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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).

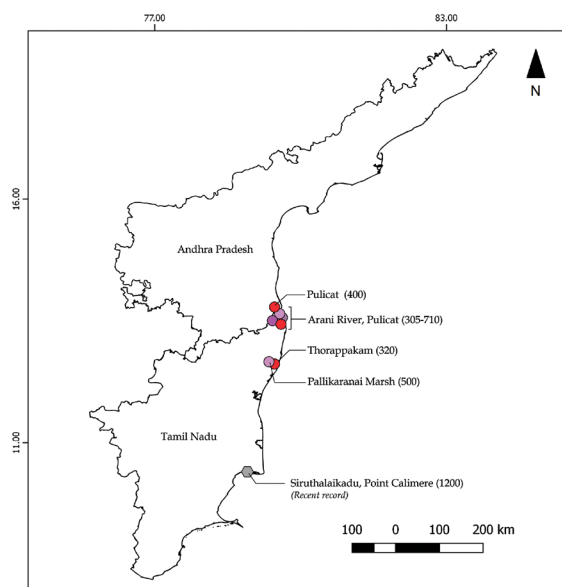


Fig. 1. Congregation records of Pied Avocets in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. Map: Subhasish Arandhara

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.

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A leucistic Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* from Cumilla, Bangladesh

On 20 May 2019, while birding at Shaluk Mura village (23.51°N, 91.17°E), Cumilla, Bangladesh, we spotted a white Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* with a narrow black crescent on the back of the neck [242]. A closer examination of the bird in the photographs revealed that it was a leucistic individual, as the pattern of white plumage, which is not chalky light brown to gray-buff when compared with a normal bird (van Grouw 2013) [242]. It was noted that it had blackish bill and eyes, and pinkish feet. Mahabal et al. (2016) who compiled all colour aberrant bird reports from India did not list any colour aberration for this species but a brown mutant was reported from Gujarat in 2009 (Trivedi 2016). This is probably the first instance of a leucistic Eurasian Collared Dove being reported from South Asia.



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242. Leucistic Eurasian Collared Dove.

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White-cheeked Starling *Spodiopsar cineraceus*, Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*, and Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens* in eastern Arunachal Pradesh, India

In this note we describe three interesting sightings from a trip to Walong, Anjaw District, Arunachal Pradesh, in November 2019.

White-cheeked Starling *Spodiopsar cineraceus*

On 15 November 2019, when we stopped for breakfast at Salamgam village (27.96° N, 96.40°E), Lohit District, we spotted two White-cheeked Starlings at the edge of the village (c.800 m asl) at 0800 h. One bird was feeding on the ground along with a Great Myna *Acridotheres grandis*, near the chicken coop and garbage bin, and another was seen on the wire behind a rice hotel. It had a conspicuous white patch extending from the side of its crown to the cheek, a black crown, and a greyish belly against a dark breast; bright orange beak and legs are features that separate it from other starlings [243–246]. The bird on the wire flew a few minutes later, and we photographed it in flight.



243. White-cheeked Starling showing back, nape, mantle, and side profile. Salamgam, Lohit District, Arunachal Pradesh.



244. Ventral view of a White-cheeked Starling, Salamgam, Lohit District, Arunachal Pradesh.

Both: Yagnik Sinha