



149. Short-tailed Shearwater: captured by fisherman on St. Martin's Island, Bangladesh.

and kindly confirmed after some debate the identification.

David James (*in litt.*) summarised the identification features that narrowed it down to Short-tailed or Christmas Shearwater, and supported identification as Short-tailed but lacked experience of Christmas, we quote:

1. The fusion of the nostrils in a single tube without a medial crease, and with a diagonal (not vertical) termination at the front openings is typical of shearwaters and wrong for *Bulweria*, *Pseudobulweria*, *Pterodroma*, and *Hydrobatidae*.
2. The dark plumage leaves several shearwaters (Short-tailed, Sooty, Heinroths(?), Christmas, Wedge-tailed, and Flesh-footed).
3. The fairly short but delicate and slender bill is typical of Short-tailed (also known as slender-billed) and too gracile for Wedge-tailed and Sooty and Flesh-footed (also the wrong colour for Flesh-footed).
4. Dark pinkish-grey legs and dark nails suits Short-tailed and Sooty (Wedge-tailed has pale nails; Christmas supposedly has uniformly dark grey-black feet; flesh-footed has pale feet).
5. The feet that would clearly trail the rather short tail suit Short-tailed but not Sooty, (Wedge-tailed or Flesh-footed).
6. The dark eye eliminates Heinroths, which has a blue eye.

This left the challenge of determining between Short-tailed and Christmas- Shearwaters (the latter being found in the central Pacific Ocean). There was some debate among experts over these two similar species, but with Short-tailed more likely to show a hooded appearance compared with uniform Christmas. Ultimately Jeff Davies (*in litt.*) made the following analysis: "This is based on a small sample size but four bill profiles of Short-tailed [Shearwater] show the nostril cavity length compared to bill length ratio as 0.62 to 0.65, a selection of three Christmas [Shearwater] on the other hand are 0.70 to 0.74, the Bangladesh bird measures at 0.65. In other words Short-tailed may have a proportionately longer nasal tube than Christmas when

compared to bill length. It may also be steeper/more abrupt at the opening than Christmas." Together with the other features discussed above and plumage and leg-foot colour we consider this is sufficient to confirm this bird as Short-tailed Shearwater.

This is the first record of this species for Bangladesh, no previous confirmed or claimed records having been traced when PMT and EUH compiled the latest national bird list published (Siddiqui *et al.* 2008), and one of only a small number of records from South Asia. Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) included it in the species of South Asia on the basis of only two May specimens from Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and Grimmett *et al.* (2011) relegate it to the appendix of vagrants. However, there have been sight records (summarised in xxx this issue). This record from April is consistent with the May records listed in this summary, coming from the pre-monsoon season—a period when cyclones and storms, quite often, affect the Bangladesh coast. Few people interested in birds visit St. Martin's Island or other coastal waters of Bangladesh during that period, so it is impossible to say if the species might be anything other than a vagrant to Bangladesh.

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Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*: A first record for Ladakh

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The Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*, as its English name suggests, is a bird of rocky terrain, occurring in mountainous and barren regions from the Iberian Peninsula in the west, the Mediterranean region, eastwards across Turkey, Central Asia, Iran, northern Afghanistan to Mongolia and northern China.

Several subspecies are recognised, although separation in the field is very difficult, since the differences are largely due to subtle features of plumage tone, based on examination of museum skins (Clement *et al.* 1993).

In the Indian Subcontinent, Baker (1926) described *P. p.*

intermedia as occurring in Baluchistan, Gilgit, Kashmir, and the North-West Provinces at between 3660 and 5180 m on bare, deserted plains and cliffs, considering it as only a winter visitor to the north-western Himalayas. Ali & Ripley (1987) describe the species as a common winter visitor to Gilgit. Grimmett *et al.* (1998) also cite this, adding that it is occasionally recorded in Baluchistan and the Indus Valley in Pakistan. There do not appear to be any documented records from the Indus Valley in Ladakh.

On 2 March 2003, I was being driven along a road to the south of the Indus River, near Stakna (25 kms east of Leh, c. 3000 m asl). There had been heavy snow during the previous few days, and light snow continued to fall that morning. However, in places the wind had blown the snow to create small patches of bare, snow-free, stony, and sandy ground. These patches attracted small groups of passerines such as Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*, Tibetan Snowfinches *Montifringilla adamsi*, and Brandt's Mountain Finches *Leucosticte brandti*. We stopped the car at 1230 hrs and I got out to watch a male Great Rosefinch *Carpodacus rubicilla* on an area of gently sloping, dry rocky terrain, close to an agricultural station. I immediately noticed two smaller, very stocky birds on the ground, which then flew to the top of a dry-stone wall about 15 m away, affording good views, even though light snow was falling. They were clearly sparrow-like, dumpy, with short tails. What was most striking was the bold head pattern, namely a broad pale crown stripe, bordered on either side by a dull darker brown stripe, with a pale supercilium below that. Both extended in a downward curve behind the ear

coverts. The greyish brown mantle was boldly streaked, whilst the paler under parts were more lightly streaked. In flight the tail appeared distinctly rounded with a striking, bold whitish tip. There was also a white patch at the base of the primaries. No call was heard. I watched the birds for about five minutes.

The combination of the bold head pattern, white-tipped tail and overall stocky build is diagnostic for the Rock Sparrow, which could only possibly be confused with a female House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, which lacks such a striking head pattern. I am familiar with the species in southern Europe and a winter record from Ladakh is not unexpected, given the records from Gilgit.

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The Black-browed Tit *Aegithalos bonvaloti* in Arunachal Pradesh: A new species for the Indian Subcontinent

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On 7 May 2013, at 0721 hrs, while birding at Namti (28°11'N, 97°01'E, 1459 m asl) near Walong, Anjaw district (Arunachal Pradesh, India) we noticed six to seven *Aegithalos* tits in a dry bush along the Walong–Kibithu road. As the tits appeared unfamiliar to us we immediately took their photographs. Within a few seconds they disappeared and were elusive during our subsequent visits to the site. However, on 8 May 2013 at 0557 hrs MS shot another picture of an adult *Aegithalos* tit close to Walong (28°09'25"N, 97°01'13"E; 1428 m asl).

Our first reaction after watching the birds at Namti was that we had seen a new species for the area as the birds resembled none of the *Aegithalos* tits that are known to occur in north-eastern India. After a quick reference to Meyer de Schauensee (1984) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), and comparing pictures of the birds on our camera monitors with plates in these

books, the birds were identified as Black-browed Tit *Aegithalos bonvaloti*. Later, based on the description and plates in del Hoyo *et al.* (2008), and MacKinnon & Phillips (2000) we were able to confidently confirm the identity of the birds. The birds seen by us on 7 May were in a roving group of six to seven birds, restless and persistently calling softly like other tits, and maintaining group cohesion. They seemed uninterested in our presence and did not behave warily. The birds were in a fairly open area covered with fern, and scattered stands of pines [150].

Description

The main diagnostic features of a Black-browed Tit that can be discerned from the three accompanying photos areas following: The bird in [151] is most likely an adult in worn plumage with sides of head and markings on throat dull black, no cinnamon