Table 3. Expressions used to describe reddish colouration on legs of Pond Herons *Ardeola grayii* in published literature.

Source	Description
Hancock and Kushlan 1984	"sometimes show a salmon-pink flush early in the season"; "legs turn red before individuals acquire full breeding plumage".
Wesley 1993	"coral red legs"
Grimmett *et al*. 1998	"legs can be bright yellow or even reddish"
Ali and Ripley 2001	"salmon pink in some breeding individuals"
Rasmussen and Anderton 2005	"legs briefly pinkish"

Notes on pelagic and uncommon offshore records from Mumbai

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A naval officer in Mumbai (Maharashtra, India) has many opportunities to watch birds at sea, which are hard to come by for land-locked birders. Also, defence being a large landowner in the city, there are many areas in Mumbai that remain largely inaccessible to local birdwatchers. Many of these defence areas are also extremely nice habitats for birds. I have now been stationed in this city for over two years. Some of my birding experiences including a few notable pelagic and offshore sightings are described here.

Occasionally, as part of my current duties, I embark ships for daylong trial sorties at sea. The fringe benefits, a much-used phrase these days, are quite obviously, the opportunity to watch some pelagic and offshore birds.

The first sailing, on 17.vi.2005, was just before the monsoons reached Mumbai and therefore we had fairly calm seas, very clear visibility and lovely blue skies. The second on 23.vi.2005 was in the thick of the monsoons with sheets of rains hitting almost continually and the accompanying rough seas making almost everyone seasick. Under such conditions, one would undoubtedly need to be a mad birder to stand in the bridge of the ship without any compulsions of duty and constantly gaze at sea in the hope of catching sight of a stray pelagic!

On 17.vi, about 10 miles off Mumbai, I sighted a frigatebird species flying low over the water a few hundred meters away. The large dark bird with forked tail and long wings was quite likely a Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel.* Although seen in clearly from the high vantage of a warship's bridge, it was difficult to conclusively identify the species.

During the second sailing on 23.vi, in spite of rough seas that tossed the ship mercilessly, I managed to spend a couple of hour's sea-watching from the bridge. The highlight of the day, undoubtedly, was a Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* that was swimming in the sea as the ship sailed past, barely 100 feet from it. There are very few records of this magnificent ocean tern from here. I have, however, had some good experience of watching the Brown Noddy near Cochin in late April 2004 while I was posted on a ship. They were particularly numerous during the five days that we spent sailing within about 30-40 miles from coast.

On both days, just offshore near the outer approaches to Bombay harbour, White-cheeked Terns *Sterna repressa* were fairly common. Great Crested Terns, *Sterna bergii* were also sighted on both days but were not as common. Great Crested Terns are large birds with rakish wings and a prominent lemon yellow bill that is hard to miss even at a distance. White-cheeked Terns have gray upperparts, with concolorous rump and tail. The thin tail streamers and the white cheeks were prominent in many. It is likely to be confusable with Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* and Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*. However being a winter visitor one is unlikely to encounter Common Terns around Mumbai in early July. While the Roseate, besides being larger, with its variable amount of white in the tail feathers and different flight action, is also rarely reported around Mumbai.

On 06.vii.2005, at end of the day about a dozen terns gave us company, following the wake of the ship as we were returning to harbour. They were all Lesser Crested Terns *Sterna bengalensis* and White-cheeked Terns. However, a lone Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata* flew in briefly. Interestingly, all these terns followed the ship till about the fairway buoy that indicates the outer entrance to the harbour, which is about two miles out from the southernmost tip of the land. The offshore nature of these terns also explains why the local birders in Mumbai rarely ever report any of these species.

Recently, on 11.ix.2005, after a morning of family birding at Karnala Bird Sanctuary and Uran mudflats, we ended up for lunch at Admiral Perriera's resort at Peeranwadi beach near Uran town. Stormy winds blew that day bringing with them plenty end of the season rains that, generally, ruined our day's birding. The saving grace on this wet Sunday turned out to be close views of a lone Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus* that flew low along the surf line at the beach. The tide was high and the tern flew low, trying to feed over the breaking surf at the beach while, simultaneously, maintaining its balance in the strong winds. Bridled Terns breed at Vengurla Rocks, but they are rare along the shore of Mumbai.

In Bridled Tern the upper parts, including the mantle, wings, rump and tail were uniformly brownish-gray. The underparts, in comparison are quite strikingly white. The dark crown and mask was clearly prominent. Once familiar with the tern sp. that we can see around Mumbai, the only species that can really be confused with Bridled is the Sooty Tern. In flying birds, trying to figure out the size of forehead white patch to differentiate Bridled from Sooty is, in my opinion, quite a vain exercise. In my experience, besides the obvious darker and bulkier appearance of Sooty the best differentiator in flying birds at a distance is the extent of white in underside of primaries. The Bridled Tern, which I saw at Uran, had extensive white in the underwings primaries with black restricted to the extremities only. Interestingly, Bridled, Great Crested and Roseate Terns have been reported to be breeding at Vengurla Rocks during monsoon months (Lainer 2001).

Easily accessible by a naval ferry that regularly runs between Colaba and Karanja naval base near Uran, Peeranwadi beach and the rocky shores north of it, adjacent to the naval base, were one of my regular stomping grounds for birding during my earlier tenure in Mumbai in early 1990s. Going through my notes, I discover that on

16.ix.2000, while on a visit from Delhi, I had seen a Crab Plover, Dromas ardeola, here on the rocky seashore adjacent to the naval base, which is another good record for Mumbai. More recently in 2004, for four months during the rainy season, as part of a study course, I had the opportunity to commute daily from Colaba to Karanja by the naval ferry. An interesting pelagic record in July 2004 was a Parasitic Jaeger, Stercorarius parasiticus. On 14.vii.04, in the middle of the channel, it flew right over the ferry. Just ahead of the boat, it swooped low over the water with its characteristic falcon like powerful flight and flew away towards the Middle Ground Island. It was my first sighting of a Jaeger species. The identification is therefore was based on the slightly built size, all dark colour and pointed central tail feathers that became visible briefly as the bird swooped low ahead of the ferry. The similar Pomarine Jaeger, *Stercorarius pomarinus* is described as a larger bird compared to the one that I saw.

During my daily trip to Karanja last year, another interesting record was a Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* that flew past the ferry in the middle of the harbour channel on 17.vii.2004. This Great Bittern laboured against strong opposing sea winds and light rains, as it flew southwards from Chembur side that morning. I had good views of it through my binoculars, which I always carried with me during those days for exactly such opportunities. The identification was conclusive since the bird overtook the ferry from behind and flew past quite close, giving me ample time to observe it closely. Great Bittern is a winter visitor and rare in peninsular India. There are no records from Mumbai region for over fifty years (Prasad 2003). This mid July record in 2004 from Mumbai is therefore particularly interesting.

On 3.ix.05 and on an occasion earlier, early one autumn morning two years ago, I encountered migrating flocks of over a hundred Common Terns sitting on rocks alongside the seaside promenade at the United Services Club (US Club), Colaba. They were gone by the afternoon and not again seen during subsequent visits on other days. Compared to the concolorous upperparts, tail and rump of the White-cheeked, the rump and upper tail coverts in Common Tern are prominently white. In spite of their name, Common Terns are also fairly uncommon winter visitors around Mumbai.

Interestingly, the seashore near the US Club at the southernmost tip of Colaba, together with the 1km long causeway that connects to the 19th century Prong's Reef Lighthouse, is truly a shore birders' delight.

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Nesting of Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* in Kumarakom, Kerala.

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We report here the nesting of the Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, which is believed to be a migrant or resident in India (Ali and Ripley 2001) at Kumarakom, which is, situated 14km west of Kottayam and forms a boundary of the Vembanad estuary. Vembanad–Kole wetland has been designated a Ramsar site in November 2002.

On 18.vi.2005 we visited the recently drained, muddy, Malikkayal paddies in Kumarakom where 42 Black-winged Stilts were observed at different locations in the paddies. One of them was found in the cultivated paddy field. We approached that bird in the muddy field for details. The bird was very alert and responded to our presence in no time and it flew away and started giving out alarm call and acted 'broken-wing-drama'. That broken wing action is somewhat similar to the action of the nesting Little-ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius.* It was an alarm signal to all other individuals of the species; immediately they started flight and encircled the area and made similar call as that of the other bird. It was an indication that some nesting activity was going on that area.

With this inference in mind, keen searching of the muddy field for nest was carried out. We succeeded in finding a nest with two eggs. The nest was situated in the muddy and watery part of the field. It showed a peculiar pattern of construction. The nest had a raised platform with a small disc like central depression. There is no human intervention in this area because of some legal problems, which therefore provided favourable habitat for the birds for nesting. As a result, about four acres of the land remained untouched, which is covered by luxuriant growth of cattails *Typha elephantina* and swamp rice grass *Leersia hexandra.* In a detailed observation fourteen nests at various stages were found at different locations in the same field; two nest are on construction, three nests with two eggs each, five nest with four eggs and the rest without eggs. Two juveniles were observed in the grassy part of the area. Three nests were found adjacent to the *Leersia hexandra* community. All these nests were placed nearby as a loose colony.

Another five nests were found on 03.vii.2005 in the Vattakkayal paddy fields near to the Malikkayal paddy filed; three nests close by and other two slightly apart. Totally, eight eggs were found in these nests. Of these, two nests were made only with clay, without the addition of any other nest materials. The eggs were dull in colour. In the two nesting sites, the material used for constructing the nets were the stems *Leersia hexandra.*

Only two nesting reports were noted from Kerala; the first was from the Karali marshes of Kollam district (12 nests) and the second from Rajagiri College campus, Ernakulam district (1 nest). In total, nineteen nests were found in the two paddy fields of Kumarakom making this the biggest nesting colony ever reported from Kerala.