

# Addition of Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer* to the Indian avifauna

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[With notes from Praveen J]

Kasambe, R., & Kasambe, V., 2022. Addition of Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer* to the Indian avifauna. *Indian BIRDS* 18 (1): 10–13.

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Manuscript received on 29 January 2022.

We (RK & VK) were on a bird watching trip to Alibaug area (18.62°N, 72.88°E; Raigad District, Maharashtra) during 21–23 December 2020. In the evening of 21 December 2020, we photographed two greenshanks (*Tringa* spp.) at Akshi Beach along with a multitude of waders. We considered them to be Common Greenshanks *Tringa nebularia* and uploaded the images on eBird as such.

In January 2021, RK had a relook at the images and was intrigued by the extra-thick, and bi-coloured beak of these greenshanks. He suspected them to be the rare Nordmann's Greenshanks *T. guttifer* [18, 19, 20].



18. Nordmann's Greenshank showing bi-coloured bill, yellow legs, and white underparts.



19. Nordmann's Greenshank feeding amongst waders on Akshi Beach, Alibaug, Maharashtra.



20. Nordmann's Greenshank showing the thicker, slightly re-curved bill.

The two birds showed a slightly upturned, thicker, bi-coloured bill, and yellow legs. The yellow basal half of the bill could be clearly seen in one individual. The underparts of the body were clean white. A short video clip of one foraging bird showed the bird walking on the sandy beach and picking up tit-bits of food off the surface (<https://youtu.be/bUUI1bCi1bM>).

It was distinguished from the Common Greenshank by its shorter, yellower legs, and heavier bill with paler basal half (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). The differences described by Brelsford (2016) were helpful in confirming the identification. It had a thicker neck, which it often held closer to its body, and a pronounced ventral angle (protruding belly), giving Nordmann's a more hunched appearance than Common Greenshank (Brelsford 2016). RK posted the images on a Facebook group (Ask ID of Indian Birds), and also sent them to expert birders (Adesh Shivkar & Mayuresh Khataavkar pers. comm.) for confirmation. Many experienced birders, from across the world, confirmed that the birds were indeed Nordmann's Greenshanks.

## Status in India

According to Ali & Ripley (1980: 268–269), Nordmann's Greenshank is a rare winter visitor to Assam. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012: 684) consider all reports from India as dubious, including Stuart Baker's (1933: 306) from Assam. PJ reviewed all published sight records (Table 1) of Nordmann's Greenshank

**Table 1.** Unconfirmed reports of Nordmann's Greenshank from India

Date	Location	Coordinates	Remarks	References
December 1877	Kolkata environs	22.57°N, 88.37°E	A.O. Hume procured a "mangled specimen in the Calcutta [=Kolkata] market"; probably collected nearby. Probably the same mentioned as "Calcutta district" in Dement'ev & Gladkov (1951: 250), and BirdLife International (2001). This specimen remains untraced and hence the real identity has not been assessed by anyone else though likely to be true.	Hume & Marshall (1881: 403)
Undated	Near the Brahmapootra [=Brahmaputra], Assam	NA	A mention that it occurs here during autumn and spring passage, apart from Surma Valley (now in Bangladesh) 'in the wider expanses of cultivation and swamps' of the river where it was shot. The call, 'a sharp whistling note as they rose' from swamps when disturbed, does not match with available recordings of this species or known vocalisations (Maleko et al. 2021). Other details sketchy and hence insufficient for an assessment.	Stuart Baker (1933: 306)
Undated	South-eastern Gujarat	NA	Mapped with a question mark; actual record untraced and a recent photograph of a juvenile that was initially identified as a possible <i>T. guttifer</i> was later assigned to <i>T. nebularia</i> (Ganpule 2016).	Grimmett et al. (1998); Kazmierczak (2000)
Undated	Rajaji National Park, Uttarakhand	30.05°N, 78.17°E	Listed as seen intermittently with no further details available. Original observation not traceable.	Pandey et al. (1995: 109)
1992	Karnataka	NA	25 birds in Perennou et al. (1994) – obviously in error.	del Hoyo (1996)
February 1997	Ranthambhore National Park, Rajasthan	26.02°N, 76.50°E	Unconfirmed report by M. Narcy.	BirdLife International (2001)
21 November 1993	Dighalrang, Dibru-Saikhowa National Park	27.62°N, 95.37°E	Lone bird. Rahmani (2012) treated this as unconfirmed. No further details of this bird available, however, another photo exists of a suspected bird from the same area, but unfortunately unreachable (Anwaruddin Choudhury, <i>in litt.</i> , e-mail dated 10 September 2014).	Choudhury (2000); Rahmani & Choudhury (2012)
13 April 1994	Daphlang [=Dafflong] Beel (Baguri), Kaziranga National Park	26.50°N, 93.28°E	A lone bird recorded by P. K. Saikia. Rahmani (2012) treated this as unconfirmed. However, observer clarified that he could not trace such a record attributed to him and hence should be removed (Prasanta Kumar Saikia, <i>in litt.</i> , 23 September 2014).	Barua & Sharma (1999); Choudhury (2000)
29 November 1997	Solmari Beel, Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary	26.22°N, 92.05°E	Three recorded by F. Ahmed. Seen with <i>T. nebularia</i> . Record submitted to <i>Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society</i> was rejected, lacking a supporting photograph, and is best treated as unconfirmed (Firoz Ahmed, <i>in litt.</i> , e-mail dated 10 September 2014). Rahmani (2012) also treated this as unconfirmed.	Choudhury (2000)
February–March 1999	Nameri National Park, Assam	26.90°N, 92.85°E	Seven birds recorded by P. K. Saikia. Rahmani (2012) treated this as unconfirmed and the same record is mentioned in Saikia & Kakati (1999). Further details and photographs of this record are untraceable (Prasanta Kumar Saikia, <i>in litt.</i> , 23 September 2014)	Choudhury (2000)
19 December 1993	Beside Dadhia River, Dibru-Saikhowa National Park	27.57°N, 95.23°E	Two photographed in a marsh, but photographs untraceable (Anwaruddin Choudhury, <i>in litt.</i> , in e-mail dated 10 September 2014). Rahmani (2012) treated this as unconfirmed.	Choudhury (2006); Rahmani & Choudhury (2012)
1999	Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu	10.32°N, 79.87°E	Listed but no further details available.	Balachandran (2006)
February–March 2000	Manas Biosphere Reserve	26.77°N, 90.95°E	Three birds from Manas River with no further details (Prasanta Kumar Saikia, <i>in litt.</i> , 23 September 2014). Coordinates are approximate.	Saikia & Rabha (2006)
2001–2002	Mahul Creek, Mumbai, Maharashtra	19.00°N, 72.87°E	Listed with no further details.	Verma et al. (2004)
12–13 January 2002	Chilika, Odisha	19.72°N, 85.48°E	Twelve listed as seen during Asian Waterbird Count, with no further details	Nayak (2006)

**Table 1.** Unconfirmed reports of Nordmann's Greenshank from India

Date	Location	Coordinates	Remarks	References
July 2002-July 2003	Satabhaya, Bhitarkanika National Park, Odisha	20.63°N, 86.93°E	Two listed with no further details.	Nayak (2006)
23 January 2003	Udabali Is, Bhitarkanika National Park, Odisha	20.78°N, 87.02°E	Two birds sighted by first author. No photographs or field notes available (Gopi GV, <i>in litt.</i> , e-mail dated 15 September 2014).	Gopi & Pandav (2007); Rahmani & Nair (2015)
11 November 2004	Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur, Rajasthan	27.16° N, 77.52°E	Two birds – reported as 'first' for the birders in the trip but no other details available for assessment.	Chaudhuri & Gupta (2005: 1, 3)
10 December 2005	Mouth of Barunei River, Bhitarkanika National Park, Odisha	20.50°N, 86.75°E	Two birds sighted by first author. No photographs or field notes available (Gopi GV, <i>in litt.</i> , e-mail dated 15 September 2014).	Gopi & Pandav (2007); Rahmani & Nair (2015)
2009-2014	Pong Dam, Himachal Pradesh	31.97°N, 75.93°E	Recorded twice in this period at Jhalarian and Nagorota. However, image depicted is of Common Greenshank. See Praveen (2019).	Dhadwal (2014); Dhadwal & Kanwar (2018)

from 11 Indian states—Assam, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, and West Bengal—and concluded that none of the sight records could be corroborated. The seemingly casual way of reporting in the past has not helped in establishing a single confirmed record from the country. Hence, the species was excluded from the checklist of birds of India (Praveen et al. 2021). Guruprasad & Tanuja (2007) erroneously list *T. guttifer* as the Latin name for Common Greenshank *T. nebularia* and this is not considered here in the table. There is also a likelihood of confusion with the Spotted Redshank *T. erythropus* as Nordmann's Greenshank was also known as the Spotted Greenshank. During Asian Waterbird Counts between 2001 and 2005, it has been reported five times from Assam, twice from Maharashtra, and once each from West Bengal and Chhattisgarh, but none of these are analysed here in Table 1. Despite this situation, Nordmann's Greenshank (Gopi et al. 2014), or its past claims from India (Rahmani 2012; Sangha 2021), continue to be listed in extant literature.

### Status in rest of South Asia

Ali & Ripley (1980) considered it a rare winter visitor to Bangladesh. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) state that it is, almost certainly, a regular winter visitor to south-eastern Bangladesh, though a critical review of the sight reports is called for—considering identification difficulties with no traceable regional specimens. However, there are a number of recent reports (Thompson et al. 1993; Thompson & Johnson 2003), some of them with photographic documentation (Rahmani 2012; Thompson et al. 2014; Bird et al. 2020) from coastal Bangladesh, indicating it's a regular winter migrant in small numbers. There are multiple records from south-eastern coastal Bangladesh in eBird (eBird 2022), from various sea beaches or on islands, like Nijhum Dwip (Domar Char), Char Piya Island (west and north coasts), Foillatoli Sea Beach, Patenga Sea Beach, Hasher Char Island, Belekat'dia Island, Sonadia Island (Cox's Bazar), Moheshkhali, and Cox Bazaar Sea Beach, apart from a restricted site near Cox Bazaar. Seven of these records are supported by photographs. The species was considered for the Indian Subcontinent checklist on the basis of its regular presence in Bangladesh (Praveen et al. 2017). Apart from this, sight reports from Nepal (del-Nevo 1984) and Sri Lanka (de Silva 1992)

have not been accepted (see Praveen et al. 2017 for details). Claims of Nordmann's Greenshank from Chagos are insufficiently documented (Carr 2015).

### Conclusion

In summary, ours is probably the first definitive documentation of Nordmann's Greenshank in India. The species is listed as Endangered (BirdLife International 2022) with a declining population and a global estimate of 600-1,300 individuals. Hence this first ever photographic documentation from India, from the western seaboard, is a significant record. Considering that we have many excellent, well equipped bird watchers, this sighting gives hope to think that, more intensive search along coasts of India may result in further sightings.

### Acknowledgement

Our thanks to the admins and members of the Facebook group Ask ID of Indian Birds, besides birder friends, namely, Adesh Shivkar, Mayuresh Khatakar and Pradnyawan Mane for help in confirming the identification of the greenshank. Thanks to Asad Rahmani, Ex-Director, BNHS, Mumbai for help in preparing the research note draft.

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Subsequent to our submission, the species was reported by Milan Mandal. from Lothain Char, West Bengal, on 11 February 2022. See photos here: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S103906309>.

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