

Crested Tree-Swifts *Hemiprocne coronata* were commonly seen in the *Eucalyptus* plantation where I had known them to roost and nest. Only once did I hear the calls of the Grey Junglefowl *Gallus sonneratii* and the Red Spurfowl *Galloperdix spadicea*. Both the Jungle *Turdoides striatus* and White-headed Babblers *T. affinis* were seen, the latter in more open areas. The Spotted Babbler's *Pellorneum ruficeps* melodious calls were heard once. Thick-billed *Dicaeum agile*, Tickell's *D. erythrorhynchos* and perhaps the Plain Flowerpeckers *D. concolor*, Purple *Nectarinia asiatica*, Purple-rumped *N. zeylonica* and Loten's Sunbirds *N. lotenia* were noticed often.

Grey-headed Starlings *Sturnus malabaricus* were seen in good numbers on the *Bombax* trees. These birds were also noticed in flight one evening towards dusk in Thrissur, right in the busiest localities in the centre of the town. I remember seeing several Rosy Starlings *S. roseus* here in the dry season when the *Bombax ceiba* trees in the vicinity of the temple were in bloom.

Raptors present include the Changeable Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus* - which in this case did not change its old haunts and was perhaps nesting on the same *Terminalia paniculata* tree, Oriental Honey-Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*, Crested

Serpent-Eagle *Spilornis cheela*, Shikra *Accipiter badius* and Black Kite *Milvus migrans*. The birds seen in the vicinity of the reservoir from the dam include Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*, River Tern *Sterna aurantia*, Indian Shag *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis* - (2-3 birds), Little Egretta *garzetta* and Cattle egrets *Bubulcus ibis*, Indian Pond-*Ardeola grayii* and Black-crowned Night Herons *Nycticorax nycticorax*. Two Franklin's Nightjars *Caprimulgus affinis* were heard at dusk across the dam along the scrub-covered slope. Several Indian Edible-nest Swiftlets *Collocalia unicolor*, House *Apus affinis* and Asian Palm-Swifts *Cypsiurus balasienis*, Red-rumped Swallows *Hirundo daurica* and Ashy Woodswallow *Artamus fuscus* were seen in flight, hawking insects.

It was wonderful to be back at Peechi and it was interesting to notice the subtle but significant changes in the bird life following the changes in the vegetation. We need to monitor such changes over long time periods to see how the wildlife responds to changes in the vegetation. Peechi appears ideal given its easy access and rich and diverse bird life. Perhaps Nameer or someone else from nearby areas would take the initiative to re-survey the birds of this sanctuary.

Other species seen on the visit: Common Hoopoe *Upupa epos*, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater *Merops leschenaulti*, Asian Koel *Eudynamis scolopacea*, Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis*, Blue Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*, Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*, Indian Robin *Saxicoloides fulicata*, Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*, Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*, Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*, Indian Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*, Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura*, Gold-fronted Chloropsis *Chloropsis aurifrons*, House *Corvus splendens* and Jungle crows *C. macrorhynchos*, Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*, Red-whiskered *Pycnonotus jocosus*, Red-vented *P. cafer* and White-browed Bulbuls *P. luteolus*, Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius*, Blyth's Reed- *Acrocephalus dumetorum* and Greenish Leaf-Warblers *Phylloscopus trochiloides*, Yellow-throated Sparrow *Petronia xanthocollis*, White-rumped Munia *Lonchura striata* and Large Pied Wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis*.

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## New and significant records from the Great Himalayan National Park, Himachal Pradesh, India

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The Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP; Himachal Pradesh, India), represents the best example of undisturbed west Himalayan temperate forest and falls within one of the globally Endemic Bird Areas (DO2: Western Himalayas) identified by the ICBP Biodiversity Project (Gaston et al. 1994). But the birds of GHNP have not been exhaustively surveyed. Both Babault (1920) and Whistler (1926) visited Parbati Valley, a day's walk from the park boundary and Wynter-Blyth (1952) passed through Tirthan Valley, not far from the park. There is no published account reporting birds from the actual park area, except by Gaston et al. (1994). The purpose of this note is to update published information on the avifauna of the park with additional records from birdwatching trips to the Tirthan Valley during 16-20.vi.2002 and 13-24.iv.2003.

#### New records

1. Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus*: Four birds were observed on 13.iv.2003 near

Sai Ropa (c.1440m). Later five birds were seen outside the park in the afternoon on 24.iv.2003 at the Rohtang Pass (3,978m). Both the groups were migrating northwards.

2. Shikra *Accipiter badius*: A male was observed calling in the afternoon on 23.iv.2003 and again in the morning on 24.iv.2003 at Sai Ropa. It is possible that the species moves to the higher areas during summer.

3. Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*: A small flock of five birds was observed near Sai Ropa at c1600m on 18.vi.2002, considerably higher than the known altitudinal range of 600m for the species (Kazmierczak 2000).

4. House Swift *Apus affinis*: More than 200 were seen in the afternoon near Sai Ropa on 24.iv.2003. For fifteen minutes or so they hunted in the valley before flying away.

#### Significant records

1. Western Tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus*: This 'Vulnerable'

pheasant was heard late in the evening of 15.iv.2003 at 17:50hrs while camping at Shilt (c.3100m). The wailing call was heard nine times. On 16.iv.2003, early in the morning, it started calling at 05:30hrs and continued up to 07:00hrs with an odd-call at 09:00hrs also. While walking on the slippery track from Shilt to Chhoa Dar, one was flushed near the camp. Unlike Koklass Pheasant *Pucrasia macrolopha* and Impeyan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus* it did not call when flushed. However, its wings made a curious, rattling sound, very different from the other pheasants. Around 07:55hrs one male flew down the slope and landed on the track barely 5m from us! For five seconds we were treated to an eye-filling view of his spiky black crest, scarlet face and nape and flame-red breast. Seeing us so close the startled bird walked 2m or so up the slope before turning and wheeling down the steep mountainside, twisting between the trees. Another male flew behind that one, but kept

going down slope, giving good views in flight. We also flushed a female before returning to the camp.

On 17.iv.2003 a bird called at 05:15hrs for about four minutes. Another bird started calling soon after from a different direction. A third bird called around 06:15hrs.

We trekked up to Khorli Poi (c.3000m) on the opposing north face of the valley where we camped for two days. In the inclement weather, with heavy snowfall, we did not see tragopans, but two males were heard. A male roosting some distance from our tents, started calling at night (03:45hrs). Two more birds from different directions called from the first light of pre-dawn on 21.iv.2003. On

22.iv.2003 one bird called sporadically during the night (02:45 hrs).

2. Cheer Pheasant *Catreus wallichi*: The only time we heard this 'Vulnerable' species was from the top of the south-facing slope near Rolla. The birds called at 17:45hrs for a minute or two on 18.iv.2004.

3. Orange Bullfinch *Pyrrhula aurantiaca*: Previously reported only by Ben King (Gaston et al. 1994) who visited the park from 27.ix–2.x.1984. One female was observed near Shilt on 16.iv.2003. Kazmierczak (2000) gives only three isolated records from Himachal Pradesh and one from Uttaranchal outside Jammu and Kashmir, of this 'Near-threatened' species.

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## Greater Spotted Eagle, Grasshopper Warbler and Broad-tailed Grassbird near Pune, Maharashtra, India

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**G**reater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* is considered Vulnerable by BirdLife International (2001). It is an uncommon winter visitor to western Maharashtra but difficulty in separation from Indian Spotted Eagle *Aquila hastata* makes records uncertain but Greater / Indian Spotted Eagles are not uncommonly sighted in the Deccan, often near water.

I observed an adult for half an hour beside the Mula-Mutha about 4km east of Koregaon Park, Pune on 4.ii.2005 and managed to take many photographs clearly showing the short gape extending only to the middle of the eye, the dark brown iris and circular nostril, which separates this species from Indian Spotted Eagle, Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* and Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax*.

The following unconfirmed records are claimed from the Pune District: **Ujani**, between 11-12.i.1997, SS (SS in litt. 2002); **Ujani** 1 on 5.ii.1994 (AP pers. obs.); **Bhimashankar** undated (Kalpavriksh 2001); **Bhimashankar** Pune District, undated (Islam & Rahmani 2004); **Khamgaon** 1 adult on 22.xii.2002, RP (RP in litt. 2.i.2003); **Varvand** 1 adult on 22.xii.2002, RP (RP in litt. 2.i.2003); **Pashan** Pune, 'a few records,' undated, RP (RP in litt. 2002).

There are also the following unconfirmed records from the Bombay area: **Near Bombay** Monga (2001) lists it as occasional and there have been 12 reports from around Bombay between 2000-2002 on <birdsofbombay@yahoo.com>, and raptor expert Clark (1994) recorded it once in October 1990 and again in February 1996

(MD 18.xii.2000 <birdsofbombay@yahoo.com>). In the Bombay area up to and including the Ghats, Abdulali (1981) lists it as uncommon; Ali & Abdulali (1938) had only two records from Bombay and Salsette and considered it a straggler. The quote from Abdulali (1981) in BirdLife International (2001) 'uncommon' has been misinterpreted, as the species is unbracketed and therefore refers only to the Bombay area up to and including the Ghats and not the whole of Maharashtra. Further records claimed from near Bombay: Mahul, 1+ on 12.xii.2001 (Verma 2004); SGNP, one in January 1987 (BirdLife International 2001); Mahul-Sewri, Bombay, undated (Islam & Rahmani 2004); SGNP, Bombay, undated (Islam & Rahmani 2004); Thane Creek, Bombay/ Thane District, undated (Islam & Rahmani 2004); Bombay, the record of a male specimen from January 1939 at FMNH in BirdLife International (2001) is incorrect, there is no such specimen (Field Museum 2004).

Further unconfirmed records from: **Taloda** and **Toranmal** Dhule District, undated (Islam & Rahmani 2004).

There are two confirmed records from: **Lake Beale**, Nasik District, the two specimens in the BNHS collection (Abdulali 1969) are presumably the same specimens given as Lake Beale (December 1949) and Ghoti (December 1957) in BirdLife International (2001).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Davidson and Wenden (1878), observed it several times in the Deccan and 'believed (it) to breed near the Ekroot tank,' Sholapur District and Butler

(1881) found it to be not common and very local. The breeding mentioned in Khandesh by Ali & Ripley (1983) is discounted by BirdLife International (2001).

In Goa, Lainer (2004) records it as a locally, fairly common winter visitor and cites various sources.

**Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella naevia* is another rarely recorded winter visitor to western Maharashtra but is probably under-recorded due to its skulking nature. It is more common in the Bombay neighbourhood including the Ghats (Monga 2001, Ali & Abdulali 1945, Abdulali 1981). I was sitting under the shade of the hillside at Bopdeo Ghat in the spot where the photograph was taken, about 4-5km west of the crest of the ghat on 6.ii.2005. I had sat for about 45 minutes and had heard some rustling close behind me, which I had presumed to be of mice or lizards. When I got up to stretch and move off a bird flew from the grass right behind me. Luckily it was as surprised as me and had to alight nearby low down near a bush in order to check me out. This gave me time to see the clear fairly strong brown stripes on the pale long under-tail coverts and the clearly but finely striped markings on the side of the upper-breast (possibly right across but not seen fully) and the strongly marked dark centred greater coverts. The upper-parts were an overall pale sandy yellowy brown with brown stripes and the ground colour of the under-parts was off white. There was a fairly faint pale supercilium and a dark eye-stripe and the alarm call was a tongue clicking 'tsuk'. The bird then dived into cover and could