

# The Red-legged Crake *Rallina fasciata*—a new species for the Indian Subcontinent, and the Slaty-legged Crake *Rallina eurizonoides*—a new species for the Nicobar Islands

Shashank Dalvi, Soham Dixit, Omkar Dharwadkar & Tejas Thackeray

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Shashank Dalvi\*, Soham Dixit, Omkar Dharwadkar & Tejas Thackeray: Thackeray Wildlife Foundation 601, Vaibhav Chambers, 6th floor, Bandra Kurla Complex, opposite IT Office, Bandra East, Mumbai 400051, Maharashtra, India. \*E-mail [shashank.da@gmail.com](mailto:shashank.da@gmail.com) [Corresponding author]

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The genus *Rallina* is distributed throughout South Asia, Southeast Asia and West Papua, and north-western New Guinea. There are eight known species (Winkler et al. 2020), four of which are found within India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; eBird 2021), and potentially, a fifth undescribed congeneric (Rajeshkumar et al. 2012). Two *Rallina* crakes have been reported from the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago. The Slaty-legged Crake *R. eurizonoides* is known from just two sightings from the Andaman Islands (Raman et al. 2013; Gokulakrishnan 2020). The Andaman Crake *R. canningi* is endemic to the Andaman and Little Andaman Islands (Ali & Ripley 2001; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), and the undescribed, new-to-science, Great Nicobar Crake, is known only from the Great Nicobar Island (Rajeshkumar et al. 2012). On the Nicobar Islands, the only known *Rallina* sp., till date is the Great Nicobar Crake. We report the first records of Red-legged- *R. fasciata* and Slaty-legged Crake from the Nicobar Islands, and discuss their status.

## Red-legged Crake

Ali & Ripley (2001) included the Red-legged Crake from India based on several specimens obtained by Stuart Baker from North Cachar. However, Baker (1899) reported a female Red-legged Crake, which had been caught at his bearer's house in December. Later, Baker (1927) documented its breeding record, when he captured a female with a young one. However, Rasmussen & Anderton (2005, 2012) couldn't locate any of these specimens and listed the Red-legged Crake as hypothetical for India. This species is not included in the 'India Checklist' (Praveen et al. 2021). However, this species is widely distributed throughout Southeast Asia, ranging from southern Myanmar, eastwards to the Philippines, and southwards to the Greater Sundas; also sporadically throughout the Lesser Sundas and the Moluccas (Winkler et al. 2020; eBird 2021).

While on an avifaunal survey in the Great Nicobar Island (6.96°E, 93.84°E) (See Fig. 8), we heard the typical call of a Red-legged Crake on 14 May 2021, well after sunset, at 1930 h. Since the bird had already settled to roost, we returned to the same area early next morning and again later in the evening. We managed to observe the bird late in the evening when it was about to roost, and photographed it [200–202]. The bird had a white belly with black bars, boldly barred wing-coverts, and bright red legs; its bill was blackish-green with a red gape, and it had a

orangish-red eye-ring [200, 201]. Its underwings were white with black barring, which were narrower around carpals, and broad on primaries and secondaries [202]. The black bars on the belly were broad, indicating that it could be a male.

We also made sound recordings on both days, in the morning and evening, using a Tascam DR-100MK3 system with a Wildtronic Amplified Pro Mono Parabolic Microphone. Three types of vocalizations were recorded from this individual.



200. White belly with black bars, boldly barred wing-coverts and bright red legs; bill was blackish-green with red gape, orangish-red eye-ring.



201. White belly with black bars, boldly barred wing-coverts and bright red legs; bill was blackish-green with red gape, orangish-red eye-ring.

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202. White underwings with black barring which are narrower around carpals and broad on primaries and secondaries

One territorial song consisted of a sharp “hiccup” followed by shrill rattles reeling down in scale for two seconds (Fig. 1). The

second territorial song was an extension of the first. Where a sharp “hiccup” followed by shrill rattles reeling down in scale for two seconds were followed by ‘UH-UH-UH-...’ notes which were given in a cluster of 13 notes followed by a cluster of five to seven notes (Figs. 2, 3). This song lasted 3–4.5 m. The third vocalization consisted of a cluster of ‘UH-UH-UH-...’ notes that were uttered only from the roost, before sunrise and after sunset.

Three days later we found another individual of the Red-legged Crake, about 400 m from the previous location. Both individuals were recorded from secondary forest habitat with dense undergrowth of bushes, cane, and the nearby presence of a small stream. We also had a possible Red-legged Crake in flight, after dark, which we heard but couldn’t see or sound record. These sightings represent the first record of this species within Indian Subcontinent limits.

### Slaty-legged Crake

The Slaty-legged Crake is known to be a resident and local migrant, in well-wooded areas with waterbodies, distributed from north-western Pakistan to eastern Assam. The species

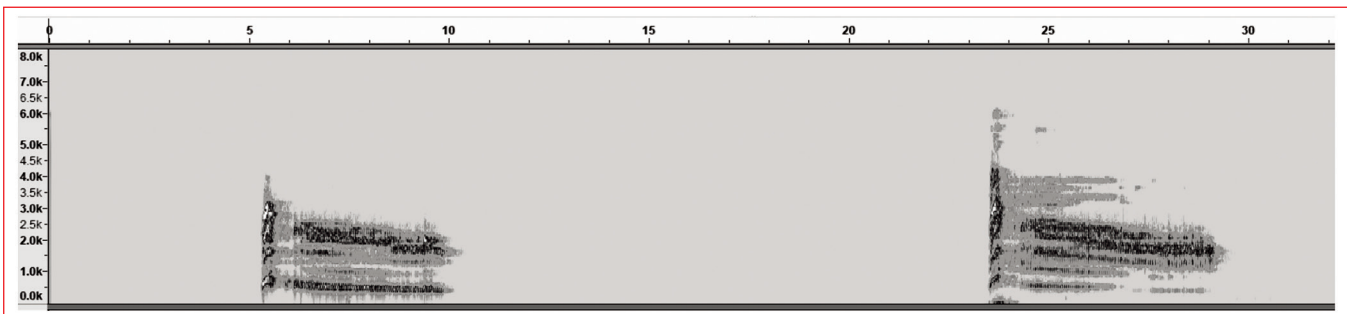


Fig. 1. A territorial song of Red-legged Crake at Great Nicobar Island which consist of a sharp “hiccup” followed by shrill rattles reeling down in scale for 2 seconds.

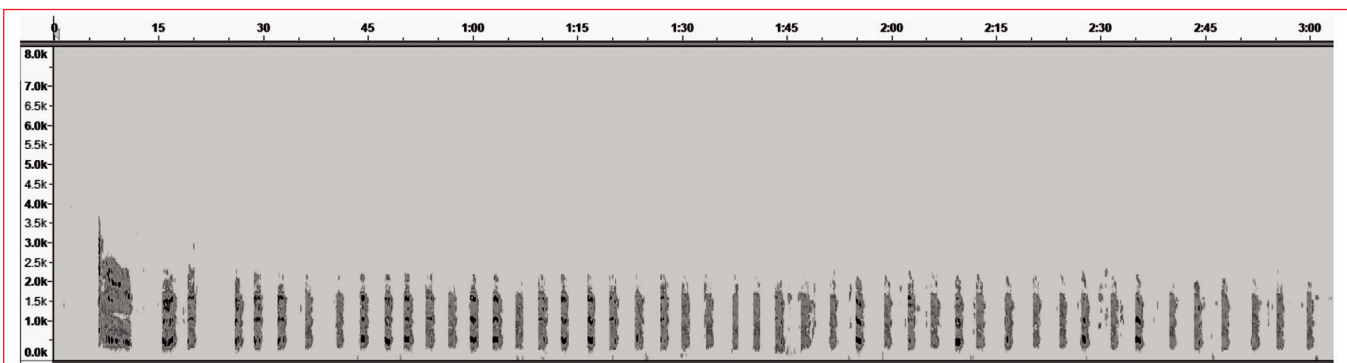


Fig. 2. A territorial song of Red-legged Crake at Great Nicobar Island recorded on the roost. A sharp “hiccup” followed by shrill rattles reeling down in scale for 2 seconds. Followed by series of ‘UH-UH-UH-...’ notes

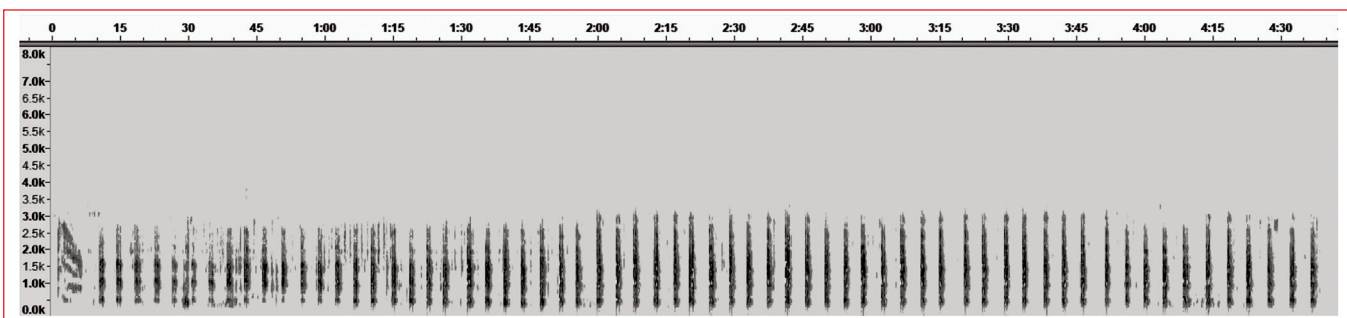


Fig. 3. A song of Red-legged Crake recorded during the day at Great Nicobar Island.



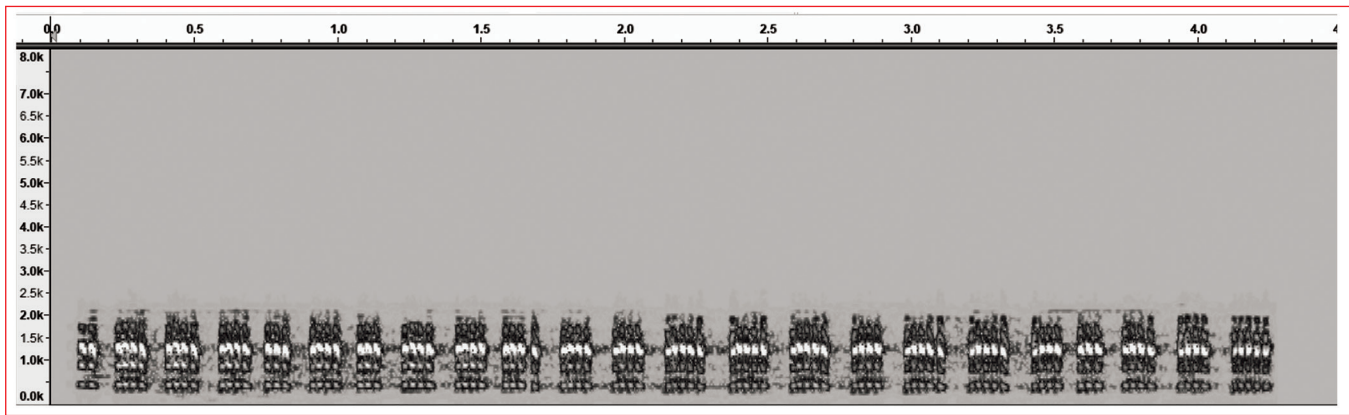


Fig. 7. Another vocalization of Slaty-legged Crake recorded by Danish at Great Nicobar Island on 21 March 2021.

territories for most of the observation period. However, some of the individuals possibly moved out of their territories once the monsoon commenced at Great Nicobar Island at the start of May. We also documented playback responses of Slaty-legged Crakes to conspecific territorial calls, as well as those of the Red-legged Crake. All individuals of Slaty-legged Crakes responded to territorial calls of both species.



Fig. 8. Sightings of Red-legged and Slaty-legged Crakes from Great Nicobar Island.

## Discussion

We recorded some of the Slaty-legged Crakes and Red-legged Crakes during the second half of May 2021, and they were seen defending territories. It is possible that both species are resident on Great Nicobar Island. This may not be surprising as both species are resident on Sumatra, Indonesia, which is the closest landmass to Great Nicobar. During our survey of the Great Nicobar Island we didn't get any confirmed, or unconfirmed sighting, or vocalization of the Great Nicobar Crake. Rajeshkumar et al. (2012) had eliminated the possibility of hybridization due to the lack of other known *Rallina* species from the Great Nicobar Islands. However,

with Slaty-legged Crakes responding to the song of Red-legged Crake, the possibility of hybrids cannot be ruled out completely. Notwithstanding that, it is pertinent that Rajeshkumar et al. (2012) found unique sets of characters in Great Nicobar Crake like, entire pale green bill, and orange-red legs, which differed from the other two species. The presence of two rail species now makes the search for the Great Nicobar Crake even more challenging, as it no longer remains the lone Rallid present on Great Nicobar Island.

## Acknowledgements

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