

The Greater Adjutant *Leptoptilos dubius* preying on domesticated ducklings in rural Assam, India

On 21 August 2025, two adult Greater Adjutants *Leptoptilos dubius* were observed actively preying on domesticated ducklings during a bird survey near the village of Kokilamari (also known as Kokilamari Gelapathar), Sivasagar district, Assam (27.141°N, 94.666°E, 88 m asl). At about 1315 h, each Greater Adjutant managed to prey upon and consume two domesticated ducklings *Anas platyrhynchos domesticus*, in succession, in a waterlogged crop field [187–189]. Each Greater Adjutant managed to prey and consume two ducklings, though few ducklings were able to escape. During paddy cultivation, Greater Adjutants usually have access to ample food, such as, small fishes, crabs, snails, mud eels, etc (Elliott & Kirwan 2020). The birds were observed initially feeding in shallow waters but were later found preying on and consuming the domesticated ducklings. Despite the attempts of the poultry farmer to protect the ducklings from predation, they were unsuccessful. Local people have also reported that Greater Adjutants sometimes tear fishing nets to extract trapped fish to opportunistically feed on the catch. Despite such incidents and incurring a loss of domestic animals or poultry, the local community expressed some awareness regarding the conservation of the species, and acknowledging its current rare status.

The Greater Adjutant is a Near-threatened species, with populations limited to only three small breeding populations globally – Bihar (India), Assam (India) and Cambodia (BirdLife International 2000, 2001; Elliott & Kirwan 2020; Choudhary et al. 2011). In Assam, it is mainly distributed in the Brahmaputra valley, where it nests colonially, usually associated with other large storks (Choudhury 2000). The species functions as proficient predators, delivering live prey, such as, fish and invertebrates,



187. Greater Adjutant preying on domesticated ducklings; poultry-farm owners trying to chase the birds away in the background.



188. Greater Adjutants preying on domesticated ducklings.



189. Greater Adjutant feeding on domesticated ducklings.

to nestlings during the winter breeding season (November–February). Notably, even in the non-breeding period, they actively forage in waterlogged habitats following rain, exploiting seasonal flooding in beels and wetlands to capture accessible prey (Singha & Rahmani 2007).

Our observations document the feeding behaviour of the Greater Adjutant, and this behaviour of the species may likely lead to conflict with local communities and livelihoods in the future. This highlights the need for awareness programs to balance the conservation of this stork with the mitigation of its impact on village poultry and fishing practices.

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A Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* from the coast of southern West Bengal

On 10 September 2025, our team of ST, AD, SG, and PP went on a birding trip to Kargil Beach, Frazergunj (21.575°N, 88.242°E), a popular hotspot for waders, terns and gulls, in the district of South 24 Parganas c. 120 km from Kolkata by road. The site is largely a barren sandy beach with sparse vegetation and muddy puddles, bordered by a river that creates an estuarine habitat rich in food for shorebirds.

We arrived at the spot (Fig 1) around 1010 h and shortly after getting out of our vehicle, we observed a distinct-looking wader with a slightly decurved bill busily feeding near a puddle

alongside numerous other waders [190]. Some of us (AD, SG, and PP) got clear photographs of the bird, which we initially mistook for a Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*. Later that day, we submitted the record on eBird (Talukder et al. 2025) and shared the photos across several bird identification forums, where an expert suggested that it might be a Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* and further discussions confirmed the identification. We observed the same bird again around 1300 h at the same location, where it continued to be seen until 14 September 2025.



Fig 1. Exact location of the bird with surrounding habitat (Google Earth)



Agniva Dasgupta

190. Pectoral Sandpiper, Kargil Beach, West Bengal.

Although similar to the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *C. acuminata*, this species can be identified by the sharply defined boundary between its brown-streaked breast and white belly, its less rufous crown, and the absence of the bright buff-breast often shown by Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. Its flanks and vent are also less heavily marked (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). In flight, it shows narrow white bars on the upper wings and distinct white sides to the lower rump and upper tail-coverts (Grimmett et al. 2011).

The Pectoral Sandpiper breeds in Arctic tundra from the Taimyr Peninsula in Siberia east to Hudson Bay in Canada, and winters mainly in South America, with smaller numbers in Southeast Asia, Australia, and New Zealand (Farmer et al. 2020). Its route into the Indian Subcontinent remains unclear. One possibility is that this individual deviated, for unknown reasons, from its usual migratory path towards Australia and Southeast Asia along the East Asian–Australasian Flyway (Rajeevan et al. 2014). Although the species is the most frequent transatlantic vagrant in Europe (Harrop 1993; Undeland & Sangha 2002), it remains an extremely rare vagrant in the Indian Subcontinent. This record is the ninth sighting of the species in India and the

first from the eastern coast, specifically West Bengal. Earlier records are from Punjab (Undeland & Sangha 2002), Kerala (Rajeevan et al. 2014; Reghuvaran 2017; Sreedevi 2018), Andaman Islands (Boesman 2017), Gujarat (Patel 2022), Tamil Nadu (Gajamohanraj & Sarang 2021), and Goa (Fonseca et al. 2024). These records have already been compiled in tabular form by Fonseca et al. (2024).

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Melanism in the Indian Eagle Owl *Bubo bengalensis*

Melanism, derived from the Greek *melanos* (dark-coloured), is generally defined as a condition characterized by abnormal deposits of melanin in skin and feathers, resulting in a blackish appearance. Melanism does not always involve an increase in pigment quantity; rather, it may result from altered distribution of melanin within feathers. In birds, two forms of melanin are responsible for plumage coloration: eumelanin, which produces black, grey, and dark brown colors, and pheomelanin, which produces reddish-brown to pale buff colors (van Grouw 2021). Although a relatively rare form of colour aberration, melanism has been documented across many bird families, including several