

Unusual behavior of two Green Sandpipers *Tringa ochropus* at Pariej, Kheda

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Photos: Ashit Gandhi

On 24 September 2023, early morning at 7:15 am, we started our birding trip at Pariej Lake, Kheda. Our first visit was towards the far side of the Pariej Lake. We were hoping to sight some passage migrants like Spotted Flycatcher, *Muscicapa striata*, European Roller *Coracias garrulus*, and Jackals, usual sightings here in this season. While driving, we noticed some activity on the road ahead and were surprised to see two Green Sandpipers on the road.

One Sandpiper was crouching/sitting on the road while the other circled around it. The Sandpiper, which was circling, intermittently flapped its wings and took alternate clockwise and anti-clockwise circles around the crouching bird. This behavior continued for about 10 minutes. It ended when both birds departed separately from that place. We could not understand the behavior of these Sandpipers. We thought it might be courtship behavior. We captured this behavior in still pictures, and the second author Mr. Pinak Vashi, took a video.

I posted some of these pictures on a Wildlife Whatsapp Group, and in response, I was approached by Mr. Ashok

Mashru requesting more information and a video of the observation. Mr. Ashok Mashru sent the pictures and the video to more knowledgeable naturalists, including Mr. Prasad Ganpule and well-known bird expert Dr. Taej Mundkur.

Mr. Prasad Ganpule concluded that this was a dominant display, not courtship behavior. The circling bird was dominating the sitting bird. Dr. Taej Mundkur opined 'It is a very odd time of the year for courtship behavior so long after the breeding season. It seems more likely a dominance behavior, and I recall observing different dominance behaviors in different shorebird species, although most often, these were of two birds standing up and trying to peck at the other individual or where while flapping their wings, they are sticking out their feet at each other'.

In an article 'Visual Displays' on various bird displays, posted on the Stanford University website, the dominant display is defined as 'In established dominance hierarchies, dominant birds often use threat displays against subordinates.

Subordinates signal their submission with other displays in passerines often by crouching with feathers fluffed and head withdrawn' (Ehrlich *et al.* 1988).



The dominant display is usually used during mate selection in the breeding season or establishing feeding territories in the non-breeding quarters. Here, it was likely that the crouching sandpiper was signaling submission to the dominant individual.

(Observations such as this offer insights into bird behavior, and we encourage others to report if they have similar encounters-Eds)

Reference

Ehrlich, P. R, D. S. Dobkin, and Darryl Wheye. 1988. Visual Display, Stanford University. https://web.stanford.edu/group/stanfordbirds/text/essays/Visual_Displays.html#:~:text=In%20established%20dominance%20hierarchies%2C%20dominant,feathers%20fluffed%20and%20head%20withdrawn. □

