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### Nesting of the Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* from Jhajjar, Haryana, India

The Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* has a wide geographic range spanning Europe, Africa, and Asia, including the Indian Subcontinent (Birdlife International 2022; Grimmett et al. 2011). The nominate subspecies *I. m. minutus* occurs in central and southern Europe and northern Africa east to western Siberia and through Iran to north-western India; it winters mainly in Africa (Martínez-Vilalta et al. 2020). In South Asia it is considered a summer visitor to Afghanistan, Pakistan in the Sindh, Gilgit, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa regions, and India in the Kashmir and Simla, Himachal Pradesh regions; it is a scarce winter visitor but mostly a passage migrant in the Indus Valley, Pakistan and elsewhere in India, and some records are confounded with Yellow Bittern *I. sinensis* (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). In India, the breeding of the Little Bittern has been conclusively confirmed only from Kashmir, with several works on the nesting and ecology of the species (Bates & Lowther 1952; Holmes & Hatchwell 1991; Fazili 2010; Fazili et al. 2014). Suspected and probable breeding have been reported from the Delhi area and from Gujarat, respectively (Trivedi & Parasharya 2019; Vyas 2019). In this note, we document conclusive, video-recorded evidence of the species nesting in the wetlands of Mandothi village, Jhajjar, Haryana, India.

Mandothi wetlands (28.709°N, 76.849°E; 230 m asl), which cover more than 100 ha, are as a result of rainwater accumulation in local village agricultural land (Rai & Yadav 2023). Most of the area is privately-owned, and large parts of the area become temporarily inundated during the monsoon season; however, the entire area is currently unprotected and not formally designated a wetland. The wetlands provides an important wintering grounds for many migratory species and boasts of high bird diversity, with at least 265 bird species reported to date (eBird 2023a). The Little Bittern was first reported from Mandothi wetlands when a male was spotted and photographed on 22 August 2021 (Rajiv 2021; Pati 2021). The species was sighted regularly in the area by several birders throughout September that year [53, 54], with the last reported sighting on 02 October 2021 (eBird 2023b). The following year, on 02 September 2022, at approximately 0700 h, while birding around the wetlands of Mandothi village, we spotted a pair of Little Bitterns. The male showed a bright red flush to the bill and was observed to be very active in one patch of *Phragmites karka* grass along the village road. We suspected it was nesting at this patch and decided to thoroughly scan this area with binoculars. After 15 min, we finally discovered a nest with five chicks of differing sizes, presumably at different growth stages. The nest was placed in *Phragmites karka* grass at a distance of 1 m above the ground. Upon discovery of this active nest, we were unable to immediately ascertain which species it belonged to, whether Little Bittern or Yellow Bittern, as the chicks of the two species are undistinguishable. We took some photographs of the nest and the nest site while maintaining an appropriate distance and left the area within a minute to avoid any disturbance, following protocols and guidelines listed in Barve et al. (2020a).



53. Little Bittern in breeding plumage.



54. Little Bittern pair in breeding plumage dated 25 August 2021.

Both: Sonu Dalal

In the Delhi NCR region, there have been previous records of the species reportedly in breeding plumage or breeding season records during the monsoon period and also suspected breeding in the past (Ganguli 1975; Harvey et al. 2006; Vyas 2019; eBird 2023b). However, no records from this region have been supported with conclusive or direct evidence of confirmed breeding and nesting. Previously published literature has provided greater insight into the nesting of the species from Kashmir and Gujarat (Fazili 2010; Fazili et al. 2014; Trivedi & Parasharya 2019). This inspired us to further investigate whether there was any possibility of the Little Bittern breeding and nesting in the Mandothi area. We decided to use a time-lapse video camera (Brinno T2C 200 f1.2 model) to record the activities at the unknown nest that we had found on 02 September 2022 by video-recording the behaviour of the chicks and adults without impacting them, following recommended field guidelines (Barve et al. 2020a; Barve et al. 2020b). On 10 September 2022, at approximately 1630 h, we placed the camera at a distance of approximately 4–5 m away from the nest to minimize disruption. The time-lapse duration was set at 1 frame per 2 sec for a period of 24 hours. The next day, we collected the camera from the site and filtered the data. While reviewing the recorded footage, we found a male Little Bittern that appeared at the nest-site, approaching the nest and chicks at 0608 h, dated 11 September 2022, presumably for feeding the chicks. In the video (<https://>



[www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKmM94y5k4s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKmM94y5k4s)), the bird suddenly appears near the nest, first perching at a grass blade at a distance of 0.5 m from the nest, then jumping to approach the nest directly, and subsequently taking off and flying away; the entire event of the male approaching and leaving the nest lasted for 20 sec in the video [55, 56]. We also recorded the chicks walking out of the nest independently and exploring their surroundings. The chicks were also recorded walking outside the nest, begging for food and trying to snatch the food from the adults instead before the adults could feed them at the nest. Our inference from these behaviours was that the chicks were probably mature enough to start fledging in addition to the increased level of food competition between them. Our time-lapse video of the nest, showing a male Little Bittern approaching the nest and chicks, along with other circumstantial evidence described in this note, conclusively proves the nesting of the Little Bittern at this location. Our record appears to be the first documented and videographed record of Little Bittern nesting in Haryana, India.



55. Little Bittern male at the nest showing its black back and tail.



All: Time-lapse video camera

56. Little Bittern male perched over at the nest showing bill and wings.

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## The Critically Endangered Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* from Ratnagiri, Maharashtra

The Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* is a Critically Endangered migratory bird species known for its rapid population decline due to habitat loss and other threats (Wiersma et al. 2020). In India, Sociable Lapwing is considered a winter migrant and is mainly reported from parts of Gujarat and Rajasthan (Tiware 2010; Kasambe 2011). There is only one confirmed record of Sociable Lapwing from Maharashtra, and it dates to 2001 in the Pohara-Malkhed Reservoir, Vidarbha region (Kasambe 2001; Wadatkar & Kasambe 2002). Hence, any new observation is a noteworthy event.

On 18 November 2022, two Sociable Lapwings were seen by Prasad Gokhale and me during a routine birdwatching expedition at Champak ground (17.001°N, 73.315°E) in the Ratnagiri District. Both were characterized by an olive-brown back, black crown and lores, thin dark line behind the eye, and bold, white supercilia that met at the forehead and nape. Both individuals had a buff wash to the supercilium and neck, indicating non-breeding plumage. One individual had a clear breast with a hint of black in the belly [57].