

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following persons for their help and inputs: R. Barman, B. Konwar, B. Oldrey, J. Tamuly, and N.K. Vasu.

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Record of a Rufous-tailed Wheatear *Oenanthe xanthopyrmyna* from Chandigarh, India

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This is a record of the sighting of a solitary Rufous-tailed Wheatear *Oenanthe xanthopyrmyna* in Chandigarh city (north India) at 08:15hrs on 6.x.2003.

Location: Chandigarh city lies at the junction of the Shivalik Ranges (the lowest and the first southern out-crop of the Himalaya) and the plains of North India. In the northern half of Chandigarh city, an open space of about 800m width, astride a seasonal stream running NNE-SW had been landscaped and developed as a "green-belt" in the 1960s and named 'The Leisure Valley.' One segment of this space measuring about 20ha in the NE quadrant of the city is laid out as 'The Zakir Rose Garden,' with about 600 varieties of roses in perhaps 1,000 beds amidst vast lawns dotted with over 100 flowering and fruiting trees of various species. At this time of the year all rose bushes are pruned leaving stumps about two feet tall.

The solitary bird was sighted on the stump of a rose bush (30°44'55"N, 76°47'10"E, 350m a.s.l.). This is c.1,000km NNE from its known wintering range in India and at least 600km E from its range in Pakistan.

Circumstances of Sighting: On 6.x.2003 at 08:15hrs I was surprised by a solitary bird, as it was new to me here. It was a bright sunny morning and I observed the bird through binoculars, uninterrupted, for about ten minutes. It looked like a chat but none that I had seen / known before. Having made a mental note of all those aspects of the bird that would later help in identification.

I rushed home for a camera and was delighted on returning to see the bird still there. I made seven frames and walked away hoping to see him again the next day. Over the next ten days all efforts at re-locating the bird were unsuccessful.

Description: I quote from my diary of 6.x.2003, written about 50 minutes after I had first sighted the bird. "Saw what might be the Rufous-tailed Wheatear on the stump of a pruned rose bush. Solitary and trusting to within about 15 feet. Tail black above and rufous below, rufous extending up to the vent region, fading out at the lower belly. Terminal tip of tail above also rufous, which may prove the best diagnostic clue. Rump rufous, more so towards the tail-base, lighter towards the back. Chin, throat, sides of neck silvery grey, crown, mantle and upper parts silvery grey-brown, ear coverts dark (light dark), tips and edges of primaries and secondaries buffish-grey and median coverts silverfish-grey. Beak and eyes black, legs glossy black.

In my library, only two books had texts on this bird. My description comes fairly close to Grimmett et al. (1998) but the illustration neither matches his own text nor mine except for the tail-rump region. The distribution map suggests that the bird is a vagrant here. Ali and Ripley (2001) state emphatically "the only Chat or Wheatear with rufous rump and base of tail." And again, "Migration occurs on winter grounds from the beginning of October till the end of March... Passage mostly in October and March..."

Distribution Status: All evidence points that the Rufous-tailed Wheatear is a vagrant at Chandigarh and as far as I am able to ascertain, this may be the first such record. There is just one other record way outside its wintering ground by Jones (1919) at Sairee in the Simla hills on 29.ix.1912.

Miscellaneous Vagrants: Between 2001 and 2003, in the Zakir Rose Garden and again during my morning walks, I have seen the Blue Whistling-Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus* thrice and heard it, in addition, 6-7 times. The Dark-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis* was seen once in April 2002. I have photographic proof of the former from March 2004. A friend has positively seen one solitary White-capped Redstart *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus* once in 2000 about 1km NE of the Rose Garden.

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Extracts from the Akhbaar book at Kihim

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"One of the major ills from which we suffer while fighting this war for our freedom and justice is paper shortage. Hence this Akhbaar book, unlike the Akhbaar books of the good old days is emaciated and does not wear the traditional look of prosperous Accountancy. The family appraises N. B. that it has cost 5 good rupees nevertheless.

Under the circs. (= circumstances) I guess that a long-winded thesis, however intellectual or elevating, will be unwelcome. The social doings of this year's Kihim season – the innumerable meals we have eaten, the hands we have shaken and the cheeks we have kissed many times per day, and the other events intelligent and

otherwise, have been or will be (no doubt) chronicled by our special Society, Three Arts and other departmental correspondents. I shall confine myself merely to certain happenings in the sphere of local ornithology. There is nothing unusual in the happenings, but [they] will be interesting records after 50 years. The generation now

in the bud, of whom I have high hopes, will find them so (- I hope). It is rather early as yet to say how many, and which, of the youngsters who are so enthusiastic at the moment will stay the course and grow old with the same interestness for birds. I feel certain, however that even if most of them fall by the wayside they will at least be able to bequeath to their children and grandchildren the correct prescription for telling a woodpecker from a duck! This in itself will be a definite advance. Among the more promising of my 'chelas' today I would name: Shamoon (son of Najmuddin), Jamila (daughter of Abu), Sadiq (s/o Adnan), Shums (s/o Mukhlis), Iqbal (s/o Mamoon), Ameeruddin (s/o Jabir), Nafisa (d/o Asaf), and last and smallest though not least Wasim (s/o Ilyas). Humayun who has also been under my wing, is past the fledgling stage and is already on the way to establishing himself as a bird man.

"A pair of Honey Buzzards has been nesting between Yali 'Retreat' for the last 12 yrs., to my knowledge – but never more than one pair. On 10th May a 14 day old chick from this year's nest in 'Retreat' compound was ringed. If it grows up, it may furnish some clue as regards the nesting pair next year. Does the same pair nest here year after year? Is its place taken in part or wholly by the new born youngsters? Or do altogether new birds occupy the place? And what happens to the yearly progeny? The same

problem needs solving re the 'Yali' pair of White-bellied Sea-Eagles. Raja, the emeritus Yali mali, tells me he has seen "this pair nesting every year in the same place since he was a boy – over 50 yrs., ago – Never has he seen more than the one pair about, and never have they succeeded in raising a family!" "Let the credit rest with the relator" as Babur would have said, but the matter is not without strangeness and certainly worthy of investigation. This season (ie., Decr. 1942) the Eagles had shifted to a Casuarina in the S-W corner of Shahinda's land. There were 2 eggs in the nest – abt., 100ft., up, which vanished after a week or so – rather unaccountably. Thereafter the birds lost interest in this nest, but they are still in the same neighbourhood. The desertion by the Eagles of their age-long nest site – the beehive Casuarina above the well N of Yali bungalow – was undoubtedly due to the large influx of White-backed Vultures that suddenly took a fancy to Yali compound and cluttered all the fine Casuarinas with their large and filthy [nests?]. The ire of the 'Squire' was justly aroused.

*He loaded his gun
And slew a dozen
Which sent the rest a-packing.*

It is hoped that the Sea-Eagles will now return.

All this is getting too long – so here a few items in brief:

2 flocks Flamingoes (50 & 26) flying N – 23 April.

2 prs. (=pairs) Green Bee-eaters and 1 White-breasted Kingfisher nesting in 'Al Murad' compound.

1 Fulvous Fruit Bat (*Rousettus leschenaulti*) ringed by me in April ('43) in an old cave on Elephanta Is., was found struggling with black ants by Shamoon in 'Yali' compound on 13 May! Believe it or not.

Pitta: Blue-cheeked (or Blue-tailed?) Bee-eaters appeared overnight 24th and 19th May respectively, after, rainy and stormy nights.

Last Blyth's Reed-Warbler at Bhonbar 25 May.

1 pair Quaker Babblers – for 1st time ever near 'Latifia' – 12-19 May.

[Sálim Ali, 27 May 1943]

* * * *

"The first attempt to catch birds with a mist net ended disappointingly. Between all yesterday (15 Nov.) and up to 2 p.m. today (16 Nov.) only 3 birds were caught – 1 Spotted Babler, 1 Grey Drongo, 1 Blyth's Reed Warbler. 1st & 3rd were ringed. No. 2 got away after much fighting & drawing blood. With a number of nets & enthusiastic netters, I am sure some very useful work could be done here in the intervals between eating and sleeping." [Salim Ali, 16.xi.1960.]

Recoveries from *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* – 6

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Seven months after the *Newsletter* was started, letters still came welcoming its existence. J. H. H. Peppe of Birdpur Estate, Basti, U. P. wrote, "I have much appreciated receiving the *Newsletter*...and would willingly pay a subscription...I have resigned my membership to the BNHS as I am only interested in the birding side..."

M. C. A. Jackson, Malajamullay Estate, Kerala, said, "I have found them (NLBW) very interesting and I strongly support the idea of an Ornithological Society."

Dr R. M. Naik, Faculty of Science, Zoology Department, Baroda, like the *Newsletter*, "I am glad you are developing it along the right lines."

B. V. Ramanjulu, Superintendent Zoological Park, "found that the *Newsletter* was performing a great service in the field of natural history."

Joseph George (well-known to our readers), then of New Forest, Dehra Dun, suggested that, "a very useful service which the *Newsletter* can do is publication of abstracts and papers on birds appearing in various journals."

Artificial nest box for Green Barbets

The July 1961 issue was a little better organised than the previous ones in having definite sections, articles, reviews, notes and comments, and correspondence. An interesting piece by Joseph George related to an experiment attempting to create an artificial nest for the Green Barbet. He noticed "A Green Barbet...near the entrance hole of one of the nest boxes put up in New Forest, Dehra Dun. The bird did not enter the box but it gave the impression that it would accept a suitably designed nest box." Taking the hint from this situation, he

designed a nest box from the internode of a giant bamboo. He learnt from books that the Green Barbet usually excavates a new nest hole every season. "A nest box that would require some tunneling seemed therefore to have the best chance of being acceptable to the bird."

He put up the box on 2.iv.1960, and three weeks later a small hole was visible in the wooden plug and wood chips were seen scattered on the ground. Matters seemed to be progressing well, but unfortunately a pair of Black-headed Mynas finally drove away the barbets and nested in the box!

Family parties of birds

I remember having read in *Bird Study* that a birdwatcher kept a close watch on the goings-on across the hedge in his garden. He found that there was always a flock of a dozen of the same species, which spent a