

Feathers 4 (1,2&3): 1–41.

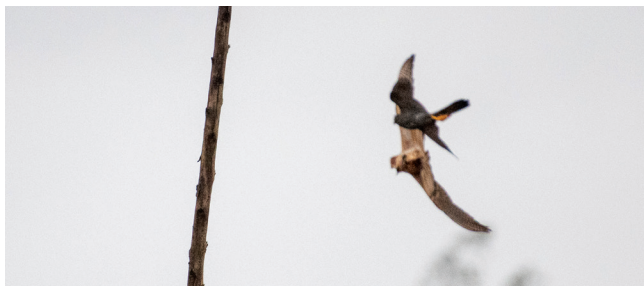
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Melanism in Red-necked Falcon *Falco chicquera*

On 31 July 2018, during a visit to the hilly grasslands (15.38°N, 75.08°E) at the juncture of Hubli and Dharwad (Karnataka, India), KA and Ajay Shiggaon saw a Red-necked Falcon *Falco chicquera*, hunting, and killing a Rain Quail *Coturnix coromandelica*. While the falcon fed on the kill, a similar, dark plumaged falcon joined it, trying to take away part of the kill. The Red-necked Falcon flew away with the kill, and the dark falcon chased it [45]. Puzzled by the dark plumage of the second falcon, we sent the image to Nirav Bhat who identified it as a melanistic Red-necked Falcon. There were three Red-necked Falcons at the site on that day, one of which was melanistic.



Kushal Addaki

45. Red-necked Falcon flies away with food, chased by a melanistic falcon.

Almost a year later, on 15 May 2019, c.15–20 km from the earlier location, and on the outskirts of Dharwad (15.43°N, 75.04°E) AK photographed [46] a pair of falcons perched on coconut palms: a dark falcon, with a Red-necked Falcon perched above it. He also saw two other Red-necked Falcons in the vicinity. Again, puzzled by the dark plumage, he sent the photos to KA, who felt it was the same pair that he had seen in the grasslands.



Anuradh Kamakeri

46. Dark plumaged Red-necked Falcon in the outskirts of Dharwad.

On 23 May 2019, Vaidehi Gunjal spotted a dark falcon perched on wire, within three kilometres of the second location (15.45°N, 75.04°E). A Red-necked Falcon joined this dark falcon. A few seconds later the Red-necked Falcon flew away, followed by the darker falcon. After a brief search, they were spotted in a nearby field. They were sharing a kill! The darker bird was the larger of the two [47]. This was, obviously, a pair, and the larger bird was the female. After a while the male just looked on while the female consumed the kill.

We saw them together on all the three occasions, and the set of photographs showing them sharing a kill clearly identifies them as a pair; the darker bird is a melanistic Red-necked Falcon.



Vaidehi Gunjal

47. A dark-plumaged female Red-headed Falcon feeds while the tiercel looks on.

There are two instances where similar, melanistic birds have been reported from India: one from Udaipur, on 6 December, 2013 (Gokarankar 2013), and the other from Hyderabad (Nirav Bhatt, *pers. comm.*, in e-mail dated 14 Apr, 2020).

Our thanks to Nirav Bhatt for helping with the ID, and researching past sightings, and to Niranjana Sant and Ashwin Vishwanathan for all the support.

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Windblown Red-footed Boobies *Sula sula* from the northern Malabar Coast of Kerala

The Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* is the most pelagic of the boobies (Sulidae), which are widely distributed throughout the pantropical latitudes in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans (Nelson 1978). Of its three races, *S. s. rubripes* breeds on islands of the Indian Ocean, and the Tropical West- and Central Pacific Ocean, eastwards to the Hawaiian Islands. It is, probably, subspecies found in India.

An adult Red-footed Booby is known to have different colour morphs, but bright red feet, and a pink-based bluish-grey bill are its distinguishable features. The different types of morphs are: white, black-tailed white, brown, white-tailed brown, white-headed-white-tailed brown, and morphs that are intermediate between these (Carboneras et al. 2020). The juveniles are brown, or grey-brown with darker streaks, and are usually paler below, with grey or greyish-pink legs and feet, and a blackish bill. Here, we report the sighting of the species from two different locations on the northern coast of Kerala.

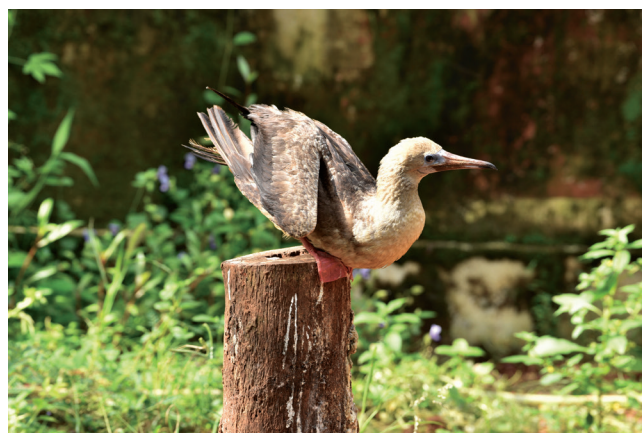
On 29 August 2019, an exhausted bird (hereafter, Bird 1) was found on the ground near the Government Hospital, Kanhangad (12.31°N, 75.10°E), in Kasaragod. Jayesh T.V. photographed it and sent the picture to us for identification. Overall it was brownish, with paler foreneck and abdomen, fleshy legs, pinkish bill with blackish tip, and bluish grey facial skin—all pointing towards a juvenile Red-footed Booby. As the outer primaries were old, and inner new [48], the bird might have been in its late first- or early second molt (Gutiérrez 2010). It remained at the same site for more than an hour, and then flew away by its own.



Jayesh T.V.

48. Images of Bird 1 sighted in Kasaragod District.

On 05 September 2019, fishermen from Ayikkara harbour (11.85°N, 75.37°E), Kannur, reported the sighting of another Red-footed Booby (hereafter, Bird 2). It was kept at the fish market till our rescuer, Sreejith Harvest, collected it [49]. Similar to Bird 1, it was also a juvenile bird, which is supposed to be less than two years old (referring to the images in Gutiérrez 2010). As Bird 2 was exhausted, it was taken to the District Veterinary Hospital for treatment. It was dewormed and given primary treatment. It was fed with marine fishes daily, in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. After a month in rehabilitation, Bird 2 had regained health. We found wing fluttering behaviour and high food (two to four medium-sized sardines) intake during the morning. Bird 2 was occasionally taken to the beach with the intent of releasing it, but this ended in failure, as it didn't show any urge to fly. This was done once every week, but it just took short flights and returned to shore. Finally, on 25 January 2020 we released it at the same site where it was found [50].



Sajeev Krishnan

49. Images of Bird 2 sighted in Kannur District.



Ashli Jose

50. Rehabilitated Red-footed Booby (Bird 2) in Kannur before release.

We assume that both the birds were juveniles, and different individuals, since Bird 1 was paler than Bird 2. We believe that heavy monsoon winds, during the August–September, might have blown these birds inland. They are known to be sensitive to strong wind conditions, leading to poor flight stability (Yamamoto et al. 2017).

A summary of Red-footed Booby reports from India is listed in Table 1, where two of them were pelagic records, and four were records of windblown birds.