

Unexpected sighting of Small Pratincole nest site in the Cauvery River in Tamil Nadu

Bird watching is a popular hobby the world over. Due to their varied lifestyles, conspicuousness, diurnal habits, interesting plumage, and calls, it attracts humans to observe them from time immemorial. Birds are also regarded as good subjects for exploring several questions of ecological and conservation significance (Urfi 2003). The Small Pratincole, a small wader from the pratincole family also called Little Pratincole *Glareola lactea* (Temminck, 1820) comes under the order Charadriiformes in the Glareolidae family. This species is distributed in the Indomalayan and Palearctic biogeographical regions (BirdLife International 2021), is a resident breeder in India.

The Small Pratincole is pale sandy grey in colour and has short legs and a short square-ended tail. The short beak is an adaptation to aerial feeding to catch the insects. The head is brown in colour. The wings are grey and have black

primaries and blackish underwing-coverts in flight, the belly is white (Grimmett et al. 2011). Breeding starts from December to March on gravel or sandbanks near rivers and lakes, laying two to four eggs in a ground scrape. From the IUCN Red List, it



A Small Pratincole nest observed with eggs (1 & 2), chicks (3 & 4), incubating the eggs (5 & 6), and adult birds (7 & 8). © T. Siva.

Unexpected sighting

On 11 April 2021, I, along with a few bird enthusiasts had gone for bird watching along the Cauvery riverside near the Tropical Butterfly Park (10.876° N, 78.628° E) in Tiruchirappalli District, Tamil Nadu. We started observing birds from 0700 h and recorded around 54 species along the river bank. As we were observing across the river, I observed a small island that was formed in the center across the river due to the differential water flow. We sighted some bird movements on the island and on closer observation found it to be a Small Pratincole that was flying around and settling on the island and either sitting or walking along the island.

The water depth of the river up to the island was just about a feet and we managed to wade our way closer to the island with curiosity to look for more. When on the island, we observed the species near a nest with two eggs so we took care not to disturb the habitat and carefully counted around 12 nests with 23 eggs and two chicks, each placed a meter apart. Each nest had a maximum of three and a minimum of two eggs. However, since we did not walk up on the island and just surveyed the habitat walking around it, I assume there would be more nests in the range of 15 to 20. The eggs camouflaged with the sand colour having small brown spots on the eggshells. The newly hatched chicks were observed to have soft fluffy feathers. We then returned to prevent any disturbance to the nest site of the Small

Pratincole. I later surveyed the literature for the nest sites of Small Pratincole. Though there are distribution records available, there is no information on nest sites for Tamil Nadu. This information can be helpful for the researchers to study this bird species, making this observation an important record for conserving the bird and its habitat along the Cauvery River.

References

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