

NEW BREEDING RECORD

The discovery of breeding colonies of two species of pratincole *Glareola* sp. on the Red River, Hanoi, Vietnam

LE MANH HUNG & VUONG TIEN MANH

Introduction

The Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum* breeds widely in the region, from India, across China to south-east Siberia and Japan. In South-East Asia it is a scarce to locally common breeder in Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia, north Laos, and in Central and South Annam and Cochinchina, Vietnam (Maclean & Kirwan 2017a). It is also recorded as a scarce to fairly common passage migrant in south Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Cambodia, Laos and the East Tonkin and Central Annam regions of Vietnam (Robson 2009).

Little Pratincole *G. lactea* occurs in east Afghanistan and Pakistan, through India to south China and thence south and south-east to South-East Asia, where it is an uncommon to locally common resident in Myanmar, Thailand, north-east Cambodia and Laos (Maclean & Kirwan 2017b). In 2012, this species was recorded as a passage migrant in East Tonkin (Le 2012).

Here we report on the discovery of breeding colonies of both species in the Red River Delta, Hanoi, Vietnam.

Study area and methodology

Between 2013 and 2017 we surveyed and monitored all the habitats in the Red River Delta, Hanoi city. From 2013 to 2016 the surveys concentrated on the habitats along the banks of the Red River, primarily during migration periods—from August to November and from March to early May. In 2017 we planned to survey some small isolated islets in the Red River during the summer. The preliminary surveys showed several potentially interesting islets adjacent to the Lien Hong and Lien Ha communes, Dan Phuong district, to the north of Hanoi city (Figure 1). Between 1 May and 30 June 2017 we visited the largest of these, a sandy islet about 40 ha in extent, at Lien Hong commune (21.137°N 105.713°E). The islet is partly covered by grasses, bushes and emergent trees, with about one third of its area being open sand; according to local fishermen, it was formed about three years ago as a result of changing water flows (Plate 1).

To minimise disturbance during the breeding season, we decided to visit the islet only once every 10 days and to spend just two hours there on each visit. All the habitats were checked and scanned



Figure 1. Map showing the study area (A) in the Red River, Hanoi city, Vietnam.

All images on the following pages taken on the islet in the Red River at Lien Ha commune, Dan Phuong district, Hanoi city, Vietnam.



LE MANH HUNG

Plate 1. General view of habitat on the islet, 10 May 2017.



LE MANH HUNG

Plate 2. Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum* in breeding plumage, 31 May 2017.

with telescopes and binoculars, and cameras were used to record the habitats and the species encountered.

Results

Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum*

During the first and second visits, on 1 and 10 May, 12 Oriental Pratincoles were recorded. Subsequently, on 20 and 31 May, there were about 200 birds present, and most were in breeding plumage (Plate 2). On 31 May we counted about 50 nests (the highest number recorded), each with two or three eggs. The nests were just shallow scrapes on the

ground among the grasses (Plates 3, 5 & 6). By the time of our fifth visit, on 9 June, the majority of the chicks had already hatched and most of them were hiding in the bushes, although some younger ones were still in the nest or on the open sand. On the sixth visit, on 19 June, we counted about 800 birds, the largest number recorded. Many were juveniles (Plate 7), reflecting good breeding success, although there were still some birds incubating and caring for very small chicks.

Things were very different on our seventh visit, on 28 June, as most of the area had been flooded as a result of long and heavy rainfall upstream,

VUONG TIEN MANH



Plate 3. Oriental Pratincole incubating, 31 May 2017.



Plate 5. Oriental Pratincole scrape with three eggs, 31 May 2017.

VUONG TIEN MANH

LE MANH HUNG



Plate 4. Oriental Pratincole in distraction display near nest, 31 May 2017.



Plate 6. Oriental Pratincole scrape with chick and two unhatched eggs, 31 May 2017.

VUONG TIEN MANH

and only two small dry patches remained (Plate 8). Most of the birds had moved and were roosting and feeding on the riverbank, but there were still 22 juveniles and nine chicks on the two remaining dry patches (Plate 9). During this visit, three juveniles feigned death when we accidentally got very close to them, and one actually floated off on the current, returning to land further downstream,

then ran away (Plates 10, 11 & 12). We returned on 30 June to check the islet again but it was all flooded, with no sign of the young chicks we had recorded two days previously (Plate 13).

This is the first confirmed breeding record of Oriental Pratincole in the Red River Delta. The only prior record of probable breeding in northern Vietnam was on 26 June 2016 when

Plate 7. Oriental Pratincoles, mainly juveniles and non-breeding birds, on the islet, 19 June 2017.

LE MANH HUNG



LE MANH HUNG



Plate 8. The almost submerged islet following flooding, 28 June 2017.



Plate 9. Oriental Pratincole juveniles, 28 June 2017.

Sébastien Delonglée recorded about 30 breeding pairs on a bare open area in Vinh Phuc province, about 35 km from Hanoi city. However, no eggs or chicks were reported and SD noted that the area was subject to regular anthropogenic disturbance (Vietnambirdnews blog).

Little Pratincole *Glareola lactea*

Little Pratincole was not recorded until our fourth visit, on 31 May, when eight were seen, all in breeding plumage (Plate 14).

On 9 June we counted 13 birds although no nests, chicks or non-breeding birds were observed. However, by 19 June there were 23 birds, with at least five in non-breeding plumage and three juveniles (Plate 15). This indicated that on our previous visits we had failed to find the breeding site, since some young would have been present at that time.

On 19 June we found one bird still incubating in an open sandy area when it engaged in a distraction display to draw our attention away from its eggs (Plate 16), as also observed in Laos by Evans (2001); to avoid further disturbance, we did not try to obtain any images of the eggs. On 28 June, following the flooding, we only found one juvenile Little Pratincole in the mixed flock with Oriental Pratincoles.

Discussion

This is the first detailed breeding record of Oriental Pratincole from the Red River in East Tonkin and is also notable for the large number seen, with up to 200 birds and 50 nests recorded. It is also the first confirmed breeding record of Little Pratincole in Vietnam and, on this occasion at least, breeding occurred in May and June. In Savannakhet province, Laos, breeding of this species was recorded during May (Evans 2001).

Plate 10. Juvenile Oriental Pratincole feigning death, 28 June 2017.



LE MANH HUNG



Plate 11. Juvenile Oriental Pratincole floating with the current to escape, 28 June 2017.



Plate 12. Juvenile Oriental Pratincole about to reach a dry area where it ran off and hid, 28 June 2017.

LE MANH HUNG



Plate 13. The completely submerged islet, 30 June 2017.

Plate 14. Little Pratincole *Glareola lactea* in breeding plumage, 31 May 2017.

LE MANH HUNG





LE MANH HUNG

Plate 15. Non-breeding and juvenile Little Pratincoles, 19 June 2017.

While most areas of similar habitat along the Red River have been converted to agriculture, this rare remaining islet is important not just for breeding pratincoles, but also for some other resident species such as Eastern Spotted Dove *Spilopelia chinensis* and Red Turtle Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica*. Fortunately, as it is fairly difficult to access and not well-known, the area is still fairly intact. We did not record any anthropogenic disturbance during the surveys. However, a local fisherman reported that people in the area use nets and guns to catch and shoot birds, mainly during migration seasons when larger species, such as Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* and egrets, appear. This suggests that this islet is also used as a roosting and stop-over site by migratory species.

There are several more small islets along the Red River outside Hanoi city which have never been checked or surveyed, and which have the potential to hold both interesting breeding species during the summer and migratory species stopping over on passage at other times of year. In the future, therefore, survey effort should be focused on all these locations to build up a more complete picture of the status of uncommon breeding visitors and other migratory species in the area.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Brian Sykes for valuable comments. Special thanks go to Nguyen Quang Hung, Nguyen Van Tuc for their support and assistance in the field.



LE MANH HUNG

Plate 16. Little Pratincole performing distraction display in front of nest, 19 June 2017.

References

- Evans, T. D. (2001) Ornithological records from Savannakhet province, Lao PDR, January-July 1997. *Forktail* 17: 21–28.
- Le M. H. (2012) *Photographic guide to the birds of Vietnam*. Hanoi: Natural Science and Technology Publishing House.
- Macleay, G. L. & Kirwan, G. M. (2017a) Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum*. *HBW Alive* accessed at <https://www.hbw.com/node/53786> on 22/09/2017.
- Macleay, G. L. & Kirwan, G. M. (2017b) Little Pratincole *Glareola lactea*. *HBW Alive* accessed at <http://www.hbw.com/node/53791> on 22/09/2017.
- Robson, C. R. (2009) *Guide to the birds of South-East Asia*. Bangkok: Asia Books.
- Vietnambirdnews blog accessed at <http://vietnambirdnews.blogspot.com/search?q=Oriental+Pratincole> on 22/09/2017.

LE Manh Hung

*Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources
Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology
18 Hoang Quoc Viet, Cau Giay, Hanoi, Vietnam
Email: Hungniltava@gmail.com*

VUONG Tien Manh

*Vietnam CITES Office, 02 Ngoc Ha, Ba Dinh, Hanoi
Vietnam
Email: hyderabadmanh@gmail.com*