersmith Barbet *M. haemacephala* Very common. Many records from all over the hills.

## Picidae

Rufous Woodpecker *Micropternus brachyurus* Recorded at Kamakoti and Namaste estates and on the track to Tholukadu.
Streak-throated Woodpecker *Picus xanthopygaeus* Fairly common. All altitudes except the lowest.
Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker *Dinopium benghalense* Common. Found at all elevations.
Indian Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos nanus* Widespread at the higher elevations. Seen feeding on nectar of silver oak trees.

## Pittidae

Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura* Calls heard at Vellimalai Koil and at Namaste Estate. Not very common.

## Alaudidae

Jerdon's Bush Lark *Mirafra affinis* Our only records are from the foothills.

## Hirundinidae

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* Not uncommon. Also seen at higher elevations.
Red-rumped Swallow *H. daurica* Many records from all over the hills.
Northern House Martin *Delichon urbicum* We saw less than half-a-dozen of these birds in a congregation of swallows and swifts at Periapannai pond in April 2007. They were apparently having a drinking of water before retiring at sunset.
Dusky Crag Martin *Hirundo concolor* Seen at Thozhukkadu in July 2007.

## Motacillidae

Forest Wagtail *Dendronanthus indicus* Not common. Three records covering all elevations. Also seen in April (2007).
Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* We found this bird at a few locations scattered across the hills. Seen on September 3, 2007 and in early April 2007.
White-browed Wagtail *M. maderaspatensis* Recorded only from Periapannai and the Kolinjipatti foothills.

## Campephagidae

Pied Flycatcher-Shrike *Hemipus picatus* We found this bird in a few locations at the higher elevations. Seen over half-a-dozen birds in a mixed hunting party in August 2006 at Namaste Estates.
Malabar Woodshrike *Tephrodornis sylvicola* One unconfirmed record from the Horticultural Station.
Common Woodshrike *T. pondicerianus* We found it very common at Kamakoti Estate in August. But subsequently we found it only at a few other locations.
Large Cuckooshrike *Coracina macei* Found at all altitudes.
Black-headed Cuckooshrike *C. melanoptera* We have records from Kalankaluvi Ar Valley, Namaste Estate and Velampanne.
Orange Minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus* Seen at a few locations at the moist forests of the higher elevations.

Small Minivet *P. cinnamomeus* Not very common. Found at a few locations at various altitudes.

## Monarchidae

Asian Paradise-flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi* Recorded only from the lower elevations (August 2006). Suspected by Nichols to be a resident as birds were at the base of the Sirumalai hills in July/August.

Black-naped Blue Monarch *Hypothymis azurea* Widespread. Mostly in the higher elevations, but we found it at Kolinjipatti and Kannimaan Oothu.

## Rhipiduridae

White-browed Fantail *Rhipidura aureola* Pair at Namaste Estate in the drier forests.

## Pycnonotidae

Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus* The commonest bird of the Sirumalais. Found everywhere. Nest with young seen in February 2007.

Red-vented Bulbul *P. cafer* Very common and widespread. More often seen in the lower, drier and open forest areas and in the savannah areas on the plateau. Nest in a bush (construction stage) in February 2007 close to the Redwhiskered Bulbul's.

Yellow-throated Bulbul *P. xantholaemus* Restricted to a narrow altitudinal range. Recorded from the Dindigul-Pazhaiyur road, the Tholukadu track and near Kannimaan Oothu.

White-browed Bulbul *P. luteolus* Common. Found at all altitudes.

Yellow-browed Bulbul *Iole indica* Found mostly at the upper elevations but also at the Kolinjipatti foothills.

## Aegithinidae

Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia* Fairly common. Found at all altitudes.

## Chloropsidae

Gold-fronted Leaf-bird *Chloropsis aurifrons* Seen at Kamakoti Estate and near Thalaikadai. One unconfirmed record from the Horticultural Station.

Jerdon's Leaf-bird *C. cochinchinensis* More common than the Goldfronted Chloropsis. Seen at a number of locations.

## Laniidae

Bay-backed Shrike *Lanius vittatus* We found this bird in the foothills at Kolinjipatti and near Kodai Road.

Brown Shrike *L. cristatus* We have just a few records. Found from the foothills up to the top. A single bird noticed in April 2007.

## Turdidae

Malabar Whistling-Thrush *Myophonus horsfieldii* Not confirmed. Calls heard once at Karuppukoil and a flying bird seen near Vellimalai Koil. Mr. Narayan Swami reports this species to be common.

Pied Ground-Thrush *Zoothera wardii* Two records, the first one of a male near Pazhaiyur (February) and the second one of a female near Meenakshi Estate (April).

Orange-headed Thrush *Z. citrina* We heard what we believe is the call of this species at Vellimalai Koil once. The record is not confirmed. Reported seen by Bundell (2010).

## Muscicapidae

Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica* Not common. Recorded at Namaste Estate and on the track to Kodai Road from Kamakoti Estate. Juvenile bird seen August 2006.

Brown-breasted Flycatcher *M. muttui* Our only records are from Rajaram Pallam, Poonjolai and Kolinjipatti.

Red-throated Flycatcher *Ficedula albicilla* One record from Karuppukoil.

Blue-throated Flycatcher *Cyornis rubeculoides* Recorded from near the stream at the Kolinjipatti foothills in November.

Tickell's Blue Flycatcher *C. tickelliae* Widespread at the higher elevations.

Indian Blue Robin *Luscinia brunnea* Three records, from Rajaram Pallam, Agasthiarpuram and Meenakshi Estate ( February and April, 2007).

Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis* Common bird found at all elevations.

White-rumped Shama *C. malabaricus* Not always seen, but calls heard at a number of locations. Apparently widespread.

Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata* Found in the foothills; one record from Periapannai.

Indian Black Robin *Saxicoloides fulicatus* A few records from the foothills.

## Timalidae

Puff-throated Babbler *Pellorneum ruficeps* Common and widespread.

Indian Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus horsfieldii* Recorded from a number of locations, mostly at the higher elevations.

Tawny-bellied Babbler *Dumetia hyperythra* Found at nearly all altitudes.

Yellow-eyed Babbler *Chrysomma sinense* Our only record is from the Kolinjipatti foothills.

Indian Rufous Babbler *Turdoides subrufa* A few records from the plateau.

Jungle Babbler *T. striata* Common in most parts of the hills.

Pale-headed Babbler *T. affinis* Common in the foothills.

Brown-cheeked Fulvetta *Alcippe poioicephala* Calls heard at Kamakoti Estate once. Not confirmed.

## Cisticolidae

Grey-breasted Prinia *Prinia hodgsoni* Common and widespread.Seen in breeding plumage and in song in July 2007, August 2006 and September 2007.

Jungle Prinia *P. sylvatica* Recorded twice at the lower elevations.

Ashy Prinia *P. socialis* Recorded once, the calls being heard at Kolinjipatti.

Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius* Common everywhere.

## Sylviidae

Thickbilled Warbler *Acrocephalus aedon* Uncommon. Recorded at two locations in April.

Blyth's Reed Warbler *A. dumetorum* Widespread in April. Only two other records in other months.

Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata* Our only record is from Kanavaypatti in February.

Large-billed Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus magnirostris* We found this bird at the Kolinjipatti foothills in November. Subsequently we recorded it only at Namaste Estate.

Greenish Leaf-Warbler *P. trochiloides* Not very common, but our records are from all elevations (seen in early September 2007).

Green Leaf Warbler *P. nitidus* Couple of birds noticed at Namaste in April 2007.

Western Crowned Warbler *P. occipitalis* We saw this bird once at Rajaram Pallam and once at Namaste.

## Paridae

Great Tit *Parus major* Sparsely distributed over the hills.

## Sittidae

Velvet-fronted Nuthatch *Sitta frontalis* Not uncommon in the higher elevations.

## Dicaeidae

Thick-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum agile* The least common of the flowerpeckers in the Sirumalais. One record each from Kamakoti and Namaste estates.

Tickell's Flowerpecker *D. erythrorhynchos* Common. Found at all elevations.

Nilgiri Flowerpecker *D. concolor* Less common than former.

## Nectariniidae

Purple-rumped Sunbird *Leptocoma zeylonica* Common. Found everywhere.

Loten's Sunbird *Cinnyris lotenia* Found at all altitudes. Common. Probably breeding (Feb 2007). Appeared very common in February (2007).

Purple Sunbird *C. asiatica* Widespread. In eclipse plumage in August 2006.

## Zosteropidae

Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus* Common at the higher elevations. Seen collecting nest material in February 2007 Mating also noticed in April 2007.

## Estrildidae

Indian Silverbill *Euodice malabarica* One record from Kolinjipatti.
White-rumped Munia *Lonchura striata* Two records: from Vellimalai Koil and from near the stream at Kolinjipatti.
Scaly-breasted Munia *L. punctulata* Three records from scattered locations.

## Ploceidae

Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus* Found at the Kolinjipatti foothills, where it appears to be abundant.

## Sturnidae

Black-headed Myna *Sturnus pagodarum* Seen only at Kolinjipatti.
Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* Seen at various locations, but not particularly common.

## Oriolidae

Golden Oriole *Oriolus kundoo* We have just a couple of records: from Pudur and Karuppukoil.
Blackheaded Oriole *O. xanthornus* Common. Found at all altitudes.

## Irenidae

Fairy Bluebird *Irena puella* Fairly common at the higher elevations.

## Dicruridae

Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus* Found only at the foothills.
Ashy Drongo *D. leucophaeus* A few records from well wooded areas.
White-bellied Drongo *D. caerulescens* Widespread; our records are mostly from the higher elevations.
Bronzed Drongo *D. aeneus* Common in the moist forests of the upper elevations.
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *D. paradiseus* We saw these birds only twice, both times at Meenakshi Estate.

## Artamidae

Ashy Swallow-Shrike *Artamus fuscus* Seen at many locations, at all altitudes.

## Corvidae

Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda* Fairly common everywhere.
House Crow *Corvus splendens* Seen only at Kolinjipatti and at Thalaikadai. Not established in the hills. According to Bundell (2010) these birds were not seen here even as recently as 1980.
Jungle Crow *C. macrorhynchos* Uncommon, but we recorded small numbers at various locations. Bundell (2010) these birds were not seen here even as recent as 1980.

## Notes:

Bundell (2010) includes the Mountain Imperial Pigeon *Ducula badia* in his list based on secondary data.
Green Imperial Pigeon *D. aenea* was ***s***een by Nichols (1944-45) at the foot of the Sirumalais.
Bundell (2010) includes the Large Green-billed Malkhoa *Phaenicophaeus tristi* – this is obviously through oversight!
Bundell (2010) includes the Mottled Wood-owl *Strix ocellata* based on secondary data.
The Great Eared Nightjar *Eurostopodus macrotis* is a rare bird recorded in the higher elevations of the Palnis. Narayan Swami found the species to be common in the Sirumalais. We did not encounter it during the survey. Narayan Swami has recorded the Ceylon or Sri Lanka Frogmouth *Batrachostomos moniliger* in the Sirumalais. He was able to study a specimen knocked down by a vehicle. We searched for this species but were unsuccessful in finding it.
Blue-tailed bee-eater *Merops philippinus* has been ***s***een by Nichols (1944-45) at the base of Sirumalai.
The Heart-spotted Woodpecker *Hemicircus canente* has been included by Bundell (2010) on the basis of secondary data.
Kumar (2007) recorded the White-naped Woodpecker *Chrysocolaptes festivus*.
Kumar's (2007) record of Long-tailed Minivet *Pericrocotus ethologus* and Great Barbet *Megalaima virens* in the Sirumalais are cases of oversight or mistaken identity.
Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassina* was seen by Kumar (2007).
The Nilgiri Flycatcher *E. albicaudatus* has been recorded in the Sirumalais by Narayan Swami. He considers it uncommon. We did not come across this species. It has also been reported by Kumar (2007).
The Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis* is included in the Sirumalais list by Bundell (2010) on the basis of secondary information.
Bundell (2010) includes the Black-headed Munia *Lonchura malacca* in his list on the basis of secondary data.

## Appendix 2: Gazetteer of locations and habitats

Agasthiarpuram (10°13′N, 77°58′E; 1181 m): Eucalyptus stands, dense undergrowth of lantana.
Aralikkadu (10°11′N, 78°00′E; 1072 m) and Chandra Estate: Agricultural land (banana, jackfruit and silk cotton cultivation) and some dense moist forest.
Dindigul–Pazhaiyur road (Pazhaiyur–10°14′N, 78°00′E; 1118 m): Scrub with dense shrubs and occasional trees, changing gradually to deciduous forest.
Horticultural Station (10°11′N, 77°59′E; 1064 m): Riverine habitat; many old and tall trees; introduced trees including eucalyptus, pine and *Grevillea*.
Kalankaluvi Ar Valley (10°12′N, 77°58′E; 1106 m): Chow chow plantations on either side of stream; small patches of natural vegetation with tall trees.
Kamakoti Estate (10°12′N, 77°58′E; 1218 m) and Vinayagar Koil (coordinates and altitude not recorded): Coffee, *Grevillea,* garden plants, pepper, degraded savannah.
Kanavaypatti foothills (coordinates and altitude not recorded): Scrub forest; deciduous forest with a few tall trees; extensive planting of *Acacia planifrons*.
Karuppukoil village (10°09′N, 77°59′E; 1166 m): Sacred grove; a few old trees; riverine habitat; cultivation.
Kolinjipatti foothills (10°09′N, 78°03′E; 275 m): Riverine forest (including tall *Terminalia arjuna*, mango, *Albizzia lebbek* and tamarind trees); deciduous forest; fruit and coconut plantations.
Kutladampatti Falls (10°07′N, 78°01′E; 307 m): Overgrown scrub; riverine forest; occasional tall trees; waterfalls; intense human presence.
Loyola (Ayyanar) Estate (coordinates and altitude not recorded): Coffee and *Grevillea* in savannah.
Meenakshi Estate: As in Sirumalai Pudur.
Namaste (Kandighe) Estate (10°10′N, 77°58′E; 988 m): Riverine habitat; savannah; vegetable cultivation; large stretches of dense deciduous forest (one of the very few such places we saw).
Periapannai Kulam (10°14′N, 78°00′E; 1124 m) and Kadamankulam (10°14′N, 78°01′E; 1113 m) ponds: Open waterbodies, no visible aquatic vegetation; possible inflow of sewage. Landscaping in vicinity of Periapannai.
Poonjolai (10°11′N, 77°58′E; 986 m): Abandoned coffee estate: tall *Grevillea*; some old *Ficus* and other native trees; some riverine patches, resembling Kalankaluvi Ar valley.
Pudur–Tholukadu (Tholukadu Malai peak–10°14′N, 77°57′E; 1126 m) track: Belt of plantations with jackfruit and silk cotton; occasional rocky outcrops with grass; patches of dense forest.
Rajaram Pallam (10°13′N, 77°58′E; 1184 m): Riverine, dense deciduous forest; some large (planted) trees; banana plantations.
Sathiar Reservoir (coordinates and altitude not recorded): Open waterbody surrounded by degraded, low scrub jungle.
Savannah between Namaste and Loyola estates: Short grass with intervening trees of medium height. The secondary forest between Namaste and the savannah has taller grass and a dense growth of lantana on the sides of the tracks.
Sirumalai Pudur (Meenakshi Estate) (10°14′N, 77°58′E; 1183 m): Plantations of coffee, *Grevillea* and pepper; *Ficus* trees; habitations.
Tenmalai village (10°11′N, 77°59′E; 1059 m): Chow chow plantations.
Thalaikadai (10°12′N, 78°01′E; 818 m): Betel nut and jackfruit cultivation; some forestland.
Thenkuzhi Pallam (coordinates and altitude not recorded): Savannah with some large old trees
Track to Kodai Road from Kamakoti Estate via Kannimaan Oothu: Mixture of habitats: riverine, deciduous, savannah (tall grass), thorny scrub (*Acacia and Prosopis*).
Vellimalai Koil (10°14′N, 77°59′E; 1115 m): Mixed habitat: stream, dense lantana, tall *Grevillea* and coffee, open areas.

# First records of Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* and Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus* from Kerala

P. C. Rajeevan, K. M. Khaleel, Jayan Thomas & Harkirat Singh Sangha

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During regular bird monitoring on 19 September 2013,at Madayippara (12°02'N, 75°16'E; *c.* 40–47 m asl), a laterite hillock overlooking the Arabian Sea in Kannur district, Kerala, PCR spotted a strikingly plumaged wader with longish neck, short legs and a medium length bill slightly decurved at tip.It was among a flock of Lesser Sand Plovers *Charadrius mongolus*, Little Stints *Calidris minuta,* Curlew Sandpipers *C. ferruginea*, and Broad-billed Sandpipers *Limicola falcinellus*. PCR tentatively identified the bird as a Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris/ Ereunetes melanotos* with the help of field guides (Dunn & Alderfer 2006; Grimmett *et al.* 1998). After a short while, another wader flock landed at a certain distance and another unfamiliar plover was seen in it. This bird was of the size of a Greater Sand Plover *C. leschenaultii* with pale brown plumage, long and dull greenish-yellow legs, a broad white supercilium, black bill, faint breast-band, and a white wing-bar in flight. PCR could not identify this plover. KMK and JT joined the birding in the afternoon and took photos of both the birds. On 20 September 2013, PCR and JT surveyed Madayippara but could not locate the birds. That same day Muhamed Jafer Palot and K. V. Uthaman joined PCR at 1000 hrs and found the Pectoral Sandpiper feeding with Lesser Sand Plovers, and took more photographs.

C. Sashikumar and HSS independently examined the photographs taken by KMK and K. V. Uthaman on 21 September 2013 and confirmed that the species was indeed a Pectoral Sandpiper [**69**]. The identification was fairly straightforward as the only other calidridines in this size range, with yellow legs, are Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*, and the vagrants—Sharp-tailed *C. acuminata* and Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis*—but neither have the strong breast demarcation of the Pectoral.

On 21 September 2013, PCR and KMK again visited Madayippara at 0800 hrs and found both birds at different locations and could take more photographs. The plover was feeding alone, away from a flock of Lesser Sand Plovers [**72**]. When approached, it moved away slowly, keeping a distance. In flight, the bird uttered a single-note "*kek*" call. Later the Pectoral Sandpiper was found feeding with a flock of Lesser Sand Plovers, Curlew Sandpipers, and Little Stints.

That day, at 1300 hrs, HSS along with a group of birdwatchers, including Praveen J., Dipu Karuthedathu, Manoj Sharma, Muhammed Jafer Palot, and K. V. Uthaman, visited Madayippara to look for the Pectoral Sandpiper but they were unaware of the plover seen on the previous day. However, the team picked up the unidentified plover quickly from the wader flock and HSS readily identified it as a Caspian Plover *C. asiaticus.* More birding revealed at least six different Caspian Plovers and several photographs of different individuals were taken by the photographers in the group. Within *c.* 30 min, the Pectoral Sandpiper was found by the group in a flock of waders. Unfortunately, it took off quickly, before everyone could observe it, and soon after it started raining. After a brief interruption, the birdwatchers were once again out in the field and Dipu Karuthedathu located the Pectoral Sandpiper

Photos: K. Chovva

**69.** Pectoral sandpiper.

**72.** Caspian Plover.

**70.** Pectoral Sandpiper.

**71.** Pectoral Sandpiper in flight.

again enabling everyone to observe the vagrant closely and take photographs.

On 22 September, PCR, KMK, and JT visited Madayippara at 0800 hrs and saw a single Caspian Plover feeding away from the flock of Lesser Sand Plovers. The Pectoral Sandpiper was found feeding with another flock of Lesser Sand Plovers.

After 22 September, there was a gap of sightings for a few days despite regular visits by PCR. However, on 29 September, PCR, KMK, and Jainy Kuriakose visited Madayippara at 0800 hrs and found the Caspian Plover feeding a little away from a flock of Lesser Sand Plovers but could not trace the Pectoral Sandpiper despite a thorough search.

On 01 October 2013, PCR observed a single Caspian Plover feeding with Lesser Sand Plovers but there was no trace of the Pectoral Sandpiper.

## Field characters of Pectoral Sandpiper

### *General jizz*

The Pectoral Sandpiper at Madayippara had flatish back, potbelly, short legs, rather long rear end and smallish head on a neck which appeared short while it was feeding but longish when it was 'worried' [**70**].

### *Head and crown*

Forehead, crown, and nape were buffish, streaked dark brown; conspicuous off-white supercilium; dark brown eye-stripe. Rest of the face buffish, streaked brown; brownish smudge on ear-coverts.

### *Other upper parts*

Feathers of upper parts brown with blackish-brown shaft-streaks and brown/buffish fringes. Breast washed buff, heavily streaked dark brown, and sharply demarcated from unmarked white belly. Upper flanks, vent, and under tail coverts with three-four dark streaks.

### *Under parts*

Dark blackish-brown streaks on off-white background, across the entire width of the breast, forming a uniform gorget contrasting sharply with the white belly. This 'pectoral band' was conspicuous, even in flight. The remaining under parts were white, although two or three streaks extended below the gorget at the extreme sides of the breast.

### *Bare parts*

The slightly decurved bill was blackish with the basal third brownish yellow; legs dull yellow; iris blackish.

### *Other features*

Its flight appeared swift. It resembled a Reeve in flight and appeared larger in the air than on the ground. In flight it appeared quite dark brown except for the white belly [**71**]. The wing stripe was almost inconspicuous or faint but with prominently broad black center to the rump and tail. The toes did not project beyond tail-tip. The dark breast or 'pectoral' was always very prominent [**69**]. The under wing coverts and auxiliaries were whitish contrasting with dark breast band.

### *Behaviour*

As already noted, the bird was loosely associating with other waders and feeding in wet grassy areas. The presence of many birders did not seem to worry the bird.

## Field characters of Caspian Plovers

There were probably five or six birds at Madayippara on 21 September. At least two birds were seen well and these two were juveniles. Both these birds had feathers of upper parts very distinctly edged sandy buff giving them a 'scaly' appearance [**73**]. The forehead and broad supercilium were white; crown

Photos: K. Chovva

**73.** Caspian Plover.

Photo: K. Chovva

**74.** Caspian Plover in flight.

scalloped with white fringes; ear-coverts darkish brown and no lores except for a small variable smear in front of the eye. Very faint buff smudge on breast and white belly were distinctive. In flight, from above, brownish with dark wings and sides of tail. The narrow wing bar formed by white on inner primaries was quite prominent as was the white shaft on outer primaries [**74**]. Toes projected just beyond tail. The bill was black and legs appeared dull greenish yellow.

## Discussion

Pectoral Sandpiper occurs in Taymyr east through the Chukotskiy Peninsula to western and northern Alaska, north-central Canada, western Hudson Bay,the Yamal Peninsula, and north-western Siberia (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996).Thus the breeding range ofPectoral Sandpiper is almost as extensive in northern Siberia as in North America (Hayman *et al.* 1986), yet the vast bulk of the population migrates toSouth America, and small numbers regularly migrate to south-eastern Australia, and New Zealand (Geering *et al.* 2007). Vagrants have reached Africa, the Middle East, East Asia, India(Hayman *et al.* 1986; Urban *et al.* 1986; Shirihai 1996; Eguchi *et al.* 2000; Carey *et al.* 2001; Undeland & Sangha 2002), Kuwait (*www.birdsofkuwait.com/blog/*), UAE (*www.uaebirding.com/olduaenews.html*), and Oman (*www.birdquest-tours.com/pdfs/.../Oman*), reinforcing the status of this species as a truly global wanderer.

The migratory routes of Pectoral Sandpipers in North America are relatively well understood. However, the migratory strategy of their Siberian breeding population adds a "twist to the story" (Lees & Gilroy 2004). Their breeding range in Siberia is almost as extensive as that in North America, suggesting that a surprisingly high proportion of the world population may breed in the Old World (Hayman *et al.* 1986). This population apparently uses the same South American wintering grounds as the Nearctic population, since there have been recoveries in Siberia of birds ringed in Saskatchewan and Kansas during autumn migration but few birds may migrate through eastern Asia, south to Japan and Korea (Cramp & Simmons 1983) on their way to Australia and New Zealand.

It is also possible that few birds migrate via Europe, perhaps spending the non-breeding season in Africa (Chandler 2009). However, the recent occurrence of a Pectoral Sandpiper in Mauritius provides evidence in support of the idea that at least some of the birds arrive directly from Siberia (Hockey & Douie 1995). A surprising number of records do exist from the African region. For example, Sinclair *et al.* (1993) describe Pectoral Sandpiper as a 'rare but regular (austral) summer visitor' to southern Africa. Elsewhere, there are records of Pectoral Sandpipers from several sub-Saharan West African nations, including Mauritania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Ivory Coast, Ghana, and Gabon and Príncipe, from between October and March (Borrow & Demey 2001). Vagrants have also occurred in East Africa, with at least two records from Kenya and one from Burundi (Stevenson & Fanshawe 2002).

The occurrence of the rare vagrant at Madayippara possibly resulted from autumn movements as noted above. However, due to paucity of records it is difficult to speculate on the destination of the bird. It is not implausible that it belonged to the Siberian population that regularly migrates to Australia on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. On the other hand, if we accept that there is a potential of small, but viable, populations of Pectoral Sandpipers wintering in Africa, based on several records as already mentioned, it could be heading to Africa. This explanation holds well for Caspian Plover as non-breeding birds occur in eastern and southern Africa. Their migratory routes are not well understood; autumn migrants probably move across Red Sea to pass through Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, and Zambia to Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa (Urban *et al.* 1986). Some individuals and small flocks that have drifted outside their normal range to the Indian Subcontinent spend winter here, but others could be flying directly to Africa after 'hopping' in the Indian Subcontinent. One might speculate that migration to Africa via the Indian Subcontinent could be a secondary route, followed by a small fraction of the overall population that has drifted eastwards. The large number of records (Sangha *et al.* 2010), the consistency of arrivals, especially of small flocks, is perhaps also a strong indicator of a regular migration.

The Pectoral Sandpiper is a vagrant to the Indian Subcontinent (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Kazmierczak 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) on the basis of a single sight record from Harike, Punjab (31°13'N, 75°12'E) on 10 and 11 May 1998 by HSS and Per Undeland (Undeland & Sangha 2002). Although occurrence of the Pectoral Sandpiper at Madayippara is the second record for the Indian Subcontinent, and first record for Kerala and peninsular India, this is the first photographic record of the species from the Indian Subcontinent.

The Caspian Plover, though considered a vagrant to the Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett *et al.* 2011 Kazmierczak 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), is probably an overlooked species (see Sangha *et al.* 2010). Although this is a first record of this species from Kerala, as its not listed by Sashikumar *et al.* (2004, 2011), it is not unexpected, as it has been recorded a few times in peninsular India and Sri Lanka (Kazmierczak *et al.* 1993; Balachandran 1994; Elamon2013), and Goa (Lainer 2004).

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# Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* recorded in Rajasthan, India in 2001

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Ullman, M., 2014. Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* recorded in Rajasthan, India, in 2001. *Indian BIRDS* 9 (3): 67–68.
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On 03 February 2001, I visited the river junction at Sangam with a group of Swedish birdwatchers. Sangam is south-east from Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan (25°50'N, 76°33'E).

While walking along the river shore we got very bad views of a gull flying off at eye-level. My own reaction was, "There is no gull with such a wing pattern in this area," concluding that it was stained or aberrant (it was obviously larger than a Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*). Only afterwards did I learn that someone actually had mentioned Kittiwake.

Well, the odd gull was entirely forgotten as we enjoyed great views of *c.* 80 Small Pratincoles *Glareola lactea* as well as Black-bellied Terns *Sterna acuticauda*, Brown-headed Gulls *Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus*, and Great Black-headed Gulls *Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus*.

After lunch we resumed our birding when I suddenly, at 1430 hrs, spotted a first-winter Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* leisurely flying south along the river. The others' attention was immediately drawn to the gull and at a distance of *c.* 200 m we could follow it in our telescopes as it continued south in steady flight with somewhat stiff wing beats, typical of the species. The visibility was good, and we had the sun from behind for at least 30 seconds, after which the bird was flying towards the sun, but still being lit from the side.

## Description

Pale grey saddle and inner fore-wing. Well-defined, narrow black hind-neck band. Obvious black upperwing W-pattern with approximately four outer primaries solidly black and gleaming white "triangle" covering secondaries, greater coverts and inner primaries. Underwing white. Tail with very shallow fork and black terminal band. Bill black [Fig. 1].

## Identification

The bird was immediately identified, simply because there was no alternative! The only regular gull with a similar W-pattern in the area is first-winter Little Gull, which, however, has more dark grey and less pitch black in primaries, dark bar along the base of the secondaries, sooty crown, and different and more fluttering flight apart from being obviously smaller. Little Gull was not even considered at the time of observation.

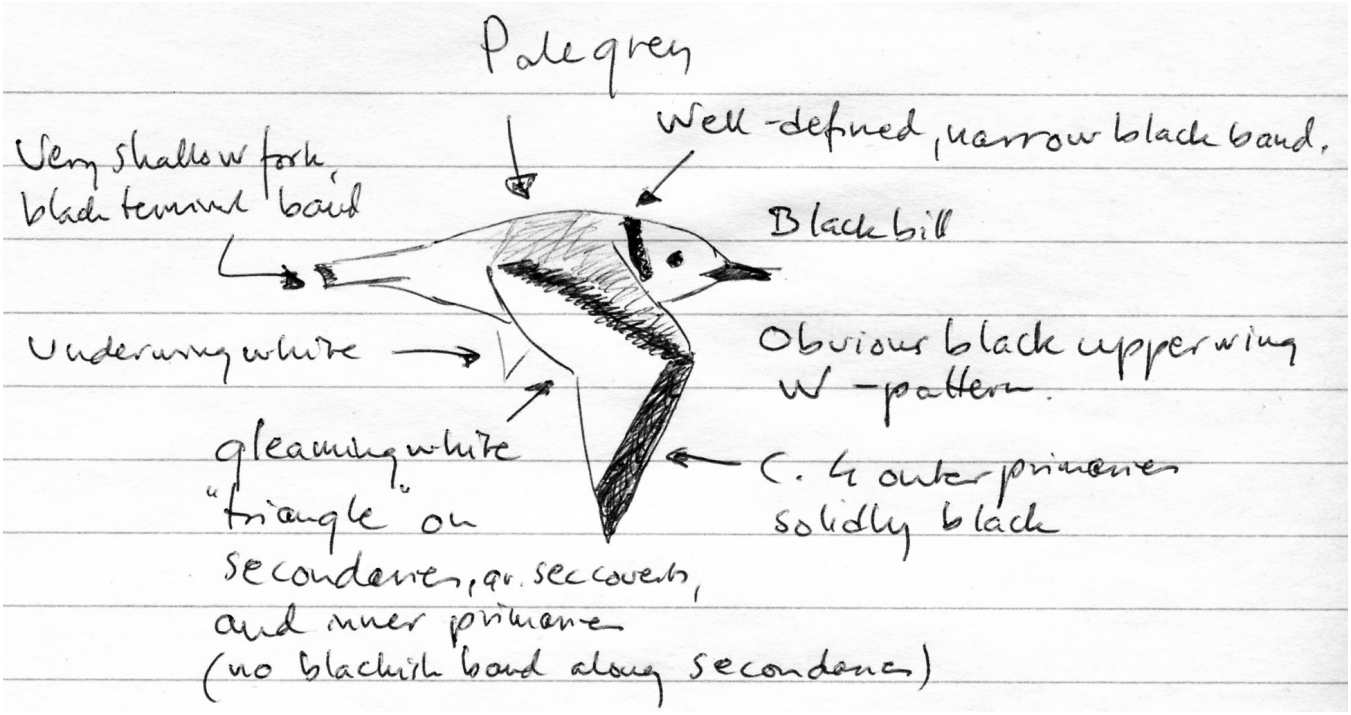


Fig. 1. Author's field sketch of the Kittiwake.

## Conclusion

While marvelling over this highly unpredictable record we also concluded that the Kittiwake might actually have moved inland across Siberia and Central Asia to this site, deep inside mainland India, rather than come to South Asia along a marine migratory route via the Bering Strait or West Europe.

This appears to be the first record of Kittiwake in the Indian Subcontinent.

## Subsequent records

While the Rajasthan observation constitutes the first Kittiwake record for India, there have been at least four subsequent records of five birds:

One first winter, Morjim, Goa, 16 January 2005 (Newsome 2005; Prasad 2005).

One first winter, Alibaug, Maharashtra, 25 November 2012 (Rahane & Bramhankar 2013).

One first winter on the Brahmaputra near Majuli Island, Assam, 30 November 2012 (Chatterjee 2012).

Two first winter, Chavakkad, Kerala, 24 January–05 February 2013 (Das *et al.* 2013).

The Assam observation is an inland record, as is the Rajasthan record, while the other birds appeared along the coast. However, it is highly likely that all Kittiwakes travelled inland via Central Asia to India, rather than any of the much longer marine routes.

Also, it is notable that four birds were recorded in the winter 2012/2013, which actually may suggest that Kittiwake is not as rare in India as has formerly been the view.

All six recorded birds were first winters, which would be expected in this type of extreme vagrancy.

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# Long-tailed Jaeger *Stercorarius longicaudus* from the western coast of India: Identification in retrospect

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Pelagic birding is a recent trend in the Indian birding scene. The interest generated from the loosely coordinated surveys conducted from 2010 (Karuthedathu *et al.* 2013; Praveen 2013a) onwards, off the coasts of Kerala and Karnataka, have triggered a great interest in the genre, resulting in more off-shore boat trips from Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra (Gnanaskandan 2012; Muthunarayanan 2012; Manivannan 2013; Shivkar 2013).

The trips conducted during winter have always resulted in sightings of the small skuas, also known as Jaegers (Stercorariidae). The overall distribution trend of these birds, based on positive identifications from the western coast of India, can be summarised as follows: Parasitic Jaegers *Stercorarius parasiticus* are the commonly met species, which start to appear from August onwards, followed by Pomarine Jaegers *S. pomarinus*, which have been sighted from October onwards. Trips from November to February have produced more Pomarine than Parasitic Jaegers, while towards the end of the migratory season (April), this trend is again reversed (Prince 2011; Praveen 2013a, b). Long-tailed Jaegers had not been recorded with positive identifications till now in any of these trips (Prince 2011; Gnanaskandan 2012; Muthunarayanan 2012; Karuthedathu *et al.* 2013; Manivannan 2013; Praveen 2013a; Shivkar 2013).

The only published record of Long-tailed Jaeger from the Indian region is a sighting of three birds off Lakshadweep by D. M. Simpson (Bourne 1989), but the recent field guides (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) still treat this species as a vagrant/possible species. Praveen *et al.* (2013) have proposed that the Long-tailed Jaeger be excluded from the Indian checklist due to lack of well-confirmed sightings, though it was noted that it could potentially occur in the region.

In this note, I discuss the features of a confusing jaeger from Kochi, and subsequent re-identification of two birds photographed during a pelagic trip from Mangalore, as one definite, and one likely, Long-tailed Jaeger. These birds were initially dismissed as possibly Parasitic/Pomarine Jaegers, but a re-visit of the archived photographs, with a fresh perspective, brought to light the key features that were missed during the earlier identification process. The main reasons for this oversight are:

- Plumage characters of the observed birds did not match the typical plumage illustrated in popular field guides (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Maling Olsen & Svensson 1997). Jaegers exhibit a high degree of plumage variations resulting in identification challenges. There is a considerable inter-specific overlap between their plumage characters, the multiple stages of immature plumages, and the great deal of individual variations (Howell 2007)
- In jaegers along the Indian coast, moult from breeding plumage to winter plumage, and back, within a few months, result in a large number of birds with intermediate characters. In many instances, immediate identification may not be possible and chances of misidentification are quite high.
- Indian observers are not well versed with structural and plumage differences of jaegers, as opportunities to study them in the field are scarce. The process of building up expertise in pelagic birds is also slow as only a few pelagic trips are conducted annually, and participation opportunities are relatively low.
- A bias formed due to rarity status of this species is probably a major reason. Since the species was not reported in the recent past (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) and existing records were under scrutiny (Praveen *et al.* 2013), it was presumed that probability of encountering a Long-tailed Jaeger is very less.

The challenges in pelagic bird identification implied that some birds (or many in some trips!) might not have been positively identified, or were misidentified. Hence, it was a norm to collect all photographs from the participating photographers to create a single repository of pelagic bird pictures. Most photographers readily shared all their images, irrespective of the quality, sharpness, or resolution, without any copyright concerns. This repository, with its large collection of pictures, enabled viewing of multiple images of the same bird from different angles and positions, thus facilitating the identification process. So, on the brighter side, this re-identification process has become possible just because of the creation of a digital archive of pelagic bird photographs at a single location.

## Confusing jaeger from Kochi

During email exchanges with experts (Klaus Malling Olsen, and Daniel López-Velasco: *pers. comm*., emails of 12 November 2013; John Martin, Martin Elliott, and Ian Broadbent through Mike Prince: *pers. comm*., emails of 13 December 2013) regarding a jaeger [**75-78**] photographed off Kochi, Kerala, there were suggestions that the bird showed a few characters of a Long-tailed Jaeger in some views, while it matched a Parasitic Jaeger in others. The main characters that were further discussed are summarised below:

Characters favouring a Long-tailed Jaeger: Small round head with large eyes, and attenuated rear, typical of Long-tailed Jaegers. Legs look pale in a few images, which may favour a Long-tailed Jaeger, as other two species would have shown dark patches on, or fully dark, tarsi— assuming this bird is an adult/near-adult (aged based on the darker underwing coverts).

Characters favouring a Parasitic Jaeger: Overall lack of contrast

between the fresh coverts and primaries is a point against Long-tailed Jaeger. Being a possible adult/sub-adult, the amount of white at the base of primaries is much larger than that expected for a Long-tailed Jaeger (note that the primaries appear bleached). Also, the bird shows pale shafts to all five outer primaries.

The beak looks short and stout in some views, while it appears longer in some other views.

Though the identification of the above bird was inconclusive, the detailed review of identification features triggered a relook into the existing images in the "Pelagic archive". This resulted in re-evaluation of identification of two jaegers from the Mangalore coast and four jaegers from Odisha (Ukil & Karuthedathu 2013; see elsewhere in this issue), and all these turned up as Long-tailed Jaegers.

## Long-tailed Jaeger from Mangalore

Both the birds described below were photographed during a two-day pelagic trip organised by the S. A. Husain Memorial Trust, Mangalore, on 03–04 March 2012.

### Bird 1

The characters that support its identification as Long-tailed Jaeger are: relatively small build and narrower wings, short and stout beak, absence of white at the base of primaries, white shaft prominent on the growing P9, very subdued pale shaft for other inner primaries, pin-like central tail feathers, and the dual tone upper wing with darker secondaries and paler coverts [**79-80**]. The plumage looks quite different from field guide illustrations, with a brown hood and warm brown barring on the flanks and under tail coverts. The bird is identified as an adult based on uniformly dark underwing coverts; besides, several experts have also confirmed the identification as this species (Robert Flood, *pers. comm.*, email of 30 November 2013; Rob van Bemmelen, *pers. comm.*, email of 11 December 2013; Dick Newell, *pers. comm.*, email of 05 January 2014; Klaus Malling Olsen, *pers. comm.*, email of 19 January 2014).

**75.** Confusing Jaeger, Kochi, Kerala.

**76.** Confusing Jaeger, Kochi, Kerala.

Photo: Biju P. B.

Photos: J. Kuriakose

**77.** Confusing Jaeger, Kochi, Kerala.

Photo: M. Mohan

**78.** Confusing Jaeger, Kochi, Kerala.

**79.** Long-tailed Jaeger (Bird 2), Mangalore, Karnataka.

Photos: J. Kuriakose

**80.** Long-tailed Jaeger (Bird 2), Mangalore, Karnataka.

**81.** Possible long-tailed Jaeger (Bird 3), Mangalore, Karnataka.

**82.** Possible long-tailed Jaeger (Bird 3), Mangalore, Karnataka.

Photos: S. Shankar

**83.** Possible long-tailed Jaeger (Bird 3), Mangalore, Karnataka.

## Bird 2

This bird was seen at a distance, and flew past quickly. Observers noted its faster flight, lighter body, and overall grey tones in the field. The images [**81-83**] show that the bird is lighter in build with narrower wings and long 'arms', has overall paler upper wings with contrasting secondaries, shows white shafts to only two outer primaries (vs. greater than three primaries with white shafts in other jaegers), and uniform dark under wings without any obvious white at the base of primaries [**82**]. Though the above-mentioned features are diagnostic with respect to other jaegers, the identification of this bird as a Long-tailed Jaeger is left provisional, as the images are not sharp and clear.

## Conclusion

Amongst the three jaegers discussed, the first bird from Mangalore is confirmed as Long-tailed Jaeger and is the first record from India's western coast, while the second bird appears to be a

Long-tailed Jaeger. Opinions on the bird from Kochi were divided and hence further detailed opinions are invited from experts.

The effort of getting multiple photographers to scan their archives, coordinating with them to pick the relevant images, processing them, and collating all these images is a herculean task! As indicated above, this whole process of retrospective identification was possible because photographs from multiple photographers (providing multiple angles and resolutions) were available for browsing at a single place.

This discussion highlights the importance of building up an archive of photographs to solve identification challenges for difficult groups like pelagic birds. It is recommended that in future pelagic trips the coordinators should transfer all photographs from participants, then and there, without worrying about content, quality, or size of the transferred images.

## Acknowledgements

This result would not have been possible without the selfless contribution from a bunch of bird photographers who shared all their images without any further apprehensions. So I wish to thank all photographers who contributed to creating this database: Abhilash Arjunan, Anush Shetty, Arun C. G., Aswinikumar Bhat, Bijoy K. I., Biju P. B., Garima Bhatia, P. J. George, Jainy Maria, Karthik, Kesavamurthy, E. Kunjhikrishnan, Mike Prince, Mohanram Kemparaju, Muruganmohan, Praveen E. S., Prashanth Poojari, Raju A. K., Sachin Shurpali, Sandeep Das, Shiva Shankar, Teddy Nirappaan, K. V. Uthaman, Vijay Cavale, Vijesh Vallikkunnu, Vinayakumar Thimmappa, and Vishnu Sivadas. Thanks to Klaus Malling Olsen, Robert Flood, Rob van Bemmelen, John Martin, Martin Elliott, Ian Broadbent, Steve N. G. Howell, Mike Prince, and Daniel López-Velasco, who analysed the images and provided opinions on identification. I would also like to acknowledge Praveen J., for reviewing the initial draft and for overall support and encouragement.

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Shivkar, A., 2013. First Pelagic trip off North Maharashtra coast – 6th Oct, 2013. URL: https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/bngbirds/conversations/messages/25836 [Accessed on 28 February 2014].

# Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris* from Kanyakumari coast, Tamil Nadu

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Manivannan, P., Mohan, M., Karuthedathu, D., Muthunarayanan K., 2014. Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris* from Kanyakumari coast, Tamil Nadu. *Indian BIRDS* 9 (3): 72–73.

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Pelagic bird watching trips have been conducted regularly since September 2010 off the western coast of India (Karuthedathu *et al.* 2013). However, on the eastern coast, they started only from September 2012. The fourth such trip was organized by the Pearl City Nature Society, on 07 September 2013 from off the Kanyakumari coast (08°05'N, 77°33'E). The Southwest Monsoon was not active over this part of the country at this time and reports from fishermen about bird sightings encouraged us to make this trip. At around 0900 hrs, approximately 5 kms from the harbor, we sighted, close to a catamaran, a Noddy, along with Sooty- *Onychoprion fuscatus* and Common *Sterna hirundo* Terns. At first sight, the Noddy appeared smaller than a Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*, which we had sighted on previous trips, including one from Tuticorin, *c.* 100 kms from Kanyakumari. Its flight was faster than a Brown Noddy and somewhat fluttery. When we approached closer, it moved

Photo: D. Karuthedathu

**84.** Lesser Noddy and Common Tern.

Photo: M. Mohan

**85.** Lesser Noddy.

away from our boat and disappeared from view.

While the bird was flying away from us, MM managed to take few good photographs, and DK managed to grab a short video footage. Analysis of these images indicated that the bird in question had a long thin beak, a relatively delicate build, long narrow wings, and uniform dark upper parts, all of which favored a Lesser-*A. minutus*, or a Black-*A. tenuirostris* Noddy [**84** Karuthedathu 2013). The bird also showed pale lores and a pale cap grading evenly to the grey sides [**85**], and moderately forked tail, indicating a Lesser Noddy, as against a Black Noddy, which should have shown all dark lore, contrasting pale white cap, and deeply forked tail (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

These images were also circulated amongst various experts (David Montecelli, and Tony Diamond, *pers. comm.*, emails of 12 September 2013; W. R. P. Bourne, and Teresa Catry, *pers. comm.,* emails of 12 September 2013; Charles Anderson, *pers. comm.,* email of 18 September 2013; Chris Feare, *pers. comm.,* emails of 18 October 2013) who were familiar with both types of birds, for confirmation. All of them agreed that it is one of the smaller noddies, and while commenting on the difficulty in separating Black and Lesser Noddy in field, most of them confirmed the identification mainly based on the pale lore and evenly grading cap. This is the second record of this species from Tamil Nadu, the first being from Point Calimere (Balachandran *et al.* 1986).

Breeding of the Lesser Noddy has been reported from Chagos and the Maldives in the Indian Ocean (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It is also reported as a non-breeding visitor to Sri Lanka (De Silva 1979; Robson 2011). Further pelagic trips from the southern Indian coast are essential to collect more data on this species and conspecifics.

## Acknowledgements

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# Wind-blown pelagic birds from Odisha, India

Panchami Manoo Ukil & Dipu Karuthedathu

Ukil, P. M., & Karuthedathu, D., 2014. Wind-blown pelagic birds from Odisha, India. *Indian BIRDS* 9 (3): 74–76.
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Until recently, the data on Indian pelagic avifauna has been compiled mainly from records of wind-blown birds (Ali & Ripley 1987; Karuthedathu *et al.* 2013). Most of these birds have been brought to land by strong monsoon winds on India's western coast, and the occasional cyclones that hit the country's eastern coast.

On 12 October 2013 a very strong tropical cyclone, called Phailin, hit the Odisha coast at midnight. On the following afternoon, ornithologists Umakanta Biswal and Subhendu Bhattacharya visited the Munduli Barrage (20°26'N, 85°44'E) in Cuttack district, Odisha, 30 kms from the state's capital, Bhubaneswar, as they anticipated that some sea birds may have been blown inland by the strong cyclonic winds. They were rewarded with the sight of three jaegers, *Stercorarius* species, feeding and resting on the turbulent river. The birds were seen the next afternoon too when they returned with Ar Shakti Nanda and Mahesh Kar. On the morning of the 15 October, PMU, Swetashree Purohit, and Avinash Khemka revisited the area. On that day, five jaegers, a noddy (*Anous* sp.), and a dark-backed tern (Sternidae) were sighted. The jaegers floated on the fast-flowing waters of the barrage, and would occasionally take short flights, skimming the water and rising again.

Photographs were taken of all the birds using digital cameras, but since the observers were not familiar with these birds, they were not identified in the field. Once back from the field, the images were circulated on various online forums. The noddy was identified conclusively as Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* while the dark-backed tern was identified as Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus.* The initial set of jaeger images generated much discussion, with suggestions ranging from Parasitic Jaeger *S. parasiticus* to South Polar Skua *S. maccormicki*, but the majority weighed towards a Parasitic Jaeger, based on the overall size, and the fact that it was the commonest jaeger sighted during recent pelagic surveys (Karuthedathu *et al.* 2013; Praveen 2013).

At this time, DK was in touch with Klaus Malling Olsen with respect to the identification of a jaeger photographed at Kochi during a pelagic trip, which showed characters of a Long-tailed Jaeger *S. longicaudus.* This discussion triggered DK to revisit the images that were circulated from Odisha. PMU shared more images of the birds and selected images of three birds were sent by DK to Klaus Malling Olsen, Rob van Bemmelen, and Robert Flood, who also agreed with the identification of the three birds as Long-tailed Jaegers (Klaus Malling Olsen, Rob van Bemmelen, and Robert Flood: *pers. comm.*, emails of 28 November 2013). Later, one more jaeger with very similar characters was found while collecting more images. Thus, out of five jaegers seen, four had been identified as Long-tailed and one had to be left unidentified, as its photograph was unclear; but this last bird could also be a Long-tailed Jaeger as it was similar in size and behaviour to the other four birds.

## Identification

### Jaeger 1 [86]

This bird is an adult Long-tailed Jaeger; it is aged on the basis of its plumage, which is similar to that of a typical adult in breeding plumage. The key pointers for identification are an overall sleeker build with thin neck and small rounded head, and a narrow but well-defined cap, a short, but stout, all dark beak, greyer coverts noticeably paler than remiges, and pointed central tail feathers. All the above-mentioned characters differentiate it from a Pomarine Jaeger *S. pomarinus.* Except for its pointed tail, which a Parasitic Jaeger could have, rest of the features distinguish this bird from that bird.

Photo: P. M. Ukil

**86.** Adult Long-tailed Jaeger.

### Jaeger 2 [87-88]

This bird is identified as an adult/immature Long-tailed Jaeger. It is aged on the progress of moult: this bird shows two fresh, and six old, primaries (Juveniles are expected to start the moult only between November and January and hence would have shown more number of older primaries, say 8-10 on this date) (Howell 2007), and possibly unmarked under primary coverts (Fig 3). The key pointers for identification are an overall smaller build, overall grey tones to upper body, short beak, pale tarsus for this age (Pomarine and Parasitic Jaegers which are more than an year old generally show some dark patches on tarsii), coverts noticeably paler than remiges and pale primary shaft visible only on two outer primaries (prominent in three or more primaries for Pomarine and Parasitic). All the above-mentioned characters differentiate it from both, the Pomarine, and the Parasitic Jaegers.

**87.** Immature/Adult Long-tailed Jaeger.

Photos: M. Kar

**88.** Immature/Adult Long-tailed Jaeger.

## Jaeger 3 [89-90]

This slightly heavily barred bird is identified as an adult Long-tailed Jaeger, its age determined based on the uniform under wing coverts. The key pointers for identification are overall smaller build with small round head and large eyes, short but stout all-dark beak, overall grey tones to upper body, pale coverts contrasting with darker remiges, pale primary shaft prominent only on two outer primaries (*contra* three or more primaries for Pomarine and Parasitic), pale tarsus (Pomarine and Parasitic Jaegers which are more than an year old generally show some amount of dark patches on tarsus), lack of any visible pale bases to primaries and pointed central tail feathers. All the above-mentioned characters differentiate it from a Pomarine Jaeger, and, except the pointed central tail feathers, from the Parasitic Jaeger as well.

Photo: A. Rathor

**89.** Adult Long-tailed Jaeger.

Photo: A. Khemka

**90.** Adult Long-tailed Jaeger.

## Jaeger 4 [91-92]

This bird is identified as a possible second year Long-tailed Jaeger, its age being based on lack of pale tips to upper wing coverts and uniformly barred under wing coverts. The key pointers for identification are its overall smaller build with small rounded head, short all dark beak, overall grey tones to upper body, pale coverts contrasting with darker remiges and similarity in size to other birds in the field. All these characters separate it from both, Pomarine, and Parasitic Jaegers.

Long-tailed Jaegers generally show prominent pale shafts on only two outermost primaries, but this image shows pale shafts on middle primaries as well. It is assumed that, here, this effect could have been caused due to aging and bleaching of feathers.

Photo: A. S. Nanda

**91.** Jaeger 4 (Immature Long-tailed Jaeger).

Photo: M. Kar

**92.** Immature Long-tailed Jaeger.

## Discussion

The only published record of a Long-tailed Jaeger from the Indian region is a sighting of three birds near Lakshadweep (Bourne 1989), but the recent field guides (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) still treat this species as a vagrant/possible species. During the recent review and update of the Indian Checklist (Praveen *et al.* 2013), the Long-tailed Jaeger was excluded from the checklist due to a lack of sufficient confirmed sightings, but with a note that it is a very probable bird as there are confirmed records from Maldives and Sri Lanka (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The current sighting (from east coast), along with a recent sighting in west coast during a pelagic trip from Mangalore in 2012 (Karuthedathu 2014) indicates that they are indeed not uncommon in Indian coast.

Published data (Praveen *et al.* 2011; Karuthedathu *et al.* 2013; Praveen 2013) from the previous pelagic trips from India's western coast indicate that Parasitic and Pomarine Jaegers are common along that coast, but among the windblown birds of Odisha, these species were absent. Indeed, it would be interesting to find out if jaeger distribution along the eastern coast differs from that of the western. The fact that Long-tailed Jaegers were spotted at Munduli Barrage perhaps indicates that they may not be as rare as considered earlier, and that future pelagic trips off the eastern coast should keep a lookout for them.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank ornithologists Umakanta Biswal and Subhendu Bhattacharya for informing about the sighting of the Skuas at Munduli on 13 October 2013 and all the members of Birds of Orissa and The Bhubaneswar Bird Walks who photographed and documented the sightings over a period of five days. Thanks to Mahesh Kar, Avinash Khemka, Ar Shakti Nanda, and Ashesh Rathor for sharing the photographs used in this report. We would also like to thank Klaus Malling Olsen, Robert Flood, and Rob van Bemmelen for confirming the identification and providing detailed comments on the identification pointers, and Klaus Malling Olsen also for reviewing an earlier draft of this note. We thank Praveen J., and Anurag Mishra for initiating the discussions, and Praveen J., for his constant inputs and review of initial drafts.

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# Oriental Scops Owl *Otus sunia* sighted in Delhi after nearly a century

Janaki Turaga

Turaga, J., 2014. Oriental Scops Owl *Otus sunia* sighted in Delhi after nearly a century. *Indian BIRDS* 9 (3): 76–77.
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The sighting of a single Oriental Scops Owl *Otus sunia* in its rufous morph (cinnamon-bay phase) at Raghopur village in South Delhi at approximately 1700 hrs on 05 March 2011 is the first known record from Delhi State since 1925 [**93**]. It was not sighted subsequently. The site is just a few yards away from the Delhi-Haryana border with only a broken barbed wire fence marking the boundary between the two states. The bird was observed for about forty minutes, until fading daylight and cold winds made it difficult to continue observation. It was found asleep in the bare thorny branches a 'keekar' tree *Acacia nilotica indica* that was putting out new leaf. The tree was along a dirt track through ripe mustard fields, which were being harvested. The sleeping owl occasionally turned its head and opened and closed its eyes. The strong winds blew its prominent ear tufts backwards almost flattening them to its head.

As shown in the photographs [**94**], the plumage was the typical rufous morph of the cinnamon-bay phase described in Ali & Ripley (1969). The bird's bare parts were also as described there: iris golden yellow, bill horny yellow tipped blackish and feet dingy yellowish. The wider habitat where the owl was found was a mix of agricultural and human habitation (see the background picture).

The only known previous sighting of the Oriental Scops Owl in Delhi was in 1925 when two sightings were made in February and March. Note at that time, and well into the 1970s, it was considered a subspecies of the Eurasian Scops Owl *Otus scops.* There have been no further reported sightings from Delhi or indeed Haryana (Harvey *et al.* 2006). Table 1 summarizes the three known sightings.

**Table 1.** Oriental Scops Owl sightings from Delhi

| Date | Place: village/state | Specimen: number/sex/morph | Habitat: natural/man-made | Activity | Tree species | Status of the bird | Observer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 05 March 2011 | Raghopur Village, South Delhi; close to Haryana border | One of unknown sex, rufous morph, cinnamon-bay phase | Amidst cultivation / man-made | Roosting in the middle branches of a keekar tree | Acacia nilotica | Photographed | Janaki Turaga |
| 22 March 1925 | Near New Delhi | One male, reddish-brown morph, Cinnamon-bay phase | keekar jungle | Perched "…amongst the topmost branches of a Keekar tree…" | Acacia nilotica | Specimen collected | Basil-Edwards (Ganguly 1975) |
| 26 February 1925 | Qudsia Gardens, North Delhi | One female, cinnamon-bay phase | 18th century man-made garden, with many old trees. Re-constructed in 1905–1906 | Not available | Not available | Specimen collected | F. H. Cole (Ganguly 1975) |

**93.** Oriental Scops Owl rufous morph, at Raghopur village in South Delhi.


Photos: J. Turaga

**94.** Oriental Scops Owl rufous morph.

## Habitat changes

The habitat of Oriental Scops Owl has been described as, "Forest, wooded areas and habitation," (Grimmett & Inskipp 1999), and, "Affects forest (deciduous and evergreen), orchards, groves of densely foliaged trees around cultivation, etc.," (Ali & Ripley 1969). All three sightings were from places that would fit these broad descriptions. The Qudsia Gardens are medieval Mughal gardens, which were man-made and planted with many exotic species of trees, resembling an orchard. They were reconstructed in 1905–1906. The *keekar* jungle site was most likely part of the Ridge, which was forested by the British in the late nineteenth century. In spite of encroachments, much *keekar* jungle remains along the Ridge in Delhi and it would seem the owl might favour this tree species.

Raghopur village area itself has undergone various land use changes in a short span of three years. The *keekar* tree dried up and was cut down by the villagers when the dirt track road was replaced with a tarred road. The area of Raghopur and the nearby areas of New Palam Vihar (Gurgaon, Haryana state) are being developed with farmhouses, apartment complexes, and independent homes. In 2014, the agricultural lands of Raghopur adjoining the road were approved for building farmhouses with a plot of one acre, for which tarred roads were laid, and electricity infrastructure provided.

Such local changes aside, the main reason there are so few sightings are probably that Delhi is beyond its normal range and its occurrence there is therefore infrequent. In addition it is a small, inconspicuous, nocturnal species that usually roosts in thick cover and is very easily overlooked.

## Range & status

Globally, the Oriental Scops Owl's range comprises South Asia, South-East Asia, Japan, and South-East Russia, and it has a 'Least Concern' status (BirdLife 2014). It is a resident breeder of India with a wide range including the Western- and Eastern- Ghats (and adjoining lowlands in north-central and southern India), the Himalayan foothills, the north-eastern region, and the Andaman Islands. It covers an impressive range of ecosystems ranging from tropical rainforests (Western Ghats), deciduous forests (central and southern India), and the entire extent of the Himalayan foothills. There are no known estimates for the population either for India, or for each ecosystem that it inhabits in India. As a consequence, its status in India is not fully known. Any further sightings from Delhi (or indeed Haryana) should be reported.

## Acknowledgements

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# Sighting of Common Swift *Apus apus* from southern India

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Karuthedathu, D., Das, V. N., & Palot, M. J., 2014. Sighting of Common Swift *Apus apus* from southern India. *Indian BIRDS* 9 (3): 78–79.
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The distribution of the Common Swift *Apus apus* in South Asia is given in Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) as, "Summer visitor N, C and E Afghanistan, Baluchistan, Himalayas of N Pakistan through Kashmir and east to C Nepal; widespread migrant through Afghanistan and Maldives. Reported as vagrant Gujarat and Andamans." This species was reported from Saurashtra (Gujarat) in the late fifties (Lavkumar 1958; Ali & Ripley 1983), and more recently there have been a few unconfirmed reports from Goa (Lainer 2004), and Maharashtra (Prasad 2006).

This note describes three separate records of Common Swift from southern India: two sight records, one from Mettur, Tamil Nadu (11°54'N, 77°43'E), and the other from Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu (08°05'N, 77°33'E), made during bird watching trips; and the third, a specimen recovered from the Arabian Sea near Thaikadappuram, Kasaragod district, Kerala (12°14'N, 76°06'E).

While on a regular bird watching trip to Gopinatham (Chamarajnagar district, Karnataka) on 29 August 2009, DK and VND had stopped along the Mettur Reservoir to observe the waterbirds in the shallow backwaters. There was also a big flock (100+) of Asian Palm Swifts *Cypsiurus balasiensis* in the sky at that time. While scanning this flock, a relatively bigger and darker swift caught our attention. In the next few seconds, while the bird was around, we could clearly note that this bird was bigger, bulkier, and darker compared to Asian Palm Swifts; had an all-dark rump area with no visible contrast with the dark back, had a well forked tail, and a slightly paler throat compared to the rest of its body. Though we scanned further, we could not locate any more such birds. Since the documented distribution ranges did not include South India (other than provisional records from Goa) and we saw just a single bird (no photographs were taken), we decided to keep the identification of this bird as provisional and to keep a look out for this in future trips before publishing. Though we searched, the bird was never seen again in the further trips to the same area. And then on 07 September 2013, it happened again! DK and VD were part of a group of bird watchers waiting to board the boat for a single day pelagic trip from Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu. A flock of Asian Palm Swifts and a few Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* were flying above and amongst these, we noticed a big dark swift. Though the bird did not come close, it stayed in the area for a few minutes, during which its relatively bigger size, all dark rump, and well-forked tail were noted. Balaji Rayadurgam also managed to take few pictures of the swift before it disappeared. The images showed the overall shape, well forked tail, and pale throat, which matched a Common Swift [**95**].

As we were about to prepare a note based on the above two sightings, about the possible occurrence of Common Swifts in southern India, we got some unexpected supporting evidence! On

Photo: B. Rayadurgam

**95.** Three images of Common Swift in flight from Kanyakumari.

24 September 2013, K. Praveen Kumar of Nileshwaram brought an exhausted swift, recovered from a fishing boat approximately 20–25 km off the coast of Thaikadappuram, to MJP. It had no apparent external injuries but was exhausted and couldn't fly. The bird died the next day and the specimen was photographed, and deposited in the collections of Zoological Survey of India, Kozhikode (specimen number ZSI/WGRC/IR/V.2474) [**96-97**]. The images of the bird clearly showed all features of a juvenile Common Swift: uniform dark plumage including dark rump, scaling on crown, white throat patch, well forked tail, and pointed wings. The bird weighed about 8.5 g (other biometric data are given in the Table 1).

For completeness, the other species considered during our identification process were, Pallid Swift *A. pallidus*, and Dark-rumped Swift *A. acuticauda*. The former was ruled out based on colour, very pointed wings, lack of pale fringes on under parts,

**96.** Under parts of recovered Common Swift juvenile from Thaikadappuram, Kasaragod district, Kerala.

Photo: K. P. Kumar

**97.** Upper parts of recovered Common Swift juvenile from Thaiikadappuram, Kasaragod district, Kerala.

**Table 1.** Biometrics of the specimen recovered from Thaikadappuram, Kasaragod district, Kerala

| | Thaikkadappuram Bird | Handbook (Ali & Ripley 1983) |
|---|---|---|
| Wing | 165 mm | 160–180 mm |
| Wingspan | 370 mm | – |
| Tail | 70.5 mm | 66–77 mm |
| Culmen | 07.9 mm | – |
| Bill | 09.5 mm (tip to skull) | 8 mm (tip to feathering) |
| Tarsus | 10.17 mm | 10 mm |
| Claws | 5.8 mm | – |

and eye patch, and the latter on its uniform dark underside.

The habits of Common Swift are mentioned as, "Highly gregarious, often in mixed flocks" (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). This latter part matches our observations as on both occasions, the bird was found amidst a flock of Asian Palm Swifts. Since all the three records mentioned here occurred during the known period of passage migration, during late August and September, and from different years, they may suggest that Common Swifts do pass over southern India during their migration to Africa, and it may be worthwhile to scan the resident swift flocks during this season to find an odd Common Swift.

During our analysis of previous records from the Indian plains, we came across a single record in Grimmett *et al.* (2011), from Chhattisgarh, which possibly could have been based on Bharos *et al.* (2010), who mention Common Swift in their checklist and give it the status, "Resident Common," but the list does not mention Little Swift *A. affinis*, which is indeed a common resident. Since the nearest breeding location of Common Swift in India is the Himalaya (Pfister 2004; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), we suspect that this is an error and recommend that the bird recorded by Bharos *et al.* (2010) be considered a House Swift.

## Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Praveen J., and Mike Prince for the help with identification and references. Also, thanks to K. Praveen Kumar who brought us the specimen & sent the initial photographs and Balaji Rayadurgam who shared the images from Kanyakumari.

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100. Baikal Bush-warbler *Locustella davidi*. Photo: R. K. Das

# Baikal Bush-warbler *Locustella davidi* from Dibru-Saikhowa National Park and Biosphere Reserve, Assam, India: A new species for India

James A. Eaton & Ranjan Kumar Das

Eaton, J. A., & Das, R. K., 2014. Baikal Bush-warbler *Locustella davidi* from Dibru-Saikhowa National Park and Biosphere Reserve, Assam, India: A new species for India. *Indian BIRDS* 9 (3): 80–81.

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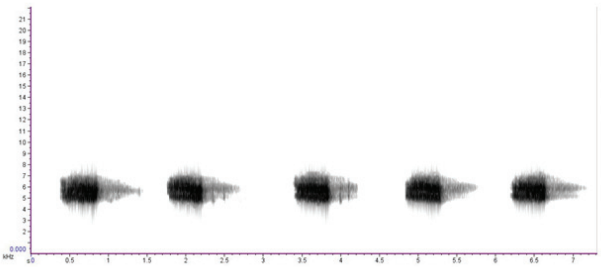
Baikal Bush-warbler *Locustella davidi* is a rather nondescript, small, short, and stiff-tailed, skulking *Locustella* that breeds from north-central China (from north-east Sichuan) to Siberia, wintering in northern south-east Asia (eastern Myanmar to northern Thailand) (JAE *pers. obs.*; Robson 2010). It is typically found breeding in low-lying scrub and grass in open, forest glades up to 2500 m, and winters in rank grassland and marshes below 1400 m (JAE *pers. obs.)*. Due to their similarity, it was long considered conspecific with Spotted Bush-warbler *L. thoracica* until recently (Round & Loskot 1994; Alstrom *et al.* 2008) when its vocalisations became better known. It is in fact sympatric with Spotted Bush-warbler in the southern part of its range (Alstrom *et al.* 2008; JAE *pers. obs.*). It is olive-brown above with pale brown and greyish white throat and grey breast. The breast-spots are weaker than those present in most breeding-plumaged Spotted, but this is variable in both species. In winter both may have pale lower mandibles (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

This note describes three records of Baikal Bush-warbler from Dibru-Saikhowa National Park (NP) and Biosphere Reserve (27°34′N, 95°21′E) ***c***.10 km from Tinsukia town in Tinsukia district, Assam, India. The first two were sightings in successive years documented with a call recording, and the third was more recent photo documentation.

On 22 April 2012, while leading a Birdtour Asia tour to Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, JAE and seven other birders visited Dibru-Saikhowa NP, primarily in search of the endangered Black-breasted Parrotbill *Paradoxornis flavirostris*. The weather was dull and overcast, initially with moderately heavy rain. Within five minutes of leaving the boat on the River Dibru, JAE heard a familiar insect-like noise emanating from the nearby elephant grass (*Saccharum* sp.), and immediately presumed that the sound originated from a Baikal Bush-warbler, a bird with which he is very familiar from north-central China. He was already aware of the importance of the record, having predicted that the species would winter here. He immediately played a pre-loaded recording of the species (from Sichuan, China), and within seconds an all-dark olive-brown *Locustella* appeared just three metres in front of the group. It showed the broad, well rounded tail, all black bill and lower throat faintly spotted as is typical of many members of the genus, and in particular the Spotted/Baikal Bush-warbler complex. Because of the heavy rain, JAE did not have his camera to hand, though one birder, Jacqui Probst did, and she managed to take several photos of the bird as it sang in full view for several minutes. Unfortunately, due to the dull conditions, the photos were not of sufficient quality to reproduce here. JAE did however obtain several sound recordings of the bird, which was in full song (Fig. 1). The song can be described as a single, long cricket-like buzz, lasting 5.5 seconds at a constant 4-7 khz.

Another Baikal Bush-warbler was heard only, approximately 50 m away on the same day. In the late afternoon on 03 April 2013, again at Dibru-Saikhowa NP JAE, again guiding a Birdtour Asia group, heard at least five further individuals, one of which was seen at that time.

Unaware of these records, RKD, visited Motapung-Maguri beel, situated near Dibru-Saikhowa NP, on 02 December 2013 to photograph Spotted Bush-warbler with Binanda Hatiborua, a local birding guide. It was around 0645 hrs when he entered the thick grassland located near the water bodies of Dibru River. Binanda played the call of Spotted Bush-warbler just for a few seconds, when suddenly the bird came out from the dense grassland and RKD obtained a record shot [**98**]. As RKD wanted to take full-body photographs of the bird, he decided to try for a few more minutes. But, to his surprise, another bush-warbler came out from the opposite direction after just four minutes and sat exposed, so RKD was able to take some clear photographs [**99-101**]. Initially, this individual was also thought to be the same species, the Spotted Bush-warbler. However, later RKD decided to transmit the series of photographs to Krys Kazmierczak who further circulated them to Peter Kennerley and Philip Round for help with identification. With their help, it became clear that RKD had photographed both Spotted (the first bird that responded by playback), and Baikal Bush-warbler (second bird that gave a clear view), at the same wintering site together, almost in the same patch!



J. A. Eaton

Fig. 1. Sonograph of a Baikal Bush-warbler's song, Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, 22 April 2012.

**98.** Spotted Bush-warbler *Locustella thoracica*

**99.** Baikal Bush-warbler *Locustella davidi*

Photos: R. K. Das

**101.** Baikal Bush-warbler *Locustella davidi*

Because of their remarkable similarity, Spotted- and Baikal Bush-warblers have long been treated as races of a single species. Here we highlight the important differences between them based on our photographs. Subtle features like differences in size (Baikal slightly smaller) and bill length (slightly shorter in Baikal) are best appreciated in hand and hence not of much use for field IDs. [**99-101**] (Baikal) shows that the bird has slightly more olive tones to its upper parts plumage compared to [**98**] (Spotted); these pictures were shot with the same camera in the same light conditions with no extra post-processing. Baikal has a whiter supercilium compared to that of Spotted as seen in these figures. One of the crucial ID features used was the width of the white on the under tail coverts, which is wider in the case of Baikal, than the white under tail band of the Spotted (Philip Round *in prep.*); though the picture of Spotted [**98**] does show this feature clearly – [**99** & **101**] shows this clearly enough to separate the Baikal. The *sushkini* race of Baikal, which the wintering birds in north-eastern India might belong to, shows a cleaner white throat as seen in [**99** & **101**]. In winter, the lower mandible of Baikal is believed to be entirely pale according to some works (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005), but this is not the case with this particular individual, which has a dark tip to the bill, and such inconsistencies have been reported earlier (Round & Loskot 1994). This is expected since the bill colour transitions from an all-black bill in breeding plumage to a largely pale lower mandible in non-breeding plumage. Additionally, Baikal has a slightly shorter tail, which can be appreciated in these photographs.

Baikal Bush-warbler was considered hypothetical for the South Asian region by Rasmussen & Anderton (2005), as the identification of only putative specimen from India from W. Assam in BMNH (Round & Loskot 1994) was considered doubtful. However, Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) accepted this species for India and South Asia based on JAE's records. There are more recent ringing records from neighbouring Bangladesh (Ul Haque 2012), and also from Nepal (Round & Baral 2013). The identification of the BMNH Assam specimen could perhaps be confirmed by molecular analysis in a future project. This is perhaps the first photographic record of this species from India.

All these records are rather unsurprising, as Baikal Bush-warbler is a common and widespread breeder, with only small numbers found in winter in northern Indochina, so its occurrence further west is to be expected, especially at Dibru-Saikhowa NP due to the area's huge potential for harbouring wintering bush-warblers and other little-known wintering migrants. This adds to the value of Dibru-Saikhowa NP, not just for the rare Brahmaputra floodplain resident species, but also as a major wintering site for many birds breeding further north. Further study is recommended on the importance of the site for Baikal Bush-warbler and other wintering migrants.

## Acknowledgements

JAE wishes to thank Pamela Rasmussen for confirmation of the record, Birdtour Asia Limited and its participants for enabling JAE's visit, and Praveen J., for encouragement to write up the record. RKD would like to express hearty thanks to Krys Kazmierczak, Peter Kennerly, and Philip Round for helping with proper identification of the bird. RKD is indebted to Binanda Hatibarua of Natun Gaon who is one of the finest birding guides of Dibru-Saikhowa NP and who accompanied him on that day.

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# Kashmir Flycatcher *Ficedula subrubra* at Bengaluru: A first record for Karnataka

Shubha Bhat

Bhat, S., Kashmir Flycatcher *Ficedula subrubra* at Bengaluru: A first record for Karnataka. *Indian BIRDS* 9 (3): 82–83.
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*Manuscript received on 03 November 2013.*

This note describes the sighting of an adult male Kashmir Flycatcher *Ficedula subrubra,* at the birdbath in my home garden at the Indian Institute of Science (henceforth, IISc), Bengaluru (13°01'N, 77°34' E), Karnataka, India.

As a part of my routine to maintain the birdbaths in my home garden at IISc, Bengaluru, I watered the ornamental hibiscus and ixora bushes surrounding the birdbaths at about 1140 hrs on 10 October 2013 and went back to my hideout near my kitchen window. While I was observing the usual guests, the Oriental White-eyes *Zosterops palpebrosus* and Cinereous Tit *Parus cinereus* in one of the smaller birdbaths, a Kashmir Flycatcher [**102-103**] appeared all of a sudden from one of the bushes. I was sure that this was a new bird at the birdbath and started observing it. It went back quickly into the bushes and again appeared in a nearby tree for a brief time without giving me an opportunity to photograph it. It continued this hide-and-seek, for about ten minutes, and eventually parked itself on the rim of the big birdbath. I immediately began recording it in video. It started looking around, flicked its tail up and down, and possibly felt safe in the area. It jumped to its right along the rim of the birdbath, and plunged into the birdbath, on top of the leaves of the water lily. Then it came out on the rim and hopped back and forth on the rim of the birdbath. Suddenly it decided to seek the company of the white-eye and the tit, and jumped on to the rim of the smaller birdbath, where the Cinereous Tit was bathing, and the white-eye perched on the other side of the rim. For a split second all three birds formed a nice triangle on the rim of the small birdbath. After this brief encounter, the Kashmir Flycatcher disappeared into the bushes. The entire episode on the birdbath lasted for about a minute. There was no further sighting of the bird after that. It was presumably on its passage southwards to Kerala or Sri Lanka. I have uploaded the entire video at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7E1TUIOs30&feature=youtu.be.

Grimmett *et al.* (1998), and Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) display distribution maps that show its winter population in Sri Lanka, with isolated records in the Western Ghats, perhaps most

Photos: S. Bhat

**102.** Kashmir Flycatcher at author's birdbath in Bengaluru, Karnataka.

**103.** Side view of Kashmir Flycatcher at author's birdbath in Bengaluru, Karnataka.

of them concentrated around the Nilgiris. The status of the bird is listed as Vulnerable (Rahmani 2011; BirdLife International 2014), with passage records from Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and south-western Tamil Nadu. There are no reports of its presence in Karnataka, on the Internet forums like www.indiannaturewatch.net, www.orientalbirdimages.org, or email group, "BngBirds", and hence this is perhaps the first confirmed report for Karnataka.


## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Subbu Subramanya for confirming the identification of the Kashmir Flycatcher. I also thank Non-coastal Karnataka Birding group on Facebook for indicating that the sighting is really rare. I thank Navakanta Bhat and Praveen J., for help in preparing this short note.


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# Letter to the Editor

## A sighting of the Rufous-bellied Hawk-eagle *Lophotriorchis kienerii* from the Palni Hills, Tamil Nadu

Recently, we went on a brief trip to Perumparai, Palni Hills (*c.* 1000 m asl). On the morning of 7 November 2012, around 9.00 am, we had the good fortune to get a good view from a clearing, of an adult Rufous-bellied Hawk-eagle *Lophotriorchis kienerii* soaring above us. The bird was seen for over five minutes in good light and we could see all the field-marks clearly. We also managed to get a record shot of the bird before it disappeared behind a hillside.

The habitat over which the bird was noticed was mainly moist-deciduous but had been converted into plantations of coffee, pepper, and other minor commercial crops. Though the canopy cover was intact and continuous, with patches of remnant vegetation, there were also a few settlements. However, there were some good forest patches also within a few kilometers' radius of Perumparai, including scrub, dry- and moist-deciduous and semi-evergreen vegetation.

The Rufous-bellied Hawk-eagle, though widespread over South and South-east Asia, is quite uncommon, particularly in the Western Ghats (Grimmett *et. al.* 1998; Naoroji 2006). Published reports from Tamil Nadu are rare. There have been just two earlier records of this species from the Palni Hills (Nichols 1944: "Kodaikanal - seen by S. K. Bunker"; Lockwood 2006: "Bombay shola in July 2006"), both from Kodaikanal, around 2000 m asl. In view of the paucity of reports, we thought this sighting was worth reporting.


## Acknowledgement

We are grateful to Joe Homan for inviting and hosting us at Perumparai.


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*18 August 2013.*

# Snapshot sightings

## Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon at Yeoor Hills, Maharashtra

Prateik Kulkarni


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A male Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon *Treron sphenurus* was photographed at Yeoor Hills (19°14′N, 72°57′E), Sanjay Gandhi National Park near Mumbai on 31 December 2013. This is a first record for Maharashtra and the second from peninsular India. It has been reported from Pachmarhi, Madhya Pradesh (Osmaston 1922; Grimmett *et al.* 2011), though that record is considered 'doubtful' by Rasmussen & Anderton (2012).

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## Black-breasted Thrush from Kuldiha Wildlife Sanctuary, Odisha

Avisek Banerjee


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A female Black-breasted Thrush *Turdus dissimilis* was photographed on 04 February 2013 on the eastern bank of the waterbody near Gohirabhola watch tower (21°26′N, 86°35′E), Kuldiha Wildlife Sanctuary, Odisha. There was one more bird with similar features in that area. More regularly recorded in the hills south of River Brahmaputra in north-eastern India, this is the first report from Odisha (Inskipp 2014) and peninsular India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

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## Eurasian Bittern at Dighal, Haryana

Rakesh Ahlawat & Sanjay Tiwari

A single Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* was seen on 25 February 2014 at Dighal (28°45′N, 76°38′E), Jhajhar district, Haryana and photographed two days later. At least three birds are being regularly spotted in this area at the time of writing. Considered an irregular winter visitor here (Harvey *et al.* 2006), and wintering in small numbers in northern India (Rasmussen & Anderton, 2012), the bird gets rarely reported due to its skulking habits.


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## Common Ringed Plover at Pallimukkam, Kerala

Lekshmi R.


107

On 16 February 2014, a single Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* in non-breeding plumage was spotted in a flock of several Little Ringed Plovers *C. dubius* by its larger size, absence of obvious eye-ring and white wing bar in flight, at Pallimukkam Wetlands (09°12′N, 76°39′E), Kerala. Generally considered rare in southern India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011), but possibly overlooked (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), there are a handful of sightings of this species from northern Kerala (Sashikumar *et al.* 2011). However, this is the first photograph of the bird from the state.

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# "AMATEUR NATURALIST TRAINING (ANT)" PROGRAMME FOR FOREST RANGERS

WWF-India's Andhra Pradesh State Office (APSO) conducted a two day "Amateur Naturalist Training (ANT)" Programme for 90 newly-recruited forest rangers from States of Goa and Andhra Pradesh in the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department Academy [AFDA], Dulapally on 6–7 September, 2013. Dr. P. Raghuveer, Director, AFDA, had invited WWF-APSO to conduct the training.

An 18-month course for the Forest Rangers offers them a variety of theoretical lessons, including field visits to the forest areas that encompassed principles of forest management. As a part of their orientation to understanding wildlife, the training programme was planned with a focus on awareness about nature, environment, wildlife, and climate and biodiversity conservation. The course included an introduction to nature & wildlife, understanding wildlife census techniques, interpretation census data, an introduction to plant world, mammals, birds and reptiles, jungle survival, stargazing at night and nature trails.

Sessions held during ANT:

- Treasure Hunt game for Flora
- Nature Trail- Campus Biodiversity Watch
- Mysterious Insect World – PowerPoint Session
- Movie Screening
- Birds and Bird Watching – PowerPoint session
- Nature Watch- A Study of Indirect and Direct Signs
- Night Trail – Herpetofauna Study
- Star-Gazing
- Bird Watching
- Wild Wisdom Quiz
- Champions of the Cause: Community and Group Understanding
- 'U' Present and 'V' Observe

The program ended with the trainees thanking the WWF staff for organising the programme, and with a few Range Officers sharing their experiences over the past two days. They asserted that while this training gave them an overview of wildlife and biodiversity conservation, it also provided them a platform to develop their skills on relaying information to others through logical debate, impassioned speech and insightful presentations. The trainees who performed their best in the two days of training were recognised and gifted WWF prizes by Dr. Raghuveer.

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