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8. LARGE PIED WAGTAIL *MOTACILLA MADERASPATENSIS* GMELIN IN LADAKH

On the morning of July 7, 1999, two adult Large Pied Wagtails *Motacilla maderaspatensis* were observed on the bank of the Indus river near Likeer on the Srinagar-Leh highway. The birds were easily identified, as the species is familiar to the observers. This is a new sighting for Ladakh, extending the species distribution further north. There are no previously documented records of the species from Ladakh to the best of our knowledge. Ali and Ripley (1998), Grimmett *et al.* (1998) and Kazmierczak and van Perlo (2000) do not mention this area in the species distribution for the Indian subcontinent.

The altitudinal range of the species for the Indian subcontinent is "up to c. 900 m (Sikkim) and locally 1500 m (Garhwal, Kulu) or 1700 m (Nepal – Diesselhorst); in the hills

of southern India up to 2200 m" (Ali and Ripley 1998). The site where the birds were observed is at an altitude c. 3000 m, which considerably exceeds the known range of 2200 m.

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HARKIRAT SINGH SANGHA  
B-27, Gautam Marg, Hanuman Nagar,  
Jaipur 302 021, Rajasthan, India.  
Email: sangha@datainfosys.net

RISHAD NAOROJI  
Godrej Bhavan, 4-A, Home Street,  
Mumbai 400 001, Maharashtra, India.  
Email: rnaoroji@vsnl.com

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9. GANGES SOFTSHELL TURTLE *ASPIDERETES GANGETICUS* (CUVIER)  
ATTACKING A MALE PEAFOWL *PAVO CRISTATUS*

The Ganges Softshell Turtle *Aspideretes gangeticus* is present in many water bodies of southern Rajasthan (Sharma 2000, 2002); Madar dam near Udaipur City is one of them. Due to repeated drought, water in dams and ponds in the area is declining fast; even big water bodies like Madar dam are becoming unsafe for the Turtle.

On May 18, 2001, I was checking the availability of water and safety aspects of *A. gangeticus* at Madar dam. While scanning the drying bed of the dam in the morning, I saw a male Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* drinking at the periphery of a burrow pit, present in the bed of the dam. Since this was not a strange or new event I ignored it and started looking at another site of the dam. After a lapse of few seconds, an unusual wing flapping action of the Peafowl drew my attention. I observed the bird through my binoculars and found that a large *A. gangeticus* had caught hold of the Peafowl's neck and was trying to pull the bird into the water. The Peafowl was trying its best to get out of the turtle's grip.

After a short struggle, the bird became motionless. I did not disturb the turtle and left the site. The next morning, I reached the dam and minutely checked the dead bird. A big portion of the neck of the bird was missing.

The Ganges Softshell Turtle is an omnivorous species and its diet comprises a wide range of aquatic vegetation and animal food like fish, molluscs, frogs and crustaceans. It is also a very prominent scavenger (Tikader and Sharma 1985). Adults feed on other softshells, turtles and waterfowl too (Daniel 2002). The present observation indicates that this giant turtle can kill big sized terrestrial birds like *Pavo cristatus* and can predate on them if the opportunity is available.

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SATISH KUMAR SHARMA  
Phulwari Wildlife Sanctuary,  
Kotra 307 025, Udaipur district,  
Rajasthan, India.

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## 10. OCCURRENCE OF DEEP-SEA SHARKS OFF THE PONDICHERY COAST

On January 17, 2000, members of our dive group landed on the beach at Solainagar, a suburban village of Pondicherry where we noticed a pile of dead shark carcasses dumped on the sand. Investigating this discarded catch, we at once realised that these were not ordinary sharks. These had the characteristics of deep-sea sharks, usually seen only in photographs taken from submersibles.

The sharks, about 200 in number and ranging from 3 to 140 cm, had a dull brown to blackish colour; some had bizarre fins, while others had long snouts. Some had thorn-like spines running along the body; others had odd spines sticking out. Their bodies were soft and flaccid and many had their internal organs sticking out. The eyes were noticeably big and bulging.

On quizzing the fishermen, they revealed that on the previous night they had dropped a long line in waters about 1,000 m deep some 30 km off the coast and had hauled up this catch. These bizarre sharks held no commercial value for them, and hence they were discarded.

From this discarded lot, three sharks were taken to the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE) campus for display to students. Here they were photographed and measured. The biggest of them (130 cm; estimated length) had to be later thrown back onto the beach, as it was too big to be accommodated in a museum jar, while the two smaller ones were preserved in formalin.

A search was conducted on the Internet and we had responses from various scientists and specialists who expressed interest in this catch. A 'tele-identification' of the specimens was done.

The biggest fish was a Long-nosed Chimaera, a member of the genus *Neoharrita*. Of the three species of this genus recorded so far, one occurs in the southern Caribbean, the second off the West African coast and third has been recently described from the Gulf of Aden and eastern Somalia. Our specimen of the Chimaera, as examined by specialists via photographs, differ from the described species, and are probably a new species or a range extension of the Somalian species.

The second fish (64 cm; total length) is Bramble Shark *Echinorhinus bruccus*, which has a worldwide distribution, normally occurring at water depths of 400-900 m, sometimes shallower.

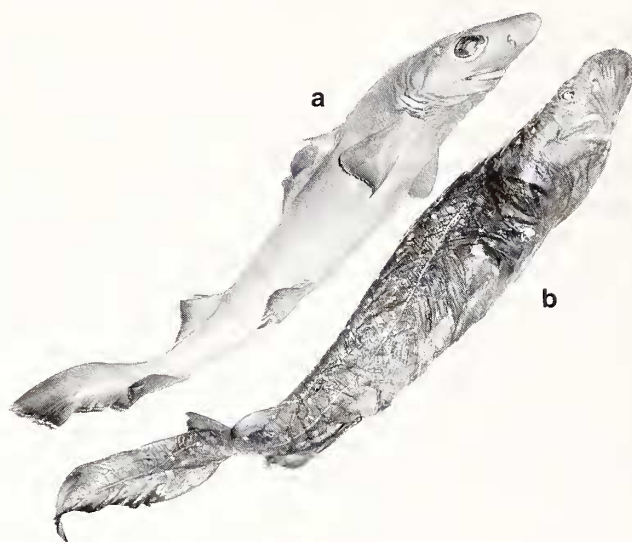


Fig. 1: Deep-sea sharks caught off Pondicherry coast:  
a. Gulper Shark *Centrophorus granulosus*  
b. Bramble Shark *Echinorhinus bruccus*

The third fish (44 cm; total length) is tentatively identified as a Gulper Shark of the genus *Centrophorus*, probably *Centrophorus granulosus*, found in all the oceans but not recorded previously from India.

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SHILPIN PATEL  
ATMA REDDY  
GITA DOLIA  
Sri Aurobindo International Centre  
of Education  
Pondicherry 600 002, India.