

Acknowledgements

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

Lt. General Baljit Singh

House No.219, Sector 16-A, Chandigarh 160015.

This is a record of the sighting of a solitary Rufous-tailed Wheatear *Oenanthe xanthopyrna* 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

Zafar Futehally

#2205 Oakwood Apartment, Jakkasandra Layout, Koramangala, 3rd Block, 8th Main, Bangalore 560034, India. Email: zafar123@vsnl.net

"One of the major ills from which we suffer while fighting this war for our freedom and justice is paper shortage. Hence this Akhbar book, unlike the Akhbar 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