

| Family & species | Abundance | Status in Assam | Habitat |
|--|-----------|------------------------|---------|
| Ashy Woodswallow <i>Artamus fuscus</i> | c | R, C | OT |
| Corvidae | | | |
| House Crow <i>Corvus splendens</i> | c | R, C | OT |
| Jungle Crow <i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i> | c | R, C | OT |
| Indian Treepie <i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i> | c | R, C | E |
| Abundance: | | R=Resident | |
| c=common (daily encounter) | | S=Stray or vagrant | |
| HS=H. Singha | | U=Uncommon | |
| r=rare (encountered once or twice) | | W=Winter visitor | |
| un=uncommon (encountered occasionally, five or less than five times) | | | |
| Status in Assam (Choudhury 2000): | | Habitat: | |
| C=Common | | E = Edge | |
| L=Local and altitudinal migrant | | L = Logged | |
| M=migrant, but some breed here | | M = Monoculture | |
| P=Passage migrant | | OT = Outside transects | |
| | | S = Stream | |

The Crested Tit-warbler *Leptopoeile elegans* in north-west Arunachal Pradesh. An addition to the Indian avifauna

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The Crested Tit-warbler *Leptopoeile elegans* is a globally Near-threatened species (Collar et al. 1994). It is distributed through northern central China and Tibet from central Gansu and Qinghai (namely Nan Shan and Qinghai Hu region south to southern Gansu), north-western Sichuan to Sungpan, and to central Sikang, China, westwards to the China border. It inhabits coniferous mountain forest and scrub (mostly spruce and also dwarf alpine juniper and birch) from above the tree line to 4,300 m. In winter it descends to mountain valleys in the sub-alpine forest zone between 2,800 and 3,900 m when it forms small flocks and mixes with other species (Baker 1997; MacKinnon & Phillipps 2000).

Several authors have speculated about the species' presence in Arunachal Pradesh (Ali & Ripley 1997; Baker 1997; Kazmierczak 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). Being resident in the Tsangpo bend area of south-eastern Tibet, Ali & Ripley (1997) presumed that the species could occur south of the bend along the McMahon Line (the international boundary between India and China), where in fact the habitat is tropical (such as at Gelling), and the elevation much lower, at several points, than the species prefers. Two of us (HSS and RN) surveyed the area on two earlier visits: in February

2004 up to Mouling National Park and in December 2005 up to Gelling along the McMahon Line where the Brahmaputra (Siang) River enters India (Naoroji & Sangha 2006). The lower and middle altitudes along the Siang Valley are covered with tropical evergreen forests.

Bum La (4,331 m) and Gasella (c. 4,000 m) lie along the McMahon Line. We spent two days, 23.x.2006 and 27.x.2006, birding these desolate areas and were fortunate to record the Crested Tit-warbler *Leptopoeile elegans*—a first for the Indian Subcontinent.

It was 2°C in the sun at 14:15 hrs on 23.x.2006, and bird activity was low on the track going towards Gasella from Tawang. While we were checking the dwarf rhododendrons, the dominant vegetation in the snow covered area, a conspicuous bird was spotted atop a rhododendron. The bird was barely 3 m from HSS and MS and both of them got clear views of the bird for approximately 10-15 seconds when it flew to another rhododendron some distance away.

Recovering quickly from his initial excitement HSS confirmed that it was a male Crested Tit-warbler, the species being strongly dimorphic. Having studied the illustrations and distribution of the species in Vaurie (1972), Meyer de

Schauensee (1984), Baker (1997) and MacKinnon & Phillipps (2000), HSS had strongly felt that it could occur in the high altitude areas of Arunachal Pradesh and had included it in his “potential Arunachal Pradesh list” even during the December 2005 visit with RN, so the identification of this bird was quite straightforward. Moreover, the male’s distinctive combination of well marked bright colours – chestnut nape and head, whitish crown with prominent crest and blue mantle, back and tail, unlikely to be confused with any other bird, rendered the tit-warbler distinctive in the field.

Given its distribution in China its discovery was not entirely unexpected near Gasella. The warbler was sighted at most 3–4 km south of the McMahon Line at 3,955 m. The site above the tree line was dominated by dense dwarf rhododendron.

The Crested Tit-warbler is essentially a Palearctic species (Beaman 1994) and is not typical of the Indo-Malayan (Oriental) avifauna (Inskipp et al. 1996). The expected area of occurrence in Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) is north-eastern Arunachal Pradesh (presumably based on Ali & Ripley 1997 and Ripley 1982). Baker (1997) and Kazmierczak (2000) presumed it to occur in northern Arunachal Pradesh. It is interesting to note that it has not been mentioned in Grimmett et al. (1998).

Although our sighting constitutes the first record for India, the Crested Tit-warbler’s status and distribution within the

country remain hazy. Small numbers may be a resident species in suitable habitats and previously overlooked due to the relative inaccessibility of the region. The areas along the McMahon Line in Arunachal Pradesh are among the most remote, a logistical nightmare, and hence least explored. Based on our sighting in extreme north-western Arunachal Pradesh it can be presumed that it occurs on the McMahon Line wherever suitable habitat exists. Contrary to common perception, the altitude and habitat vary greatly along the McMahon Line.

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Gasella track with dwarf rhododendrons (foreground) where Crested Tit-warbler *Leptopoeile elegans* was seen

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Nocturnal foraging by Painted Storks *Mycteria leucocephala* at Pulicat Lake, India

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Nocturnal species of birds are comparatively fewer than diurnal species. The assumption that night feeding occurs predominantly among nocturnal species may be due, in part, to the difficulty in making observations in darkness. However, many diurnal species have been documented to forage at night. This is attributed, in temperate latitudes, to high-energy requirements under severe winter conditions and shortened daylight periods (Engelmoer et al. 1984; McNeil & Rodríguez 1996).

Among waterbirds, activities in minimal light conditions have been reported in several shorebirds (Robert et al. 1989; Staine & Burger 1994; Colwell 1996). Nocturnal feeding by diurnal, large waterbirds is known for a few species including Night Heron *Nycticorax* spp. (Watmough 1978), Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias* (Willard 1975; Bayer 1978; Pratt 1980; Black & Collopy 1982; Powell 1987), Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* (Whitting & Guinea 1999), White Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* (Aguilera 1990) and Wood Stork *Mycteria Americana* (del Hoyo et al. 1992). In this note, we report nocturnal feeding activity in another species of Ciconiid, the Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala*, observed in Pulicat Lake (13°24'–13°47'N 80°03'–80°18'E), situated in the Nellore and Tiruvallur districts of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, India.

These observations were quite accidental and hence no systematic methods could be used. However, one of us (VK) visited the site for four nights, but refrained from counting as the birds became disturbed and flew about agitatedly over the feeding site due to the sound of his motorbike and its headlamp.

In July 2005, the seasonal south-west monsoon rains caused inflows into Pulicat Lake after a severe dry summer spell. This resulted in water flowing through several culverts on the roads cutting into the lake from the mainland and between islands. The water current and cover of the structure resulted in congregations of fish around culverts, making these favoured sites for fishermen. One such site was along the Atakanitippa–Venadu Island road. The presence of fishermen during the day was a source of frequent disturbance for picivorous birds such as the Painted Stork. Except for occasional foraging, when fishermen were absent, the storks largely rested / roosted during the day, in nearby abandoned crop fields adjacent to Pulicat Lake, along with Spot-billed Pelicans *Pelecanus philippensis* and Eurasian Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia*.

The storks were observed to come back for feeding after 19:00 hrs when human disturbance along the culverts was minimal. Between 27–30.vii.2005, we continued our observations at the site at different times from 19:00 hrs–23:00 hrs, and observed night feeding by storks with the aid of the motorbike's headlight. Due to lack of night vision optical equipment, we could not clearly assess their number, but a day count of 852 birds was recorded at a nearby roost. The storks were observed feeding in large numbers along with a few Grey Herons *Ardea cinerea*, but pelicans and spoonbills were not recorded as they were roosting.

The storks could have resorted to feeding at night to take advantage of increased availability and activity of prey and lack of human disturbance at night. Influence of human