

Status of Red Avadavat *Amandava amandava* in Goa, India

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The Western Ghats, a UNESCO World Heritage Site (UNESCO 2012), are one among eight biodiversity hotspots of the world (Radhakrishnan & Rajmohan 2012). Goa, one of the smallest of Indian states, is a part of these biologically rich Western Ghats and consequently has an unique avifauna. Compared to other parts of the Western Ghats, the compilation of a comprehensive avifaunal inventory for Goa took place only in the recent past through the works of Grubh & Ali (1972), Rane (1982), Saha & Dasgupta (1992), Lainer (1999, 2004), and Lainer & Alvares (2013). These studies have documented the status and distribution of nearly all the birds of Goa and the total number of birds in the Goa checklist stands at 462 (Lad & Rangnekar 2011). There is still a steady flow of new birds being reported from the state (Mahabal & Patil 2008; Holt 2009; Rangnekar & Lad 2009; Lad & Rangnekar 2011).

In this note, we record the presence of the Red Avadavat *Amandava amandava* in Goa. This species was previously reported as a vagrant / escapee based on a single sight record in Lainer (2004), and subsequently ignored in the revised version of the same work (Lainer & Alvares 2013).

We observed the Red Avadavat at Navelim Wetlands (15°32'N, 74°00'E) and at Shirgao Wetlands (15°36'N, 73°4'E), both in Bicholim Taluka, Goa. These sites have tall grasses growing near the water source, which concurs with the typical habitat of the Red Avadavat (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). At both these sites, this species has been observed since 2012 (Table 1). The birds have also been photographed several times [192-194]. Shirgao Wetlands were monitored more closely during 2014 (Table 2) and the highest count recorded there was of 36 individuals on 15 April 2014. At Navelim Wetlands, except for two sightings, one each in 2012 and 2013, all the other encounters were based on calls from the flock, where at an average, calls from three–four individuals could be detected at every encounter. In Shirgao Wetlands, there has been a steady increase in the number of these birds encountered each month.

The only report of the Red Avadavat from Goa, till recently, was of a single bird from Sinquerim Marsh on 16 November 1996

Table 1. Summary of observations from 2012–2014

Year	Navelim Wetlands		Shirgao Wetlands	
	No of sightings	Average flock size	No of sightings	Average flock size
2012	1	6	1	1
2013	1	3-4*	0	-
2014	1	3-4*	8	20

* Estimate from calls heard

Table 2. Summary of 2014 observations from Shirgao Wetlands

Months	No of sightings	Average flock size
January	1	5
February	4	18
March	0	0
April	3	27
May	0	0
June	0	0

(Lainer 2004). Maps in various ornithological works on India do not correctly reflect the current distribution of this species in southern India. Ali & Ripley (1987) included the entire Deccan region, and most of the western coast, almost till Malabar, while Rasmussen & Anderton (2005, 2012) included the entire western coast ('moist areas in south India'), and excluded most of the Deccan! Grimmett *et al.* (1998, 2011), and Kazmierczak (2000) excluded the entire western coast, except for the single Goa record.

The Red Avadavat is categorised as 'uncommon' in the Konkan region, though several recent sightings are documented (Prasad 2005). It is unlisted from southern coastal Karnataka (Achar & Shivashankar 2012), and was historically absent in Kerala (Ali 1969), though now thought to be 'uncommon' from there (Neelakantan *et al.* 1993; Sashikumar *et al.* 2011). This suggests a likely westward extension in recent years in the distribution of

Photo: P. Baidya



192. Red Avadavat pair at Navelim wetland on 5 December 2012.



193. Red Avadavats in Shirgao wetland on 1 February 2014.

Photos: C. Pinto



194. A flock of Red Avadavat in Shirgao wetland on 23 February 2014.

Red Avadavat in its southern Indian range, including Goa. This species is known to occur in adjoining Belgaum, Karnataka, and could have been the source population (Sant 2005; Mallya 2011). Alternatively, Red Avadavat is an extremely popular cage bird and these could be escapees from the bird trade.

Continuous sightings of Red Avadavat from these two locations lead us to conclude that there is a stable, possibly breeding population of this species in the state. Future reports through online forums like eBird (www.ebird.org) will help us understand seasonal / population trends better. We propose to add the Red Avadavat to the main checklist of birds of Goa and

elevate its position from that of a 'vagrant' to a 'possible resident'. This takes the Goa Checklist to 463.

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