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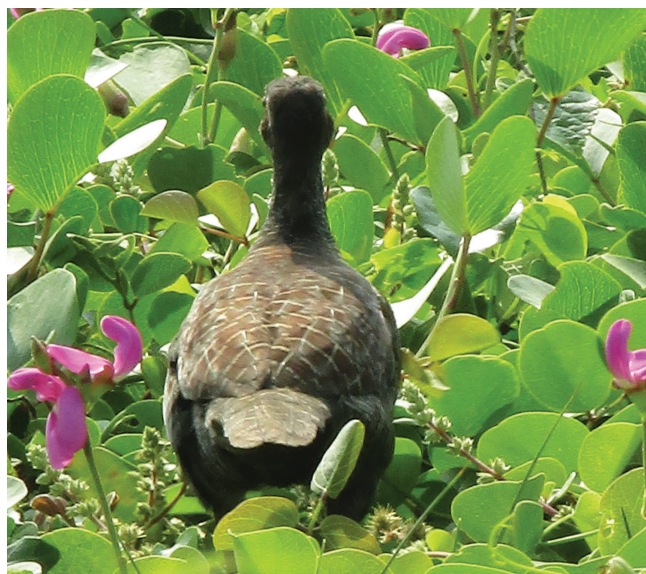
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A dark colour-aberrant Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus*

On 05 December 2019, BV was on one of his routine birding trips along the beaches of Chennai specifically looking for shore- and seabirds. He noticed two unusually dark-coloured Grey Francolins *Francolinus pondicerianus* on Thiruvanmiyur Beach (12.97°N, 80.26°E). These birds looked almost black [237]. The birds ran into the bushes and disappeared while he barely managed to take a photograph.



B. Vinoth

237. Dark morph of the Grey Francolin in Chennai.

Mahabal et al. (2016) mention one instance of a dark-coloured Grey Francolin reported from Surendranagar of Gujarat in 2010 (Roy 2011). Ours might be the first instance of this colour aberration in Grey Francolin from southern India.

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Tundra Swan *Cygnus columbianus* in Kaziranga National Park, Assam

On 23rd December 2019, at 1500 h I saw a solitary Tundra Swan *Cygnus colombianus* in Daphlong Beel (26.60°N, 93.20°E) in the central range of Kaziranga National Park, Assam. On the same day, Bablu, Takib, Parag Hazarika, and Pallab Saikia also saw it. Next day it attracted more birders and was photographed [238]. It was initially thought to be a Whooper Swan *C. cygnus* but when the images were circulated over social media, the correct identification as Tundra Swan (the Eurasian race *bewickii*) got established. The key identifiers were: yellow bill patch was not pointed or triangular as in a Whooper, the head was rounded unlike flattened and triangular in a Whooper, and the neck was relatively short. The bird stayed for four weeks, which enabled birdwatchers from around the country to visit and see this rarity. It was last it recorded on 26 January 2020. Most of the time it was spotted in Daphlong Beel, and also in Donga Beel in the western range of Kaziranga National Park.



Harish Thangaraj

238. Tundra Swan in Kaziranga National Park, Assam.

The Tundra Swan is a rarity in India. There are two documented historical specimens: *A bewickii* subspecies from Haryana, and a *jankowskyi* subspecies (not always recognised) from Gujarat (Praveen et al. 2014). A photograph of a swan taken in Gandhigram, Changlang District, Arunachal Pradesh, in December 2008 was believed to be this species. Two sight records of flocks of swans from the same area, in 1998 and 1999, though claimed to be Whoopers, could also have been this species (see Praveen et al. 2014 for details of all past records of swans from India).

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Gould's Shortwing *Heteroxenicus stellatus* and Chestnut-crowned Bush Warbler *Cettia major* in the Great Himalayan National Park, Himachal Pradesh

On 15 June 2019, at 0915 h, while birding in the Great Himalayan National Park (henceforth, GHNP) in Kullu District, Himachal Pradesh, at 3,500 m asl, two kilometers from Gumtrao, on the trail from Gumtrao to Dhel (31.72°N 77.48°E), we observed one adult male Gould's Shortwing *Heteroxenicus stellate*, and two Chestnut-crowned Bush Warblers *Cettia major*. The two species were sighted c.100 m away from each other.

Gould's Shortwing *Heteroxenicus stellate*

As we were traversing through a small gully where there was an abundance of rhododendron shrubbery, we heard high-pitched calls with sustained descending 'tseeeuu' notes from down the gully by the side of the foot trail. We halted there for about five minutes suspecting a shortwing. A single male Gould's Shortwing then showed up perching on a rhododendron bush, and then almost immediately flew across the foot trail, on to the other side, up an inaccessible slope [239]. The bird continued to call and was again spotted hopping on the ground.



Ashwin Mohan

239. Gould's Shortwing in a gully surrounded by rhododendron shrubbery.

This bird is a scarce and local resident in the Himalayas from eastern Kumaon in Uttaranchal to Arunachal Pradesh and is found at elevations between 3,300 and 4,200 m in summer (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Grimmett et al. 2011; Inskipp & Inskipp 1991). However, extant literature indicates only five reports of this bird from west of Nepal. Ali (1956) thought that Robert Fleming's specimen from Dodi Tal, Uttarakhand, 3,350 m asl, in June 1953, was a considerable extension of the bird's range; Green (1987), recorded a specimen at 3,540 m asl in rhododendron scrub at Rudranath, Uttarakhand; A Zoological Survey of India report mentions a 1921 record from Pauri, Uttarakhand, by Osmaston, and an undated record by B. S. Lamba from Corbett Tiger Reserve (Director: Zoological Survey of India 2010). Osmaston (1921) however does not mention the Gould's Shortwing. The Zoological Survey of India's report gives no details of the sighting by B. S. Lamba and hence the veracity of the record is open to question. The only record of this bird from Himachal Pradesh seems to be of Price et al. (2003), in Manali Sanctuary, stating, 'A male singing on June 6, 1994, in a juniper bush at c.3,500 m. There are only a few earlier observations of this very distinctive species west of central Nepal, and none west of Uttaranchal. Despite searching, the species was not observed again.' When the manuscript was being finalized, we chanced upon Dhadwal & Kanwar (2019), which included a sighting of the Gould's Shortwing in the summer of 2013 from Triund (Dharamshala), Himachal Pradesh.

Our photographic record from GHNP, Himachal Pradesh, is a definitive documentation of Gould's Shortwing from Himachal Pradesh and is a strong validation of the distribution range of the species in the Western Himalayas.

Chestnut-crowned Bush-warbler *Cettia major*

About 100 m away from the Gould's Shortwing, a presumably breeding pair of Chestnut-crowned Bush-warblers *Cettia major* were spotted. They were moving and calling on juniper bushes [240]. They appeared intermittently on the top of a cluster



Adithi Muralidhar

240. Chestnut-crowned Bush-warbler.

of bushes, singing a five–seven note call that ended with a loud warble, 'chiu-wi-twee-twee-twee'. In the field, they were noticeably larger than the similar-looking Grey-sided Bush-warbler *C. brunnifrons*, and the distinct pale supercilium had warm-buff colouration towards the loreal area.

The Chestnut-crowned Bush-warbler is known to be a breeding summer visitor from Uttaranchal to Bhutan in the altitude range of 3,300–4,000 m asl (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Extant literature shows many records of this bird from the state of Uttarakhand (Director: Zoological Survey of India 2010; Sultana & Khan 2000; eBird 2019; OBC 2019), with the western-most records being from Dehradun District. However, to the best of our knowledge there have been no previous records of the Chestnut-crowned Bush-warbler from Himachal Pradesh and hence the western-most record for India, and probably the first for the state of Himachal Pradesh.

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Large congregations of Pied Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta* following tropical cyclone 'Gaja', at Point Calimere Wildlife and Bird Sanctuary, southern India

On 16 November 2018, Cyclone Gaja devastated the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The coastal and delta districts of the state witnessed the severity of the cyclone. Huge losses in terms of human life, agriculture, and wildlife were observed in several districts. To estimate the damage caused to the birds from the cyclone, the Tamil Nadu Forest Department, Nagapattinam Division, Vedaranyam Forest Range, along with the wildlife biology students of A.V.C. College Mayiladuthurai conducted bird surveys on 23 December 2018 at 12 different locations in and around Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary.

Point Calimere Wildlife and Bird Sanctuary is a Ramsar Site (10.19°N, 79.38°E) covering an area of about 38,500 ha on the south-eastern coast, known as the Coromandel Coast (Bay of Bengal), India. It is famous for both, resident, and migratory bird species. Till date, 274 bird species have been recorded here out of which, about 119 species are waterbirds (Anon. 2002).

Among the beautiful, eye-catching, and colourful birds, the Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, extant in the Indian Subcontinent, was found here in large numbers (1000s) in the 1980s. In recent years, the sighting of this bird had drastically reduced and, until recently, sighting it was a 'very rare' occurrence, as its numbers had reduced to the hundreds (Balachandran & Thirunavukarasu 2009), mainly due to habitat degradation such as extension of salt based industries, diminishing rainfall, and disturbance caused by fishermen (Balachandran 2006).

At 0930 h, 23 December 2018, in Siruthalaikadu (10.23°N, 79.46°E), near Point Calimere, a flock of 1,200 Pied Avocets [241] was observed for about 15 min on the nearby salt pans. The earlier trends of the Pied Avocet population in Point Calimere was >7,000 in the 1980s, >500 in the 1990s, and <100 from 2000 to 2008 (Balachandran 2012).



241. A large congregation of Pied Avocet at Point Calimere.

We collected the post 2000 eBird datasets (eBird 2019) for the Pied Avocet distribution records in two states: Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. These states share boundaries on the south-eastern coast of India. We segregated the datasets by only considering congregations that were greater than 300. The majority of sightings were recorded from the Pulicat, and Pallikaranai region. In that list, the maximum number of Pied Avocets were recorded from the Arani River, Pulicat (13.42°N, 80.29°E): 710 on 24 February 2017; followed by 500 in the Pallikaranai Marsh (12.95°N, 80.22°E) on 09 February 2014; and 400 in Pulicat Lake (13.72°N, 80.13°E) on 03 January 2006. We prepared a map for the segregated datasets and it represents the previous congregation records of Pied Avocet from the two states mentioned above (Fig 1).

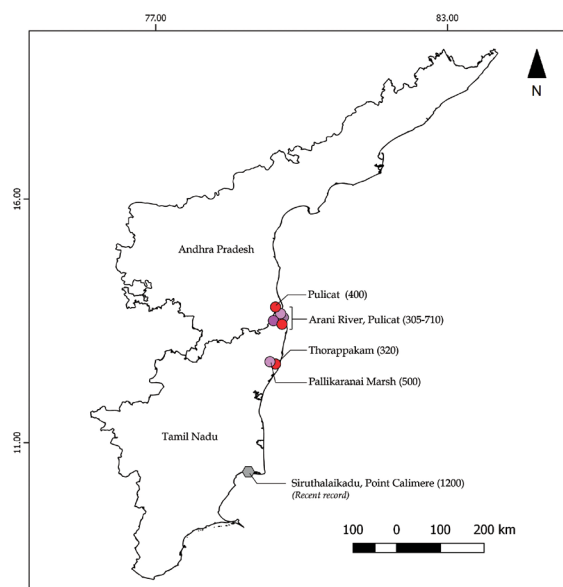


Fig. 1. Congregation records of Pied Avocets in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. Map: Subhasish Arandhara

Chambon et al. (2018) suggest that environmental conditions affect wintering ground selection and the choice of migratory behaviour in Pied Avocets. Thus, the effect of cyclone may have changed the movement of this particular bird to come to the same grounds in such huge numbers after many years.

Acknowledgement

We are grateful to Tamil Nadu Forest Department, Nagapattinam Division, Vedaranyam Forest Range for accommodating us in the bird survey. We would like to thank S. Sivakumar, BNHS for helping us in preparing the manuscript. We also extend our gratitude to Malayasi Bhattacharya, Wildlife Institute of India, for helping us in the segregation of eBird datasets, and Subhasish Arandhara, A.V.C. College, Mayiladuthurai, for helping us in the preparation of the map.

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