



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

January 2025, a juvenile was observed within the same forest patch between 1715 and 1730 h.

On 11 May 2025, calls of Malayan Night Herons were again recorded at the same site. On 12 July 2025, a nest was observed on the same tree but on a different branch at a similar height [122c]. Nesting in close proximity to the previous site suggests strong nest-site fidelity, a behaviour reported for the species (Kushlan & Hancock 2005). The nest was monitored during subsequent visits in July [122d]. However, from the first week of August 2025 onwards, no adults were observed attending the nest, indicating a second probable nest abandonment.



Photo: B. Kilson Kiragori

122a. First photograph of the nesting of Malayan Night Heron on 09 October 2024. **122b:** Early morning picture while observing the nest on 10 October 2024. **122c:** Nesting on same tree but on a different branch, photograph taken on 12 July 2025. **122d:** Last sighting of the bird on the nest on 26 July 2025.

All observations and call recordings were uploaded to eBird by the author. Additionally, an independent record of nest building on 05 May 2025 was reported from Diglipur, North Andaman (Rajan 2025). Repeated nesting attempts in the same tree across consecutive seasons at Brookshabad, together with the record from North Andaman, suggest that the Malayan Night Heron may have a breeding population in the Andaman Islands. The apparent variation in breeding timing between northern and southern Andaman could reflect differences in climatic conditions or population origins. The population in the Nicobar group of islands is taxonomically distinct, as the subspecies *G. m. minor*, while the breeding population in Andamans have not been sampled and may represent another taxonomically valid unit (Praveen 2025).

Continued monitoring of known locations like Brookshabad forest patch and nearby habitats may provide further insights into the breeding ecology and population status of this species in the Andaman Islands.

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A Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* on the Kalpeni Island, Lakshadweep, India

During a coastal walk on the Kalpeni Island in the Lakshadweep archipelago (10.071°N, 73.648°E) on 02 June 2025, MJKK encountered an unfamiliar seabird resting quietly on a mooring buoy near the shore of the leeward side of the atoll. The bird appeared calm and alert, showing no signs of distress or exhaustion. He observed it for approximately two hours as it occasionally preened and balanced itself against the light breeze, before eventually taking flight toward the southwest over the lagoon. Based on visual assessment and subsequent photographic confirmation, the bird was identified as an immature Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* a rarely recorded seabird in Indian waters [123]. Notable identification features included a pale blue bill with a darker base, bare blue facial skin with a blackish throat patch, vivid red webbed feet, and predominantly dirty white plumage with contrasting dark brown primaries. which aligned with field descriptions by Harrison et al. (2021).



Photo: Mohammed Jabir, K. K

123. Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* observed in Kalpeni Island, Lakshadweep, India, in June 2025.

The Red-footed Booby is a widely distributed seabird that breeds on remote tropical islands across the world's oceans (Schreiber et al. 2020). Within Indian waters, however, sightings are rare. Reports are generally of at-sea observations or of individuals that have been driven ashore during storms. Until 2013, there was only one confirmed record of the Red-footed Booby from India, of a grounded individual from New Digha, West Bengal (Praveen et al. 2013). By 2020, there were six records from India, five of them being from the west coast, and four of them being beached birds (Rodrigues & Roshnath 2020). Since then, there have been four more reports from the west coast, of which three of them were rescued birds from land while