

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

district), to the way to Hyderabad. This big vulture dwarfed the eagle and as they passed over the road they came right above me. Through binoculars, I could see a feathered head and a relatively short neck apart from the huge size and black colour; all these features confirmed that this was indeed a Cinereous Vulture.

I saw the Cinereous Vulture again on 28.i.2001 (16:45hrs), perched on the upper branches of a medium-sized *Ficus* sp., tree in a fallow field next to the Star-chick poultry. It allowed me to approach very close and I was able to get some good photographs. At that proximity, I could clearly see the massive bill and the head covered with down like feathers on the occiput, cheek and lores. This was a juvenile (adults are sooty-brown, juveniles, jet black – hence the name, ‘European Black Vulture’ (American Zoo and Aquarium Association 1998). The reason it stuck around in this area was obvious: the offal dumped by the poultry farm was an attraction not only for the vulture but also for Tawny Eagles. I have seen Tawny Eagles near the poultry farm quite often, squabbling and chasing each

other for scraps of chicken carcasses. On later visits, I noticed that the *Ficus* sp., tree on which the bird was seen had been cut down.

The Cinereous Vulture is a scarce and uncommon winter visitor to south India and sighting one near Chevella was totally unexpected. Other reports of this species from south India include: Karimnagar district, Andhra Pradesh (Choudhury 1990); Nelapattu Wildlife Sanctuary, Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh (Perennou & Santharam 1990); Kerala (Kumar 1991); Coorg district, Karnataka (Subramanya 2001); Mysore, Karnataka (Shivanand 2002).

Based on the above reports, it is possible that the Cinereous Vulture spreads to peninsular and southern India more than we are aware. Birdwatchers from these regions would do well to keep a lookout for this species.

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The Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica* in Mainpuri, Uttar Pradesh, India

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The Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica* is a globally endangered species with a small and declining population due to degradation and shrinkage of preferred grassland habitats (Sankaran 2000). Most records of this species in India are from Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. In Uttar Pradesh, in recent times, the species has been sighted only in Dudwa National Park (Javed & Rahmani 1998), while other records from the state are from the 1880s (BirdLife International 2001). In this note I report a sighting of this species in Mainpuri district, Uttar Pradesh.

During a routine road transect to record large waterbirds in the area bordering Etawah and Mainpuri districts on 15.vi.2005, one male and one female Lesser Floricans were sighted foraging in an uncultivated agriculture field with low grass. The male could be photographed and was in partial moult. The field was previously part of the Kudaiyya wetland but was drained for agriculture by a wasteland reclamation project in 2001 (personal observation). Rainfall during 2004-2005 had been poor and the area was reeling under a dry spell. On

second visit to the area (5.viii.2005) we saw that the field was being cultivated with rice paddy after a good spell of showers in July in August. There was no sign of the floricans. During earlier, regular field visits to the same site and other sites in the two districts, from December 1999 to July 2002, I had never sighted the species.

There is one past record of this species from the area; a male was collected from the neighbouring Etawah district in August 1869 (BirdLife International 2001). The Lesser Florican therefore appears to be an infrequent vagrant to Etawah and Mainpuri districts when conditions are right, occurring in small and scattered populations. Males of this species are known to moult into breeding plumage in June and July (Sankaran & Rahmani 1986). It is likely that the individuals seen in Mainpuri were on their way to breeding grounds.

Acknowledgements

I thank R. Chauhan, E. Ilyashenko, M. Nagendran, and M. Stichov for their company during the sighting. The International Crane

Foundation and the Wildlife Protection Society of India provided facilities that assisted during the two visits and during the writing of the note, and are gratefully acknowledged.

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