



Photo: Ameya Deshpande

51. Collared Pratincole nest with two eggs and an adult bird incubating the eggs at Kalewadi, Maharashtra.

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The Jerdon's Bushlark *Plocealauda affinis* from Goa, India

Goa, though India's smallest state (0.12% of India's land area), supports a disproportionately rich avian diversity, with 489 species recorded (Baidya & Bhagat 2024). This figure represents approximately 35% of India's bird species and is likely attributable to Goa's varied landscapes, ranging from coastal wetlands and estuaries to inland forests and lateritic plateaus. The Socorro Plateau in North Goa is a notable birding site and this note reports the first confirmed sighting of Jerdon's Bushlark from the state of Goa.

Socorro Plateau (15.568°N, 73.838°E; 50–90 m asl), with an area of 3.5 sq. km., is located in North Goa District (TessaDEM 2024) (Fig. 1). It comprises a low-level Ferricretes (LLF) type of flat lateritic plateau (Watve 2013), dominated by grass species interspersed with sparse scrub vegetation, providing suitable habitat for various grassland-associated species. To the south, it is bordered by the Salvador do Mundo Plateau, characterized by dense shrub and tree cover. On 13 August 2024, during a reconnaissance visit to the habitat, three larks were observed flying over and settling in an open grassy patch of land at a spot (15.566°N, 73.840°E; 72 m asl). Two individuals were identified as Malabar Lark *Galerida malabarica*, a species frequently encountered in the region. However, the third bird displayed morphological differences that prompted closer scrutiny. A photograph was obtained [52]; however, the bird remained silent and was visible very briefly. Identification was based on the following morphological features: heavily streaked upperparts, buff underparts, short tail, prominent rufous colour on the wings, buffy lores, and a large, thickset bill with a dark upper and pale lower mandible (Grimmett et al. 2011). The photograph was later shared on Facebook and, subsequently, the identification was confirmed (Damle 2024).



Photo: Omkar Damle

52. Jerdon's Bushlark at Socorro Plateau, Goa, 13 August 2024.

The Jerdon's Bushlark occurs in southern and eastern India and Sri Lanka, and is a resident species that breeds from December to May, chiefly from March onwards, in India; and from March to August or September, mainly May, in Sri Lanka (Alström 2020). It is typically associated with drier regions, and inhabits a variety of open landscapes, including grasslands, scrublands, agricultural fields, rocky plains, and forest edges. While it is resident in peninsular India, it has also been documented from, as far north as, Bastar in Chhattisgarh, and Midnapore in West Bengal (Dinda & Das 2018; Bharos et al. 2019).

The Jerdon's Bushlark is not listed in the available checklists for Goa and citizen science databases (Baidya & Bhagat 2024; eBird 2025; iNaturalist 2025). Thus, our record of the species at Socorro Plateau represents an important addition to the avifauna of Goa. While this species is well documented in southern India, its prior absence from Goa is intriguing. In Maharashtra, there are only two confirmed records, both from the plains in the northern (Patil 2023) and north-eastern (Babre 2018) areas. From Karnataka, while there are sparse records close to the border between Goa and Karnataka (Prabhu 2021; Kalkura 2022; Bharathi 2024; Rai 2025), regular records are reported from the southern coastal plains (for e.g., in Udipi, Mangaluru etc.), and inland tablelands (for e.g., in Bengaluru, Mysuru,

etc.) (eBird 2025). Based on its known habitat preferences and current distribution, it is apparent that the species typically avoids the hilly and forested terrains of the Western Ghats, but prefers flat, open plateaus. Based on this, the Western Ghats ranges of Goa may be hypothesised as a possible geographical distribution barrier for this non-migratory species. Specifically, the areas at the east-west projections of the Western Ghats, such as near Canaguinim (15.099°N, 73.988°E; 99 m asl) and Agonda (15.054°N, 74.017°E; 145 m asl) in Goa, as well as near Karwar (14.794°N, 74.313°E; 105 m asl) in Karnataka, which extend close to the coastline. These densely forested hill ranges may possibly restrict or obstruct the movement of dryland species like Jerdon's Bushlark, resulting in likely sporadic or isolated records from the coastal flats of Goa and adjacent regions. Alternatively, the apparent absence of records in these regions may probably stem from biases in coverage, resulting in this small and somewhat visually cryptic species being potentially unnoticed or misidentified. This highlights the importance of consistent, systematic, and targeted surveys to more accurately detect and document species presence and abundance. Furthermore, this record highlights the ecological significance of lateritic plateaus as important habitats for open-country birds, emphasizing the need for focused efforts to protect these unique ecosystems.

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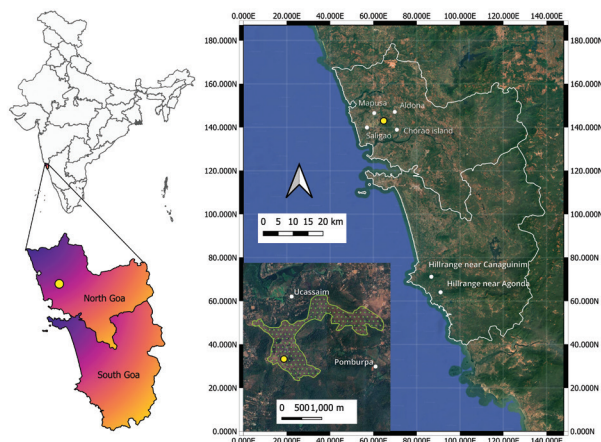


Fig. 1. Location map of the Socorro Plateau, showing the approximate site of the observation on 13 August 2024 (indicated by a solid yellow circle). Plateau boundaries are outlined in green. Map created using QGIS Desktop v3.14.12. Map by Omkar Damle

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The Grey-crowned Prinia *Prinia cinereocapilla* from Valmiki Tiger Reserve, Bihar, India

The Grey-crowned Prinia *Prinia cinereocapilla* is endemic to the Indian Subcontinent, and found discontinuously from the Himalayan foothills of Uttarakhand to Bhutan (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). This species is listed as globally Vulnerable by the IUCN and only patchily occurs outside the protected areas, both in Nepal and India (Birdlife International 2025). Here, I record it from the Valmiki Tiger Reserve, Bihar.

On 27 December 2024, while birding in Gobardhana Range (27.351°N, 84.307°E) of the Valmiki Tiger Reserve, I heard several *tree-eei* calls from grassy hill slopes in forest. The overall habitat was broadleaved evergreen forest with hilly ravines and grassy hill slopes. Approaching closer, I found four rufous-brown prinias with slaty-grey caps calling and moving in *Thysanolaena* grasses that occur in the understorey of this forest. Prinias were very close to me, as they had a small rufous-brown patch above their bill and front of head, slaty-grey crown, and creamy white supercilium. With their unique calls, it was straightforward to identify them as Grey-crowned Prinias in non-breeding plumage. Unfortunately, I could not take any pictures that day.

On 29 March 2025, I again encountered Grey-crowned Prinias in same habitat in Gobardhana Range. In fact, their calls were being heard all over *Thysanolaena latifolia* grass in the understorey. This time, I photographed three different individuals [53, 54] and saw nearly 11 different individuals calling and foraging. Some prinias were acquiring their breeding plumages while others were yet to acquire the breeding plumage.

Since then, I have searched all habitats of Valmiki Tiger Reserve in past two years but have not come across the species in any other habitat. Hence, I presume that the supporting habitat of the Grey-crowned Prinia in Valmiki Tiger Reserve is limited to hilly slopes of Gobardhana Range or any other site within the tiger reserve where such a habitat occurs. No other prinias were encountered in this particular habitat.