

Ladakh: 26 May—26 June 2004

Otto Pfister

*Transversal 1 Este #57-42, Bogota D. C., Colombia. Email: otto_pfister@hotmail.com***Introduction**

My wife accompanied me on my tenth visit to Ladakh. The main objectives of this trip included updating Ladakh wildlife records, especially mammal and breeding bird observations, photography, and promoting my forthcoming book '*Birds and Mammals of Ladakh*' (launched by end of June 2004). Book promotional activities forced us to spend excessive time in Leh town. Our fieldwork, however, concentrated on areas north of Leh, the Shey-Tikse marshes, the Rumbak area in Hemis National Park, Hemis Shukpachan, Wanla region and Rupchu, within the latter focusing mainly on Chumatang, Yoye-Tso, Sumdo, and Tsomoriri with Thadsang Karu, Puga, Tso-Kar and Taglang-La. The planned breeding bird survey in Nubra Valley had to be cancelled following two failed attempts to cross Kardung-La when first we were blocked for an entire day (10.vi) at Pulu South by snowfall and again the following day by avalanches.

In Leh we stayed at 'Hotel Snow View' at Upper Changspa / Leh (Tel. +91-1982-252504/250153; email: snowviewleh@hotmail.com), a nicely located, quiet hotel a bit above Leh bazaar, offering cozy rooms, tasty food and a nice view into Stock Kangri. Its owner, David Sonam, is probably one of the most knowledgeable persons in town about birds and his diverting chats are full of good stories and useful hints. Tsering Tashi, my old friend, accompanied us (as usual) for fieldwork, taking good care of our well being and keeping his binoculars always within reach. And Dorje drove us safely into all those narrow valleys and plains. In Rumbak we stayed with local people who offered guest-rooms, whereas in the remaining places we pitched camp.

Initially the weather was often cloudy, cold and windy, but it improved during the second part of our trip and turned warm towards the end of our stay. The rivers therefore originally carried very little water (especially in the eastern and central parts of Ladakh), a matter of grave concern for farmers who needed to irrigate their sprouting barley fields; this drought was due to a very dry winter and prevailing unusually low temperatures, preventing what little snow existed in the upper reaches from melting. Fortunately the situation

improved in the valleys towards end of June, whereas water level at Startsapuk-Tso remained extremely low with the main feeder streams dry and the spillover connection into Tso-Kar barren. The low water table offered apparently favorable breeding conditions to Great Crested Grebes *Podiceps cristatus* in Startsapuk-Tso where a remarkably high number of about 100 nests were counted. In addition, some 30 Black-necked Grebes *Podiceps nigricollis* were observed in the same lake about three weeks later (M. Ritschard, pers. comm.). Further, perhaps due to the snow-less winter, encounters with lagomorphs (hares and pikas) were abnormally low. Ongoing construction of a 'highway' between Mahe Bridge and Tsomoriri and the inevitable presence of road workers and their camps resulted in considerable litter. This disturbance could be the probable cause of absence of some typical species like Tibetan Partridge *Perdix hodgsoniae*, White-tailed Rubythroat *Luscinia pectoralis* or reduced density of Himalayan Marmot *Marmota himalayana*. Sprouting grass and barley in agriculture fields up in the Rumbak region attracted considerable concentration of Blue Sheep *Pseudois nayaur* offering favorable observation.

Highlights of this trip included observation of a breeding pair of Black Kite *Milvus migrans lineatus* in Leh, a Blue-fronted Redstart *Phoenicurus frontalis* at Zinchan, my third encounter with the *sordidus* morph of a White-throated Dipper at Sumdo (see photo on back cover), the fantastic Blue Sheep 'show' near Rumbak and the very close encounter with two Tibetan Argali on the slopes of the Tso-Kar basin. The lush poplar and willow grove around Zinchan definitely needs greater scrutiny by passing observers since this spot frequently hosts exciting bird rarities.

Itinerary

26 May: Arrive early morning in Leh (3,500m). Rest all day. Sunny morning, overcast afternoon, windy and cold.
27-28: Leh, resting, organizing trips and permits, book promotion, birding in the surrounding. Morning partly sunny, but cold. Overcast afternoon, with sandstorm.
29: Shey marshes (3,260m). Sunny and warm.

30: Walk along the river from Leh up to Horzey (3,840m). Sunny and warm.

31: Leh. Sunny and warm.

1 June: Dropped at Zinchan (3,250m) and walked up to Rumbak village (4,000m). Cloudy and windy. Rumbak cold and snowing.

2-6: Rumbak and surroundings including Stock-La base (4,600m), Hussing Nullah (4,000-4,500m) and Yurutse (4,200m) towards Ganda-La (4,500m). Generally overcast and windy, cold including snow showers, but also a few hours of sunshine.

7: Returned from Rumbak to Zinchan, drove to Leh via Trisul-Tso (3,270m). Overcast and rain. Later dryer and windy.

8-9: Leh, book promotion. Cloudy, cold.

10: Towards Kardung-La, blocked at South Pulu (4,630m) for the entire day because of snowfall.

11: Again towards South Pulu but sent back because of avalanches. Changed plans and continued to Hemis Shukpachan (3,760m). Morning overcast and cold with light snowfall. Afternoon, while moving lower and westwards, improving to sunny and warmer.

12: Around Hemis Shukpachan, mainly around Juniper *Juniperus macropoda* stands – one of the only places in Ladakh where remaining groves of very old juniper trees can be seen. Sunny and warm.

13: Moved on via Likir, Khaltse to Wanla (3,200m). Sunny and warm.

14: Wanla area. Sunny and warm.

15: Returned via Khaltse, Alchi Bridge with its Stupa and pre-historic animal rock carvings, Phyang (3,600m) and Trisul-Tso to Leh. Sunny, later partly overcast.

16: Leh. Mostly sunny and warmer.

17: Tikse-Shey marshes. Sunny and warm.

18: To Chumatang (4,000m). Slightly overcast, cool and windy.

19: Via Yoye-Tso (4,730m) to Mahe Bridge (4,050m) and on to Upper Sumdo (4,320m). Overcast and windy, later heavy rain.

20: Around Sumdo. Weather improving during morning later turning sunny and warm.

21: To Tsomoriri (4,600m) via Thadsang Karu (4,710m) and back to Sumdo. Cloudy-sunny and windy.

22: To Tso-Kar (4,600m) via Puga (4,450m).

- Cloudy-sunny and very windy.
23-24: Explored the Tso-Kar basin. Generally sunny and warm, but partly windy and cold.
25: By mid-day drove via Taglang-La (5,320m) and Miru (3,700m) back to Leh. Sunny and warm, turning very windy in the Indus Valley.
26: Leh. Rather sunny and considerably warmer than a week earlier.
27: Departure for Delhi – with freshly snow covered mountain tops bidding fare-well!

Annotated checklists

Birds

- Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* Two birds in breeding plumage (7, 11, 15.vi) in Trisul-Tso.
- Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* One pair (incubating) in Yoye-Tso; common at Tsomoriri (6+ nests at northern shore); common in Startsapuk-Tso (about 100 nests) – pairs mainly incubating, some constructing nests and some already with chicks.
- Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* One bird at Yoye-Tso.
- Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* Common at Thadsang Karu Lake and Tsomoriri (with chicks); common (200 birds) in Startsapuk-Tso (some with chicks).
- Brahminy (Ruddy) Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* Two pairs in Yoye-Tso; common at Thadsang Karu lake, less so at Tsomoriri (few with chicks); occasional in Puga and Sumdo, more common at Tso-Kar than Startsapuk-Tso.
- Gadwall *Anas strepera* Two males / one female (7, 15.vi) in Trisul-Tso; two pairs in Yoye-Tso.
- Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* Two pairs in Yoye-Tso; 20+ birds in Startsapuk-Tso (some males moving into eclipse).
- Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* One male in Startsapuk-Tso.
- Northern Shoveller *Anas clypeata* One pair (11.vi), one male (15.vi) in Trisul-Tso; one male at Shey fish ponds.
- Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* Seven pairs (11.vi) in Trisul-Tso; about seven pairs in Yoye-Tso; 40+ birds in Startsapuk-Tso.
- Garganey *Anas querquedula* Three pairs (15.vi) in Trisul-Tso.
- Red-crested Pochard *Rhodonessa rufina* One male in eclipse / two females (7, 11, 15.vi) in Trisul-Tso; occasional (males in eclipse) in northern part of Tsomoriri; two pairs in Startsapuk-Tso.
- Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* Three males, two females (7.vi), one male (11.vi), three males, two females (15.vi) in Trisul-Tso.
- Tufted Pochard *Aythya fuligula* One male (7, 11, 15.vi) in Trisul-Tso.
- Common Merganser *Mergus merganser* One female in Indus at Chumatang; one female in northern Tsomoriri.
- Black Kite *Milvus migrans lineatus* One pair breeding in an old Black-billed Magpie *Pica pica* nest in a poplar tree (c. 8m above ground) in the Leh circuit house complex (3,600m) – one of the first confirmed breeding records for Ladakh.
- Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus* One sub-adult over Rumbak; one adult below Stock-La / Hussing Nullah; one bird roosting below southern reach 5km before Mahe Bridge; one adult at nest with unfledged chick (at eastern reach before ascending steep slope towards Yoye-Tso); a pair in spectacular courting display flight at Puga-Sumdo (calling a very soft ‘*piaa*’); one bird at Tsomoriri; one bird over Startsapuk-Tso; over Dibring one bird soaring before and another another immediately north of Taglang-La in its roost / nest.
- Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis* One immature below Stock-La / upper Hussing Nullah; six birds soar around peaks of northern reach (3km after Likche, 3,680m); three birds sit in respective white-washed roosts / nests located on high cliffs in northern reach (5km after Likche, 3,710m).
- Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* One bird near Tso-Kar.
- Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius* One bird at Tsomoriri below Korzak.
- Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* One bird gliding along cliffs near ‘nest’ in Rumbak Gorge.
- Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* One pair in Leh breeding in an old Black-billed Magpie nest (c. 8m above ground) in poplar tree in the circuit house complex (five trees away from the Black Kite nest, fighting often for the dominant perch on a neighbouring dry / dead treetop. Kestrel is more aggressive). The male carries a Himalayan Agama *Laudakia himalayana* and presents it to the begging female, sitting on the perch; one female accompanying her fledged chick in flight training above Upper Sumdo; one female at Puga; two birds in the Tso-Kar plains.
- Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* One bird hunting dragonflies over ‘fishponds’ in Shey marshes and devouring the catch in flight, while its partner called from a nearby poplar tree (29.v) and again (17.vi) presumably the same pair hunting dragonflies over the same site; a pair breeding in old Black-billed Magpie nest in poplar tree (c. 12m above ground) after Shey bridge. Female incubating while male, perched on a horizontal branch of the neighbouring tree calls frequently in fast repeated, rising ‘*piu-piu-piu...*’
- Saker *Falco cherrug milvipes* One shy bird for three days (its established territory?) above southern edge of Startsapuk-Tso.
- Tibetan Snowcock *Tetraogallus tibetanus* Two birds heard for three days in the early mornings in the upper slopes high above Upper Sumdo.
- Himalayan Snowcock *Tetraogallus himalayensis* Occasional along the upper hillsides above Rumbak; four birds above Yurutse (+ 4,500m); 20 birds below Stock-La / above Hussing Nullah (4,600m).
- Chukor *Alectoris chukar* Two birds at Horzey / Leh; common to abundant from Zinchan to Yurutse up to below Ganda-La but also into Hussing Nullah and especially around Rumbak ‘the Chukor capital’; common around Hemis Shukpachan, and also around Wanla.
- Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis* One pair breeding on longish island at the northern pond off the main lake at Yoye-Tso. A new breeding spot, since my research, on the species in Ladakh from, 1995-97. The nest contained two creamy, reddish-brown splotched eggs, laid directly on the grass – no nesting material being added. The partner feeding in the nearby marshes amongst sheep, goat and yak is frequently chased by a shepherd dog; one second-year sub-adult at northern feeder-stream delta at Tsomoriri; two (non-breeding) pairs and one ‘loner’ in the Tso-Kar plains and shuttling to Puga.
- Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* Six birds in Shey marshes – mainly in the fish ponds.
- Common Coot *Fulica atra* Ten birds in Shey marshes – mainly the fish ponds; three birds (7.vi) and two birds (11.vi) in Trisul-Tso; one bird in Yoye-Tso; occasional in northern part of Tsomoriri; 70 birds in Startsapuk-Tso. Compared to earlier year counts I would suggest the summering coot population in Ladakh is increasing.

- Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* Two birds, probably a pair, on a side-canal in the Shey marshes.
- Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* Common at Thadsang Karu Lake and around the Tso-Kar Lakes; about 20 birds on the northern feeder-river delta of Tsomoriri. Males of this latter group were lacking any white on lower forehead or above lore – characteristic of the usual Ladakh breeding form ‘*atrifrons*’, but appeared black from forehead and lore to ear-coverts, i.e. identical to the Tien-Shan / Karakorum breeding form ‘*pamirensis*’. Confirmation of identification (photographed) would indicate a new subspecies for Ladakh, on migration to reach its breeding grounds.
- Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* Two birds at Yoye-Tso; occasional in the Puga plains; rather common in the Tso-Kar plains especially around Startsapuk-Tso.
- Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* One bird at the spring at northern Tso-Kar.
- Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunnicapillus* One over Indus at Chumatang; one bird over river at Upper Sumdo but occasional at Puga; abundant at Thadsang Karu Lake and Tsomoriri, and common over the Tso-Kar lakes and breeding in Startsapuk-Tso.
- Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* One pair on Indus at Shey marshes (29.v, 17.vi); one over Indus at Chumatang; one bird over Yoye-Tso; two records over northern Tsomoriri, and four birds at Startsapuk-Tso.
- Tibetan Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes tibetanus* Daily fly-past of a pair (07:30hrs) and one male drinking at spring at Startsapuk-Tso.
- Blue Rock Pigeon *Columba livia* Common throughout the areas visited in the lower regions of Ladakh to about 3,900m.
- Hill Pigeon *Columba rupestris* Common throughout visited parts of Ladakh up from 3,800m, but mainly above 4,000m.
- Oriental Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* Occasional to common in groves throughout the lower regions of visited parts of Ladakh to about 3,700m, with single sightings up to Rumbak; two fledglings at Hemis Shukpachan.
- Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* One female in hepatic morph in Wanla area; one male (calling) and one female (hepatic morph, also calling) in the Shey-Tikse marshes.
- Eurasian Eagle-Owl *Bubo bubo* An adult with one downy chick in a rock-niche nest in steep rock-wall at Upper Sumdo; one adult in northern rock wall above nomad winter settlement at Puga.
- Little Owl *Athene noctua* One pair breeding in rock-fall at southern end of Startsapuk-Tso, with the male hunting in grassland near the spring and carrying vole-kill up into the rocks. The nest site was found in a changed location due to destruction of their traditional breeding place (Pfister 1999).
- Common Swift *Apus apus* One bird over Shey marshes; two birds over Indus-Rumbak river junction; one bird over Startsapuk-Tso.
- Pacific Swift *Apus pacificus* Two birds over Indus-Rumbak river junction.
- Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops* Quite common around Leh (pairs calling); common in Shey marshes (a pair courting, others carried food); one bird in the Wanla area.
- Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* One bird in the Wanla area, perched in a poplar tree in woodpecker-fashion, calling unceasingly in a repeated (c. 15-noted) fast ‘*piu-piu-piu-piu...*’.
- Hume’s Short-toed Lark *Calandrella acutirostris* Occasional at Yoye-Tso; common around Thadsang Karu lake and Tsomoriri; common in Puga; common (also incubating) in the Tso-Kar plains.
- Eastern Skylark *Alauda gulgula* Occasional (including some singing males) in Hemis Shukpachan; occasional in the Shey-Tikse marshes.
- Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris* Occasional in the upper Rumbak Valley from Rumbak upwards; common towards Kardung-La (South Pulu); common in the Rupchu region including Yoye-Tso, Thadsang Karu lake and Tsomoriri, Puga-Sumdo or Tso-Kar plains (also incubating).
- Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* One bird in the Wanla area.
- Eurasian Crag-Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* Occasional in Rumbak Valley (c. 3,500m); a pair incubating in a small breeding colony (together with Northern House Martin) above Alchi Bridge (3,200m) on 13.vi. The nest was found destroyed two days later (vandalism) and the clutch of four brown-splotched white eggs lay broken underneath, with the birds gone; two birds over Indus 3km after Likche (3,680m); common (breeding) in the Puga-Sumdo area.
- Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica rustica* Two birds over Shey marshes; a pair at Startsapuk-Tso.
- Northern House-Martin *Delichon urbicum* One over Choglamsar; three pairs building nests in a small breeding colony (with Eurasian Crag-Martin) above Alchi Bridge (3,200m) on 13.vi. Two days later the colony was found destroyed (vandalism) and the birds gone; two birds over Indus 9km before Mahe Bridge; common along the north-facing rock wall east of Sumdo (seven pairs in nests / incubating).
- White Wagtail *Motacilla alba alboides* Common above Leh along Leh River and the Shey-Tikse marshes; one bird in Wanla area; quite common around Chumatang.
- White Wagtail *Motacilla alba personata* One bird near Indus along the road c. 3km west of Alchi Bridge.
- Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola calcarata* Common above Leh along Leh River and in the Shey-Tikse marshes; a pair below Yurutse (4,050m); one male, one female at Hemis Shukpachan; quite common in Wanla area; occasional at Yoye-Tso; common in the Puga-Sumdo area; occasional amongst the Tso-Kar plains.
- Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* One pair breeding at water canal in Leh near bazaar; common above Leh town along Leh River; two individuals and a pair along Rumbak River.
- White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* Three birds and two fledging chicks above Leh; two birds along Rumbak River (3,550m); one fledged juvenile along Rumbak River (3,750m); a pair carrying nesting material at upper end of Rumbak gorge (3,850m); a pair constructing a nest at the edge of a small brook below Yurutse (4,050m); two birds along northern feeder river into northern Tsomoriri; a mixed pair (normal ‘*cashmiriensis*’ and rare ‘*sordidus*’) were feeding into their nest pasted into the vertical slope of the brook at Upper Sumdo. One bird, probably a male, with the usual white throat was singing next to the nest-site. The second bird, which brooded often and removed the chick’s faecal sacs, which are typical female-related attributes and females apparently do not sing during the breeding time, had a chocolate-brown breast, that was paler than remaining underparts and mantle area (‘*sordidus*’ morph). This latter bird’s penultimate outer-tail feather and its second outer

- primary feather were white. It collected food often away from the watercourse, in the scree. We further observed sympatric breeding of Brown Dipper and White-throated Dipper in a 300m-long stretch of river at Horzey (3,840m) above Leh. The Brown Dipper with three fledgling chicks and the White-throated with two fledgling chicks mixing / flying freely in their 'common territory'.
- Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii* Three birds and three fledgling chicks above Leh and at Horzey. The sympatric occurrence and breeding of both the Brown Dipper and the White-throated Dipper at Horzey is discussed above under 'White-throated Dipper'.
- Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* One bird at Horzey above Leh.
- Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* Two birds towards Kardung-La, at South Pulu.
- Robin Accentor *Prunella rubeculoides* Occasional in the Rumbak region; common towards Kardung-La, at South Pulu; common at Yoye-Tso, Puga-Sumdo, and occasional at Tso-Kar.
- Brown Accentor *Prunella fulvescens* Occasional in the Rumbak region; one bird towards Kardung-La, at South Pulu; common in the Puga-Sumdo area; a pair above Startsapuk-Tso.
- Blue Rock-Thrush *Monticola solitarius* One male below 3,600m and one near 'plantation' 3,700m in the Rumbak valley; a pair establishing territory above Rumbak (4,100m), the male singing. One singing male at Yurutse (4,400m), and two males / one female in Wanla area.
- Blue Whistling-Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus* One bird along Leh River above town; two birds (one singing) around Zinchan, and two single birds further above, after entrance to Hemis National Park; one bird in Wanla area.
- Tickell's Thrush *Turdus unicolor* A group of three males at Sumdo.
- Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* Rather common above Leh in Buckthorn bushes along Leh River (red-star morph more frequent than white-star); common though much more visible / audible on 17.vi than during first visit in late May (red-star morph more frequent).
- Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* Common around Leh, with a pair breeding in a roadside stone wall next to the hotel; common up Rumbak Valley up to Yurutse, but also Hemis Shukpachan, Wanla area, Puga-Sumdo and occasionally in Tso-Kar plains; most pairs busy feeding into the nest; many males appear in various shades of darker brown-to-black-coloured back, or not uncommonly, breeding males appear in female plumage.
- Guldenstadt's (White-winged) Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogaster* Three pairs at South Pulu towards Kardung-La defending territories; one male collecting / carrying food at Upper Sumdo.
- Blue-fronted Redstart *Phoenicurus frontalis* One male keeping territory in Zinchan grove – a third record for Ladakh only.
- Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* Two breeding pairs carrying food in a barren plateau along the road 3km west of Alchi Bridge.
- Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* One male towards Kardung-La below South Pulu; one male at Yoye-Tso; occasional in Puga-Sumdo including a pair carrying food; quite common in Tso-Kar plains.
- Mountain Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus sindianus* Common to partly abundant (especially in the Shey-Tikse marshes) in the lower tree-set (favouring willow trees) areas up to 3,700m. Rapidly decreasing above that and rarely up to about 3,900m.
- Tickell's Warbler *Phylloscopus affinis* Few birds amongst Caragana above Rumbak; few around Sumdo with a nest in Caragana bush – the incubating bird sitting tight even after my close (1m) approach.
- Olivaceous Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus griseolus* One bird in Zinchan Grove moving along poplar tree-trunk like tree-creeper; one bird at 'plantation' (3,700m) in Rumbak Gorge; occasionally around Rumbak, with a pair carrying nesting material (4,100m); four birds above Yurutse (4,500m) calling in a dry sharp 'duck'; three records in Upper Sumdo.
- Hume's Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia althaea* Common in dry scrub in Shey-Tikse marshes and Wanla area; occasional above Leh town and Hemis Shukpachan.
- Great Tit *Parus major* Common in and around Leh; occasional (some birds seen carrying food) in Shey-Tikse marshes; three and two birds in Rumbak Valley; some few records at Hemis Shukpachan; quite common in Wanla area with a pair feeding into nest located in a willow trunk slit.
- Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* One female in Wanla area; a pair at Shey-Tikse marshes.
- Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach* One bird in Wanla area (singing unceasingly from top of poplar tree, among other calls, imitating Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus* and Eurasian Golden Oriole).
- Grey-backed Shrike *Lanius tephronotus lahulensis* One bird at Chumatang (called frequently).
- Black-billed Magpie *Pica pica* Common around Leh; the Shey-Tikse Marshes; Hemis Shukpachan to Wanla; occasional up Rumbak Valley to Rumbak, or up Indus to Chumatang.
- Hume's Groundpecker *Pseudopodoces humilis* One pair collecting food at southern end of Startsapuk-Tso and carry it far up into southern slope. Another bird collecting food at south-western end of lake and flying up into south-western barren slope.
- Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* Occasional over Leh; some individuals towards Rumbak Gorge and a pair nesting (incubating) in a hole in moraine wall below Rumbak; occasional towards Yurutse (4,500m); common in Hemis Shukpachan; quite common in Wanla area including a pair with two fledged chicks; occasional around Chumatang and common at Tsomoriri.
- Yellow-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus* Three birds towards Kardung-La at South Pulu; occasional at Hemis Shukpachan (mixing with Red-billed Chough around feeding places).
- Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos intermedius* Two birds (probably a pair) at the back dump of circuit house complex (wedged tail exceeding tip of primaries at rest, with rather slim and longish bill).
- Common Raven *Corvus corax* One bird soaring over Leh; two birds at northern end of Tsomoriri; three birds at Tso-Kar and three at Startsapuk-Tso.
- House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* Very common in and around Leh (busy in nest construction), Shey-Tikse marshes, Hemis Shukpachan; common in Rumbak Valley up to Rumbak; abundant around Chumatang, and common around Korzak at Tsomoriri.
- Tibetan Snowfinch *Montifringilla adamsi* In general quite common above 4,000m in central and eastern Ladakh including Rumbak to Yurutse, or the Rupchu region with a pair collecting food at Chumatang and many feeding into their nest or fledged chicks at Tso-Kar.

White-rumped Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda taczanowskii* One bird above the slopes of Thadsang Karu Lake.

Plain-backed Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda blanfordi* Occasional to quite common amongst the sandy slopes of Startsapuk-Tso (feeding into nest or fledged chicks).

Plain Mountain-Finch *Leucosticte nemoricola* Three birds after Rumbak gorge (3,900m) but common around / above Yurutse (to 4,500m); occasional in the Wanla area.

Brandt's Mountain-Finch *Leucosticte brandti* Common towards Kardung-La around South Pulu; common at Yoye-Tso, around Sumdo-Puga, Tsomoriri and Tso-Kar.

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus* Occasional in Shey-Tikse marshes, mainly along willow-scrub near moist areas (on inward migration); occasional around Zinchan but common around Wanla area, and a pair at Sumdo.

Red-mantled Rosefinch *Carpodacus rhodochlamys* One male and five females on barren sandy slope south of the Wanla area.

Streaked Rosefinch *Carpodacus rubicilloides* Common around Rumbak (4,000m) but less so around Yurutse (up to 4,500m); one male, three females at Chumatang; occasional around Puga-Sumdo. The species favours Caragana bushes.

Great Rosefinch *Carpodacus rubicilla* One territorial male towards Kardung-La at South Pulu; four pairs (4km before Likche, 3,650m) towards Chumatang. The species favours dryer boulder strewn slopes.

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris* Encountered mainly above 4,000m. Occasional around Rumbak; common at Yoye-Tso, Puga-Sumdo, Tsomoriri (with fledged chicks), or Tso-Kar plains.

Fire-fronted Serin *Serinus pusillus* Common

at Shey-Tikse marshes – favours blooming willow trees and feeding on its seeds; occasional above Leh town; common in Rumbak Valley, feeding at blooming willow; occasional towards Yurutse (4,500m); common at Hemis Shukpachan (a pair observed: female alone is constructing nest while male followed her on material collection and perched in vicinity singing); common in Wanla area but occasional in Chumatang.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia* Occasional in the Rumbak region, in Hemis Shukpachan and one record in the Wanla area.

Mammals

Nubra Pika *Ochotona nubrica* Common amongst caragana in Upper Sumdo.

Royle's Pika *Ochotona roylei* Few animals in Rumbak gorge; occasional to fairly common (probably this species) amongst caragana above Rumbak; one at Hemis Shukpachan.

Woolly Hare *Lepus oiostolus* One above Rumbak; one at Upper Sumdo and one dead animal south of Startsapuk-Tso.

Himalayan Marmot *Marmota himalayana* Occasional around South Pulu towards Kardung-La; three animals at Saspotse near Hemis Shukpachan; common at Yoye-Tso, Upper Sumdo, Tsomoriri and common at Tso-Kar.

Stoliczka's Mountain Vole *Alticola stoliczkanus* Common at Tsomoriri and the Tso-Kar plains.

Snow Leopard *Uncia uncia* Fresh tracks and two calls (5.vi) in Hussing Nullah Rumbak region.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* One adult with three growing pups in grassland at Startsapuk-Tso.

Mountain Weasel *Mustela altaica* One below Rumbak gorge.

Tibetan Argali *Ovis ammon hodgsoni* A

group of seven above Yurutse; a group of six males on the southern ridge above Startsapuk-Tso; two females in slope at southern end of Startsapuk-Tso.

Ladakh Urial *Ovis vignei* Two females and one 'fresh' lamb in the plains after Lama Guru Sikh temple before Zanskar-Indus junction; two sub-adult males in Wanla area.

Bharal (Blue Sheep) *Pseudois nayaur* A group of 30 (mixed females with yearlings and younger males) just after Rumbak gorge; common above Yurutse; occasional above Rumbak; two females before Likche; a group of 14 juveniles and sub-adults on north-facing rock-wall between Upper Sumdo – Sumdo.

Kiang *Equus kiang* Common (120 animals) in the Tso-Kar plain.

Reptiles

Himalayan Agama *Laudakia himalayana* Occasional around Leh; common towards Hemis Shukpachan and in the Wanla area.

Theobald's Toad-headed Agama *Phrynocephalus theobaldi* Common on arid slopes towards Yoye-Tso (to 4,800m); above Thadsang Karu and around Tso-Kar basin.

Ladakhi Rock Skink *Asymblepharus ladacensis* Occasional amongst boulders or below low bushes in the Rumbak valley up to above Yurutse (4,500m).

One unidentified small Lizard (about 7cm long including tail, dark, blackish dark-grey over back with small pale spots) in rocks, scree at 4,300m in Hussing nullah.

Reference

Pfister, O. 1999. Owls in Ladakh. *O. B. C. Bull.* 29: 22-28.

Pune birds, with special reference to distribution updates

Anand Prasad

Middlewood, Roeburndale West, Lancaster, LA2 9LL, United Kingdom. Email: swamianandprasad@yahoo.com

From 1992-1996 I spent over a thousand hours birding in winter around Pune, mostly near the Mula-Mutha River to the west of Koregaon Park, Sinhadgad and Mahabaleshwar, with single visits to Valvan-Lonavla for three days and single day visits to Ujani (Bhigwan) and Veer. When the recent field guides (Grimmett et. al. 1998;

Kazmierczak 2000) were published I was very impressed by the distribution maps, but noticed a few discrepancies when I compared these with the observations of some Pune-based birdwatchers and my own notes. Many species that were mapped as rare or absent were so common that notes had not been kept, which made me want to

return and gather indisputable evidence in the form of detailed notes and if possible photographs. Most of these discrepancies are also supported by published material, which I collected when researching a paper on the birds of western Maharashtra (Prasad 2003). This winter I had the opportunity of returning for five days' birding (29.i.—