

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria* in Gajner, Bikaner district, Rajasthan: a new record for the Thar Desert

Harkirat Singh Sangha

Sangha, H. S., Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria* in Gajner, Bikaner district, Rajasthan: a new record for the Thar Desert. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (6): 171.
Harkirat Singh Sangha, B-27, Gautam Marg, Hanuman Nagar, Jaipur 302021, Rajasthan, India. Email: harkirat.sangha@gmail.com
Manuscript received on 8 May 2011.

On 19 February 2011 while watching waterfowl from Gajner Palace on the embankment of the lake, in Bikaner district, Rajasthan I noticed a bird landing on the embankment just above the water. It was a pleasant surprise to see the unmistakable Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria* foraging on the stone embankment just above the water. I identified the bird immediately, having seen it on many occasions, and at several locations in the Himalayas and their foothills. After 15–20 seconds it flew up and was lost from view.

The Wallcreeper is probably Eremian (of the arid Palaearctic) in origin, found in temperate, boreal, and steppe climatic zones and mountain regions of south Palaearctic. Typical haunts in winter are rock faces, including quarries and sea cliffs, earth and clay banks or cliffs, newly built road cuttings, and buildings such as churches, cathedrals, and ruins (del Hoyo *et al.* 2004).

The species has not been recorded previously from the Thar Desert in western Rajasthan although Kazmierczak (2000) has shown isolated record(s) from Bharatpur in eastern Rajasthan. In recent years the species has been recorded irregularly from three sites in Bharatpur district. Harish Sharma, a local bird guide from Bharatpur and a group of birders saw a Wallcreeper while they were watching Long-billed Vultures *Gyps indicus* on the ramparts of Bayana Fort near Bharatpur on 5 December 2007. A few days later another local guide, Ansar Khan, also saw the bird at the same site. A Wallcreeper was seen foraging in the moat of Bharatpur Fort by Goverdhan, a local bird guide, three–four years ago (Harish Sharma *pers. comm.*). Gajender, bird guide in Bharatpur, saw a Wallcreeper at Ban Baretha near Bharatpur in c. February 2006 (*pers. comm.*).

Although Gajner is approximately 500 km from the Himalayas the sighting is not really exceptional. The species is an altitudinal and, to some extent, a short distance migrant, wintering mainly within the breeding range and adjoining areas. Some individuals, however, move up to several hundred kilometers from their nesting area, and in such cases, may even return to the previous years' wintering site. The species has straggled to England, Channel Islands, north France, north Germany, Portugal, islands in the Mediterranean, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Morocco, and Algeria. Individuals wintering in Morocco would need to complete a journey, presumably from the Pyrenees, of some 960 km. While the sole record for Algeria, at Constantine, may have involved the crossing of 640 km of sea (del Hoyo *et al.* 2004).

A similar pattern of vertical displacement and winter wanderings holds fine for the eastern population of the Wallcreeper in the Indian Subcontinent where it breeds mostly above 3300 m (del Hoyo *et al.* 2004). In winter it commonly reaches the foothills in suitable country and sometimes wanders considerable distances, up to 500 km, in the plains, in the Indian

Subcontinent. It has occurred in, "plains of northern Pakistan in the northern Punjab from Mianwali to Kalabagh on the Indus east through the Salt Range to Faisalabad and Lahore, and in small numbers also to northern Baluchistan (Quetta) the plains of northern India south to Delhi, and to Uttar Pradesh at Fatehpur Sikri, Etawah and Ghazipur, also Rajasthan?" (Harrap & Quinn 1996). It has also been recorded from Meghalaya (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005), and Amritsar (del Hoyo *et al.* 2004). There is an old record from Lyallpur (Aitken 1910). The species has occurred irregularly in Delhi (Ganguli 1975) although there are no recent records.

It is not easy to explain the presence of the species in Gajner, an arid area in the Thar Desert. Nevertheless, the possibility of occasional drift¹ should not be excluded; bearing in mind that the Wallcreeper's mode of flight makes it extremely susceptible to this phenomenon.

Acknowledgement

I thank Harish Sharma, and Gajender, for sharing information about Wallcreeper sightings in Bharatpur.

References

- Aitken, A. B., 1910. The Wall Creeper (*Tichodroma muraria*) in Lyallpur. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 19 (4): 983.
- del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A., & Christie, D. (eds.). 2004. *Handbook of the birds of the world. Volume 9. Cotingas to Pipits and Wagtails.* Vol 9. 1st ed. Pp. 1–863. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions.
- Ganguli, U., 1975. *A guide to the birds of the Delhi area.* Jaiswal, P. L., Lokeshwar, R. R., Jain, M. K., & Mehdi, M. S. (eds.). Pp. i–xv, 1–301. New Delhi: Indian Council of Agricultural Research.
- Harrap, S., 1996. *Tits, nuthatches and treecreepers.* Pp. 1–464. London: Christopher Helm.
- Kazmierczak, K., 2000. *A field guide to the birds of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and the Maldives.* 1st ed. Pp. 1–352. New Delhi: Om Book Service.
- Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2005. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide.* 2 vols. 1st ed. Pp. 1–378, 1–683. Washington, D.C. & Barcelona: Smithsonian Institution & Lynx Edicions.

¹ Drift migration: "a migration forced by adverse climate conditions such as a storm, gale, or hurricane," [Eritzoe *et al.* 2007. *The ornithologist's dictionary.* 290 pp. Lynx Edicions: Barcelona.