

had a bird in its talons, which appeared to be a passerine. The harrier made a few attempts to snatch the bird from the kestrel but failed in its effort as the kestrel perched on a stone fence pole. The harrier also perched on a similar fence pole c.150 m away. The kestrel defeathered the bird and consumed it while constantly looking in the direction of the harrier. After about four minutes, at 1758 h, the harrier flew away while the kestrel fed on its quarry.

Medium-sized raptors such as harriers have been known to employ kleptoparasitism as a tactic to procure opportunistic prey. For example, Northern Harriers *C. hudsonius* have been observed stealing from smaller raptors (Temeles 1990). On the contrary, Northern Harriers, Marsh Harriers *Circus* spp., and Hen Harriers *C. cyaneus* have been victims of kleptoparasitism by other large raptors (Brockmann & Barnard 1979). More specifically in India, Brahminy Kites *Haliastur indus* and Black Kites *Milvus migrans* in Tirunelveli and Laggar Falcons *F. jugger* in Rajasthan have been observed to kleptoparasitize Montagu's Harriers *C. pygargus* (T. Ganesh, verbally, dated 27 December 2023).

My observation, to the best of my knowledge, is the first recorded instance of a Pallid Harrier trying to kleptoparasitize a smaller raptor. Further behavioural studies of Pallid Harriers could reveal more insights into whether kleptoparasitism is a rare occurrence or a strategically adapted foraging tactic to combat dwindling prey availability across their breeding and wintering ranges.

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Plastic in the nest of a Bronze-winged Jacana *Metopidius indicus*

The Bronze-winged Jacana *Metopidius indicus* is a widespread resident throughout the Indian Subcontinent, occupying freshwater wetlands with floating vegetation (Grimmett et al. 2011). On 10 July 2024, I was birding at Pichola Lake (24.563°N, 73.684°E), in Udaipur District, Rajasthan, India. The lake has Lotus *Nelumbo nucifera* and Water Lily *Nymphaeaceae* sp. growing in a small patch. On the edge of this patch, I saw a Bronze-winged Jacana *Metopidius indicus* foraging among the vegetation. I observed it gathering leaves and vegetation and begin constructing a nest. After constructing a base, it took a big piece of plastic floating in the lake and carried it to its

nest, placing it on top of the nest base [206]. Guidelines for nesting biology (Barve et al. 2020) were carefully followed during my documentation. I visited the nest in late afternoon to avoid disturbance to the birds and made sure my activities had minimum impact on the vegetation and surroundings.



206. Bronze-winged Jacana placing plastic on its nest base. Photo: Rajat Chordia

Urbanization can affect several aspects of nest design (Reynolds et al. 2019). Studies have highlighted a change in nesting materials with the main changes in nest composition being an increased use of anthropogenic nesting materials and reduction in use of natural materials (Wang et al. 2009; Radhamany et al. 2016; Reynolds et al. 2016). Bronze-winged Jacanas are known to construct floating nests (Butchart 2000) and the floating quality of plastic may be conducive to nest construction in this group.

Several hypotheses have been suggested as to why birds use anthropogenic nesting materials in their nests (Jagiello et al. 2023). The 'availability hypothesis' proposes that the most commonly available materials in the nesting environment are used by birds to construct their nests (Wang et al. 2009; Antczak et al. 2010). The proximity of the nest site to the city along with a lot of plastic waste dumped in the lake make such nesting materials more readily available.

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Seabirds foraging alongside a Sperm Whale *Physeter macrocephalus*

The oceanic waters of the Arabian Sea around the Lakshadweep Archipelago are characterized by an abundance of nutrients, supporting a wide variety of marine life including, fishes, cephalopods and planktonic organisms (Murty 2002; James 2011). As a result, these waters serve as vital foraging grounds for large marine fauna, including the Sperm Whale *Physeter macrocephalus* and various seabird species (Moazzam et al. 2020). I describe an observation of seabirds engaged in foraging alongside a Sperm Whale near Kavaratti Island (10.740°N, 72.520°E).

On 31 January 2024, during a research expedition, a Sperm Whale was sighted alongside a flock of seabirds in the Arabian Sea at 1635 h approximately 23 km off the coast of Kavaratti Island. The observation was made through binoculars (Nikon Prostaff P7 8x42) from a research vessel at a distance of at least 200 to 300 m. The whale appeared black in colour with an extremely large head and large body size that was visually estimated to be more than 15 m in length. During its surfacing, for a short time, small spatula-shaped flippers were seen along with typical blows projecting forward and to the left. However, no photographs of the whale could be obtained. Throughout the observation period of five to six minutes, three species of seabirds including 20 individuals of Great Crested Terns *Thalasseus bergii*, and eight individuals of Lesser Crested Terns *T. bengalensis* were observed diving into the sea, plunging beneath the surface to capture prey. Additionally, five Sooty Terns *Onychoprion fuscatus* were observed catching prey from the sea surface. Meanwhile, the whale was observed surfacing three times actively engaging in foraging activities alongside the seabirds.

The Sperm Whale and the seabirds were suspected to be feeding on Purpleback Flying Squid *Sthenoteuthis oualaniensis* as numerous individuals were seen in the vicinity flying with fins first and arms splayed in similar shapes. A high concentration of

these squids has already been reported from the northern Arabian Sea upon which Sperm Whales in the region are likely feeding (Moazzam et al. 2020). Seabirds are known to prey upon juvenile and small squids (Croxall et al. 1996), swiftly diving into the water accurately to seize their prey, the terns demonstrated agile aerial manoeuvres. The potential advantages for seabirds to associate with marine mammals may be heightened under conditions of reduced prey availability or limitations in accessing prey at depth as shown in research elsewhere (Ashmole 1971; Clark & Mangel 1984). The observed foraging behaviour of the Sperm Whale aligns with established knowledge regarding the species' feeding habits. The presence of Sperm Whales in proximity to the Lakshadweep Islands underscores the importance of these waters as critical habitats providing essential resources for marine mammals and seabirds.

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Status of the Eurasian Siskin *Spinus spinus* in the Indian Himalaya

The Eurasian Siskin *Spinus spinus* is a monotypic species that breeds across Europe and Asia, from Scandinavia to Greece, east to Siberia and south to Iran. The breeding range extends to north-eastern China, possibly to Kamchatka in north-eastern Russia and the Hokkaido Island in Japan (Clement 2020). The bird winters in northern Africa, Cyprus, Middle East, Korea, Japan, China, and Taiwan (Clement 2020). India falls outside of its breeding range and usual migratory paths and is considered a vagrant to the Indian Subcontinent (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) with confirmed reports only from Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, and Ladakh (Pop et al. 2022) apart from its regular occurrence around Gilgit (eBird 2024). This note documents two observations in 2024 by two different groups in Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir and reviews its present status in India.

The first observation was on 19 January 2024 at 0755 h from Helmet Top (28.150°N, 97.005°E; c.2,300m asl) near Walong, north-eastern Arunachal Pradesh. After birding, we (KAS, GS, SBS, STL, & BH) walked down c.100m and settled near a small waterhole which was being visited by a few species like

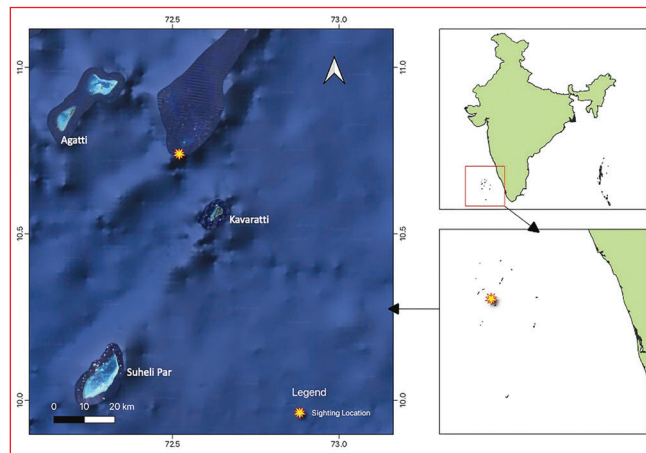


Figure 1: Map showing the location of the observation.