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A Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* from Coimbatore: A new species for Tamil Nadu

On 15 October 2021, we were birding at Achankulam Lake in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India (11.04°N, 77.09°E) to monitor the presence of winter migrants.

At 0650 h, we saw a medium-sized wader that caught our attention instantly. The bird was actively feeding in the company of Little Stints *Calidris minuta* and Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola*.

The features that were quite apparent on this bird were its unusual feather patterning, bright yellow-green legs, and a rather long, decurved bill that had a distinct orangish base.

We took photographs of the bird [143], which was quite a distance away. Our initial impression of the bird was of a Long-toed Stint *C. subminuta*, but it did not seem to match in terms of structure and size. The significant size of the bird was apparent when it was seen alongside Little Stints. Another possibility was Ruff *C. pugnax*, but our bird had distinctly different upperparts colouration and pattern, along with a different bill shape. Our familiarity with these species allowed us to conclude that this was a bird we had not yet seen in the field.



Sharang Satish

143. Pectoral Sandpiper at Achankulam Lake, Coimbatore.

Once we looked at the photographs and videos, and consulted field guides such as Svensson et al. (2009) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), we realized that it could potentially be one of the vagrant sandpipers: Buff-breasted *C. subruficollis*, Sharp-tailed *C. acuminata*, or Pectoral *C. melanotos*. A Buff-breasted Sandpiper was immediately eliminated due to the facial pattern and bill size. Features such as less-warmer cap and well demarcated streaking up to the center of the breast in our bird differentiated it from a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. Svensson et al. (2009) also clarified another major field mark on our bird—streaking on the breast that ended sharply, demarcated against the bright white belly. This was an ID feature that was only found in a Pectoral Sandpiper. Thus, we could safely conclude that this

was indeed a Pectoral Sandpiper, an extremely rare vagrant to this part of the Indian Subcontinent (Kazmierczak 2000; Grimmett et al. 2011; eBird 2022).

We also consulted Praveen J and Ashwin Viswanathan, who corroborated with our conclusion.

We observed the bird for almost nine days in that area. It was very active and territorial. Due to heavy rain, the water level was slowly increasing in the lake and the shoreline started vanishing, so the bird probably couldn't stay longer.

The Pectoral Sandpiper has been reported from Harike in Punjab (Undeland & Sangha 2002), Madayipara (Rajeevan et al. 2013), Kadamakudy (Reghuvaran 2017), Kottayam (Sreedevi 2018), and Andaman Islands (Boesman 2017).

This would make our sighting of this bird the very first record in Tamil Nadu, and possibly the sixth record from India.

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