

New records of birds from the Maldives

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Fifteen species of bird were recorded from the Maldives for the first time, mainly during 2001–2007: Indian Swiftlet *Collocalia unicolor*, Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*, Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*, Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus*, Long-tailed Jaeger *Stercorarius longicaudus*, Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*, Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, Red-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon rubricauda*, Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*, Short-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris*, Band-rumped Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma castro*, Ashy Woodswallow *Artamus fuscus*, Large Cuckooshrike *Coracina macei*, Rosy Starling *Sturnus roseus* and Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*. This raises the total number of birds known from the islands to 182. These appear to be the first records of both Long-tailed Jaeger and Band-rumped Storm-petrel for the South Asian region.

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Maldives lies in the tropical Indian Ocean, to the south-west of India and Sri Lanka. The country is composed entirely of atoll reefs, with the only land being small, vegetated sandbanks. There are some 1,200 islands in all; the area of the largest island is only 5 km², and the total land area is estimated to be less than 300 km², distributed over a total atoll area of some 21,400 km². The climate is tropical, but moderated by the ocean, with average temperatures varying little beyond 26–31 °C. The country is affected by the monsoons, with the stronger and wetter south-west monsoon blowing from April to October and the north-east monsoon predominating from December to March.

The birds of the Maldives have not been particularly well studied. The only major reports are those of Phillips and Sims (1958), Phillips (1963), Strickland and Jenner (1978) and Ash and Shafeeg (1994). The last authors reviewed records for a total of 150 species of bird from the Maldives. Subsequently, Anderson and Baldock (2001) provided records of 12 new species and five published records that were not included in the review of Ash and Shafeeg (1994). That raised the total number of species known from the Maldives to 167.

The aim of this paper is to document 15 additional records for the Maldives, two of which also appear to be first records for the South Asian region. Some information about other bird species occurring in the Maldives is also presented.

METHODS

All observations are by RCA, except where credited otherwise. I have been resident in the Maldives since 1983; most observations reported here were made since the submission of the paper by Anderson and Baldock (2001) and thus cover the period early 2001 to early 2007. Observations by others include those kindly provided by the following visitors to the Maldives: M. J. and J. P. Pointon (visited North Malé, Meerufenfushi, 5–17 November 1996); J. Jansen (North Malé, Lohifushi, 6–20 January 1999); S. Rowland (South Malé, Fihalohi, 28 January to 11 February 2002). Observations by other observers were made on field trips with RCA.

Records from the Royal Naval Bird Watching Society (RNBWS) are published in their annual journal *Sea Swallow*. A database of these records has been compiled by S. Howe, who has added previously unpublished dates

and positions for many records from the original reporting forms. A copy of database records for the Maldives area was kindly provided by W. R. P. Bourne (*in litt.* 21 July 2001).

Records from the 1950s by W. W. A. Phillips (Phillips and Sims 1958, Phillips 1963) form the core of our current understanding of birds in the Maldives. However, some questions have arisen over some of his records, for example as a result of subsequent splitting of some species. Phillips's unpublished Maldives notebooks were generously given to me by his daughter, Mrs E. Wynell-Mayow. They provide a number of useful insights into his records that did not find their way into his published papers.

A particular issue in the Maldives is the keeping of wild-caught pet birds, which may be wing-clipped and allowed to run freely (Ash and Shafeeg 1994, Anderson and Baldock 2001). Some of the birds are caught locally, but others are imported. Many apparently significant records for the Maldives turn out on further investigation to be imported birds. Records of pet birds are included here where the author is satisfied that the birds originated in the Maldives; if there is uncertainty this is indicated.

Species marked with an asterisk (*) are first records for the Maldives. A map of the Maldives is provided in Fig. 1. Since several disjunct islands may share the same name it is common practice to prefix island names with the abbreviation of the atoll in which they are located. Thus, the island of Hithadhoo in Seenu Atoll may be written as S. Hithadhoo, to differentiate it from say Hithadhoo in Laamu Atoll, which would be written as L. Hithadhoo. The standard atoll abbreviations used are given on the map. Further information on atoll names is provided by Ash and Shafeeg (1994).

OBSERVATIONS

NORTHERN PINTAIL *Anas acuta*

Four drakes and seven females seen on the saltwater lake (Eidigali Kili) at the north end of S. Hithadhoo on 20 February 2002. Three males and five females at the same location on 23 February 2002. A captive female at H.Dh. Kulhudhufushi in November 2000, reported to have been caught on the island. An uncommon northern winter visitor, not previously recorded in February, nor from Haa Dhaalu Atoll (Ash and Shafeeg 1994).

GARGANEY *Anas querquedula*

Twelve birds were present on 20 February 2002 on the saltwater lake at the north end of S. Hithadhoo. Five

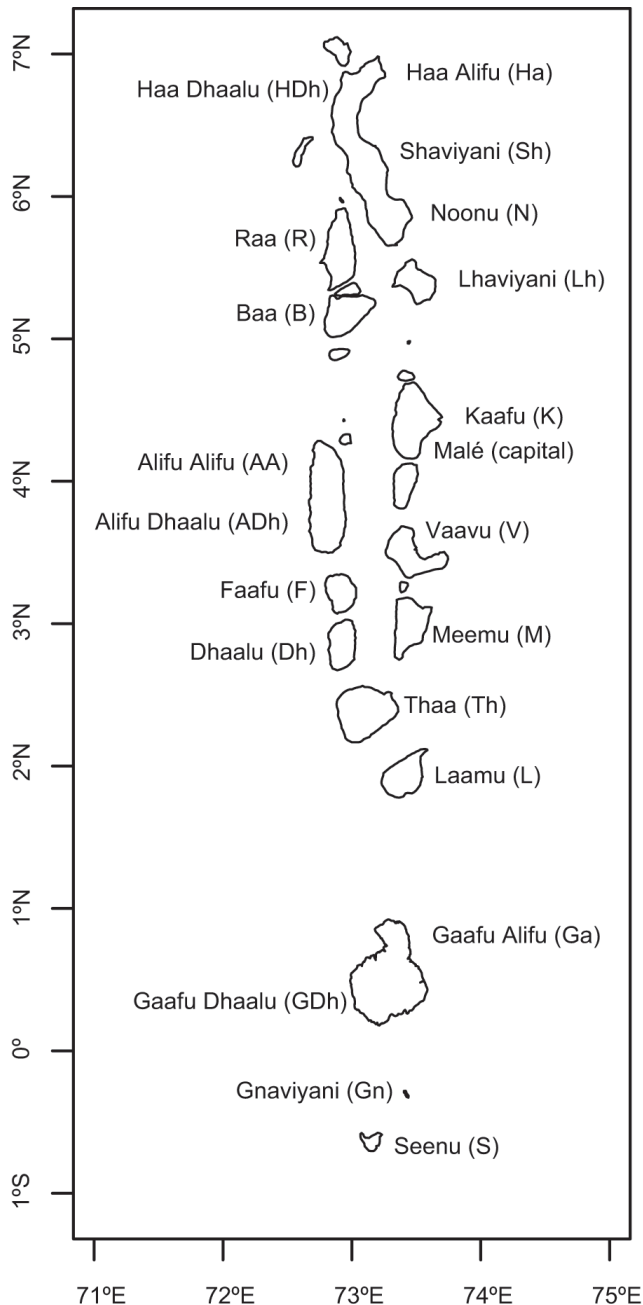


Figure 1. Map of the Maldives showing main atolls and their standard abbreviations.

captive birds were seen in three separate households at H.Dh. Kulhudhufushi in May 2002: a male reported to have been caught with a female (which had died) at H.A. Baarah some time previously (probably between November 2000 and April 2001); two males caught on the island in September 2001; a male and female bought from another household on the island, original provenance unknown. One wild female or eclipse male on the saltwater lake at H.Dh. Kulhudhufushi on 18 October 2002. A regular winter visitor not previously recorded in February, nor from the far north of the Maldives (Ash and Shafeeg 1994, Anderson and Baldock 2001).

BLUE-TAILED BEE-EATER *Merops philippinus*

Six birds were seen on 5 November 1996 at K. Meerufenfushi by M. J. and J. P. Pointon; one or more of

what were presumed to be the same birds were heard but not seen on 8 November 1996 (M. J. Pointon *in litt.* 2002). This is only the second record for the Maldives (Ash and Shafeeg 1994).

*INDIAN SWIFTLET *Collocalia unicolor*

One individual was seen on 10 February 2004 at sea off south-east Faafu Atoll (at 3°09'N 73°07'E) by RCA and G. Tucker. It was a small swift, with a distinctly fluttering flight interspersed with short glides. Its tail was relatively short and only slightly forked, and it appeared uniformly medium brown above with no trace of any pale on the rump. This last feature distinguished it from Himalayan Swiftlet *Collocalia brevirostris* (Ali and Ripley 1987, Chantler and Driessens 1995, Grimmett *et al.* 1998, Rasmussen and Anderton 2005). This is the first record of this species from the Maldives. A small flock of 5–6 swiftlets was seen from a moderate distance hawking over palm trees on K. Guraidhoo on 18 February 2004 by RCA. They are believed to have been either Indian or Himalayan Swiftlet but were not seen clearly enough to enable identification to species. Himalayan Swiftlet has been recorded from Maldives before, with four previous records in November to January (Phillips and Sims 1958, Phillips 1963, Strickland and Jenner 1978). However, Chantler and Driessens (1995) and Rasmussen and Anderton (2005) consider Maldivian records of Himalayan Swiftlet to more likely have been Indian Swiftlet. Regarding the first of those records (Phillips and Sims 1958), W.W.A. Phillips wrote in his unpublished field notes (author's collection): '*Collocalia brevirostris*... It flew low and was identified with certainty, with the aid of field glasses at 30/40 yards range.' However, in the 1950s these two species were widely regarded as races of a single species, so the early records from the Maldives do deserve critical review. Rasmussen and Anderton (2005) place both species in the genus *Aerodramus*.

WHITE-THROATED NEEDLETAIL *Hirundapus caudacutus*

One individual was seen 12–16 November 1996 at K. Meerufenfushi by M. J. and J. P. Pointon (M. J. Pointon *in litt.* 2002). This is only the second record for the Maldives (Strickland and Jenner 1978, Ash and Shafeeg 1994).

PALLID SWIFT *Apus pallidus*

One individual was seen at close range and identified with confidence on 7 January 1999 at K. Lohifushi by J. Jansen (*in litt.* 2002). This is only the third record for the Maldives (Strickland and Jenner 1978, Ash and Shafeeg 1994).

HOUSE SWIFT *Apus affinis*

One individual was seen at close range and identified as *Apus affinis galilejensis* on 7 January 1999 at K. Lohifushi by J. Jansen (*in litt.* 2002). This species is an uncommon winter visitor to the Maldives (Ash and Shafeeg 1994).

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa limosa*

One captive individual was photographed on B. Thulaadhoo in May 2001. It had been captured on the island during the previous August–October. This appears to be only the second record with details of this species from the Maldives. The first definite record is of a bird

captured in Malé in 1980 and photographed by Ahmed Shafeeg (Ash and [Ali] Shafeeg 1994). Ali and Ripley (1969) had previously recorded this species as a vagrant to the Maldives, but without providing any details. It is not clear where Ali and Ripley (1969) obtained this information, although Ahmed Shafeeg informed me (verbally, May 2002) that he corresponded with Sâlim Ali in the 1960s, providing him with information on Maldivian birds, although he could not remember specific details.

*GREEN SANDPIPER *Tringa ochropus*

A single bird was clearly observed at close range at S. Gan on 24 February 2002. Since this species is a widespread winter visitor throughout India and Sri Lanka, and has been recorded from Lakshadweep (Kurup and Zacharias 1994), it might not be as rare in the Maldives as this single record suggests.

SANDERLING *Calidris alba*

A single bird in non-breeding plumage was seen on the airfield at S. Gan on 9 September 2001. One individual was seen on V. Anbara on 9 February 2004. Two were seen on V. Anbara on 20 February 2004. This uncommon winter visitor has not previously been recorded earlier than October nor from Vaavu Atoll (Anderson and Baldock 2001).

EURASIAN OYSTERCATCHER *Haematopus ostralegus*

A 'few' individuals were seen in January 1999 on K. Lohifushi by J. Jansen (*in litt.* 2002). A captive individual in non-breeding plumage was photographed by RCA on B. Thulaadhoo in May 2001. It had been captured on the island during the previous August–October. There has been only one previous record of this species from the Maldives (Ash and Shafeeg 1994).

*COLLARED PRATINCOLE *Glareola pratincola*

An immature was observed at close range on the airfield at S. Gan on 8 and 9 September 2001. It was positively identified to this species: the distinct white trailing edges to the secondaries were clearly seen on several occasions. Furthermore, the long tail was very deeply forked. Other features included white rump, vent and belly; rufous axillaries and underwing-coverts; and a pale throat-patch lacking a black border.

This appears to be the first record of this species from the Maldives. There have been previous reports of Collared Pratincole from the Maldives: both Phillips (1963) and Strickland and Jenner (1978) recorded it from Addu Atoll. However, Oriental Pratincole *G. maldivarum* was generally regarded as a subspecies of Collared Pratincole at that time. Indeed, in his unpublished Maldives papers, Phillips does refer his sightings to *G. pratincola maldivarum*. As late as 1987, Ali and Ripley reported the two as subspecies of Collared Pratincole. However, Hayman *et al.* (1986) referred Maldivian pratincoles to Oriental Pratincole in their distribution maps. Similarly, Ash and Shafeeg (1994) included all previous pratincole records from the Maldives under Oriental Pratincole, and omitted Collared Pratincole from their checklist. However, both these species of pratincole have now been positively identified from the Maldives (see below). While it is likely that most previous records of pratincole in the Maldives were of Oriental, this record of Collared does place the specific identity of some

previous records in doubt. One additional record of interest is that of P. W. G. Chilman who recorded three adults and one juvenile (as Collared Pratincole) at 07°32'N 75°42'E, i.e. 118 nautical miles west-south-west of the southern tip of India on 7 September 1979 (Casement 1983 and RNBWS records).

ORIENTAL PRATINCOLE *Glareola maldivarum*

1. A single individual was seen on K. Lohifushi on 9 January 1999 by J. Jansen (*in litt.* 2002).
2. A single captive bird (a locally caught adult) was seen on B. Thulaadhoo on 21 May 2001. Although the primaries of this bird had been clipped, the secondaries of both wings were intact and definitely lacked white trailing edges.
3. A single juvenile was seen on the airfield at H.Dh. Hanimaadhoo on 10 November 2003. It was initially identified as a Collared Pratincole on account of the white border to the secondaries. However, this border was very narrow, much narrower than that seen on Collared Pratincole, and is a feature of juvenile Oriental Pratincoles (Hayman *et al.* 1986).

As noted above, all previous pratincole records were placed under Oriental Pratincole by Ash and Shafeeg (1994). Ali and Ripley (1987) state that *Abularge* is the Maldivian name for this species. Although they gave no source for this name, they appear to have obtained it from W.W.A. Phillips; in his unpublished Maldives papers Phillips mentioned *Abulargee* (sic) as a possible name for pratincoles from Addu (=Seenu) Atoll, but it is omitted from his printed paper (Phillips 1963). The name *Abulagee* is indeed a name from Addu Atoll for a bird that fits the description of a pratincole (N. Mohamed, National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research, verbally March 2007). An alternative name, *Alamaaluguraa*, was given by Ash and Ali Shafeeg (1994), following Ahmed Shafeeg, but appears to be incorrect. Ahmed Shafeeg (verbally May 2002) noted that he recorded this name only once and was not sure of its appropriateness. The name *Alamaaluguraa* normally applies to an insect found in taro flowers (Naseema Mohamed, National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research, verbally March 2007).

BROWN SKUA *Catharacta antarctica*

1. One captive bird was photographed on V. Felidhoo on 2 June 2001; it was reported to have been caught by fishermen of the atoll.
2. One individual was seen by RCA, D. Barber and M. Scott-Ham off Lhaviyani Atoll (at 5°32'N 73°36'E) on 6 November 2003.
3. Another individual was seen and photographed by RCA, G. Tucker and C. Weir off Vaavu Atoll (at 3°31'N 73°45'E) on 20 April 2006.

All three birds were separated from South Polar Skua *C. maccormicki* by their warm dark brown coloration (without any trace of colder, greyer tones). There are approximately 12 previous records of *Catharacta* skuas, not all specifically identified, and mostly of captive birds (Ash and Shafeeg 1994, Anderson and Baldock 2001). These new records appear to be the first of wild Brown Skua with dates, and they support the contention that this species is a southern winter visitor to the central Indian Ocean (Olsen and Larsson 1997, Rasmussen and Anderton 2005; also Mörzer Bruyns and Voous 1965).

*PARASITIC JAEGER *Stercorarius parasiticus*

There are three positive records:

1. One individual seen at close range (to <50 m) off North Malé Atoll (at 4°22'N 73°41'E) on 29 February 2004. It appeared to be an intermediate/dark phase bird, mostly warm chocolate brown with white primary upper wing flashes, cream nape and sides of neck, and distinct pointed tail projection.
2. One individual seen at moderate distance (about c.500 m) off Vaavu Atoll (at about 3°18'N 73°36'E) on 18 March 2004. It showed a pale nape and belly, and was only slightly larger than the Brown Noddies *Anous stolidus* it was harrying.
3. One individual seen at close range (to c.50 m) off Vaavu Atoll (at 3°18'N 73°40'E) on 15 April 2005. It was a pale morph adult, without breast-band, with a distinct pointed tail projection. It was seen harrying an Audubon's Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri* and a Brown Noddy.

In addition, there are four sightings of five individuals, which were identified as this species when seen, but the possibility of confusion with other jaeger species cannot be entirely discounted:

4. One juvenile seen off Haa Alifu Atoll (at approximately 7°10'N 72°40'E) on 9 April 1998.
5. One individual seen in the One-and-a-half Degree Channel (at about 1°18'N 73°19'E) on 28 March 2001.
6. Two individuals seen by J. Young and M. Baldock off Lh. Naifaru (at about 5°25'N 73°20'E) on 19 April 2001.
7. One individual seen off V. Fotheyo (at 3°32'N 73°44'E) on 4 April 2003. It was harrying Brown Noddies in a feeding flock associated with a school of tuna.

These are apparently the first records for the Maldives. Harrison (1985: map 200) included the Maldives within the boreal winter range of this species in the Indian Ocean, although that does not appear to have been based on actual records. However, this species has been widely recorded from the eastern Arabian Sea (Prasad 2004) including Lakshadweep (Daniels 1992) and also Seychelles (Skerrett *et al.* 2001). It is likely that this species is under-recorded in the region: at sea dark and intermediate morph individuals can easily be confused with Brown Noddy (pers. obs.), so much so that I believe I must undoubtedly have overlooked this species on occasion. More generally, this may be an example of 'aggressive mimicry', providing a selective advantage to dark phase birds on their winter feeding grounds and contributing to the maintenance of polymorphism in this species.

*LONG-TAILED JAEGER *Stercorarius longicaudus*

1. One individual was clearly seen (and poorly photographed) at moderate range (to about 100 m) about 8 nautical miles (c.15 km) off South Malé Atoll (at 3°48'N 73°36'E) on 16 April 2005. It was an adult in breeding plumage, with remarkably long tail projection, and identification was not in doubt.
2. A second bird was observed (to <50 m) and photographed in the Watteru Kandhu (between Vaavu and Meemu Atolls, at 3°12'N 73°38'E) on 21 April 2006 by RCA, G. Tucker, C. Weir and others. It appeared to be a first-year bird, with cold grey head and breast, plain dark brown upper wings with only outer two primary shafts white (this feature clearly seen in photographs), and a speckled mantle.

These appear to be the first definite records for the Indian region. Although three were recorded off Lakshadweep on 22 February 1987 by D. M. Simpson (Bourne 1989), that record does not seem to have been widely accepted: this species was not included by Grimm *et al.* (1998) nor by Prasad (2004), and it was only regarded as possible in the region by Kazmierczak and van Perlo (2000) and Rasmussen and Anderton (2005). Olsen and Larsson (1997: 167) indicated that this species migrates northwards across the western Indian Ocean in April. However, that appeared to be based more on the annual occurrence of birds on spring passage through Eilat, Israel (Shirihai 1996) than on actual records in the Indian region.

HEUGLIN'S GULL *Larus heuglini*

I have five records of captive birds, all adults when seen.

1. A captive adult on Malé in 1990 reported to have been caught in the Maldives some eight years earlier.
2. A captive adult seen on H.Dh. Kulhudhufushi in February 1991, November 2000 and May 2002; reported to have been caught near H.Dh. Makunudhoo in about 1988.
3. A second captive adult on H.Dh. Kulhudhufushi in May 2002; reported to have been caught on the island about 5 years previously.
4. A captive adult on K. Meerufenfushi (Meeru Island Resort) in 1994 and April 1998; what was probably the same individual was seen in November 1996 by M. J. and J. P. Pointon (Mike Pointon *in litt.* 15 October 2002); origins uncertain.
5. A captive adult on K. Bodufinolhu (Fun Island Resort) in March 2003 and March 2004; reported to have been on the island since at least 2002 but origins uncertain.

There have been only two previous records of gulls referred to this species (Ash and Shafeeg 1994, Anderson and Baldock 2001). It is certainly not common in the Maldives, but these records suggest that it is the commonest of the large white-headed gulls to occur here, as it is in some other parts of the region (Bourne 1996, Buchheim 2006).

YELLOW-LEGGED GULL *Larus cachinnans*

1. A captive adult was seen and photographed at H.Dh. Kulhudhufushi in May 2002. Its legs were yellow and its upperparts lighter grey than the captive Heuglin's Gull seen on same day. Its exact provenance was uncertain: it was variously reported to have been caught on the island or brought from Malé where it had been caught by local fishermen.
2. A captive adult reported from K. Meerufenfushi in November 1996 by M. J. and J. P. Pointon (*in litt.* 2002). Also seen by RCA in April 1998.

There are only three previous records apparently of this species from the Maldives, all based on photos of captive adults taken by Ahmed Shafeeg (Ash and Shafeeg 1994). The taxonomy of these gulls remains problematic. They seem to be best referred to *Larus cachinnans* according to Grimm *et al.* (1998), *Larus cachinnans barabensis* according to Olsen and Larsson (2004), *Larus (heuglini) barabensis* according to Rasmussen and Anderton (2005) and *Larus barabensis* according to Buchheim (2006).

BROWN-HEADED GULL *Larus brunnicephalus*

A single captive individual in breeding plumage was photographed at H.Dh. Kulhudhufushi in May and June 2002. The left primaries were cut, but the right primaries had extensive black and small white mirrors. It was said to have been caught by Maldivian tuna fisherman on a local fish aggregating device, but precise details unknown. There are only two previous records from the Maldives (Ash and Shafeeg 1994).

LITTLE TERN *Sterna albifrons*

There are five sightings which were identified to this species with confidence. Several other sightings of small terns that might have been of this species could not be confidently separated from Saunders's Tern *Sterna saundersi*, which is relatively abundant in the Maldives.

1. One was seen at relatively close range, perched on a drifting buoy, off the east side of Lhaviyani Atoll (exact position not noted) on 16 April 1998 by RCA and R. Pitman.
2. Two groups were seen by RCA and I. Robinson on 27 March 2002, both just off the south-western side of Raa Atoll. The first group of three birds was part of a mixed flock of seabirds feeding over a tuna school at about 5°20'N 72°51'E, and the second group of about 25 birds was at about 5°32'N 72°47'E.
3. Four were seen off V. Fotheyo at about 3°22'N 73°45'E on 12 April 2002.
4. At least one seen amongst c.100 Saunders's Terns at Kalha Handi (islet) in Alifu Atoll on 11 March 2004 by RCA and C. Still.
5. Two single Little Terns were seen in Alifu Dhaalu Atoll, one near Dhungethi on 24 February 2005 and one the next day near Fushidhiggaa, by RCA and M. Oliver.

There has been only one previously published record of Little Tern in the Maldives: a single individual recorded from Addu Atoll in November (Phillips 1963). The new records presented here suggest that Little Tern is not so rare in the Maldives, and may be a regular boreal winter visitor, particularly to the northern atolls. The scarcity of previous records is probably the result of confusion with the more abundant Saunders's Tern, combined with a lack of ornithological study in the northern atolls. By way of contrast, in the Chagos archipelago, Little Tern is considered to be a moderately abundant resident, while Saunders's Tern is considered to be a vagrant (Carr 2005).

WHITE-WINGED TERN *Chlidonias leucopterus*

There are five new records, four from the north and centre of the Maldives:

1. One non-breeding adult and one immature White-winged Tern observed at the airfield at S. Gan on 8 September 2001.
2. One non-breeding adult seen near K. Asdu on 30 March 2003.
3. One immature bird seen at K. Hulhumalé on 4 November 2003 by RCA, D. Barber and M. Scott-Ham.
4. One non-breeding adult seen outside Raa Atoll (at about 5°30'N 72°45'E) on 13 November 2004.
5. One adult in breeding plumage seen near M. Maduvveri on 21 April 2006, feeding over a shallow lagoon in the company with two Black-naped Terns *Sterna sumatrana*.

In addition two probable immatures were seen separately just outside the west edge of Ari Atoll on 16 and 17 November 2004. This is a not-uncommon winter visitor, but previously recorded only from the south of the country.

WHITE TERN *Gygis alba*

1. A single individual was seen at H.A. Medhafushi on 31 March 2002, in the company of Black-naped Terns, by RCA, I. Robinson and H. Shaheem.
2. Another individual was seen at 5°00'N 73°28'E near K. Kaashidhoo on 24 November 2006, in association with a school of Fraser's Dolphins *Lagenodelphis hosei*. These are the first records of this species from the northern Maldives. This species has long bred in Addu Atoll in the far south of the Maldives. But its range does appear to be spreading northward: it is reported to have started breeding on G.Dh. Havodigalaa in 1995, with the population there now being perhaps as high as 100 individuals (M. Saleem *in litt.* 2006).

LESSER NODDY *Anous tenuirostris*

Anderson and Baldock (2001) noted thousands of Lesser Noddies off the far north of the Maldives during the north-east monsoon season, at what appeared to be a major feeding ground. Largely on the strength of that report, Haa Alifu Atoll was listed as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by BirdLife International (2004). During three days of a cetacean survey (31 March to 2 April 2002) I recorded an estimated 8,000+ Lesser Noddies off Haa Alifu Atoll (although the possibility of confusion with Black Noddy *Anous minutus* cannot be entirely discounted). In comparison to previous visits (in April 1998, February 1999 and March 2000) there appeared to be fewer birds and they were all off the north-east side of the atoll, with none off the north-west side (where they had been seen before). Lesser Noddy is an Indian Ocean endemic, with breeding strongholds in Chagos (Symens 1999) and Seychelles (Skerrett *et al.* 2001). It does not breed in the Maldives in any numbers. Indeed, there is only a single previously reported case of breeding (Gadow and Gardiner 1903). However, there have been some recent and as yet unconfirmed reports of small numbers breeding in Huvadhoo (GA plus GDh) Atoll.

OSPREY *Pandion haliaetus*

1. One captive individual, photographed on V. Felidhoo in early 2000, was reported to have been caught in Haa Alifu Atoll in March 1999.
2. One captive individual, photographed on B. Hithaadhoo in May 2001, was reported to have been caught on B. Maduvvari in April 2001.
3. One wild individual was seen perched on the navigation beacon near Lh. Aligaa on 24 April 2003; what was presumed to be the same individual was seen again at the same location the next day, where it was being mobbed by a House Crow *Corvus splendens*.
4. One wild individual was seen on Lh. Kanifushi on 13 November 2003 by RCA, D. Barber and M. Scott-Ham.
5. One captive individual was photographed on B. Thulaadhoo on 2 February 2005 by S. Mohamed Rasheed and Z. Waheed. It was reported to have been caught on the same island about four months previously, i.e. in about early October 2004.

There have been only three previous records of Osprey from the Maldives (Ash and Shafeeg 1994). Even though the greatest level of ornithological recording has been in the southern Maldives, six of the eight records to date have been from the northern and central atolls, with only two records from the south. This suggests that Osprey (in common with several other northern winter migrants) is more frequent in the north of the Maldives than the south. This situation is not unexpected and was first noted by S. Gardiner for other birds of prey (Gadow and Gardiner 1903). Osprey might be better classified as a regular, if uncommon, northern winter visitor (at least to the northern Maldives) rather than a vagrant as suggested by Ash and Shafeeg (1994).

*BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE *Elanus caeruleus*

A captive adult was photographed on S. Gan on 5 October 2002. It had been purchased (for MRf 300, about US\$ 23) from G.Dh. Thinadhoo, where it was reported to have been caught about one month previously; this was subsequently confirmed by the catcher. A wild adult pair of Black-shouldered Kites were seen and photographed adjacent to the airfield on S. Gan on 1–3 August 2005. These are the first records for the Maldives.

*BLACK KITE *Milvus migrans*

1. One captured individual was photographed in Malé in June 1995; it was reported to have been caught in Maldives during the preceding north-east monsoon.
2. A single Black Kite, apparently juvenile, was clearly seen flying over S. Maradhoo on 20 February 2002. It was being shadowed and mobbed by an extraordinary flock of some 60+ White Terns *Gygis alba*.
3. An immature bird, apparently of subspecies *M. m. lineatus*, was photographed on K. Hulhule on 28 November 2003 by K. Nye.

A captive adult seen in Baa Atoll in June 2001 was originally reported to have been caught in the Maldives; subsequent investigations revealed that it had been imported from India.

AMUR FALCON *Falco amurensis*

1. A single male bird was observed at S. Gan on four occasions between 20 and 24 February 2002. It appeared to be hawking for insects over the grassland adjacent to the runway.
2. Three falcons were seen at K. Hulhule on 29 November 2002, hovering and hawking for insects on the grass adjacent to the runway. One was positively identified as a juvenile Amur Falcon; the other two birds were similar in appearance and were assumed to have been Amur Falcons as well but were not seen closely enough to allow positive identification.

There are only two previously published Maldivian records with dates, both also from S. Gan: one arriving 5 December 1958 (Phillips 1963), and six present from November 1964 to January 1965 (Strickland and Jenner 1978). The latter authors do, however, also note the presence of this species (recorded as Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*) in Addu Atoll as a regular winter visitor between November and March.

EURASIAN HOBBY *Falco subbuteo*

1. From the records of the RNBWS (T. M. Barry), one Eurasian Hobby was reported coming on board ship

off the Maldives on 18 November 1979, departing at about 8°N 74°E.

2. One Eurasian Hobby was seen on several evenings from 5 to 11 November 1996 on K. Meerufenfushi by M. J. Pointon and J. P. Pointon (*in litt.* 2002). The bird (it was presumed to be a single individual) was seen catching and eating dragonflies. It was positively identified as this species (M. J. Pointon and J. P. Pointon *in litt.* 2003).

*RED-TAILED TROPICBIRD *Phaethon rubricauda*

1. One individual was observed off South Malé Atoll at 3°59'N 73°34'E on 18 March 2003 by RCA, T. Aylett, N. Gricks and S. Mustoe.
2. Another individual was seen near K. Kaashidhoo at 5°00'N 73°28'E on 24 November 2006.

Both birds lacked tail streamers, but both were positively identified as this species. They were seen clearly and at close range; both had an orange-red bill and lacked black markings on the upper wing; and both appeared clearly bigger than White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*, although direct comparison was not possible. These appear to be the first records of Red-tailed Tropicbird from the Maldives, although its occurrence is not unexpected. Indeed, the southern Maldives is included within the range of this species by Tuck and Heinzel (1978: 243). In addition, a Red-tailed Tropicbird was reported from 1.7°S 69.8°E (i.e. about 180 nautical miles, 330 km, south-west of Addu Atoll) on 6 April 1987 by J. G. W. Dixon (Bourne 1989: 18). Because the southern boundary of the Maldivian EEZ has not yet been formalised, it is not clear if the 1987 record was from Maldivian waters or not. Red-tailed Tropicbird breeds at several locations in the Indian Ocean south of the equator, including Christmas Island, the Chagos Archipelago, the Seychelles and Europa Island; observations north of the equator are relatively rare (e.g. Jakobsen 1994). Two recoveries of tagged birds demonstrate long-distance movements across the Indian Ocean from east to west (Jenkins and Robertson 1969, Le Corre *et al.* 2003).

LITTLE EGRET *Egretta garzetta*

This species has been characterised as an uncommon winter visitor, with few previous records from the Maldives, and none from the far north (Ash and Shafeeg 1994, Anderson and Baldock 2001). I have a further 13 records, all between September and March, which confirm its status as a winter visitor, but suggest that it is more regular and widespread than previously recognised. The new records, by calendar date, are: two 6–7 September 2001 S. Hithadhoo; one 15 and 20 October 2002 H.Dh. Kulhudhufushi; one 3 November 2001 H.Dh. Kulhudhufushi; two 13 November 2003 Lh. Kanifushi; one 16 November 1996 K. Meerufenfushi (M. Pointon *in litt.* 15 October 2002); two 17–18 November 2001 H.Dh. Hanimaadhoo; one 18 January and 6 February 2003 A. Etheremadivaru; four 20 and 23 February 2002 S. Hithadhoo; one on four occasions between 9 February and 19 March 2004 V. Anbara; one 18 March 1997 H.Dh. Kulhudhufushi.

LITTLE HERON *Butorides striatus*

Two endemic subspecies have been described from the Maldives: *B. s. albidulus* from the southern atolls and *B. s. didii* from the northern and central atolls. The north-

central subspecies is particularly pale and is very distinct from the much darker subspecies, *B. s. javanicus*, of the Indian subcontinent. Two dark individuals that appeared to be typical *B. s. javanicus* were seen by RCA, D. Barber and M. Scott-Ham on H.Dh. Hanimaadhoo on 10 November 2003. The position in the north of the Maldives, and the date of those sightings, suggest that some *B. s. javanicus* may be winter visitors to the Maldives, where they presumably do not interbreed with the local *B. s. didii*.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON *Nycticorax nycticorax*
A single adult was seen at the brackish water lake (Eidigali Kili) on S. Hithadhoo on both 6 and 7 September 2001. It was noticeably larger than nearby Indian Pond Herons *Ardeola grayii* and had all-grey wings, with a black mantle and crown. Its legs were a dull orange, and it had a distinct black eye-stripe, as illustrated in Bhushan *et al.* (1993) but not in Grimmett *et al.* (1998). In flight it had a duck-like call. An adult bird (possibly the same individual) was seen at exactly the same location on 23 February 2002. Two adult birds were seen at the same location again on 7 October 2002. There has been only one previous record from the Maldives (Ash and Shafeeg 1994).

BLACK BITTERN *Dupetor flavicollis*

I have a photo of a wild bird taken in Malé in the late 1990s, but the details are now lost. A single individual was seen flying over the sea from the south to K. Asdu on 15 November 2003 by RCA and D. Barber. Another bird, probably of this species, was seen flying at Lh. Lhosalafushi on 16 April 2003. This species appears to be an uncommon winter visitor, with the few records so far (Ash and Shafeeg 1994) all between November and April.

GREATER FLAMINGO *Phoenicopterus ruber*

One immature individual was seen at the brackish water lake (Eidigali Kili) on S. Hithadhoo on 25 March 2001. A flamingo, presumably the same one, was reported from the same site on 10 and 12 June 2001; it was not seen during visits on 15 and 17 June 2001 (S. Akester verbally 2001). One adult Greater Flamingo was seen at the same location on 23 February 2002. It is not known if this was the same individual. A photo of a single bird (presumably a captive, but without details) was published by Voightmann *et al.* (1987: 49).

***SPOT-BILLED PELICAN** *Pelecanus philippensis*

A captive individual was photographed on B. Horubadhoo (Royal Island Resort) in May 2001. It had been caught from the wild on B. Thulaadhoo in January 2001 (this was confirmed on Thulaadhoo in May 2001). Previous unconfirmed records of this species were noted by Ash and Shafeeg (1994) and by Anderson and Baldock (2001).

GREAT FRIGATEBIRD *Fregata minor*

Weimerskirch *et al.* (2006) reported the movement of a satellite-tagged female Great Frigatebird from her nesting site on Europa Island in the Mozambique Channel, via Aldabra in the Seychelles, to the island of G.A. Hithadhoo in the south of the Maldives. The bird covered a distance of 5,354 km in less than 13 days. She then remained at Hithadhoo for at least 4 months, making regular foraging excursions (up to a maximum distance of 240 km), until the tag was shed. Hithadhoo is well known locally as a

roosting site for both Great and Lesser (*F. ariel*) Frigatebirds. It is one of only two islands in the Maldives regularly used as roosts by frigatebirds, the other being B. Olhugiri. Hithadhoo is the more important, with a few hundreds of frigatebirds regularly using the island, while the importance of Olhugiri has reportedly declined in recent years with no more than tens of frigatebirds now using it. Both islands have mature stands of large softwood trees which are favoured by the frigatebirds for roosting.

BULWER'S PETREL *Bulweria bulwerii*

One individual was seen on 22 January 2004, nearly 200 nautical miles west of Dhaalu Atoll at 2°41'N 69°34'E. It was an all-brown small-to-medium-sized petrel, and was distinguished from Jouanin's Petrel by its relatively more slender bill and the presence of an obvious pale, diagonal upperwing bar. Its flight (in Beaufort Force 3) was low over the water, with much flapping and some gliding.

JOUANIN'S PETREL *Bulweria fallax*

One individual seen in the Ariyadhoo Channel between Faafu and Alifu Atolls at about 3°22'N 72°49'E on 24 March 2003 by R. Atkins (verbally 2003). Distinguished from Bulwer's Petrel by larger size and lack of any pale on upperwings. Taleb (2002) described the first known breeding site, on the island of Socotra, where nesting appears to occur during July–November.

WEDGE-TAILED SHEARWATER *Puffinus pacificus*

In the Indian Ocean, Wedge-tailed Shearwater breeds south of the equator, mainly during the austral summer months (e.g. Harrison 1985, Symens 1999, Skerrett *et al.* 2001). In the Maldives it occurs commonly from April to about September as a non-breeding migrant. Starting from about mid-April large numbers are seen heading north, often in company with Flesh-footed Shearwater *Puffinus carneipes*. These birds are all assumed to be southern hemisphere, southern summer breeders. However, just before the start of this northward migration, during the first half of April, smaller numbers of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters are seen heading south. The origin(s) and destination(s) of these birds are unknown. However, it is possible that they are austral winter breeders, and they may be heading for the Chagos Archipelago south of the Maldives.

***SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER** *Puffinus tenuirostris*

One individual (identified by size relative to nearby Audubon's Shearwater, limited grey—not conspicuous white—on underwings, and short tail with clearly projecting feet) was seen on 12 November 2003 by RCA, D. Barber and M. Scott-Ham east of Shaviyani Atoll (at 6°25'N 73°15'E). This species migrates in large numbers around the Pacific, but is regarded as a vagrant to the northern Indian Ocean (Frith 1978, Robertson 1994).

AUDUBON'S SHEARWATER *Puffinus lherminieri*

A morphological study of Audubon's Shearwater in the Indian Ocean identified three main populations, with birds from Maldives being biometrically inseparable from those from the Seychelles (Bretagnolle *et al.* 2000). A more recent genetic study (Austin *et al.* 2004) suggested that individuals in the Indian Ocean refer to Tropical Shearwater *P. bailloni*.

SWINHOLE'S STORM-PETREL *Oceanodroma monorhis*

1. One seen in the Fulidhoo Channel between South Malé and Vaavu Atolls at 3°45'N 73°30'E on 9 February 2004 by RCA and also but less clearly by G. Tucker.
2. One seen off North Malé Atoll at 4°16'N 73°35'E on 9 November 2004 by RCA, H. Shirihai, C. Martin, A. Goddard and others.
3. Another single bird, seen outside north-east Raa Atoll at 5°51'N 72°50'E on 20 April 2004, was probably of this species but was not seen clearly enough to claim this with complete confidence.

Penhallurick and Wink (2003) suggest the use of the generic name *Cymochorea* for this species.

*BAND-RUMPED STORM-PETREL *Oceanodroma castro*

One bird was seen at close range (to about 10 m as it crossed our bows) on 9 November 2004 by RCA, H. Shirihai, C. Martin, A. Goddard and others, east of North Malé Atoll (at 4°18'N 73°37'E). It was a medium-sized storm-petrel, all dark brown-black except for a conspicuous white oval rump-patch (which wrapped around the sides, extending towards the ventral surface) and pale upperwing bands. The legs clearly did not project beyond the slightly forked tail. Other details are available from the author. This is the first record of Band-rumped Storm-petrel for the South Asian region. There appears to be only one previous record for the entire Indian Ocean, a single bird observed off Eilat in the northern Red Sea in June 1983 (Shirihai 1987, 1996). This species may not be quite as rare in the northern Indian Ocean as suggested by the lack of previous records; confusion with Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* (a common austral winter visitor and the only white-rumped dark storm-petrel previously recorded from the region) is a distinct possibility. Band-rumped Storm-petrel is also known as Madeiran Storm-petrel; Penhallurick and Wink (2003) suggest the use of the generic name *Thalobata*.

*ASHY WOODSWALLOW *Artamus fuscus*

A single individual, identified as a juvenile by its pale throat, was seen flying over Lh. Lhosalafushi on 6 November 2003 by RCA, D. Barber and M. Scott-Ham. What was probably the same individual, although it was only identified tentatively as this species at the time, was seen flying over the adjacent island of Lh. Lohi on the previous day. It appeared to be hawking above the tree-tops for insects, presumably dragonflies, which were abundant on the islands at that time. As noted by Ali (1999) 'their food consists exclusively of dragonflies and other insects.'

*LARGE CUCKOOSHRIKE *Coracina macei*

Two birds together were seen clearly at H.Dh. Kulhudufushi on 18 October 2002. One uttered a characteristic loud *peu-wee* whistle in flight.

ASIAN PARADISE FLYCATCHER *Terpsiphone paradisi*

A single individual was seen by Alex and Sarah Carlisle on H.A. Gallandhoo on 17 April 2001 (verbally 2001). A coloured drawing made by A. Carlisle immediately after the sighting depicted the bird with a black head and throat, sharply demarcated from the pale breast, and with rufous upperparts and tail, the latter lacking long streamers.

This is the third record from the Maldives. Another record of interest is that of a female at 7°29'N 75°42'E, i.e. 120 nautical miles south-west of the southern tip of India, on 5 November 1979 (Casement 1983).

*ROSY STARLING *Sturnus roseus*

1. Four captive individuals were photographed at B. Thulaadhoo in May 2001. They had all been captured on the island during the previous north-east monsoon season (December 2000 to March 2001). Local bird-catchers reported that Rosy Starlings were regular (although not especially common) visitors during the north-east monsoon season.
2. A single bird came aboard ship at about 5°10'N 77°10'E (between the Maldives and Sri Lanka) on 19 January 2003 (C. Cousins verbally 2003).
3. A flock of 22 in non-breeding plumage was seen at Hulhule International Airport on 11 February 2007.

SAND MARTIN *Riparia riparia*

Sand Martin has been regarded as a regular winter visitor and passage migrant to the Maldives (Phillips 1963, Strickland and Jenner 1978, Ash and Shafeeg 1994, Grimmett *et al.* 1998). However, Maldives was not included within the range of this species by either Kazmierczak and van Perlo (2000) or Rasmussen and Anderton (2005), these authors raising the possibility of confusion with Pale Martin *Riparia diluta*. Some new records confirm the presence of Sand Martin in the Maldives.

1. One individual seen at about 7°N 77°E (between the southern tip of India and the Maldives) on 1 October 1983 (Roberts 1984; date and position from RNBWS records database compiled by S. Howe and provided by W. R. P. Bourne *in litt.* 2001).
2. One martin seen 26 September 1996 off the west side of Malé hawking for insects over the sea was identified as probable Sand Martin, but it was not seen clearly enough to exclude other possibilities.
3. One individual seen on 13 November 1996 at K. Meerufenfushi was positively identified as this species (M. J. Pointon *in litt.* 2002); another similar martin seen in the same week could not be positively identified.
4. One individual seen on 6 October 2001 north-west of K. Hululhe hawking for insects over the sea was positively identified as Sand Martin: it had a distinct brown chest-band and clearly forked tail. Three martins were seen on 4 October 2001 and four on 5 October 2001 in the same general area, and were tentatively identified as Sand Martins, but were not seen clearly enough to exclude other possibilities.
5. Four individuals seen on 6 October 2002 at S. Hulhudhoo, hawking for insects over the harbour were positively identified as Sand Martin.

Also of relevance here is the record of Phillips (1963). In his unpublished notes, W. W. A. Phillips recorded a Sand Martin at S. Gan on 3 November 1958, specifically noting that 'the brown band across the chest was most distinct.' All of these sightings occurred between 26 September and 13 November, suggesting that Sand Martin is an autumn passage migrant through Maldives.

RED-RUMPED SWALLOW *Hirundo daurica*

One individual was seen on 3 February 2002 at K. Fihalhohi by S. Rowland (*in litt.* 2002). Another was seen on 18 February 2002 by RCA at K. Rasfari, where the island watchman reported that four birds of the same species had arrived one week earlier; the single remaining bird had pale, faintly streaked, rather than chestnut, underparts. It was therefore not *H. d. hyperythra* from Sri Lanka, but presumably a migrant from further north. A third individual was seen on 11 November 2003 at H.Dh. Hanimaadhoo by D. Barber and M. Scott-Ham (verbally 11 November 2003). Although there is only one previous (January) record (Anderson and Baldock 2001), these records suggest that Red-rumped Swallow is probably a regular northern winter visitor to the northern Maldives.

*CITRINE WAGTAIL *Motacilla citreola*

A single male bird was clearly observed and positively identified on 19 January 1999 at K. Lohifushi by J. Jansen (*in litt.* 2002 and 2006).

DISCUSSION

The 15 new records reported here raise the total number of bird species recorded from the Maldives to 182. However, this includes three feral species recorded by Ash and Shafeeg (1994) and two species regarded as 'hypothetical' by Rasmussen and Anderton (2005). In addition the status of the Himalayan Swiftlet *Collocalia brevirostris* is now in doubt. There is a need for a critical review of Maldivian bird records. In addition, it is likely that northern winter migrants in particular remain under-recorded.

As noted before (Ash and Shafeeg 1994, Anderson and Baldock 2001) there is a need to be aware of imported pet birds (which are often allowed to run or fly freely). In addition to the species reported above, three other species previously unrecorded from the Maldives have been noted, but all were believed to be escapees. These were: Rain Quail *Coturnix coromandelica*, Black-throated Munia *Lonchura kelaarti* and Green Avadavat *Amandava formosa*.

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