



119. Female Great Indian Bustard foraging on a grassy open landscape at Tulshi Reservoir, Kolhapur district, Maharashtra.

fallow agricultural land, and seasonally exposed reservoir margins, with sparse shrub cover and tree growth. Our observation site consisted of open grass-dominated terrain interspersed with uncultivated agricultural fields right along the margin of the reservoir. Vegetation cover was sparse, with scattered grasses and herbs, and the area lacked dense woody growth. Human presence was minimal during the time of observation and the habitat structure allowed unobstructed visibility across the landscape.

Historically, GIBU occurred across large parts of western, central, and peninsular India, including several districts of Maharashtra (Burgess 1855; Dangre 1966). Early ornithological records and subsequent field observations indicate that the species was formerly widespread and abundant in open grasslands and dry agricultural landscapes in the state (Ali et al. 1984). However, sustained declines led to its disappearance from much of this range, with remnant populations now largely restricted to a few fragmented landscapes, most notably in Rajasthan and parts of Gujarat and Maharashtra (BirdLife International 2018). Early records indicate the occurrence of the species in districts such as Ahmednagar, Nagpur, and other parts of the Deccan Plateau in Maharashtra (Dangre 1966; Garde 1993). However, large-scale habitat transformation and changes in land-use patterns here have led to a severe contraction of its distribution in the state by 2010 (Dutta et al. 2011). At present, the Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary located in Solapur and Ahmednagar districts represents the principal stronghold for the species in Maharashtra; particularly the grasslands surrounding Nannaj and adjacent areas (Narwade & Rahmani 2020). Recent surveys from the south-western Deccan Plateau have emphasized the ecological importance of these grassland landscapes for the persistence of the remaining bustard population in the state (Narwade & Rahmani 2020). Nevertheless, the population within this landscape has also declined considerably in recent decades, reflecting the precarious conservation status of the species in Maharashtra.

Our sighting, from the Western Ghats landscape, is clearly outside its known stronghold, c.290 km away from its stronghold. Such movements may represent exploratory or nomadic behaviour, especially when solitary birds occur. Recent observations from the Solapur region have reported the presence of a single female Great Indian Bustard between 2019 and 2024, which subsequently went missing. The hypothesis that it's the same individual that wandered to Tulshi Reservoir needs a serious consideration, though this speculation would remain unconfirmed due to lack of satellite telemetry.

Such occasional sightings outside established strongholds have been interpreted as evidence of dispersal or transient habitat use, underscoring the ecological relevance of marginal and non-protected landscapes (Dutta et al. 2011). Satellite telemetry studies conducted in Maharashtra have demonstrated that individuals may move across extensive grassland and agricultural mosaics and frequently occupy sites outside protected areas, sometimes up to 100km (Habib et al. 2016). Similar observations from arid regions of Rajasthan further illustrate the species' continued dependence on open habitats, and its tendency to make large-scale movements in a landscape with fragmented habitats (Gehlot et al. 2021).

Hence, this underscores the importance of landscape-level conservation strategies for the Great Indian Bustard in Maharashtra. Although the Solapur-Ahmednagar region remains the primary stronghold for the species, individuals may occasionally disperse into other suitable habitats across the Deccan Plateau, even into the Western Ghats landscape.

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An aberrant Small Pratincole *Glareola lactea* in a pratincole breeding colony

Atypical plumage variants among sympatrically breeding waders are rare and often go unnoticed without sustained field observation. During systematic avifaunal monitoring of pratincole *Glareola* sp. colonies at Bembla Reservoir (20.480°N, 78.070°E) in Yavatmal District, Maharashtra, India from April to June 2025, an aberrant individual [120] of Small Pratincole *G. lactea* was documented amongst regularly plumaged Small Pratincoles and Oriental Pratincoles *G. maldivarum* that were breeding together.

By size, the aberrant individual appeared to be a Small Pratincole. However, the observed individual deviated from the standard phenotype. The focal bird displayed the following unusual features: reddish-brown pigmentation on the crown and



120. Small Pratincole showing reddish-brown pigmentation in crown and nape.



121. Small Pratincole showing its slightly elongated and decurved bill.

Both photos: Praveen Joshi

nape (vs grey), a broad and flattened cranial profile (vs rounded crown), a complete and conspicuous white eye-ring (vs faint or absent), and a slightly elongated and decurved bill (vs stubbier bill). No vocalizations or unusual behavioural traits were observed.

The bird was observed quite briefly when a small series of photographs were obtained. Despite five follow-up searches between 16 and 25 June 2025, this bird or no additional individuals with similar morphology were detected.

To confirm that this was not a case of individual variation within the natural spectrum, over 500 photographic records and field images of both Small and Oriental Pratincoles from regional and national monitoring and citizen science platforms (e.g., eBird India) were reviewed. No comparable individuals were found, reinforcing the uniqueness of this observation.

Several reasons could be hypothesized for this atypical individual but confirmation or elimination would require capturing the individual. I list some of the possible reasons. Environmental plumage staining—usually from iron-oxide-rich soils—has been documented in some species like vultures (Arlettaz et al. 2002; van Overveld et al. 2017) and cranes (Nesbitt 1975). This colour also seems to be present around the bird's heels where the bare parts touch the feathers, perhaps stained while wading through contaminated water. Alternatively, the individual could be a hybrid between Small and Oriental Pratincole but no such hybrids are known (McCarthy 2006) and the reddish-brown tint is not present in either of the species, and hence unlikely. The last possibility, stemming from the precise pattern and consistency of pigmentation in the focal bird may be a

melanin-related anomaly. Melanin, the dominant pigments in bird plumage, occur as eumelanin (black, grey, dark brown) and phaeomelanin (reddish-brown to buff). Birds typically regulate which pigment is produced, but a genetic mutation may induce exclusive production of phaeomelanin. This phenomenon can lead to warm reddish-brown coloration, as possibly exhibited by this pratincole (van Grouw 2021). Notably, such anomalies need not reflect an increased pigment load, but rather an abnormal distribution of melanin, altering patterns and hues within the natural feather structure (van Grouw 2021).

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Breeding of the Malayan Night Heron *Gorsachius melanolophus* from Andaman Group of Islands, India

The Malayan Night Heron *Gorsachius melanolophus* is a chestnut-colored, medium sized nocturnal heron with a distinctive long black crest (Grimmett et al. 2011). The species occurs patchily in north-eastern India, Western Ghats, Nicobar group of islands, and South China (He et al. 2016). It is resident in Taiwan and migratory in parts of its range, wintering in Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, Philippines, and the Great Sundas. Breeding has been reported mainly during the monsoon period in the north-eastern India (May–June), Philippines (June–October), and Taiwan and other Southeast Asian regions (April–September) (Martínez-Vilalta et al. 2020). In the Andaman Islands, the Malayan Night Heron is considered a migrant from Southeast Asia or north-eastern India, with no confirmed breeding records (Praveen 2025).

The species is primarily nocturnal, though it occasionally feeds during day time also (Kawakami et al. 2011). Its preference for dense forest habitats and its habit of nesting high under the canopy, typically 9–14 m above ground, make it difficult to detect during surveys.

In August 2024, calls of two Malayan Night Herons were heard in a forest patch at Brookshabad, Sri Vijaya Puram, South Andaman (11.627°N, 92.745°E). The site is a dense forest, bordered by quarries to the west, a tsunami camp to the north, the Brookshabad dump yard to the northeast, and the sea to the east. On 09 October 2024, their nest was located approximately 9–10 m above ground under the canopy in the same forest patch [122a]. Observations were done using binoculars (Solognac 8x42) from a distance of c.20 m to minimize disturbance (Barve et al. 2020). The attending adult remained vigilant during observations, responding to nearby movements and sounds. Hatchlings were not visible due to the height and canopy cover of the nest [122b]. The adult remained on the nest for approximately two weeks before disappearing, suggesting possible nest abandonment. In