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### An Oriental Plover *Anarhynchus veredus* near Port Blair, South Andaman Island

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are located east of the Indian mainland and are home to several endemic birds as well as south-east Asian species that are not usually seen in mainland India. This makes the islands quite attractive to bird watchers.

MM and MS had gone for a bird watching trip with VS to the Andamans in April of this year. On the morning of 26 April 2024, we were exploring various wetlands at Sippighat (11.606°N, 92.695°E) near Port Blair and looking at a variety of birds. It was almost noon, hot and humid with a very bright sun when we reached this particular pond. VS saw a plover which was different in size and appearance to other sand plovers but the bird suddenly took off. We followed its movement as it flew c. 100 m across the pond and landed on a grassy bank near a red flag. Through our binoculars, we could see a chestnut breast band on the plover and considering the size and jizz, we presumed it to be a Caspian Plover *A. asiaticus*. We were all quite excited as it was a rare bird and would have been new bird for MS and VS.

We drove around the pond to get nearer to its new location and walked through swampy mud and grass trying to get closer to the bird. However, we could not obtain a clear photograph. It was feeding by moving rapidly and by probing its beak into marshy grass and soft mud at the edge of the pond. A Pacific Golden-Plover *Pluvialis fulva* was feeding nearby. We were inching towards it when it flew back to its original position on the other side of the pond. Very quickly we ran to the car and drove back, this time positioning the vehicle in such a way that MS could obtain photographs [196, 197] from a reasonable distance. We did not want to disturb the bird so we left for the hotel for some lunch and respite the from heat.



Miridula Sapru

196. Oriental Plover showing broad dark pectoral band and yellow legs.



Miridula Sapru

197. Oriental Plover showing ivory supercilium and light brown cheeks.

While waiting for lunch we realized that the chance of finding a Caspian Plover here was remote and that this was probably an Oriental Plover *A. veredus* considering that the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are on the edge of the East Asian-Australasian flyway and rather far from the African-Eurasian flyway normally used by the Caspian Plover. They are closely related and at one time were considered conspecific. They are quite difficult to differentiate during non-breeding plumage, however this bird was transitioning into its breeding plumage. We describe here its plumage from our photographs.

This medium sized plover, was similar in size to the Golden Plover feeding nearby and had a long-legged and upright appearance. Its legs were yellow (*contra* greenish-grey in Caspian), and it had a rufous pectoral band that was diffused towards the white throat rather than a sharp colour-break between rufous and white as in a Caspian Plover in a similar plumage stage. A wider dark band at the lower edge of the rufous breast demarcated the white belly instead of a narrower black line as in a Caspian Plover. It also had a long ivory-white supercilium extending behind the eye with light brown cheeks and head compared to the dark-brown eye-stripe of a Caspian Plover. The hind neck was pale and whitish; mantle was brown, the tapering bill was black, and the iris dark. A female Oriental Plover lacks the dark border between the rufous breast band and the white belly and is otherwise similar to its non-breeding plumage (Sangha 2021) and hence ours must have been a male.

One of the easier ways to separate an Oriental Plover from Caspian would be by the colour of the underwing (Sangha 2021), which is dark brown in Oriental (*contra* pale in Caspian). However, we did not pay heed to this feature in the field as we did not realize its importance. With sun overhead, it would have been difficult to see this feature though. We revisited the site in the afternoon, but it was high tide, and the ponds were flooded. We also visited the mornings of two subsequent days of our stay but the bird was not to be found. Though VS visited the area subsequently after the return of MM and MS, he did not see the bird. A perusal of the eBird checklists before and after our sighting indicate that nobody else seem to have found this or any similar bird (eBird 2024).

Oriental Plover breeds in the steppes of Mongolia, southern Siberia, and northern China and mostly spend their non-breeding period in Australia, New Guinea and the islands of Southeast Asia. This bird was possibly in passage towards its northern breeding grounds as return migration takes place between February and April (Ozerskaya & Zabelin 2006; Wiersma & Kirwan 2023). It is a vagrant to the Indian subcontinent (Sangha 2021) with the

earliest record in May 1872 from Andaman Island (Ball 1872:288; Abdulali 1964) and subsequently a breeding plumaged bird in Narcondam Island on 11 May 1998 (Sangha 2021). An adult in non-breeding plumage was photographed from 08 till 16 November 2020 at Digha-Shankarpur Estuary, West Bengal (Payra 2021) while another from the North Andaman Island on 21 December 2022 (Govindarasu et al. 2023). It has also been reported twice from Sri Lanka (Samaraweera 2006) and once from Bangladesh (Ahmed & Jannat 2020). Hence, ours would be the fourth report for the Andaman and Nicobar Island and the eighth for the Indian subcontinent.

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## The Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus* from eastern India, including an addition to the avifauna of Odisha

The Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus* is a polytypic species, widely distributed from Mongolia and Russia in the east, through China, India, Pakistan, the Arabian Peninsula, Africa, the Persian Gulf, and further westward into Europe. It breeds in Central and East Asia and migrates southwest to spend their non-breeding season in the northwestern part of the Indian Peninsula, western Asia, the Arabian Peninsula, and eastern Africa (Yosef et al. 2020). In India, it is a passage migrant and a winter visitor mainly to the northern and western states (Ali & Ripley 1996; Grimm et al. 2011). Records from the eastern and southern parts of the Indian Peninsula are rare (eBird 2024). Instead, the similar-looking Brown Shrike *L. cristatus* is a common winter visitor in these regions. We report two new records of Isabelline Shrike from eastern India, one each from Odisha and West Bengal.

### Record from Kalahandi, Odisha

On 27 February 2024, while birding in Tikirapara, Kalahandi

district, Odisha (19.969°N, 83.312°E), at 0823 h, AM photographed a shrike that was identified as a Brown Shrike *L. cristatus* at that moment, since it is common in that region. However, on further scrutiny of photographs, the individual was confirmed to be an Isabelline Shrike: a small shrike with sandy brown plumage, a long rusty tail, mask not extending to the lores, indistinct supercilium, pale or pinkish bill, black iris, and black legs [198]. The overall plumage suggests it belongs to the *arenarius* subspecies, as per Ganpule (2017). To the best of our knowledge, this is the first confirmed record of the species from Odisha state. An Isabelline Shrike was observed in Padampur, Bargarh district, Odisha, in 2012 by Manoj V. Nair (pers. comm. 07 July 2024), but no photographs exist from the state. The closest known confirmed record of the species is c.200 km away in Chhattisgarh state (Fig 1).



198. Isabelline Shrike from Kalahandi, Odisha.

Anurag Mishra

The bird was perched on an *Ipomoea* bush and did not attempt to fly away despite our close approach. Later, it flew a short distance and hid inside a shrub, avoiding coming into the open. It was also seen moving on the ground briefly, probably foraging for insects. The area where this individual was photographed can be described as a wetland adjacent to agricultural fields, with a few trees dotting the landscape. The water body had *Ipomoea* bushes and *Typha* reeds on the periphery and was a roosting site for Black-crowned Night Herons *Nycticorax nycticorax*. Other species seen on that date include waterfowl such as the Cotton Pygmy Goose *Nettapus coromandelianus*, Gadwall *Mareca strepera*, Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, Little Cormorant *Microcarbo niger*, and Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*; along with more typical scrubland/open habitat species such as the Jerdon's Bushlark *Mirafra affinis*, Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus*, Plaintive Cuckoo *Cacomantis merulinus*, Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*, Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata*, Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*, and Indian Silverbill *Euodice malabarica* (Mishra 2024).

### Record from Kolkata, West Bengal

AG photographed one shrike each on 05 November 2015 (0945 h) and 16 December 2015 (1030 h) in Newtown, North 24 Parganas district, West Bengal (22.617°N, 88.457°E). While going through the photographs later, these individuals were confirmed to be Isabelline Shrikes, based on the pale sandy underparts, greyish upperparts, pale base to the bill, diffused face mask, and lacking a clear supercilium [199]. The habit was grassland interspersed by marshland patches dominated by *Typha* reeds.