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Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*: a new species for the Indian subcontinent

PER UNDELAND and HARKIRAT SINGH SANGHA

At about 18h15 on 10 May 1998 we were observing waders in wet fields at Harike, Punjab, India (31°13'N 75°12'E). Using telescopes at a range of about 30-35 m, we spotted a Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* which was immediately identified by PU, being familiar with the species in the U.S.A. and Europe. We took brief notes until 19h30 and returned to the field on the next day, when we watched the bird again in much better light at 11h00-12h30. It was astonishingly confiding and did not leave the field even when flushed, thus providing an opportunity for noting extra details.

The general jizz of the bird was like a Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*, particularly when 'worried.' It had a pot belly, shortish-looking legs when feeding, long rear-end, smallish head on a neck which, although appearing short, became surprisingly long when stretched, producing a very thin and attenuated appearance. The main features noted were a well-demarcated band of brownish streaking across the breast which ended abruptly and contrasted with the white belly. The crown was dark and very distinct. The prominent whitish supercilium continued behind the eye. The throat was white. The mantle had dark black-brown feathers with whitish fringes. The belly was white except for some fine streaks on the upper flanks. The dark brown scapulars and coverts with buff fringes were quite prominent. The black tertials had prominent buff fringes. The closed wings reached beyond the tail. No wing-bar was noticed while the bird was in flight but streaks on lateral uppertail-coverts were seen. The underwing-coverts and axillaries were white contrasting with the

breast. The slightly decurved blackish bill had a yellow base to the lower mandible. The legs were yellowish tinged with brown-green.

Pectoral Sandpiper breeds in the Arctic Tundra, from the Taimyr Peninsula in Siberia eastwards to the southern part of the Hudson Bay in Canada, and it winters in South America, largely migrating by a direct 'Great Circle' route over the western Atlantic (Hayman *et al.* 1986). Very small numbers also winter in Australia and New Zealand. Pectoral Sandpiper is the most numerous transatlantic vagrant to Europe, with over 1,760 records in Britain alone between 1958 and 1992 (Harrop 1993). However, in Asia there is only a handful of records, and it is 'recorded in the OBC region only as a vagrant' (Inskipp *et al.* 1996). The Harike bird is the first record for the Indian subcontinent.

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