

Increasing intolerance towards Barn Owls (Pande et al. 2005) and Spotted Owlets, is gradually driving them away from human habitation. Utilization of holes in earth cuttings in cliffs, banks or well walls, which are often away from human activity, appears to be an adaptive response to such disturbance.

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Table 1: Nest site preference and nest height in Spotted Owllet

| S. No. | Nest Sites | No. of Nests (n=41) | % | Nest height in meters |
|--------|--|---------------------|------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Tree hollow | 11 | 26.8 | 2.5-8.0 |
| 2 | Occupied residential premises: under roof, holes, niches, etc. | 9 | 21.9 | 4.0-8.5 |
| 3 | Abandoned buildings & ruins: crevices, holes, etc. | 4 | 9.8 | 3.0-8.0 |
| 4 | Earth cuttings: a) In walls of wells b) In earth banks, cliffs | 11 (7) (4) | 26.8 | 1.5-3.0 |
| 5 | Under bridge in constructed wall | 4 | 9.8 | 1.0-6.0 |
| 6 | Well walls with stone masonry | 2 | 4.9 | 3.0-6.0 |

Some interesting bird records from Manali, Himachal Pradesh

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In autumn 1996 I spent one month (15.x-12.xi) birding in Manali, Himachal Pradesh. I returned in the following winter from 10.xi.1997-10.i.1998 and 22.ii-25.iv.1998.

This gave me the opportunity to observe the autumn, spring and altitudinal migration. Some of my observations, which were at that time considered vagrant or rare, have since been accepted as regular winter or passage migrants. However one record of a Gold-naped Finch *Pyrrhoplectes epauletta* stands out as unique.

I had visited camp Lamadukh (3,400 m) to the west of Manali on a couple of occasions and had found it especially interesting as it was at the edge of the tree-line and at that time also the snow-line. The climb up from

Manali is 1,400 m, and steep, which does not leave much time for birding. Consequently I decided to camp up there for three days from 3-6.xi.1996.

On 5.xi.1996 I was exploring the hill above Lamadukh, which is above the tree-line, comprising grassland with scattered bushes. At this particular time the snow-line was at about 3,500 m altitude. At dusk I was descending to camp when I startled a small sparrow-sized passerine from a rhododendron type shrub at about 3,500 m altitude. The bird flew deeper into the bush but was still so close that I had to step back to focus my binoculars. The bird must have felt that it was well hidden and therefore safe and so it allowed me to spend a few

minutes observing it. Although I could not see the whole bird at one time by changing my position I managed to get a good description of the very distinctive features and took notes on the spot and then continued downwards as it was getting late.

The bird was overall a brownish colour, except the crown which was yellowish-green; the mantle and nape were grey; the primaries and tail were blackish; and on the perched bird with closed wings there was one very clear long broad strip of white along the centre of the 'back', created by the broad white inner webs to the tertials. Because of the foliage I did not get a view of the bill. The strong contrast between the ear-coverts and throat shown in the

illustration in Grimmett et al. (1988), was not present, the natural colours being more blended. This bird was a female or juvenile. A call was heard, which was presumed to come from this bird, comprising of a two-note whistle, the first note high, the second lower.

This species has only been recorded once west of Nepal at Simla, H.P. which Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) dispute, but in light of this recent sighting, the old record should be considered valid unless evidence can be provided to the contrary. Manali is about 135 km due north of Simla and so these two records constitute the most westerly records to date.

Other records from Manali, which were considered rare at the time of observation but are now considered regular, include Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* and Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*.

Chaffinch was recorded at about 1,900 m, 3-4 km north of old Manali in or near the apple orchards on 6.xi.1996 (1), 22.xi.1997 (2), 12.xii.1997 (2), on 14.xii.1997 (4) and another was recorded at the outskirts of the Great Himalayan National Park on 26.xii.1997. den Besten (2004) has recorded this species regularly at Kangra and Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) record it as 'casual' in the Himalayas.

Saker Falcon was recorded north of the Forest Rest House (2,700 m), Manali Sanctuary, on 9.xi.1996 and presumably the same individual again on 10.xi.1996. This species has also been recorded twice at Pong Dam, H.P. by den Besten (2004), in Ladakh by Pfister (2004) and also in Nepal (Inskipp & Inskipp 1991; *pers. obs.*). Kangra Valley is about 80 km west of Manali.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* was recorded only once, just above Llamadukh

(3,400 m) on 5.xi.1996 and may indeed be rare in this region although it has now also been recorded at Kangra (den Besten 2004) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) give the wintering range east of Pakistan as 'Himalayas sporadically to Nepal, with reports as far as Bhutan.'

The following additional observations, all from 3-5 km north of old Manali, are either at the edge of their previously recorded range or altitudinal records of interest, although the records of Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* and Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus* concur with the distributions given in Rasmussen & Anderton 2005.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* One in iv.1998 observed at about 2,000 m flying overhead heading north.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* Two on 24.iv.1998 observed at about 2,000 m flying overhead heading north.

European White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* One on 4.iv.1998 observed at about 2,000 m flying overhead heading north.

Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus* Two on 28.iii.1998, one on 9.iii.1998, one on 6.iv.1998, one on 7.iv.1998 and one on 8.iv.1998 all observed at about 2000m flying overhead heading north.

Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius* One on 26.x.96 at about 2,000 m, observed perched and in flight for an hour.

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* One immature on 6.iv.1998 and one on 7.iv.1998 observed at about 2000m flying overhead heading north (incorrectly given as 'Mandi' in BirdLife International 2001).

Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala* Two females / juveniles on 11.iv.1998 at about 2000m, both with an all yellow bill. The range of this species is given as up to 1,525 m (Grimmett et al.

1998, Rasmussen & Anderton 2005).

Small Bee-eater *Merops orientalis* A pair from 12.iv.1998 until at least 25.iv.1998, at about 2000m. Grimmett et al. (1998) give the range in India as up to 1,800 m, Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) up to 1,500 m 'in Himalayas (exceptionally to 2,800 m).' Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* One on 28.iii.1998 at about 2,000m.

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* One on 10.iv.1998, two on 12.iv.1998 and two on 18.iv.1998 all at about 2,000m.

[Spot-winged Rosefinch *Carpodacus rodopeplus*] One female on 23.iv.1998 at about 1,900m. The females of this group are difficult to identify although the diagnostic white tips to the tertials were observed. This would be a westward expansion of its known range and therefore need confirmation.

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Sighting of a Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus* in Rangareddi district, Andhra Pradesh, India

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(With one colour photograph on back cover)

The Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus* is the largest of the Old World vultures. It is a resident in the Himalayas, wintering down to 21°N latitude. It is generally found in northern India (BirdLife International 2001). However, it has been recorded as an occasional vagrant in peninsular India, coming down to Maharashtra (Satara) and Kerala (9°03'-9°30'N) (Ali 1996). BirdLife International (2001) has categorized it as Near Threatened.

It is also listed in Schedule I of The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. CITES lists the Cinereous Vulture in Appendix II "Threatened", a species likely to be moved into the "Endangered" category in the near future (American Zoo and Aquarium Association 1998). It prefers open savannahs and semi desert country. It feeds mainly on carrion and rarely takes live prey, generally preferring disabled individuals. The Cinereous Vulture is not as gregarious

as other vulture species and is usually seen singly or in pairs (American Zoo and Aquarium Association 1998).

On 26.i.2001 (13:30hrs), while I was on my way to Hyderabad from Anantgiri Reserve Forest (where I was monitoring a pair of nesting Bonelli's Eagles *Hieraetus fasciatus*), I saw a Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax* mobbing a huge dark black vulture near the 'Star-chick' poultry farm, located about 3 km from Chevella (Rangareddi