

of *V. modesta*, *Z. mauritiana*, and *V. nilotica* [118], providing potential foraging and nesting substrates for Sind Woodpecker. These details would potentially help other birders to search for this species elsewhere in this landscape.



Photo: Touseef Ahmed

**118.** Habitat of the locality showing dominant *Vachellia* sp. And *Ziziphus mauritiana* at Kundpur Village.

These observations, representing both male and female individuals, constitutes the first confirmed record of Sind Woodpecker from Jammu & Kashmir. This is not unexpected as there are several records in Punjab, Pakistan, which are c.50 km west of our site (eBird 2026). Nearest records of Sind Woodpecker from India are of specimens collected from Arniwala and Fazilka, both in Fazilka (formerly part of Ferozpur) district, Punjab, India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Praveen 2024). Our site is c.240km north of these sites in India, indicating a notable gap in formally documented records in this region. Our finding emphasizes the need for focused bird surveys in low elevation and human-modified landscapes of the district to improve knowledge of local avifaunal diversity and broad distribution patterns.

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## The Critically Endangered Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* at Tulshi Reservoir, Kolhapur District, Maharashtra, India

The Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* (GIBU, hereinafter) is one of the most threatened bird species globally and is currently classified as Critically Endangered by the IUCN due to its extremely small and rapidly declining population (BirdLife International 2018). Once widely distributed across the grasslands and semi-arid regions of the Indian subcontinent, the species has suffered severe range contraction over the past century, primarily as a result of habitat loss, agricultural intensification, infrastructure development, and increased human disturbance (Dutta et al. 2011). This note describes the sighting of a GIBU from Tulshi Reservoir (Fig. 1) of Kolhapur District of Maharashtra, from the northern Western Ghats landscape, and outside its known stronghold in the state of Maharashtra.

An adult GIBU was seen for the first time at Tulshi Reservoir, Kolhapur District, Maharashtra, India on 12 January 2025, at 1015 h, near the reservoir margins at Kumbharwadi (16.526°N, 74.010°E) [119]. This individual, a female, was foraging in an open landscape adjoining the reservoir. Identification was straightforward as no other species has such a large body, long legs, erect posture, brownish upperparts, contrasting black crown, and pale neck and underparts. The bustard was observed for approximately a minute. During this period, it moved slowly across ground, foraging intermittently. It remained vigilant and avoided us despite being far, eventually walking away and disappearing from our view. It later took to wing and flew towards west. No additional individuals were observed in the vicinity despite a thorough search. We kept visiting the site since then but have not come across any GIBU.

Tulshi Reservoir, created Tulshi earthen dam, has an area of 135 ha, and was built mainly for irrigation. Most of its catchment area lies in the adjoining Western Ghats. Around the water-spread area, the landscape consisted predominantly of open grassland,

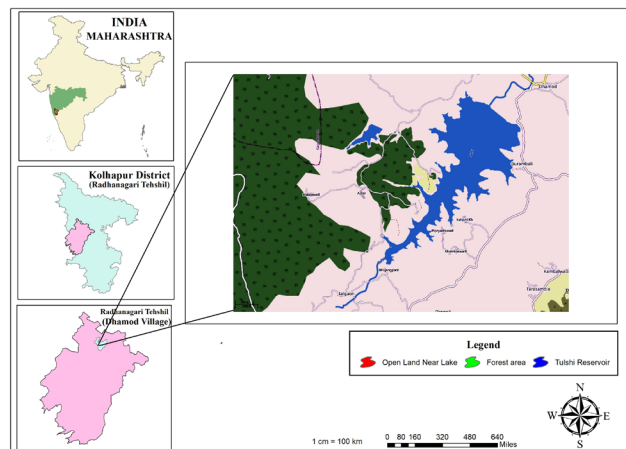


Fig. 1. Tulshi reservoir, Kolhapur district, Maharashtra, India

Photo: Rahul S Kamble



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