

The nest was being built at the end of a dry and delicate branch of the catch tree *Acacia catechu*. It was surprising to record that those birds chose such a thin twig of the tree to build its nest [168]. We continued opportunistic observations of the nest for the next few days. Both male and female were involved in nest building. The nest was built within the forest area, near a natural, perennial water source. The highest nest-building activity was observed during the early morning hours, followed by the evening hours, when birds were observed bringing nest-construction material at the nest site. The pair took c.18–20 days to build the nest. Notably, the nest site is adjacent to Dehradun-Mussoorie Road, on which vehicular traffic is quite high throughout the year, especially during the summer season. On 21 May 2022, another nest was found near Benog Wildlife Sanctuary (30.442°N, 78.060°E), which was suspended from a live overhead electric wire c.5–6 m from the ground. However, no broadbills were observed near the nest. The nest may have been damaged due to exposure to high winds in the previous weeks. Thereafter, on 11 June 2022, another nest was encountered near the Dhobighat area (30.464°N, 78.071°E) across the Benog Wildlife Sanctuary. This nest was woven at the end of a small dangling branch of a Palas tree, as in the Kolukhet area [169], which is also near a stream.



Raju Pushola

169. A Long-tailed Broadbill perching over the nest at Dhobighat area, near Benog Wildlife Sanctuary.

Observations indicate that in the Mussoorie area, as in other parts of its range, the species also prefers to nest at the end of a dangling branch of moderately tall trees in an undisturbed forested habitat or on electric wires of moderate height (Bruce 2003). However, this choice of nesting site may expose nests to high winds. Although it is considered a resident in the Himalayan foothills up to c.2000m asl, this species is most commonly seen in Uttarakhand between April to September, the breeding season (Singh 2000; Tak & Sati 2010; Mohan & Sondhi 2015; Joshi & Bhatt 2015). Considering the rarity of the species outside its breeding season, it is likely that it performs local or altitudinal movements. However, this would indicate upslope migration during the winter, which is rare but known in some Himalayan birds.

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An assessment of the origins of the two Spur-winged Lapwings *Vanellus spinosus* in Warangal, Telangana, India

Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus* is a monotypic, medium to large-sized wader recognizable by its distinctive black crown, a prominent black stripe extending from the chest to the upper neck, a black tail and a unique spur located at the wrist joint (Hayman et al. 1986; Wiersma & Kirwan 2020). It is primarily distributed in Sub-Saharan Africa (Snow & Perrins 1998; Wiersma & Kirwan 2020), the Nile Valley, the Nile delta (Goodman & Meininger 1989), and southeastern Europe. It typically inhabits wetlands, marshes, and agricultural fields and feeds on insects and other small invertebrates. These birds are social, often observed in pairs or in small groups, and are known for their loud, persistent calls that contribute to the acoustic environment of their habitats. Both the River Lapwing *V. duvacelli* and the Masked Lapwing *V. miles* were once considered conspecific with Spur-winged Lapwing. In this article, we discuss the first report of Spur-winged Lapwing from South Asia at Ammavaripeta Cheruvu, Warangal, Telangana, and examine its potential origins.

Observations

On 24 January 2024, JP observed a single Spur-winged Lapwing alongside Red-wattled Lapwings *V. indicus* at Ammavaripeta Cheruvu (17.942°N, 79.553°E), Warangal District, Telangana. It was initially misidentified as River Lapwing owing to its similarity and greater likelihood in the region. During the subsequent visit by INR, JP and AR on 18 February 2024, the species was identified as a Spur-winged Lapwing using Google Lens [170, 171]. Because this was the first report of the species from India, the site has since been visited by a large number of birders who have continued to document its presence at least until 29 October 2024 (JP).



Jagan Pannala

170. The Spur-winged Lapwing feeding by the lakeshore on 18 February 2024.



Sriram Reddy

171. Dorsal view of the Spur-winged Lapwing in flight on 21 February 2024.

Ammavaripeta Cheruvu is bordered to the north by a bund, beyond which paddy fields stretch out, while the western side features rocky hillocks, and agriculture extends southwards to the east of the bund. Primarily, a rainfed lake, Ammavaripeta Cheruvu, has a substantial catchment area that supports a diverse array of birdlife (eBird 2024). The region is a network of several small lakes interspersed with vegetation and agricultural fields, creating an ideal environment for waterbirds. The shallow edges of the lake provide habitat for numerous waders, including lapwings and stilts, whereas the central part of the lake features several small- and medium-sized islands that offer safe havens for birds.

At the lake, most observers noted that the Spur-winged Lapwing typically associated with a pair of Red-wattled Lapwings [172]. Although the birds were confiding, the trio took to flight if any one bird was disturbed. During mornings, the Spur-winged Lapwing would leave the lake area to feed in adjacent paddy fields alongside Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola* and Eastern Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus coromandus* [170]. When disturbed in

the paddy fields by farmers or feral dogs, it would either fly further to more distant paddy fields or back to the company of Red-wattled Lapwings at the lake. During the later hours of the day, it would frequent islands or marshy banks where it fed near the lake edge with Red-wattled Lapwings, Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus*, and other shorebirds. When disturbed here, it would move to one of the several rocky islands deeper in the lake where River Terns *Sterna aurantia*, Grey Herons *Ardea cinerea*, Indian Cormorants *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*, and Black-winged Stilts used to rest [173]. The stilts would sometimes mob this bird [174, 175]. Sometimes, it was observed to roost with the Red-wattled Lapwings on one of the islands [176]. It was also found to occasionally feed on insects infesting the paddy left to dry beside the lake [177]. We also observed several mounting attempts by the Spur-winged Lapwing on a Red-wattled Lapwing from April until June [178]. This probably indicates that this individual was a male.



172. The Spur-winged Lapwing alongside two Red-wattled Lapwings on 19 February 2024.



173. The Spur-winged Lapwings with waders on an island on 21 February 2024.

Both: Sriram Reddy



174. The Spur-winged Lapwing chased by a River Tern on 03 March 2024.

I Nageshwar Rao



Jagan Pannala

175. The Spur-winged Lapwing being mobbed by Black-winged Stilts on 23 February 2024.



Copalakrishna Ramachandran

176. The Spur-winged Lapwing roosting alongside a Red-wattled Lapwing on 5 May 2024.



Abdul Raheem

177. The Spur-winged Lapwing feeding on insects in the harvested paddy on 26 June 2024.



Jagan Pannala

178. Mounting attempts by the Spur-winged Lapwing on a Red-wattled Lapwing on 21 May 2024.

Interestingly, on 28 April 2024, two Spur-winged Lapwings were observed by AV, SR, and GR [179]. Both birds were initially seen in different corners of the wetland; the first was feeding with a large flock of waders far away from the approach path for birders, and the second was seen simultaneously near the path associating with Red-wattled Lapwings. Both birds eventually converged to the middle of the lake where the shorebird feeding flock had slowly moved. They did not show any signs of association and eventually moved away from each other. Both birds were observed together once again on 05 May 2024 (Ramachandran et al. 2024).



Sriam Reddy

179. The two Spur-winged Lapwings were photographed on 28 April 2024.

Discussion

This record of the Spur-winged Lapwing in Ammavaripeta, Warangal, represents one of the furthest documented extralimital reports of the species and the first record from South Asia, prompting inquiries into whether these individuals are wild vagrants or escapees from captivity. We examined its migratory behaviour and wandering tendencies and discuss its potential for vagrancy and for being an escapee from captivity.

Wild vagrant

The Spur-winged Lapwing was traditionally considered non-migratory but is known to exhibit erratic and unpredictable local movements. In recent decades, the southeastern European population of the Spur-winged Lapwing has been documented as migratory, arriving in Greece and Turkey in March and migrating in October, passing through Cyprus and Crete, although their ultimate destinations remain unclear (Hayman et al. 1986; Wiersma & Kirwan 2020). Vagrant Spur-winged Lapwings, potentially from this migratory population, have been recorded in numerous countries, including Bahrain, Bulgaria, Cape Verde Islands, Croatia, Czechia, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Qatar, Poland, Romania, Serbia, the United Arab Emirates, and Ukraine. But even in parts of its range where the species is not conventionally migratory, it has repeatedly occurred very far from known range, showing that it has a tendency for long-distance wandering and range expansion.

Once regarded as a wanderer in Tanzania, it is now known to breed in the region (Anon 1994). The species has expanded into southern Africa, initially as a vagrant but has now been confirmed to be breeding in Congo-Brazzaville (Demey 2015), Zambia (Dowsett et al. 2008), Zimbabwe (Riddell 2007, 2014), Namibia (Dowsett et al. 2008; Gollnisch 2013), and Botswana (Tyler et al. 2008) in the recent past. Reports from Sao Tome and Principe (Valle & Patacho 2014) over 250 km from the nearest population and reports from Cape Verde Islands (Hazevoet 2003) over 600

km from the nearest population and the record from Seychelles (November 2010 to April 2011) at least 1,300 km from the nearest coast (in Somalia), where the species breeds, support its potential for vagrancy even across the sea (Skerrett 2011; Seychelles Birds Records Committee 2011). Reports from Libya and Algeria indicate over-land journeys of more than 2,000 km from the nearest breeding site in the Nile Valley (Herring 2012; Farhi et al. 2020). Several additional instances have been recorded of the species straying c.2,000 km from breeding grounds, such as records in southern South Africa (Ward-Smith 2019), Poland (Dabrowski 2017), and France (Moulin 2024). Despite the large distances involved, all these birds were considered naturally occurring (Fig. 1).

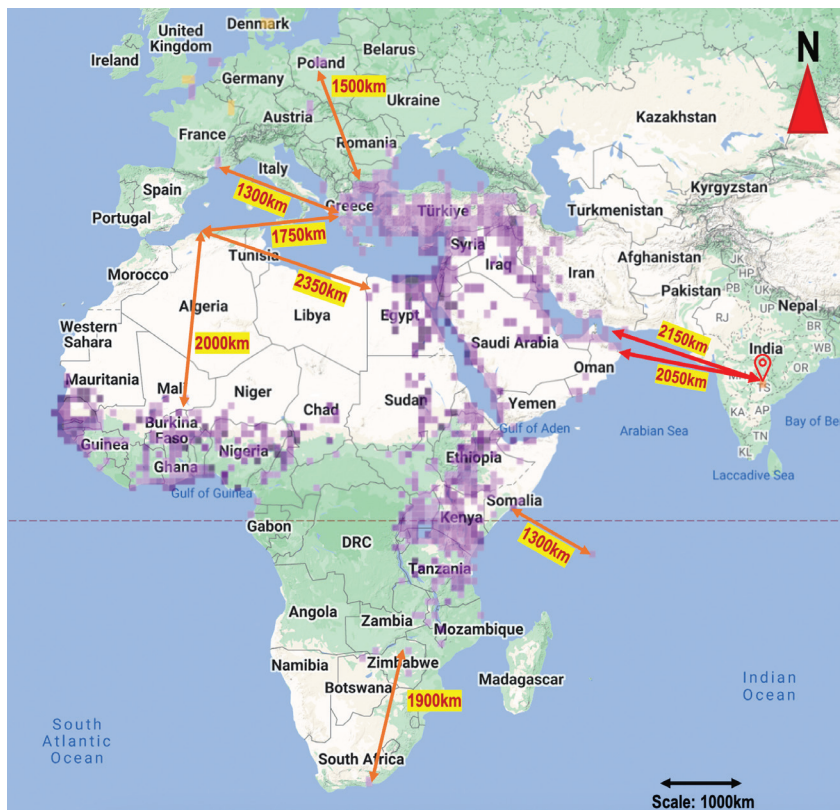


Fig. 1. Distance covered by vagrant Spur-winged Lapwings from their nearest establish range alongside the current records in India.

The Middle Eastern population of the Spur-winged Lapwing, which extends along the eastern Mediterranean from Arabian Peninsula to southwestern Iran, is considered 'dispersive' (Aye & Salmanzadeh 2007; Wiersma & Kirwan 2020). Birds from this population have been observed in Yemen (Jennings 2010), Oman (Eriksen & Victor 2013; Eriksen 2016; Unnithan 2017), Kuwait (Gregory 2005), and Saudi Arabia (Jennings 1981; Porter et al. 1996). The largest Middle Eastern population is in Turkey (Burfield & van Bommel 2004), where they are common as both migrants and breeding residents in various regions (Ozkan et al. 2012). In Iran, the species has been increasingly recorded since 2000 in Khuzestan, where it is now a resident breeding bird (Aye & Salmanzadeh 2007). In southwestern Iran, it was once regarded as a 'scarce winter visitor' but has recently been confirmed to breed there as well (Aye & Salmanzadeh 2007), which would be the closest breeding location to India (Figure 1). With its range noted to be expanding, breeding populations

of Spur-winged Lapwings were established in the West and East Azerbaijan provinces from 2014 (Khaleghizadeh et al. 2017). Since the 1960s, the population of Spur-winged Lapwings has increased significantly in Egypt and Israel, with a fivefold increase observed around the Gaza Strip between 1996 and 2003, attributed to the development of new irrigation fields, reservoirs, and sewage farms (Al-Safadi 2006). Previously considered a rare passage migrant in Lebanon, the Spur-winged Lapwing is now common and has been documented to breed in the region (Ramadan-Jaradi & Bara 2009). Additionally, local populations in Saudi Arabia, where the species was first recorded in 1984, have been reported to be increasing, with evidence of breeding activity (Jennings 2004). The Spur-winged Lapwing population in Turkey has been noted to spread further east (Kirwan et al. 2008), bringing them closer to South Asia and the Indian Subcontinent.

However, given the exceptional distances involved in our case, the vagrancy of Spur-winged Lapwing to Telangana is a low probability event. Hence, the fact that two birds migrated together or separately, possibly even from two different source populations, makes it truly exceptional. None of the prior reports of long-distance vagrancy of Spur-winged Lapwings involved multiple individuals. However, there is one case of two wild vagrant Masked Lapwings *V. miles novaehollandiae*, in New Zealand in 1932 (McCormack 2005), where they subsequently established a population.

Ammavaripeta's distance from ports in Mumbai (c.700 km) and Goa (c.650 km) to the west, and Vishakhapatnam (c.390 km), Kakinada (c.310 km), and Chennai (c.550 km) to the east suggests that ship-assisted vagrancy is an unlikely prospect. In this case, the chances of two non-associating birds being transported via the same ship, surviving the voyage, and arriving at the same wetland, which is at a significant distance from the ports, independently, are exceedingly low and hence discounted.

In summary, there are strong reasons to believe that the Spur-winged Lapwings in

Telangana could have been vagrants from a more westerly native population, and that this case was a natural event for a species known to be expanding its range. If such events had occurred in the past in the intervening region between Iran and Telangana, there is a high likelihood that the birds may have been overlooked as the similar-looking River Lapwing. However, the case here is very unique, where two individuals reached the same spot at a locality skipping a large region of seemingly suitable habitat.

Escapee

Spur-winged Lapwing is one of the popular captive waders in zoos and private collections in the west (Zoo Tier List 2024); hence, an escapee from a captive population cannot be ruled out. Should these Lapwings indeed be escapees; the question of its local source arises. Our local birding network remains oblivious to any nearby aviaries, and Warangal's distance from major urban centres diminishes the likelihood of individual collections, especially lapwings. We reached out to several aviaries across the country, but none were in possession or aware

of the possession of lapwings, including Spur-winged Lapwings at similar facilities. Moreover, the Spur-winged Lapwing is not listed by CITES as a “traded species”. However, the depth of the wild bird trade in India is poorly understood, and private collectors may obtain these birds through illegal markets. Their aviaries remain undocumented, collections secretive, and the loss of individuals is not advertised for concerns of reprisal.

The healthy plumage and soft glossy feathers observed in our observations and photos indicate that the bird is in very good condition, unlike typical caged birds, which have abraded feathers or soft parts. Behaviourally, these birds may have been more consistent with wild birds because they did not show any signs of disability and were only as bold as the Red-wattled Lapwings that they associated with.

Typically, vagrants, if they survive, leave the staging grounds and move towards their home range. However, in this case, at least one bird has stayed through the summer, indicating a lack of migratory potential, which is sometimes associated with a captive stock of birds. However, it should also be noted that over-summering phenomenon is particularly common in the Charadriidae families of waders (McNeil et al. 1994).

Conclusion

On the basis of the observed physical, behavioural, and movement patterns, we infer that the presence of the Spur-winged Lapwings at Ammavaripeta Cheruvu, Warangal, Telangana is more likely to be a case of wild vagrancy rather than an instance of escape from captivity. However, we cannot definitively determine the reason for this atypical movement or the origin of these two individuals at Ammavaripeta. Together with the unknowns of bird trade, we remain cautious in discounting potential captive origins of these birds. It is likely that more such records will emerge from the Indian subcontinent in the future if the species is indeed expanding into the Indian Subcontinent. Birders should specifically check out River Lapwings in the western parts of the subcontinent for any Spur-winged Lapwing. Until we obtain more records from the intervening regions between Iran and Telangana, we recommend that this species may be included in the India checklist of birds as a ‘Species of unknown origin’ (Appendix 2).

We acknowledge the HSBC Bird Race and the Great Backyard Bird Count, events that led the exploration, and the birding groups Deccan Birders and Hyderabad Birding Pals for their assistance in confirming the species. We thank eight anonymous referees for their comments and suggestions in reviewing this article. We thank Chandrasekhar, FDO, Forest Department of Telangana, for the constant support and encouragement for birdwatching.

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Status of the Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* in Tamil Nadu, India

The Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* is a small migratory passerine that breeds across much of temperate Europe and the western Palearctic and winters in South Asia, northern and western Africa. The wintering grounds in India include lake and marsh edges, thick grass and tamarisk scrub, rice fields, and grassy slopes with scattered bushes; lowlands, to 1,800 m in Western Ghats (Pearson et al. 2020). It winters in southern Western Ghats between October and February (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) and is considered an uncommon winter migrant in Kerala (Sashikumar et al. 2011). I document an observation of this species from Nilgiris and assess the existing records from the Indian state of Tamil Nadu to suggest its status.

We saw a Grasshopper Warbler at Koranur, Ebbanad, The Nilgiris (11.486°N, 76.785°E; c.1,865 asl) on 23 November 2022 at 0952 h among scattered tea bushes. The bird was spotted on the way to a vulture vantage point count. While walking along the trail in tea plantations, a Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus* flew up and sat upon a tea bush, and that time, we heard an unfamiliar call from the inside of the bush. After a few minutes, the bird came out and foraged on the top of the bush. We photographed the species and readily identified it as a Grasshopper Warbler using the field guide (Grimmett et al. 2011). It had clear, dark streaks on the upperparts and whitish throat, which made us think this is a Grasshopper Warbler.

Grimmett et al. (2011) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) map the entire southern Western Ghats of Kerala and adjoining Tamil Nadu as its winter range. We reviewed past literature using Pittie (2024) and accessed online portals such as www.gbif.org, www.indiabiodiversityportal.org, www.ebird.org and www.inaturalist.org to enlist all available records of this species from Tamil Nadu. We additionally searched social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to find any more records but found none. The records we compiled (Table 1) indicate that it is a rare bird in the state, with records in the winter months from November to February. According to the records of the Thiruvananthapuram Natural History Museum, it is believed to have a male Grasshopper Warbler specimen on display that was collected on 05 April 1901 from Muthukuly [=Muthukuzhy] in Kalakkad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve, Tirunelveli District.



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180. Grasshopper Warbler from Nilgiris showing streaked upperparts and a longish graduated tail and whitish throat.

However, the warbler specimens are not currently in good condition for identification (Praveen J., in email dated 27 July 2024). Grasshopper Warbler is not unexpected in The Nilgiris, as it has been recorded just outside its territorial boundaries in Sispara of the Silent Valley NP, Kerala (Sashikumar et al. 2011). While most records of the species from Kerala until 2010 were from Munnar hills and Silent Valley, both adjacent to similar habitats in Tamil Nadu, several additional sites have been documented recently (eBird 2024), including lowlands. Hence, the lack of records from Tamil Nadu is somewhat surprising.

Table 1. Records of Grasshopper Warbler from Tamil Nadu

Sl No.	Date	Reference	Districts	Remarks
1	21 February 1997	Raman (1997)	Tirunelveli	Sighting with detailed field notes including all diagnostic features.
2	15 March 2018	Joshi (2018)	Coimbatore	Seen and call recording available.
3	13 March 2020	Jambu (2020)	Coimbatore	Sighting of a <i>Locustella</i> warbler considered this species on range and habitat.
4	13 February 2021	Joshi (2021)	Dindigul	Call heard but further details unavailable.
5	23 November 2022	This work	The Nilgiris	Photographed.

We are very grateful to D. Venkatesh, IFS, CF&FD, Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, Udahagamandalam. C. Vidhya, IFS, DD, Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, Udahagamandalam. S. Gowtham, IFS, DFO, Nilgiris. Ramesh Forest Ranger Nilgiris North division and other staff of the Forest Department. Thanks to K. Selvaganesh, P. Jeganathan, and Gajamohanraj for helping with confirmation of the identification of the warbler and to S. Bharathidasan, Arulagam, Siva.T., and Bhavi K.

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