the species in the same location on 27 January 2011 and had recorded this as an unconfirmed sighting of a ‘petronia-like’ bird in his diary.

This sighting of Pale Rock Sparrow is intriguing, as its recorded wintering range is western Saudi Arabia, and north-eastern Africa (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005; del Hoyo et al. 2009). However, Swinhoe (1882), and Paludan (1959) have mentioned wintering of the species in Kandhar (Afghanistan). It is possible that birds from the eastern limits of their summer breeding range winter in the Indian Subcontinent, and have probably been overlooked in the past. It is recommended that birdwatchers keep a sharp lookout for the Pale Rock Sparrow to obtain a clear picture of the species’ status and distribution range in the Indian Subcontinent.

References

Fig. 4. Pale Rock Sparrows occasionally flew up into trees.

### Ernst Schäfer’s comprehensive historical bird collection from Sikkim and Tibet at the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin

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Editor’s note: Pale Rock Sparrow *Carpospiza brachydactyla* has also been reported from the Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat, by Jugal Kishore Tiwari, who spotted several birds on 27 January 2012. [Subhas Chandra N. S. in Deccan Herald dated 20 February 2012.]

The bird collection of the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin (ZMB) is, with more than 200,000 items, the largest in Germany. One collecting focus of this international collection is East and Southeast Asia. The ZMB holds extensive collections by Walter Beick [China: Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu, 1926–1932; 859 specimens (Stresemann 1937)]; Gerd Heinrich (Iran, Indonesia, Myanmar, 1927–1938; > 3,500 specimens); Rudolf Mell (China: Guangdon, 1915–1921; ~1,200 specimens); and Hugo Weigold (China: different provinces, 1914–1919; ~1,500 specimens).

Beyond this collecting focus, there are only a few small collections from India. Among the oldest collections from India are those of Wilhelm F. G. Behn (coasts, and Nicobar Islands, 1845/1846), M. Lamare-Piquot (Bengal, 1821–1826), as well as the expedition of Prinz Waldemar von Preußen / Werner Hofmeister (India and the Himalayas, 1844–1846).

However, the largest collection of Indian birds in the ZMB is that of Ernst Schäfer, collected in Sikkim 1938/1939. Ernst Schäfer (1910–1992) was a German zoologist and hunter. He took part in three expeditions to Sikkim, and Tibet and adjacent
provinces in China. The first two expeditions (1931/1932, and 1934–1936) to Tibet and adjacent Chinese provinces were organised by the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia and guided by Brook Dolan (1908–1945). The third expedition (1938/1939) to Sikkim and Tibet was guided by E. Schäfer himself, and is burdened by its support from, and connections with, the political aims of the Third Reich (Haffer et al. 2000; Nowak 2005). While most of the birds collected during the first and second expeditions were integrated into the collections of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (~ 3,000 skins), the entire collection of birds (besides eggs) from the third expedition was sent to the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin (~3,500 skins). Two-thirds of the birds, from all three expeditions, were collected in India (especially Sikkim) in 1938, and in the first half of 1939 (Fig. 1). Due to the separation of the collecting routes of the individual expedition members the avifauna around Gangtok could be sampled throughout an entire year (nearly 1,000 skins).

The collection in Berlin has remained almost unknown due to the political circumstances of the expedition, and the accession time of the collection at the museum, i.e., World War II. Erwin Stresemann, the curator of the ornithological collection that time, was especially interested in the taxonomy of Asian birds. He analysed the birds of the Schäfer expedition, described new subspecies (Stresemann 1939, 1940) for Sikkim, and prepared a manuscript of more than 100 pages about the entire collection. This manuscript was neither completed nor published (Haffer et al. 2000), but the data were cited by Ali (1962) for Sikkim, and Vaurie (1972) for Tibet. The collection of the about 3,500 skins remained stored separately for more than 60 years and it was catalogued to only a very small degree.

Recently the collections of Ernst Schäfer, from Sikkim and Tibet, at the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin, were completely catalogued, labelled, and systematically integrated into the main ornithological collection (Fig. 2). A catalogue was published in Zoosystematics and Evolution (Abs et al. 2010a, b). The catalogue provides detailed information about the species, sex, and age; as well as collecting locality and date of the skins. Species determination and locality names have been updated and geographical coordinates for the localities published for the first time. The specimens, as well as the manuscript of E. Stresemann, are now available for scientific studies in the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin.

References


