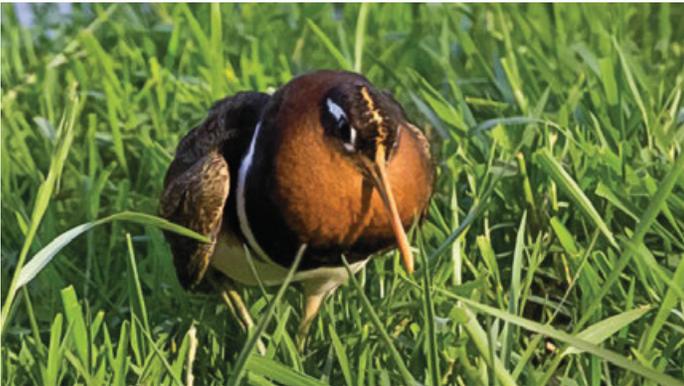


## Calling behaviour of Greater Painted Snipe

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The Greater Painted-snipe (*Rostratula benghalensis*) is our only resident snipe, but it belongs to a separate genus, *Rostratula*, and is the only species in this genus found in India. The breeding season is in the monsoon. It is an exception in birds as the female behaves like a male during breeding, which is seen in only a few select species. So the female is bright and colourful. Ali & Ripley (1980) state that the 'female is polyandrous and pugnacious as in Bustard Quails and the dominant sex partner. She battles with rival females for possession of successive husbands and once secured, and eggs laid, leaves to him the onus of incubating them and raising the chicks'.

On the evening of 12 May 2017, on a birding trip to Randarda Lake, Rajkot, with Raju Karia, we saw a female Greater Painted-snipe sitting in the grass. It froze on seeing us and after some time, it fluffed up its body; mainly the throat, upper breast, and nape was fluffed up. The fluffed out plumage was very striking and it was looking as if the upper body of the bird, including the neck sides and the nape, had been pumped with air! We managed to take some photos of this individual when it had fluffed out its plumage. Rajubhai, who had earlier observed this behaviour, mentioned that the bird would call soon. As predicted by him, the female then uttered a very slow, booming call, like an 'oook' sound, which has been described as similar to the blowing of a large mouthed bottle (Ali & Ripley 1980).

I referred to Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) and Ali & Ripley (1980) to find out if this behaviour has been described but failed to find any reference to it. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) state that the call is 'given at night by female' but do not describe that the body/plumage is fluffed out while uttering the call.

According to Kirwan (2017), females call almost exclusively in the evening except during the egg-laying and incubation periods, when calls may be given day-long, but also at night, at intervals of 1–1.5 seconds. In addition to display calls, the female also gives similar vocalizations in agonistic contacts and in response to human intruders, while males vocalize much less frequently. Voice of the female is deeper and stronger than that of the male due to the longer, convoluted trachea (twice the length of the neck). However, there is no description of the fluffed-out plumage while calling by the female.

Here, we saw the female uttering the call in the evening and it was quite vocal. It is possible that the fluffed out plumage is a visual display. Such type of behaviour was recently observed in Small Buttonquail (*Turnix sylvaticus*) in the monsoon – the breeding season of species – where the body, and especially the nape, was noticeably fluffed out when calling (Ardesana & Bharad 2017). The female of Small Buttonquail is also polyandrous and performs such calling behaviour. This raises an interesting question: is there any relation of such behaviour – calling with a fluffed out plumage – with polyandry? Or do other polyandrous species also call with a fluffed out plumage? Is it a visual display or something else? This behaviour has now been described in two species which are known to be polyandrous and raises more questions regarding the calling behaviour of these species.

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