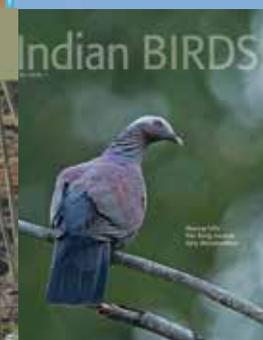
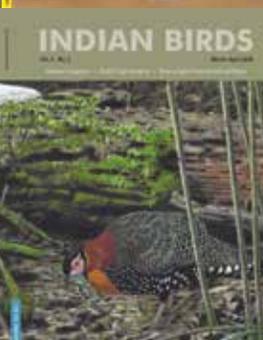
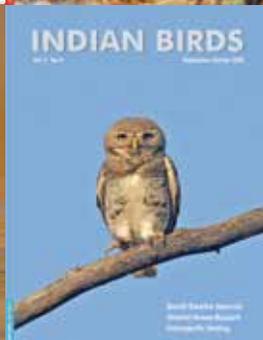
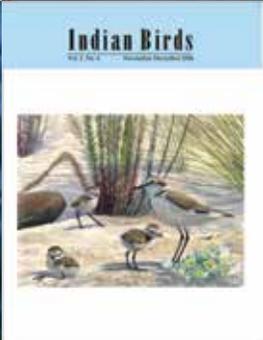
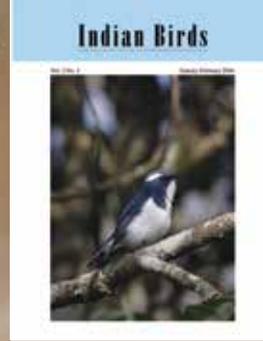
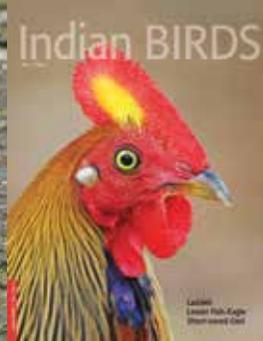
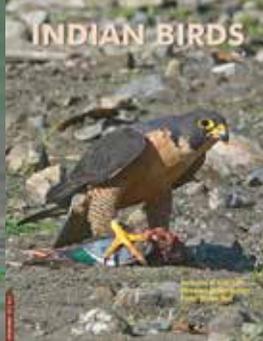
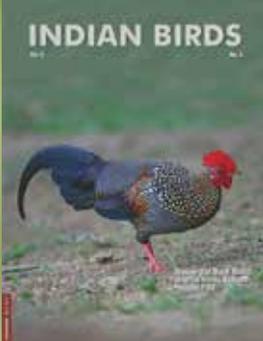
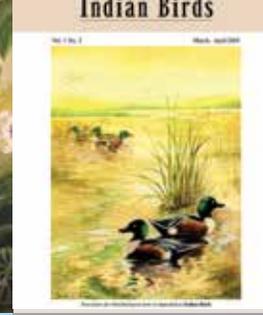
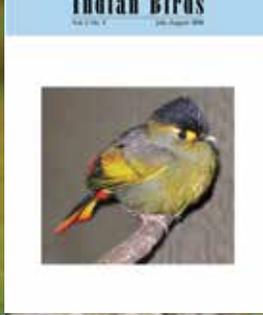
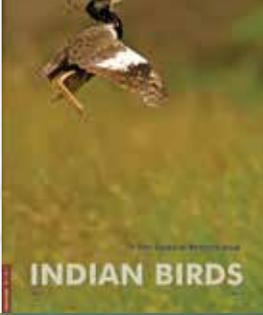




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- To promote awareness of birdwatching amongst the general public.
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Notes on the Great Grey Shrike (Laniidae: *Lanius excubitor*) complex in north-western India: Variation, identification, and status

Prasad Ganpule

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Abstract

Results of a two-year study on the resident Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor lahtora* are presented here. It is shown, based on field study of *lahtora* in Gujarat, and Rajasthan, that there is considerable variation in plumage, and head, and wing patterns, which has not been reported earlier. Separation of *lahtora* from *pallidirostris* is very difficult, and from *aucheri*, and *homeyeri*, not simple. A host of features are required to be studied to separate it. These preliminary observations of *lahtora* show that this taxon is highly variable, and that molecular study is needed to determine the divergence in the Great Grey Shrikes here.

Introduction

The Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor* is a widespread resident in South Asia. It comprises four races of which, *lahtora* is mostly resident; *pallidirostris* is a rare winter migrant to the north-western regions; and *homeyeri*, and *aucheri* are best treated as vagrants (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Though *lahtora* is a widespread breeder in suitable habitats in northern, north-western, and western India, its plumage variations have not been well-described. I present here the results of a two-year study on *lahtora*, in north-western India, and attempt to describe how it could be separated, in the field, from its conspecifics.

Taxonomy

Global taxonomy of the Great Grey Shrike complex is not yet resolved. Different works on South Asian ornithology have treated these four races in various ways (Table 1). However, a recent study, based on the mitochondrial DNA of 18 taxa (Olsson *et al.* 2009), including all four regional forms, has challenged these traditional *excubitor*, and *meridionalis* classifications. The Clades in Olsson *et al.* (2009) are arranged so that Clade A1 contains *lahtora*, and *pallidirostris*; A2, *aucheri*, apart from the

extralimital *buryi*; and A3, *excubitor*, *homeyeri*, and *leucopterus*¹. They discuss three possible taxonomic treatments for this group, together with their respective merits, and demerits. Two of these suggest the lumping of all four regional taxa in Clade A under *L. excubitor*, while the third, treating each Clade as a separate species. The third classification, the most radical among the three, would mean three different species for the Indian Subcontinent: *lahtora*, including *pallidirostris* under one species, with *aucheri*, and *excubitor* (including *homeyeri*) as the other two species. Though Olsson *et al.* (2009) state that phylogenetic pattern is well supported in the study, more data in the future may shed light on new possibilities. This might be the reason for retaining all taxa under *L. excubitor*, using the most parsimonious interpretation of the molecular tree, as followed by Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), and Dickinson & Christidis (2014). However, it must be noted that the Dutch Committee for Avian Systematics (*henceforth* CSNA) has partially accepted this radical taxonomic change by splitting Clade A into two with Clade A1 + A2 taxa grouped as a single species under *lahtora* ['Asian Grey Shrike'] (van den Berg 2015). The Ornithological Society of the Middle East (*henceforth* OSME) retains the existing treatment: *meridionalis* for Clade A1 + A2, while suggesting a likely taxonomic arrangement where each of the clades A1, A2, and A3 are treated as independent species (OSME 2015). In this fluid scenario I follow Dickinson & Christidis (2014), fully aware that this might itself be provisional.

Field identification of the different taxa is complex, and a full range of characters needs to be studied to arrive at any conclusion. The situation is further complicated by the occurrence of intergrades. The known criteria for the identification of typical individuals are given in Lefranc & Worfolk (1997), Harris & Franklin (2000), Ali & Ripley (2001), Yosef & ISWG (2008), and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012). Careful observation of general dorsal colour, head, and wing pattern, ventral colours, and the tail pattern is required to identify these birds.

Methods & observations

Adult Great Grey Shrikes, *henceforth* referred to as *lahtora*, were

Taxon	Table 1. Great Grey Shrike: Taxonomic treatments	
	Ali & Ripley (2001); Rasmussen & Anderton (2012); Dickinson & Christidis (2014)	Kazmierczak (2000); Yosef & ISWG (2008); Panov (2011); Lefranc & Worfolk (1997); Grimmett <i>et al.</i> (2011); Clement <i>et al.</i> (2015)
<i>homeyeri</i>	Great Grey Shrike <i>L. excubitor homeyeri</i>	Great Grey Shrike ¹ <i>L. excubitor homeyeri</i>
<i>aucheri</i>	Great Grey Shrike <i>L. excubitor aucheri</i>	Southern Grey Shrike ² <i>L. meridionalis aucheri</i>
<i>lahtora</i>	Great Grey Shrike <i>L. excubitor lahtora</i>	Southern Grey Shrike <i>L. meridionalis lahtora</i>
<i>pallidirostris</i>	Great Grey Shrike <i>L. excubitor pallidirostris</i>	Southern Grey Shrike <i>L. meridionalis pallidirostris</i>

¹ Clement *et al.* (2015) gives Northern Shrike as the English name for *homeyeri*.

² Grimmett *et al.* (2011) does not cover *aucheri*

¹ Most taxonomies, including Dickinson & Christidis (2014), synonymise *leucopterus* with *homeyeri*

studied in Gujarat, and Rajasthan for two years, from February 2013 to February 2015. *Lahtora* occurs in good numbers in the following areas. Gujarat: The Little Rann of Kachchh (LRK), the Banni, and Naliya areas in the Greater Rann of Kachchh (GRK), parts of Saurashtra; Rajasthan: Desert National Park (DNP), and Tal Chappar. Adult *lahtora* were photographed, their wing pattern, while they were flying, noted, and dorsal, and ventral colour, and head pattern observed in detail. To study the wing, and tail patterns in detail, good photographs are essential, and it is difficult to photograph these birds in flight. Hence, photographs were collected from other birdwatchers from different areas, mainly from Rajasthan and from Maharashtra. Photographs posted on various Internet websites (www.orientalbirdimages.org; www.indianaturewatch.net; www.ibc.lynxeds.com) were also studied in detail. Though a study of photographs cannot be compared to an actual field study, it is still essential for studying wing-, and tail details, and to gain a general idea regarding individuals found in different areas. Some of the observations from the western part of LRK may be of the same individuals, as two–three different birds were seen in the same area, over a period of four months.

Only adult birds were considered for this study. Sexual dimorphism in adult *lahtora* is minimal (adult females have a finer facial mask on the forehead, and brownish upper parts), but I have not attempted to sex individuals. I have not studied museum skins, and the results presented here are based on personal field observations (Table 2), and photographs of more than 50 individuals, apart from studying a large number of photographs taken by other people. Descriptions of plumage variations are supplemented with relevant photographs, and illustrations.

Table 2. Author's observations of Great Grey Shrikes

Locality	State*	No. of birds	Date
GRK	GJ	05	February 2013
GRK	GJ	08	November 2014
GRK	GJ	04	December 2014
GRK	GJ	02	February 2015
LRK	GJ	03	March 2013
LRK	GJ	02	April 2013
LRK	GJ	01	October 2013
LRK	GJ	02	December 2013
LRK	GJ	02	March 2014
LRK	GJ	02	October 2014
LRK	GJ	03	November 2014
LRK	GJ	06	December 2014
LRK	GJ	06	January 2015
LRK	GJ	01	February 2015
DNP	RJ	15	February 2014
Dwarka, Jamnagar	GJ	02	September 2014
Dwarka, Jamnagar	GJ	02	January 2015
Morbi area, Rajkot	GJ	01	September 2014
Morbi area, Rajkot	GJ	01	January 2015

*GJ=Gujarat; RJ=Rajasthan

Results

Plumage: Dorsal colours vary from pale whitish-grey, to a dark smoky-grey. Plumage tones ranging between pale, and dark grey are more common. The rump is slightly paler than the mantle in all birds. Most adults show white scapulars. Underparts are pure white, but a few birds ($n < 5$), showed a faint greyish / buffish wash. Often, *lahtora* roosts / perches with its wing, and mantle feathers raised, thus obscuring the mantle colour and wings, making it difficult to judge plumage colours and patterns. [1–1A].



1 November 2014, Greater Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat. Note raised feathers obscuring the mantle and wings. Many times Indian Grey Shrikes have a habit of roosting/sitting like this, making it difficult to see the mantle colour and wing details.



1A November 2014, Greater Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat. Same bird as in 1. Now note how the mantle and wings are clearly seen, and mantle is darker greyish.

In general, birds ($n=15$) seen in DNP [2, 2A, 3] were pale greyish, with a paler rump. In Gujarat, they ($n>25$) varied from pale grey to dark smoky-grey.



2. February 2014. Desert National Park, Rajasthan. Very pale plumage, finer mask and extensive white in wings. Note large primary patch and white secondaries.



2A. February 2014. Desert National Park, Rajasthan. Same individual as above in flight. Note the extensive white on the upperwings, showing wing pattern as illustrated in Fig. 4



3. February 2014. Desert National Park, Rajasthan. Note the extensive white in the primaries and secondaries. Also primary projection looks much longer (more than 100%) than generally seen in *lahtora*. Pale plumage and narrower face mask.

Photos: Prasad Ganpule

Face pattern, and bill: Facial masks vary. Two extreme face patterns are illustrated here. The palest birds, with pale, greyish-white heads (Fig 1), show a facial mask that passes over the lores, eyes, and behind the eyes, ending at the ear coverts. The black on the lores, and forehead is restricted. The darkest birds, with a dark smoky-grey head, and mantle (Fig. 2), could show a very prominent black facial mask, almost like that of a Lesser Grey Shrike *L. minor* [4], with a wider-than-normal facial mask on the forehead, lores, and through the eye, extending down towards the neck. Such dark, smoky-grey plumaged birds can be seen in Rajasthan [5], and also in Gujarat. Most birds show a facial pattern that is between these two extremes. Though posture, and how position of neck (whether stretched, or not) may affect the extent of black seen behind, and above the eye, it is apparent that this is variable, with some birds showing a wider facial mask. This feature can be judged by the width of the black band over the bill (forehead), and above the eyes, when good views are obtained. Though rare, this is especially noticeable in some individuals that sport a wider facial mask. There is a faint white supercilium present on many birds, which, even if present, is not noticeable unless closely observed. The bill is heavy and black in all adult birds.



Fig. 1. Shrike head, pale.



Fig. 2. Shrike head, dark.

Art: Prasad Ganpule



4. November 2014. Greater Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat. Note very wide and extensive mask extending well above the eye, darker grayish plumage, and much white in secondaries.

Photo: R.S.Tomar



5. October 2014, Kota, Rajasthan. Note the dark smoky grey plumage, faint supercilium above eye and amount of white in wings. This bird is in moult, with outer tail feathers still growing.

Wings: The upper-wing pattern, when seen in flight, is considered important for identification, and special attention was paid to it, and whenever possible, it was photographed. Shrikes sometimes hold the inner wing semi-closed in flight, which makes it difficult to observe the pattern on the secondaries, and only a black patch is visible. But as far as possible, I tried to observe the fully stretched upper-wing in detail. I noted three types of wing patterns on *lahtora* (Figs. 3–5²):



Fig. 3. Wing pattern of Great Grey Shrike—type 'a'.

Art: Prasad Ganpule



Fig. 4. Wing pattern of Great Grey Shrike—type 'b'.

2. Note that in all wing illustrations, the mantle, and scapulars are not illustrated; they may vary, with scapulars showing different amount of white, and mantle colour also may vary. Only the wings are illustrated, mainly to show the pattern on the primaries and the secondaries, which is a critical feature for identification.



Fig. 5. Wing pattern of Great Grey Shrike—type 'c'.

- a) The most common pattern (type 'a'; Fig. 3) is where wings are black, with a white patch on the primaries. The first (innermost) primary 'p1', mainly, is wholly white, but this is variable. The secondaries have white outer webs, with the first secondary (s1) extensively black, and showing a little bit of white, thus creating a 'step' between the white on the primaries and the secondaries. If the first primary (p1) is wholly white, then this 'step' looks more prominent. The other secondaries are whiter, with less black [6].



Photo: Swadeepsinh Jadhava

6. December 2010. Jamnagar, Gujarat. Note wing pattern. This is the typical type of wing pattern shown by majority of *lahtora* here, as shown in Fig 3. Primary patch is small, (s1) is extensively black and creates a 'step'.

- b) The pattern (type 'b') shown in Fig. 4 was noted mainly in the birds seen in the DNP, wherein the white primary patch is more extensive and wider, and the secondaries also show extensive white, thus creating a large, continuous white band. The primary patch reaches till the tips of 'p1', which is wholly white in many birds. This wing pattern is also seen on birds in other desert areas in Rajasthan. In such birds, 's1' shows minimal black, as a result of which the 'step', shown in Fig 3, is much reduced, and other secondary feathers show more white. The overall effect is of extensive white in the wings.
- c) In the rarer (n=3), third type of pattern (type 'c'; Fig. 5), the white primary patch is smaller, and the secondaries are extensively black. The outer webs show very little white, but the distal ends are white. In this pattern, the wings look more blackish, with the secondaries being blackish at their base. The white on the secondaries is only seen when the wing is fully stretched.

The closed wings are black with a small white primary patch visible, which is present at the base of outer primaries. The secondaries show extensive white tips on closed wings in most birds, with a secondary patch sometimes visible. Birds moulting from juvenile into adult plumage show a mix of juvenile and adult feathers in the secondaries [7].



Photo: Klaus Malling Olsen

7. February 2006. Rajasthan. Note wing pattern. The secondaries (s1-s4) are juvenile and brownish in colour, while remaining secondaries are black. A typical *2cy lahtora*, with the wings moulting.

Tail: The spread tail is very difficult to observe when in flight but it was observed for a few individuals ($n < 5$). The outermost tail feather (t6) is wholly white except for a small black line/patch on the rachis. The next feather (t5) is also predominantly white, though the black on the rachis is slightly more extensive. However 't6' and 't5' usually show some amount of black on the rachis. The central tail feathers are wholly black.

Identification & status

Features of *lahtora* are described above. However, separation of *lahtora* from *pallidirostris*, *homeyeri*, and *aucheri* is difficult, and good views are required to separate them. While there has been much research on field identification of *pallidirostris* from the grey shrikes occurring in Europe, field identification with respect to *lahtora* is not very well understood. Hence, details for separating *lahtora* from *pallidirostris*, *homeyeri*, *aucheri*, and *minor* are given below. These are mainly based upon work by Lefranc & Worfolk (1997), Ali & Ripley (2001), Yosef & ISWG (2008), van Duivendijk (2011), and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), and are supplemented by my observations of *lahtora*, and *pallidirostris* over the past few years. There are minor differences in the criteria for identification in the works mentioned above, but I have collated these below; all descriptions pertain to adult birds.

Lanius excubitor pallidirostris

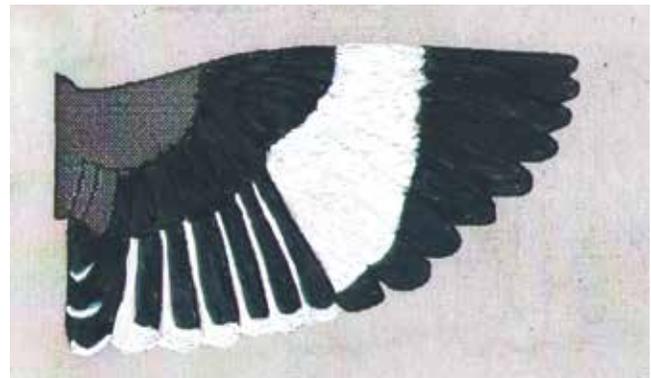
In general, pale greyish / whitish (pallid). The bill is usually pale, and the black facial mask restricted till the eye. The lores are pale, or at most greyish, and not prominent, but can be narrowly black in some adults (males?). The primary patch is wide (reaching to the tips of inner primaries), and prominent in flight, while the primary projection is much longer than in *lahtora* (about 80% of tertials), with five–seven primaries extending beyond the tertials. The upper-wing pattern is also very similar to that of *lahtora*, but with much more black in the secondaries. This could be variable as a few individuals (in the UAE, and presumed

to be *pallidirostris*) show quite obvious white edges on the secondaries, which can give the effect of extensive white across the whole inner wing when the bird is in flight [8]—but this is uncommon (Oscar Campbell, *in litt.*, e-mail dated 01 December 2015). However, the inner edges of the secondaries are white, which is seen when the wings are fully stretched. Wing pattern of *pallidirostris* is illustrated in Fig. 6. The under parts, usually, have a pinkish wash. The two outer rectrices are usually white. Adult birds are usually pale-billed in autumn but may have black bills in spring / summer. Typical birds are fairly easy to identify if these features are present.



Photo: Nick Moran

8. December 2008. Lulu Island, Abu Dhabi, UAE. Note wing pattern, with significant amount of white in the secondaries. This pattern of more white on the secondaries is rare in *pallidirostris*, but such individuals have been noted in the UAE.



Art: Prasad Ganpule

Fig. 6. Wing pattern of Great Grey Shrike *L. e. pallidirostris*.

Tenovuo & Varrela (1998) show only a small white patch on primaries, but do not show any white on secondaries; van Duivendijk (2011) too states that it has no white on the secondaries, which seems erroneous. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) state that it has 'little white in wing', and that is how it is even in Ali & Ripley (2001). As explained above, the primary patch is wide, the inner edges of the secondaries are also white, and are seen when the wings are fully stretched [9]. Why some individuals show more white across the secondaries, needs detailed study.

While the authorities cited above cover most identification details, of particular interest are some adult *pallidirostris*, which are surprisingly similar to *lahtora*. Adult *pallidirostris* show dark lores, and dark bills. Such birds have been noted in the western, and eastern part of their range. Tenovuo & Varrela (1998), quoting Cramp & Simmons (1993), state that half of the 30-odd *pallidirostris* skins in the Natural History Museum, UK, have dark lores. In photos of four museum specimens of *pallidirostris* from Sweden, there is a specimen with dark lores, and a dark bill (Cederroth 2009). Adult birds in summer are said to have a black bill, and lores, and probably first summer birds do too (van Duivendijk 2011). Such individuals are seen mainly in spring in

the UAE, and it is not known if they also occur there in winter. However, not all spring *pallidirostris* show dark lores, but there are some that do (please see images on the website <https://www.smugmug.com/gallery/n-xTxNK/> for such birds from the UAE). Most individuals seen in India, in winter, are pale-billed, but some may show dark lores [10]. These types of dark-billed, and dark-lored individuals are not illustrated either in Grimm et al. (2011), or in Rasmussen & Anderton (2012). Photos of such birds from Bahrain, and Mongolia are given here [9, 11, 12], and are also posted on many birding websites, especially those originating from Kazakhstan. Thus it is quite possible that such birds may occur in north-western India as migrants. In such cases, separation from *lahtora* is tough, and based mostly on the longer primary projection, the larger white primary patch, and the pinkish wash to the under parts (if present). Care has to be taken in separating such individuals from *lahtora*, and some birds may not be safely separable in the field without detailed views of their primary projection, and wing pattern. As seen from Fig. 6, even its wing pattern is somewhat similar to wing pattern of *lahtora* (compare with Fig. 3), and it would be truly difficult to separate such individuals with certainty. This aspect of identification of *pallidirostris* from *lahtora* has been largely ignored in the reference texts with respect to India and needs further study.



Photo: Antero Lindholm

9. March 2000. Bahrain. Same bird as in Image 11. Note wing pattern, and its similarity to *lahtora*, but wider primary patch and less white on secondaries.



Photo: Jaysukh Parekh

10. January 2014. Greater Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat. Note the white supercilium above the black mask in front of eye meeting over the bill, which is very unlike *lahtora*. Note paler bill and lores, wide primary patch like *pallidirostris* but primary projection looks much shorter than usually seen. Since wing and tail pattern was not noted, this individual is best kept unidentified, but is probably an adult *pallidirostris*, in spite of the unusually short primary projection.



Photo: Antero Lindholm

11. March 2000. Bahrain. Note the dark lores and bill. These types of birds are extremely similar to *lahtora* but note the long primary projection and wider primary patch, smaller bill.



Photo: Hannu Hatonen

12. April 2014. Gobi Desert, Mongolia. Note dark lores, black bill (a feature seen in summer?). Note extreme similarity to *lahtora*. If such birds winter in India, it would be difficult to identify them or would be overlooked as *lahtora*. But note lack of mask on forehead, longer primary projection, wider primary patch, supercilium behind eye and larger white scapulars. This individual has a broader mask than normal.

Status: *Pallidirostris* ranges from Central Asia from NW Caspian Sea (extreme S Russia) and South Kazakhstan east to Mongolia and north China and, in west, south to NE Iran, Afghanistan, north Pakistan and western foothills of Tien Shan Mountains; some populations are migratory and they winter in northern Africa and in small numbers in Arabia (Yosef & ISWG 2008). It is said to straggle to India (Lefranc & Worfolk 1997), while Harris & Franklin (2000) note that it rarely migrates to NW India. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) state it is seen 'more widely in the north-west in winter'.

There is an isolated record from eastern Rajasthan (Grimmett et al. 2011). It has been recorded in GRK, and in LRK in Gujarat. I have observed at least five individuals during the winters of 2013, and 2014 in LRK [13]. In GRK it is rare, but is regularly seen, and photographed (<http://orientalbirdimages.org>; Jugal Tiwari, verbally). It could be a regular winter migrant to north-western India, and further surveys are needed to know its status here. Birds with dark lores, and dark bills could easily be overlooked among *lahtora* seen here, and special attention should be given when identifying *lahtora* / *pallidirostris* in the arid-, and desert areas of north-western India in winter.

Photo: Prasad Ganpule



13. January 2015. Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat. Note the pale bill and lores, with a hint of pale supercilium behind eye. The underparts are distinctly washed with pink, which is noticeable in the field also. Long primary projection. Pale grey upperparts. This bird is typical of *pallidirostris* seen here.

Lanius excubitor homeyeri

Has pale grey upper parts, and white under parts. Usually, a narrow white supercilium is present. Mask is narrow. Rump is pale / white. The upper-wing pattern is different, and shows much white in wing. The basal half of secondaries is white and connected to the primary patch, creating a white wing panel on the entire upper-wing. Though the size of this patch may vary, the white bases to the secondaries are distinctive, and the white wing panel is diagnostic and important for identification (Fig. 7). The tail also shows much white, with two outer tail feathers being completely white, and the central tail feathers having a white base.

Art: Prasad Ganpule



Fig. 7. Wing pattern of Great Grey Shrike *L. e. homeyeri*.

Though it is unlikely to be confused with *lahtora*, some pale *lahtora* may be similar to *homeyeri*. In such cases, the different face-, and wing- patterns separate the two. The main confusion here is its similarity to *pallidirostris*. So the different wing pattern, supercilium above the black facial mask, etc., are useful in separating the two.

Status: It breeds in Southeast Europe (East Balkans, Bulgaria, South Romania, from Ukraine, East to foothills of Southern Urals), and Southwest Siberia (East to North foothills of Altai, including Naryn region); non-breeding to Southwest & Central Asia (Yosef & ISWG 2008). Birds of the race *homeyeri* are said to go as far south as northern Iran and up to the Pamir foothills in winter

(Lefranc & Worfolk 1997).

Homeyeri is a vagrant to India, with a record from Kashmir (Ali & Ripley 2001). Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) report it as a very rare straggler. Ali & Ripley (2001) discuss specimens from Quetta, and Gilgit (Pakistan), and Avantipur near Srinagar (India), with the comment that the birds from Gilgit were 'possibly quite correctly' identified as *homeyeri* despite it being treated as *leucopterus* (a synonym of *homeyeri*) by Charles Vaurie. Srinagar birds' identification is not discussed but it is attributed to Frank Ludlow. It is possible that *homeyeri* is overlooked, and detailed scrutiny of all grey shrikes is required to learn more about its status here; it could occur as a vagrant in areas in extreme northern India.

Lanius excubitor aucheri

Has uniform grey upper parts that do not get paler on the rump. Facial mask narrower, but head pattern similar to *lahtora*. Under parts have a distinct greyish wash. The upper-wing has a white primary patch, and almost no white on the secondaries; some birds have dark brownish secondaries. The wing pattern is said to be variable (Ali & Ripley 2001). It generally has much less white in wings and tail than do *lahtora*, *homeyeri*, or *pallidirostris* (Fig. 8). I have shown the inner edges of the secondaries white, but these may be fainter, or even black. Ali & Ripley (2001) state 'inner edge of inner web of secondaries usually white, rest brown but this is rather variable'. But generally there is almost no white on the secondaries, with the secondaries either black, or dark brownish. The outermost rectrice (t6) is mostly white with black on base / rachis, while the next feather (t5) is mainly black with a white tip, which differs from the other taxa discussed here.



Fig. 8. Wing pattern of Great Grey Shrike *L. e. aucheri*.

It is similar to *lahtora* and care is needed to separate it. Lefranc & Worfolk (1997) note that *aucheri* may intergrade with *lahtora* in western Pakistan. It is possible that such birds may occur in India, and good views / photographs are needed to identify it to sub-specific level. However, the greyish wash to the under parts is usually obvious on all adults, and the different wing pattern would separate it from *lahtora*. The wings, and tail, if seen well, would show much less white than *lahtora*, and along with the greyish under parts would be the best features for identification.

Status: It ranges from Central-eastern Sudan (south from Port Sudan), Eritrea, North Ethiopia, North-western Somalia, Iraq, Southern Iran, Syria, Southeastern Israel, Southeastern Sinai Peninsula, West Arabian Peninsula and Oman (Yosef & ISWG 2008).

Aucheri is a vagrant to the Indian Subcontinent, with a

Photo: Klaus Malling Olsen



14. February 2006. Desert National Park, Rajasthan. Note the grey upperparts and rump, grayish wash to the underparts, especially flanks, which is like *aucheri*. But note face pattern, which is similar to *lahtora* and unlike *aucheri*. An *aucheri* or a probable *lahtora-aucheri* intergrade? This individual is very different from the birds generally seen in the area.

specimen collected from Bhawalpur, Punjab, in Pakistan (Abdulali 1977). It has not been recorded in India but careful observations of grey shrikes in north-western India may get results. A probable *aucheri*, or an intergrade, has been photographed in the Desert National Park, Rajasthan [14], and a specimen is discussed by Abdulali (1977), which is similar to *lahtora*, except for a greyish wash to the under parts. Hence intergrades may occur here and more observations are required.

Lanius minor

Distinctive. Mainly males have extensive black on the forehead. Under parts are pink, or washed with pink, in males, and are less pink in females. Wing pattern is also different, with white primary patch, and all-black secondaries with white tips. Primary projection is long, and is diagnostic for identification. The tail is short and square. Females are similar, but with a fainter wash on under parts, and with brown mixed on forehead.

Adult *L. minor* is distinctive, different from *lahtora*, and is fairly easy to identify in the field—unlikely to be confused with *pallidirostris*, *homeyeri*, or *aucheri*. The long primary projection, rather short tail, and the different shape in flight contribute to its distinctiveness.

Status: It breeds from Europe to Central Asia, and winters in sub-Saharan Africa (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It is a vagrant to India, with two records from Ladakh (Delany *et al.* 2014) being the first for the country.

Discussion

The distribution range of *lahtora* extends from Pakistan eastwards till Bihar, and from the Himalayan foothills in the north till about southern Karnataka. This is a large area with varied habitat, and hence some variation in *lahtora*, due to geographical factors, is to be expected. Yet a majority of the birds seen here are lighter than those illustrated in Lefranc & Worfolk (1997), Grimmett *et al.* (2011), and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012)—all showing *lahtora* with darker smoky grey plumage. These authorities do not describe any variation for *lahtora*.

Abdulali (1977) stated, 'There is some variation in the shades of grey on the upperparts but this appears to be individual', and described a specimen from Jalandhar [=Jullunder], Punjab as the palest. Also, some birds look darker during the monsoon (their breeding season). This could be due to their fresh plumage. In

winter, though some individuals retain this dark plumage, most birds do not look dark, but pale grey. Whether this is age-related, or due to some other factors, is not known, but plumage is variable. The palest birds were observed in DNP, Rajasthan, and sometimes in LRK, Gujarat [15], while the dark birds were seen in many areas in Saurashtra, Gujarat. This occurrence is random as many times birds with variable plumage / face pattern could be seen in the same area, e.g., in GRK, it is possible to see, in a single day, birds with pale, as well as dark plumages. Certainly *lahtora* is not always dark smoky-grey as illustrated; most birds are pale grey, or even whitish grey.



Photo: Prasad Ganpule

15. December 2013. Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat. Note pale grey plumage, face pattern and long tail. Small primary patch and white secondary tips. This individual was very large in size.

The difference in wing pattern has not been described in the reference texts. They give unsatisfactory descriptions: Ali & Ripley (2001) state, 'wings black with pure white patch or "mirror" which flashes conspicuously in flight'; Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), 'black wing with large white carpal patch and edges on secondaries'; Lefranc & Worfolk (1997) 'outer web of secondaries with much white, inner webs wholly white'. Grimmett *et al.* (1998) describe the wings in some detail, 'has extensive white patch at base of primaries and, with inner webs of secondaries and tips of outer webs also largely white, shows much white in wing at rest and in flight', but do not describe any variation.

For tail pattern, though outer pair of rectrices are extensively white, there is some black present on the rachis, which is more noticeable on the second feather (t5). This is contra Lefranc & Worfolk (1997), who state that the outer pair of rectrices is wholly white in *lahtora*. Panov (2011: Fig. 1.7a) illustrates a museum specimen of *lahtora*, similar to [16].

In addition to other identification characteristics, the upper-wing pattern in the grey shrike complex is considered to be critical for identification; especially for separating similar looking *pallidirostris* and *homeyeri*, and *lahtora* and *aucheri*. Hence this variation in wing pattern observed in *lahtora* needs to be studied further, possibly with a wide-array of museum skins.

Birds seen in the DNP, Rajasthan have consistently paler plumage, narrower facial mask, more white in the wings, and longer primary projection than birds seen elsewhere. These characteristics are far too consistent to be attributed to individual

variations. This may be due to environmental factors. However, this variation does not seem clinal as birds with pale, as well as dark, plumage, and with variable facial masks were observed in Gujarat. But it is apparent that the birds seen in the DNP area are consistently different from *lahtora* seen elsewhere, and may represent a gradual cline, with paler birds occurring in the extreme west. Individual variation alone cannot explain the different wing patterns observed in the birds. It is possible that after further study, this variation might be formally recognised, as it is diagnostically different. The birds seen in the DNP area in Rajasthan certainly deserve further morphological, and molecular study.



Photo: Tom Lindroos

16. January 2013. Ranthambhor, Rajasthan. A stunning flight image. Note pale plumage, wing pattern and tail pattern. This bird shows a wing pattern, which is a little different from that illustrated in Fig. 3, with slightly more white in the inner secondaries.

There is still a lot to understand about the grey shrike complex in the Indian Subcontinent. For example, birds occurring in the area where the ranges of *aucheri*, *pallidirostris*, and *lahtora* overlap are populations in which intergrades occur (Fig. 3; Panov & Bannikova 2010). The areas where the potential overlap of these subspecies occurs is close to the Indian Subcontinent, and hence intergrades from these areas could occur as winter migrants in north-western India, especially in Rajasthan. It is further possible that *lahtora* is a local migrant, dispersing short distances in winter, towards western Pakistan, and further west, to south-eastern Iran (OSME 2014).

It is possible that in the extreme eastern, and southern part of its range, *lahtora* may show some variation from what is described here. I have seen images of *lahtora* from Karnataka, Maharashtra, and northern India carefully, but I could not find any major differences in them. But this is difficult to ascertain from photographs. A study of individuals in the field, and museum skins from these areas, are required for a comprehensive analysis. I have not studied if the vocalisations of different *lahtora* populations vary. This aspect has probably not been studied earlier, and a detailed study of calls and songs of birds from different areas will be helpful in understanding if there are any differences.

It is not known if adult *pallidirostris* with dark lores, and black bill occur regularly in north-western India; birdwatchers should look out for them. If sightings of *aucheri* and *homeyeri* are documented in the future, then their status in India will have to

be revisited.

Molecular studies on the grey shrike complex, though done in Europe, have not been carried out on a large scale in India. DNA analysis done on specimens from different areas / regions in India will be helpful in understanding if there is any divergence in the populations here. A special study should be carried out on the population of *lahtora* in DNP area in Rajasthan, with an emphasis on breeding pairs to study their morphology, vocalizations, and DNA, as these birds are different from *lahtora* found in other areas.

Finally a note of caution: though *lahtora* is still regularly seen in some places in Gujarat and Rajasthan, e.g., GRK and DNP, it seems that its population is decreasing. Ali (1955) noted it as 'common' in Gujarat. However during my study, it was not at all commonly seen in the Saurashtra region, even in areas of suitable habitat. In areas where it is resident in Gujarat, only three to four individuals could be seen in a whole day. This decrease in population has been reported earlier (Khacher 1996). It is not persecuted, but its habitat may be shrinking due to human pressures, making an impact on food availability, and it is possible that it may be declining further. A population estimation of Great Grey Shrike is needed so that an idea regarding its current status can be obtained, and a plan for its conservation can be worked out if a marked population decrease is seen.

Conclusion

The Great Grey Shrike complex in India represents a challenge in identification and taxonomy that requires detailed morphological and molecular study. From this preliminary study, it is evident that there is considerable variation in its general plumage, face pattern, and wing colouration of the resident Great Grey Shrike of the north-western India. This needs to be taken into account while identifying this bird vis-à-vis the three other migrant / vagrant races. Systematic genetic sampling across the range of *lahtora* might throw up interesting results that may explain some of these observed plumage patterns.

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Early Indian bird collectors: Jean Macé, collector during 1798–1803

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While researching the exploits of the Baudin Expedition (1800–1804), captained by Nicolas Baudin, to Australia, Timor, Mauritius, Tenerife, and South Africa (1800–1804), and the history of the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris, France (hereafter MNHN), I noticed the name of Jean Macé (Jansen 2014, 2015), who donated a number of birds from 'Bengale' [=Bengal] to the expedition. He had, earlier, also donated another batch of specimens to the MNHN. I here present my notes on the specimens, and a literature research, on Macé, and his collections.

Macé was elected as a member of the Society of the Histoire Naturelle in Paris, in 1790, and was asked to collect specimens, in foreign countries, by its board. Educated as doctor, Dr Jean Macé MD departed from The Netherlands, on board a vessel to Cape Town (South Africa) in 1789, and remained there up to 1792 (Anon. 1848: 81–83). He visited inland locations, including the Hottentots, made notes, and collected items of natural history. He then proceeded to Mauritius where he remained until 1798 (Millin *et al.* 1795). By 03 December 1793 he had accumulated a collection of 22 bird-species, including species of flamingo *Phoenicopterus*, tropicbird *Phaeton*, and others (La Bibliothèque centrale du Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris, France, letter 03 December 1793, dossier 52). His plans to visit Sri Lanka did

not materialise, due to war, and it is unknown whether he visited Madagascar as initially planned (Millin *et al.* 1795). In 1798 he was at Tranquebar (Tharangambadi; 11.03°N, 79.85°E; Nagapattinam District, Tamil Nadu, India), Serampore (Sreerampur; 22.75°N, 88.34°E, Hooghly District, West Bengal, India; erstwhile Serampore) and Saharanpur (29.96°N 77.55°E, Saharanpur District, Uttar Pradesh, India) in January 1800 (Laissus 1981). He collected, or procured no less than 371 birds from around Danish-ruled Sreerampur (La Bibliothèque centrale du Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris, France, letter 03 December 1793, 07 January 1800, dossier 52). He tried to get back to France but the authorities did not let him. His collections, library, diaries, and notes on natural history, which he had left at Mauritius, were seized, and confiscated by rioters. However, the Sreerampur bird collection he made in India in 1800 was sent, via Copenhagen, Denmark, through the Danish merchant, Christian Wilhelm Duntzfeld, to France. His natural history collections, including birds, arrived in the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris, France (hereafter MNHN) in the second half of 1801. It contained 358 birds (Manuscript dated 23 September 1801, in the Archives du laboratoire de zoologie (Mammifères et Oiseaux) du MNHN). This collection also contained purchased items from Madagascar (Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire 1803; Hill 1980). 135 birds, collected by Macé in

Photo: Justin Jansen / © MNHN



17. Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus* (two), Black-naped Monarch *Hypothymis azurea styani*, Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassinus*, and Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*, Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris, France, 17 February 2015.

Bengal [=‘Bengale’], were shipped in January/February 1803, aboard *Le Naturaliste*, one of the ships that comprised the Baudin Expedition (Geoffroy Saint-Hillaire 1809; Jansen 2014, 2015).

Birds in the MNHN collections

In the five acquisition books, drafted roughly in 1856, 45 specimens were traced back then, however, only 21 specimens from 16 taxa remain today (contra Jansen 2015). The data attached to the specimens, in Louis Dufresne’s (the MNHN taxidermist) hand, are limited; his notes can be found under the pedestals of the mounted birds [17].

Species still present from the 1856 record, in MNHN, are given in Table 1. I searched twice for the remaining specimens (in April 2013, and February 2015), but could not locate them (Table 2).

Discussion

Macé was amongst the early collectors in India, and 21+ of the birds that he collected, still remain in good condition in MNHN. However, a vast number of his collected specimens ended up in other collections, like that of Louis Dufresne (Jansen 2014). Two birds were also sent to Rouen in 1806, but these have not survived (Jansen 2015).

A record also exists, of Reinier de Klerk Dibbetz (1764–1808) donating 27 birds from “Bengale”, when *Le Géographe* visited Cape Town between 03 and 24 January 1804 (Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle du Havre: 21001; Jansen 2014), but whether these came from the Macé collection remains unknown, and it is also quite possible that Dufresne mislabelled some birds. It is evident that few details about Macé are known, and more research could reveal the whereabouts of more specimens, and more details about his life. I encourage researchers to find, and publish, additional information to this article.

Table 1. List of species collected by Macé that are present in MNHN

Species	Specimen record number	Notes
Ashy Woodswallow <i>Artamus fuscus</i>	MNHN C.G. 2014-515	
Bar-bellied Cuckooshrike <i>Coracina striata</i>	MNHN A.C. 9655	
Baya Weaver <i>Ploceus philippinus</i>	MNHN C.G. 2014-511 & C.G. 2014-512	
Black-naped Monarch <i>Hypothymis azurea styani</i>	MNHN C.G. 2014-524	
Black-rumped Flameback <i>Dinopium benghalense</i>	MNHN C.G. 2009-911 & C.G. 2009-910	Type (Voisin & Voisin 2010a: 13)
Blue-throated Barbet <i>Megalaima asiatica</i>	MNHN C.G. 2007-766	Type (Voisin & Voisin 2009: 135)
Common Iora <i>Aegithina tiphia</i>	MNHN C.G. 2014-528	
Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos macei macei</i>	MNHN C.G. 2009-926 & C.G. 2009-927	Type (Voisin & Voisin 2010a: 19-20); [18]
Black-hooded Oriole <i>Oriolus xanthonus</i>	MNHN C.G. 2014-516	[18A]
Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark <i>Eremopterix nigriceps</i>	MNHN C.G. 7364f	
Large Cuckooshrike <i>Coracina macei</i>	MNHN-ZO-2012-679	Type
Little Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>	MNHN C.G. 1991-154	Type (Voisin 1992: 163)
Pied Myna <i>Sturnopastor contra</i>	MNHN C.G. 2014-480	
Rufous Treepie <i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>	MNHN C.G. 2014-439 & C.G. 2014-440	
Verditer Flycatcher <i>Eumyias thalassinus</i>	MNHN C.G. 2014-490 & C.G. 2014-491	
Yellow-footed Green Pigeon <i>Treron phoenicoptera</i>	MNHN C.G. 2002-140	Type (Voisin et al. 2004: 112)



18. Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos macei macei* Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris, France, 2 April 2013.

Table 2. List of species collected by Macé, but not found by author

Species	Specimen record number	Notes
Ashy Woodswallow <i>Artamus fuscus</i>	MNHN A.C. 9623	
<i>Acrocephalus</i> ssp	MNHN A.C. 8703	
Black Drongo <i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	MNHN A.C. 9742	
Black headed Ibis <i>Theristicus melanocephalus</i>	MNHN A.C. 14106	
Brahmy Kite <i>Haliastur indus girrenera</i>	MNHN A.C. 149	
Common Iora <i>Aegithina tiphia</i>	MNHN A.C. 10279	
Common Myna <i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	MNHN A.C. 5813	
'Eastern' Jungle Crow <i>Corvus macrorhynchos leuallantii</i>	MNHN A.C. 5435	
Forest Wagtail <i>Dendronanthus indicus</i>	MNHN A.C. 8272	
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo <i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>	MNHN A.C. 9734	
Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher <i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>	MNHN A.C. 9475	
House Crow <i>Corvus splendens</i>	MNHN A.C. 5451	
Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark <i>Eremopterix nigriceps</i>	MNHN A.C. 7364g	
Indian Roller <i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	MNHN A.C. 3270	
Green Bee-eater <i>Merops orientalis</i>	MNHN A.C. 3371	
Orange-headed Thrush <i>Zoothera peronii peronii</i>	MNHN A.C. 8390	Type?
Paddyfield Pipit <i>Anthus rufulus</i>	MNHN A.C. 8207	
Red-vented Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	MNHN A.C. 8362 & 8364	
Rosy Minivet <i>Pericrocotus roseus</i>	MNHN A.C. 9839 & 9840	
White-throated Fantail <i>Rhipidura albicollis</i>	MNHN A.C. 9413c	
White-throated Kingfisher <i>Halcyon smyrensis</i>	MNHN A.C. 3453	

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Photos: Justin J.F. Jansen / © MNHN

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Notes on fledglings of Spectacled Finch *Callacanthis burtoni*

Puja Sharma & Somendra Singh

Sharma, P., & Singh, S., 2016. Notes on fledglings of Spectacled Finch *Callacanthis burtoni*. *Indian BIRDS* 11 (1): 13–16.

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The Spectacled Finch *Callacanthis burtoni* is a range-restricted species breeding in the Endemic Bird Area of the Western Himalayas (BirdLife International 2015). Its status is described as locally common, to scarce, and it is erratic in occurrence in some parts of its range (Clement *et al.* 1993).

On 22 August 2013, we were birding on the left bank of the Baspa River, at the western edge of the Rakchham-Chitkul Wildlife Sanctuary. This area is recognised as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by BirdLife International (2015).

It was a typically overcast August day, with recurrent spells of rain. We were walking through the transition zone between the agricultural fields and the forest, towards the south-western ridge of the valley (31.39°N, 78.35°E; 3,200 m asl) in a densely forested area strewn with large boulders. The forest was dominated by west Himalayan fir *Abies pindrow*, morinda spruce *Picea Smithiana*, blue pine *Pinus wallichiana*, Himalayan birch *Betula utilis*, and maple *Acer* species. There were some fields cultivated with buckwheat *Fagopyrum* species, in the forest clearings. Streams fed by rainwater had created a swampy bed of rich forest undergrowth.

At 1400 hrs, we saw three birds land upon a bare branch of a tall spruce, beside a buckwheat field. We identified them as an adult female Spectacled Finch, followed by its two fledglings. The birds soon flew into the dense forest. After nearly an hour's search, we saw a dull-looking bird perched upon a 60 cm high stump—it was a young fledgling waiting to be fed by one of its parents. We had stumbled upon a family of Spectacled Finches, consisting of a breeding pair, and two fledglings. We spent the rest of the day observing this family: 'Family A'.

On 23 August 2013, while observing 'Family A', we encountered another family of the species, 'Family B', also with two fledglings. They were found at nearly the same altitude, about 50 m west from the spot where we had first seen 'Family A' (Fig. 1). We observed all eight birds foraging together in the same area. We tried to observe both families by walking from one group to the other. Due to the distinct plumage differences in the juveniles, as described below, it was not difficult to separate the two family groups.

There are only two previous records documenting family parties with fledglings, and in both cases, the family parties had two fledglings each, just like what we were observing. Bates (1935) noted a pair feeding two fledglings in late June. Raja *et al.* (1999) noted a pair, accompanied by a begging juvenile, in May, and a male feeding two juveniles in late June.

We present our field notes below, and share some interesting observations.

Description of the fledglings

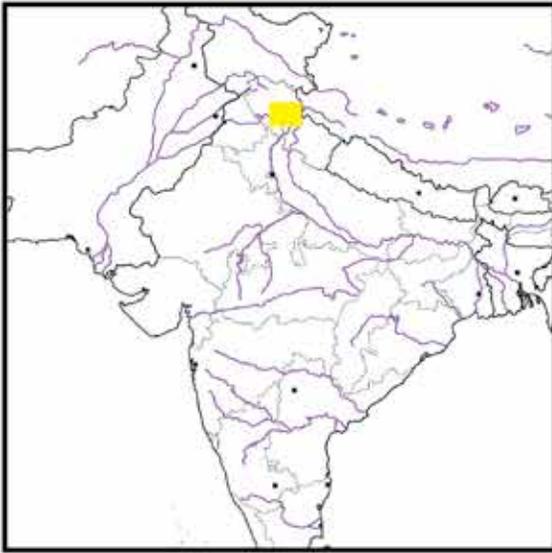
We observed 'Family A' for a period of two days, and its two fledglings merit a detailed description. The two fledglings, F1, and F2 had differences in their plumages [19]. F1 showed a faint buff patch around the eye, and had a distinct face pattern, while F2 showed a uniform brown head. Magrath (1912b) described an individual similar to F2. F1 bore a buffish tinge to the brown plumage, whereas F2 showed a uniform pale brownish colour. The spots on the greater wing-coverts of F1 became whiter progressively towards the outer most feathers, i.e., the outer most spot showed the cleanest shade of white, while the inner most two spots were still buff-coloured. In comparison, the greater wing-covert spots of F2 were all buff-coloured. Both fledglings showed clean white primary spots, slightly whitish-buff carpal patches, and buff-coloured tertial spots. The tips of the primaries and secondaries, and the tail-tips were more prominently bordered with white in F1, distinctly visible when the wing was closed. F2 showed only a faint white outline to the wing, and tail tips. The inner webs of the outer most pair of tail feathers showed white in both the fledglings. This was frequently visible as the birds always held their tails cocked when being fed by their parents. Richmond (1896) described an immature bird collected on 13 September 1891, which had a russet band over the eye, but was otherwise somewhat similar to these birds.



19. Two fledglings of Spectacled Finch showing different plumages.

Photo: Puja Sharma

Interestingly, the bill colour of all the four fledglings was dark greyish-black, unlike the yellowish bill of an adult [20]. This feature has not been documented before. The bill colour of a juvenile bird is described as 'pale yellowish-horn' (Clement *et al.* 1993). Peter Clement (*in litt.*, e-mail dated 11 November 2015) agrees that fledglings/juveniles have the bill all or mostly dark, or black until well into their first winter, but the time period over which the colour-change process occurs, and whether it is



The General location map



The Rakchham-Chitkul Wildlife Sanctuary map

Legend

-  Spot where the family group A was first sighted
-  Family group A
-  Family group B
-  The Rakchham-Chitkul WLS
-  Approximate area enlarged in the Sighting Location Map
-  Approximate area enlarged in the Rakchham-Chitkul Wildlife Sanctuary map



Fig. 1. Location of sightings of Spectacled Finch *Callacanthis burtoni* families on the left bank of the Baspa River, at the western edge of the Rakchham-Chitkul Wildlife Sanctuary.

governed by other factors, is not yet understood. The bill of the fledglings appeared stouter in shape than that of the adults. The tips of both mandibles were of the same length [20], unlike the upper mandible of an adult, which protruded slightly beyond the lower mandible (Baker 1926: 153; Fig. 37). The birds showed a prominent yellow gape flange.



Photos: Pujja Sharma

20. A juvenile Spectacled Finch has a dark greyish-black bill, the upper, and lower mandibles of which are of the same length.

Feeding behaviour of the fledglings

'Family A' was observed on 22 and 23 August 2013. They remained in the same area of about 125x50 m, over both the days. 'Family B' was observed on 23 August 2013, and remained in an area of about 100x75 m. The foraging areas of the two families overlapped (Fig. 1). On 23 August 2013, the two families were observed foraging together in the overlapping area. Here, the adults fed their respective fledglings in a congenial flock. This suggests that their territories are quite small, corroborating Roberts (1992).

The birds fed solely on the green basal part of the immature fruit of crane's-bill *Geranium wallichianum*, which flowered abundantly in the area [21]—it was identified by its large, ovate stipules (Polunin & Stainton 1997). The birds fed on the ovate basal end of the elongated fruit structure, the seed-bearing carpels'. The adults hold the fruit laterally in their bills, meticulously tear off each sepal covering the ovate seedpod, consume the seedpod, and then discard the rest of the fruit [22]. The adults fed the fledglings by regurgitation. The fledglings were clearly familiar with the crane's-bill fruit, as they held it in their bills, but were subsequently unable to consume it [23]. Once the parents arrived to feed them, they were quick to abandon such feeding attempts. It has been documented (Jones 1948; Roberts 1992) that the birds consume berries and buds of *Viburnum nervosum*, and *Berberis lyceum*, and the seeds of conifers. However, during our observation, the birds only fed on the crane's-bill fruit. Magrath (1912a) also observed that birds fed on seeds of succulent undergrowth.

We observed many feeding sorties, and routines of the adults feeding their two fledglings. The approximate frequency of feeding was once every ten minutes. When begging for food, or when being fed, the fledglings displayed, as described below. Interestingly, this display is somewhat similar to the courtship display of the adult birds (Jones 1948; Bates & Lowther 1952; Roberts 1992). The adult female of 'Family A' was seen feeding

1. The fruit has five carpels, each of which has two parts: an ovate lower part called the mericarp body that contains the seed, and an elongate upper part called the carpel beak. This type of elongate schizocarpic fruit is typical of plants in the geranium family (Geraniaceae).



Photo: Somendra Singh

21. Crane's-bill *Geranium wallichianum* flowered profusely in the area.



22. An adult Spectacled Finch *Callacanthis burtoni* holds the fruit of crane's-bill laterally in its bill.



23. Though fledgeling Spectacled Finch held the fruit of crane's-bill in their beak, they could not consume it.

F1, while F2 waited for its turn, holding a crane's-bill fruit in its bill [24]. F2 then begged for food from F1 [25]. In the majority of the feeding sorties of 'Family A', F1 was fed first, while F2 waited for its turn [26, 27].



24. The adult female of Family A feeds one chick, while the other waits, to be fed, behind her, unable to eat the fruit in its beak by itself.



25. Family A: F2 begging for food from F1.



26. Family A: In a majority of cases, F1 was fed first...



27. ...while F2 waited its turn.

Photos: Pujja Sharma

The fledglings were entirely dependent on their parents for feeding them. The fledglings would perch on a vantage point where the adults would feed them. Occasionally they would follow the parents onto the ground where they would wait while acutely observing the parents. They would frequently pick up a crane's-bill fruit. We noted that the fledglings made every effort to learn to feed by imitating their parents.

When begging for food, the fledglings would usually hold their tails slightly cocked, the wings drooped and gently quivering, while uttering a plaintive 'twee' call (Fig. 2). The fledglings also used this sound as a contact call to keep in touch with the parents. While being fed by the parents, the fledglings would flutter their wings open, make a rapid hopping movement, and hold their tails cocked. They would also utter a repetitive 'twee' call each time they received a mouthful (Fig. 3). They would also slightly fan their tails, while pumping it up and down. The movement of the tail was synchronised with the 'twee' call. A loud, whistle-like call (Fig. 4) was given by the adults to beckon the fledglings. The fledglings were quick to respond to this call, and would fly to the parents whenever they heard it.

The breeding biology of this species is relatively well known, but actual details of period of incubation, and fledging are lacking (Roberts 1992). Its movements are also poorly known (Clement *et al.* 1993). We hope that our notes on the feeding habits of the fledglings will prove useful in understanding this species better.

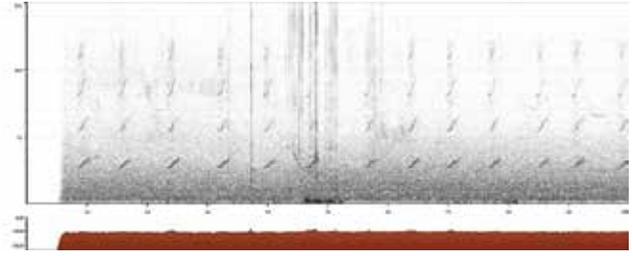


Fig. 2. Sonogram of call uttered by fledglings of Spectacled Finch when they begged for food.

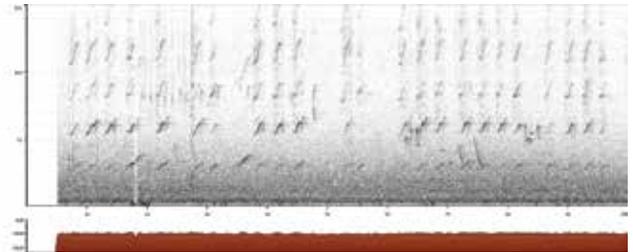


Fig. 3. Sonogram of call uttered by fledglings of Spectacled Finch with every beakful of food they received.

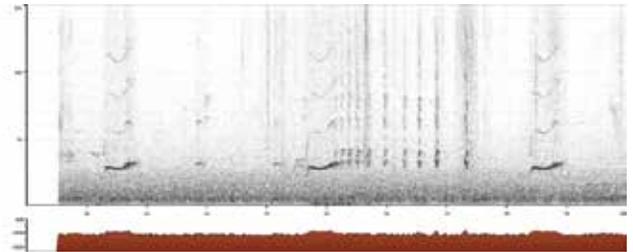


Fig. 4. Sonogram of whistle uttered by adults of Spectacled Finch to summon the fledglings.

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Recovery of a ringed juvenile Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* at Sardarshahr, Thar Desert, India

Harkirat Singh Sangha & Surat Singh Poonia

Sangha, H. S., & Poonia, S. S., 2016. Recovery of a ringed juvenile Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* at Sardarshahr, Thar Desert, India. *Indian BIRDS* 11 (1): 17–18.
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Manuscript received on 05 May 2015.

The Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* breeds in a wide zone that stretches from Slovakia, and Hungary in the west, through the forest steppes of southern Russia, to Lake Baikal. BirdLife International classifies it, globally, as Vulnerable (2015). The western populations of the Eastern Imperial Eagle (i.e., Central Europe, the Balkans, and Asia Minor) are mainly residents, while the eastern populations are migratory, wintering far south of their breeding range (del Hoyo *et al.* 1994; Forsman 1999). The migratory populations winter in the Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula, North-eastern Africa (reaching Tanzania), India, Southeast Asia, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan to the east (Cramp *et al.* 1980).

It formerly bred in Pakistan (Grimmett *et al.* 1998) but this is questionable (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) and there are no recent confirmed breeding records from in the Indian Subcontinent (Grimmett *et al.* 1998). Its main wintering range extends from Pakistan, and Kashmir, eastwards to Nepal, south through Kachchh, and Saurashtra, in Gujarat, to Mumbai, and eastwards to central Maharashtra (Ali & Ripley 1978; Naoroji 2007).

On 01 March 2015 one injured, or sick, eagle was found in Sardarshahr (28.43°N, 74.48°E; 246 m asl), Churu District, Rajasthan. It had an aluminium ring on its tarsus which was removed by the forest department. Although the eagle seemed almost dead, it was decided to try and rehabilitate it, and so it was brought that day to Tal Chhapar Wildlife Sanctaury, Churu District [28].



Photos: H. S. Sangha

28. This Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* from Churu District, Rajasthan, was initially presumed dead, but later, successfully rehabilitated!

It was identified as a juvenile Eastern Imperial Eagle by its distinctly streaked breast-band and underwing coverts, its pale head and rear body, and by its pale inner primaries contrasting

with darkish secondaries.

The details of the aluminium ring [29],—MOSKVA AB605—were sent to HSS who forwarded it to the Russian raptor expert, Igor Karyakin. On 05 March 2015, we properly examined the bird. It had no visible outer injury, and more importantly, its wings were fine.



29. The bird had been ringed in the Altai Republic, Russia, and its ring was marked MOSKVA AB605.

By 07 March 2015 it displayed some signs of recovery, and HSS consulted an experienced falconer, Sarfaraz Muhammad Malik of Dasada in the Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat on how to take care of the bird. Based on his advice, we fed it small pieces of meat (goat), and confined it to a small darkened room, where it was not disturbed. In two weeks there was an amazing recovery, and on 16 March 2015 it was released in Tal Chhapar Wildlife Sanctaury [30]. It was last seen in the sanctaury on 17 March 2015 by SSP.



Photo: S. S. Poonia

30. The bird recovered completely in 16 days, and was released.

Discussion

Adult territorial birds in central, and south-eastern Europe are mostly resident, spending the winter in their breeding territories (Bagyura *et al.* 2002; Stoychev *et al.* 2004). The movements of Eastern Imperial Eagles, from the eastern European populations, are much less understood. It is assumed they are long distance migrants, and that they probably spend their winters in the Middle

East, Arabia (Evans 1994), and north-eastern Africa (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001). The dispersal of the immature Eastern Imperial Eagles of Europe has been clarified recently by satellite tracking studies in several European countries: Bulgaria (Gradev *et al.* 2011a, b), Hungary (Meyburg *et al.* 1995; Kovács *et al.* 2008), and Slovakia (Danko *et al.* 2011).

No satellite or ringing-data of Eastern Imperial Eagles wintering in the Indian Subcontinent is available. The Sardarshahr bird constitutes the first ring recovery for the species from India. It was ringed on 02 February 2013 in a nest in the Ust-Kan Valley (50.96°N, 85.03°E), Altai Republic, Russia [31]; a straight line distance of 2654 km to India (Raptor Ringing Center of the Russian Raptor and Conservation Network: <http://rrcn.ru/en/ringing/bd>; Fig. 1).



31. The ringed eaglelet *Orosha* in its nest on 02 February 2013, in the Ust-Kan Valley, Altai Republic, Russia.

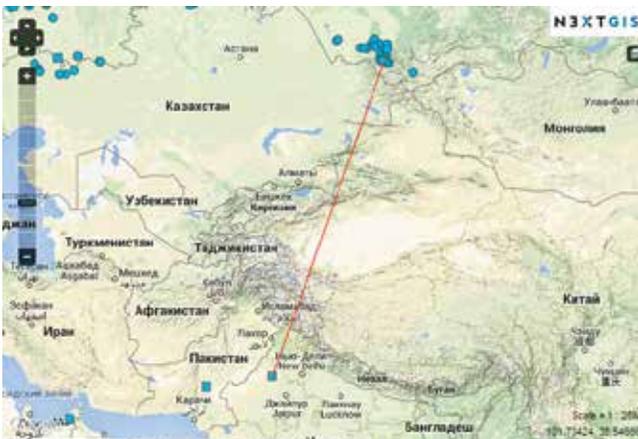


Photo & Map: Courtesy RRCN

Fig. 1. The straight line distance between its place of ringing, and Sardarshahr, where it was found, is 2654 km.

Coincidentally, one Eastern Imperial Eagle was recovered by a falconer on 15 February 2014 in Larkana (27.33°N, 68.13°E), Sindh, Pakistan. This bird was ringed on 09 July 2013 in a nest near Ust-Kan in the Altai Mountains, Altai Republic, Russia, a straight line distance of 2957 km (Raptor Ringing Center of the Russian raptor and Conservation Network: <http://rrcn.ru/en/ringing/bd>).

Both the birds travelled almost 3000 km, in a straight line, from the Altai Mountains to the Indian Subcontinent. But it is very likely that they took a circuitous route, skirting the lofty mountains barring their way. Satellite tracking data reveals that two Eastern Imperial Eagles namely Orosha (tagged in Ust-Kan area, Altai republic), and Anuyka (tagged in Altai foothills) that wintered (2014–2015) in Sindh, Pakistan did not travel straight but first flew in a south-western direction, towards Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, before heading southwards towards Afghanistan,

and Pakistan (<http://www.satellitetracking.eu/inds/showmap>). By this premise it is likely that both, the Sardarshahr, and the Larkana birds would have followed a route similar to the one taken by Orosha and Anuyka.

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Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* in northern Sikkim, India

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The Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* has been listed as 'Endangered', under the IUCN Red List category, owing to the fact that it may be undergoing a very rapid decline mainly due to unsustainable capture for falconry trade, habitat degradation, and impact of agrochemicals (BirdLife International 2015). It has been earlier recorded in the Indian Subcontinent as a scarce winter visitor to Pakistan, and western India; towards the east it might extend up to Nepal (Ali & Ripley 1987). Naoroji (2007), and Grimmett *et al.* (2011) also showed a similar range but slightly extending eastwards, with a stray record from Bangladesh (Thompson *et al.* 1994). Hodgson collected the *milvipes* race in Nepal (Biswas 1960). But Sikkim, and the rest of north-eastern India seem to have remained outside its range, except for Kallol Mukherjee's recent photograph from Buxa Tiger Reserve in northern West Bengal (Mukherjee 2015). Ali (1962) also did not record it in Sikkim.

I here report a recent observation of the species made on a visit to Sikkim. On 17 April 2014, after visiting Gurudongmar, while on our way to Cho Lhamu, a flying falcon caught my attention at 0950 hrs. We were north-east of Gurudongmar Lake, North Sikkim District (28.03°N, 88.71°E; 5,100 m asl), surrounded by a cold desert of sand and stones [32]. Then the bird landed, and

I could observe it closely, and take a number of photographs. Its tail extended well beyond its closed wings—as against, 'just beyond' in *F. jaggur*, and 'almost equal to' in *F. peregrinus*. It had a grey-brown crown, moustache, white supercilium, and rufous-brown and dark-brown dorsal barring, which eliminates both, *F. jaggur*, and *F. peregrinus*, and bold barring on thighs, and flanks. Its throat, and breast, was white. Based on all these details, which are visible in the photographs, this was identified as a Saker Falcon. It seemed to be an immature bird, based on the presence of a strong moustachial stripe, and heavy ventral barring. Krys Kazmierczak (*pers. comm.* 2014) also feels that it is not an adult. The pattern of barring on its back, as stated above, combined with its barred flanks probably indicate that it might belong to a sub-species of the 'Eastern' Saker Falcon; however, field identification of juvenile Saker Falcons, to a definite subspecies, is tricky. When I re-visited the spot at 1025 hrs, the bird had disappeared.

Both Ali & Ripley (1987), and Naoroji (2006) mentioned that it winters from October to April in India. However, the landscape of breeding record of *milvipes*, from Ladakh (Sangha *et al.* 2014), and that of the present sighting, is similar. Hence, an April record in northern Sikkim would call for extra attention from visiting birders to be alert for this species in its potential habitats.

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Photo: A. U. Choudhury

32. Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* in Sikkim, in the cold desert habitat of sand and stone.

A report of Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* from Amravati District, Maharashtra

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Choudhari, A., Khode, M., Wagh, G. A., & Wadatkhar, J. S., 2016. A report of Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* from Amravati District, Maharashtra. *Indian BIRDS* 11 (1): 20.

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The Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* is listed as Near-threatened by BirdLife international (2015) as it has undergone a moderately rapid population decline. In India it is found all over the plains, and coastal wetlands, being widespread, but not common (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). There are only a few records of the species from Maharashtra, where it is widely, but thinly distributed in suitable wetlands (Rahmani *et al.* 2014). This stork has been sighted in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra in Nagpur District (D'Abreu 1935; Anon. 2009), and at the Navegaon Bandh Reservoir in Navegaon National Park, Gondia District, (Paliwal & Bhandarkar 2014). However, it has not yet been reported from Amravati District (Wadatkhar *et al.* 2010). Through this note, we report a few instances where this species was reported from two wetlands in the district.

Dabhi Lake (21.45°N, 78.20°E), and Sawanga Reservoir (21.24°N, 78.10°E) are situated in the foothills of the Satpuda Range, in Warud tehsil, Amravati District, Maharashtra. Dabhi Lake is 13 km from Warud, and 93 km from Amravati, by road. It is surrounded by irrigated agricultural land, and is near Mahendri Reserve Forest. Sawanga Reservoir is about 15 km away from Warud, and 75 km from Amravati, and is surrounded by some

agriculture patches, villages like Sawanga, Goregaon, and Kasari, and is connected to the Kasari forest area. On both these lakes we observed fishing by the local fishermen.

On 28 September 2014, AC and MK visited Dabhi Lake for birding, and sighted one unusually tall bird on a small island in the lake. They identified it as a Black-necked Stork [33] with the help of Grimmett *et al.* (1999). AC informed JSW, and GAW about the sighting, and sent them a few images of this bird. The bird in the photographs was identified as a juvenile because the colour of its legs had not changed to the coral red of an adult. The Black-necked Stork was not seen subsequently at Dabhi Lake.

On 15 January 2015, AC and MK visited Sawanga Lake, which is 28 km away from the Dabhi Lake, and noted one Black-necked Stork, possibly the same juvenile from the latter wetland, feeding with a flock of Woolly-necked Storks *Ciconia episcopus*. It was present here, amongst the Woolly-necked Storks, during our subsequent visits: thrice in March–April, and twice in May–June 2015.

On 05 April 2015 JSW and GAW also visited Sawanga Lake at 0900 hrs and observed a juvenile Black-necked Stork feeding.

If all of these sightings were of the same bird, which is most likely, this bird must have stayed for about six months in Warud Tehsil, Amravati District. After 27 June 2015 this bird was not seen on both water bodies.

This appears to be the first report of the bird from Amravati District, as well as from the western part of the Vidarbha region (Anon. 2009; Wadatkhar *et al.* 2010).

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Photo: Ashish Choudhari

33. Juvenile Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* at Dabhi Lake, 28 September 2014.

First record of the Pompadour ('Ashy-headed') Green Pigeon *Treron pompadora conoveri/phayrei* from Uttarakhand, India

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The Pompadour Green Pigeon *Treron pompadora* is a polytypic, widely distributed, green pigeon in the tropical forests of the Oriental Realm with no less than ten recognised subspecies (Dickinson & Remsen 2013). The two races, *conoveri*, and *phayrei* are sometimes treated as a distinct species, 'Ashy-headed' Green Pigeon (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It is a widely distributed taxon, ranging from Nepal eastwards to Bhutan, Bangladesh, parts of eastern India, southern Yunnan (China), Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam (BirdLife International 2015). In the Indian Subcontinent, the distribution of this species has been recorded as west-central Nepal eastwards to Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh, southern Assam hills, Meghalaya, parts of eastern India, and eastern Bangladesh (Grimmet *et al.* 2011; Manakadan *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Ali & Ripley (1981) state the distribution of *T. p. conoveri* as, "Terai of west-central Nepal (range undefined)", and that of *T. p. phayrei* as, "West Bengal (recorded south to Calcutta), Assam north and south of Brahmaputra River, and eastward through NEFA; Manipur, East Pakistan". Rand & Fleming (1953), who described the *T. p. conoveri* from Butwal, west-central Nepal, state that the green pigeon is, "fairly common", in the forests of the area. *T. phayrei* is listed as a "Near Threatened" species in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species on account of its declining population (BirdLife International 2014). The taxonomic validity of *conoveri*, and *phayrei* as separate subspecies, remains unclear, and *conoveri* has also been included in *Treron phayrei* by Rasmussen & Anderton (2012).

On 13 December 2014, while conducting a birdwatching camp for bird guides from across Uttarakhand, a solitary Pompadour Green Pigeon was spotted amidst a flock of fifteen Pin-tailed Green Pigeons *T. apicauda* at 1301 hrs at the Khichdi River near Sitabani (29.40°N, 79.21°E; 472 m asl). Sitabani is located in the Pawalgarh Conservation Reserve, Nainital District (Kumaon, Uttarakhand). The green pigeon flock was perched on a leafless treetop, and the Pompadour Green Pigeon was

easily distinguished from the rest of the flock of Pin-tailed Green Pigeons. A photograph, for the purpose of identification, was taken [34]. We observed the green pigeon, through binoculars, in the same area for the next 30 min. The flock occasionally flew, but settled on nearby tree canopies to permit us to continue observation. The solitary Pompadour Green Pigeon flew along with the flock of Pin-tailed Green Pigeons, and they were always seen together.

This observation of the Pompadour Green Pigeon is the western-most record of this species, and is the first record from Uttarakhand. It is more than 400 km west of Butwal, Nepal, which is its current western-most range (Rand & Fleming 1953; Inskipp & Inskipp 1991). Recent publications, and checklists (Mohan & Sinha 2003; Mohan & Sondhi 2014; Sharma *et al.* 2004), from Uttarakhand, as well as the Pawalgarh landscape do not record this species either.



Photo: Ashish Kothari

34. Pompadour Green Pigeon *Treron pompadora*, 13 December 2014, Sitabani, Pawalgarh.

Subsequent visits to the same area during the Second Uttarakhand Spring Bird Festival, from 05 to 08 February 2014, did not result in any sightings of this species. It remains unclear, and the subject of further research, whether the sighting of this species was that of a vagrant, or whether the species has been overlooked in this landscape. This bird is likely to have originated from the Nepal population, treated as *conoveri*, rather than the more easterly *phayrei*. If Rasmussen & Anderton's (2012) treatment of the species is accepted, both these races will be treated under a single species, and this record will have to be treated as of 'Ashy-headed' Green Pigeon.

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Interaction between a Jungle Crow *Corvus culminatus* and a Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus*

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Gadadhar, S., & Belur, R. R., 2016. Interaction between a Jungle Crow *Corvus culminatus* and a Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus*. *Indian BIRDS* 11 (1): 22-23.

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On 22 November 2012, while on a visit to the Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary in Uttara Kannada District (Karnataka, India), we set out to visit the government timber depot, located close to the city. At the depot, we stopped at a fruiting *Ficus drupacea* tree, and found that Malabar Pied Hornbills *Anthracoceros coronatus* were visiting the tree to feed on the ripe yellow figs. The area was filled with the characteristic raucous cackling of the noisy flocks (Ali 2002). After feeding, some of them flew from the *Ficus drupacea* tree to another leafless tree close by, rested for a while, preened, and flew away.

At about 0720 hrs, one hornbill was seen resting on a 09 m high branch of the bare tree. It preened for a while. A few minutes later, a Jungle Crow *Corvus culminatus* flew onto the same branch, and tore out a chunk of bark from the lower section of the branch. Holding this piece of bark in its beak [35], the crow flew onto the same branch where the hornbill was perched, and moved closer to it, seeming as though it was trying to present the piece of bark to the hornbill. At this, the hornbill opened its beak wide, and tried to scare the crow away, but the crow returned

with the bark twice, again eliciting the same response from the hornbill. After being snapped by the hornbill the third time, the crow dropped the piece of bark, while it tried to get a proper grip on it.

After this, the crow returned once more, but this time, it broke a small twig from the base of the branch of the bare tree [36] and moved closer to the hornbill with the twig held in its beak. Before it came close to the hornbill, it appeared to eat the twig. Our initial thought was that it had broken the twig to add it to a nest, but November was not its breeding season (Ali & Ripley 2001). Thus, the fact that the crow broke a twig, and apparently ate it (see Gadadhar & Belur 2013; clip between 01:47 and 01:56), seemed rather unusual.

The crow then perched close to the hornbill. It opened its beak a couple of times, and it seemed as though it was calling. A few moments later, another Jungle Crow came onto the same branch. The first crow showed aggression towards the latter ("jumped up and 'fought' with the second crow", in our notes), and chased it away [37]. It then returned to the same branch on



35. Jungle Crow carrying a piece of bark in its beak, and moving closer to the Malabar Pied Hornbill.



38. Jungle Crow flying away.



36. Jungle Crow moving closer to the hornbill with a twig in its beak.

which the hornbill was perched.

The crow repeatedly tried to get closer to the hornbill, only to be snapped-at, and chased away. On a few occasions, the crow was within a few centimeters from the hornbill. The hornbill looked quite annoyed at the crow's behavior, and having failed to drive away the crow, the hornbill finally dropped to a lower branch. The crow followed the hornbill, and went close to it, only to get snapped-at again. After another attempt to get close to the hornbill, the crow flew away [38]. After a short while, the hornbill preened again and flew away. The entire incident lasted for about ten minutes, and was captured on video (Gadadhar & Belur 2013).

Our original impression was that the crow was trying to entice the hornbill with a piece of bark, and the twig. However, after discussions with other birdwatchers we wondered if the crow



37. Fighting Jungle Crows.

was probably 'harassing' or 'mobbing' the hornbill (Gadgil 2001). Crows are known to mob or disturb large owls, birds of prey, bonnet macaques, or even snakes (Neelakantan 1963; Editor 1975; Sivakumar & Prakash 2005). Crows are usually known to do this when there is food involved, to steal food from the other bird or animal (Koirala & Giri 1996; RSPB 2013). However, the hornbill didn't have any food with it. Jungle Crows have also been observed stealing non-food items like golf balls (Poché 1981), and even spectacle frames (Aitken 1900).

In the present incident there was no food involved, and thus it leads us to believe that the crow may not have tried to harass the hornbill, even though it repeatedly tried to get closer to the hornbill, with the piece of bark, and the twig. This unusual behavior of the crow seems to indicate that it was trying to play pranks with the hornbill (Poché 1981; Ali & Ripley 2001).

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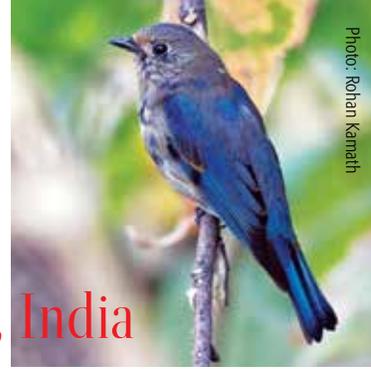


Photo: Rohan Kamath

More records of Blue-and-white Flycatcher *Cyanoptila cyanomelana* from the Western Ghats, India

Mihir Barve & Rohan Kamath

Barve, M., & Kamath, R., 2016. More records of Blue-and-white Flycatcher *Cyanoptila cyanomelana* from the Western Ghats, India. *Indian BIRDS* 11 (1): 24.

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The Blue-and-white Flycatcher *Cyanoptila cyanomelana* is a summer visitor to north-eastern Asia, moving southward during winter to Taiwan, south-eastern China, and in Southeast Asia, through the Greater Sundas, to the Philippines. Two subspecies are widely recognised, the nominate, which breeds in the southern Kuril Islands, Japan, and South Korea, and *cumatilis*, which breeds in north-eastern China, south-eastern Russia, and North Korea (Clement 2006). However, in a recent appraisal, *C. c. cumatilis* has been raised to full species status, with the English name, Zappey's Flycatcher *C. cumatilis*, while *C. c. intermedia*, a junior synonym of *cumatilis*, has been elevated as *Cyanoptila cyanomelana intermedia* (Leader & Carey 2012). It is a recent addition to the avifauna of the Indian Subcontinent (Kawale 2013; Rajeshkumar *et al.* 2014).

On 12 March 2011, we came across a lone sub-adult male Blue-and-white Flycatcher in the Tamhini region of Pune District (Maharashtra, India). The bird had a deep grey head, and crown. The wings, except for the alula, showed a completely blue coloured plumage whereas the mantle and the scapulars showed less pronounced development. The blue colour of the back had not become the deep pronounced colour seen in adults. It also showed hints of blue on its breast. We were unable to positively identify the species in the field, so we photographed it [39]. After referring to several field guides, consulting with multiple senior birders, and after looking up a March 2015 photograph from Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary (Nair 2015), we concluded that it was a Blue-and-white Flycatcher. It is however not possible to assign a racial identity to the bird based on our photographs.

Apart from a single sight report from Upper Siang District, Arunachal Pradesh (Choudhury 2006), all recent reports have been well-documented by photographs. Ours is perhaps the first photographic record from the Indian Subcontinent. Further records of this species, all from March, from the Western Ghats are listed in



Photo: Mihir Barve

39. Blue-and-white Flycatcher *Cyanoptila cyanomelana* in Pune District, Maharashtra.

Table 1. Three more records, from other parts of the Indian Subcontinent, are listed in Rajeshkumar *et al.* (2014) who indicate that a few birds might be stopping over on the Indian Subcontinent on their return migration. In the Western Ghats, most birders, who saw our pictures of the bird, thought it was a plumage variation of the endemic White-bellied Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis pallidipes*; hence it is

Table. Sightings of Blue-and-white Flycatcher *Cyanoptila cyanomelana* from the Western Ghats

Site	Date	Reference
Tamhini, Pune, Maharashtra	12 March 2011	This publication
Alibag, Maharashtra	10 March 2012	Kawale (2012)
Ganeshgudi, Dandeli WLS, Karnataka	07/08 March 2015	Nair (2015), Rebello (2015)
Old Magazine House, Dandeli WLS, Karnataka	18 March 2015	Toliya (2015)

likely that this species has been misidentified, or overlooked in the past. The fact that the species is probably present for a short period of the year (in March), and possibly in low numbers, could also be a reason why it was not reported earlier. We urge birdwatchers, active along the entire Western Ghats, from Maharashtra till their southern tip in Kerala, and Tamil Nadu, to be alert for this species during March.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Praveen J. for his inputs in identifying the bird, and then continuous support and guidance to help publish this note.

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Blue-and-white Flycatcher *Cyanoptila cyanomelana* from Kotagiri, an addition to Tamil Nadu avifauna

A. Bhoopathy & A. Indrajith

Bhoopathy, A., & Indrajith, A., 2016. Blue-and-white Flycatcher *Cyanoptila cyanomelana* from Kotagiri, an addition to Tamil Nadu avifauna. *Indian BIRDS* 11 (1): 25.

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Blue-and-white Flycatcher *Cyanoptila cyanomelana* is a recent addition to the avifauna of South Asia. It is not listed in Ali & Ripley (1987), Rasmussen & Anderton (2005), and Grimmett *et al.* (2011). It was first reported from near Mumbai (Kawale 2013), and included in Rasmussen & Anderton (2012). Since then, it has been reported from a few other parts of the Indian Subcontinent (Rajeshkumar *et al.* 2014), including one from Sri Lanka (Vidanapathirana *et al.* 2014). Here we report its first record from Kotagiri, Tamil Nadu.

On 21 November 2015, while watching birds by the roadside in Kotagiri (11.41°N, 76.85°E), Nilgiris District, AI pointed out a strange flycatcher which he could not identify. We both watched the bird for the next four hours. AI was able to take several good photographs from various angles [40, 41]. The bird was similar to the resident White-bellied Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis pallipes*, but several features, including the colour of its face, and breast, were markedly different. After referring to bird books, and several

online websites, including BirdLife International (2015), we were able to identify it as a male Blue-and-white Flycatcher. We circulated the photographs amongst many birdwatchers, who confirmed it as this species, and we have entered our record in eBird (Bhoopathy 2015). We obtained additional references, regarding its prior records from the Indian Subcontinent, and it was clear that the species had not been recorded from Tamil Nadu. This bird was last sighted on 02 December 2015.

The species is described as an uncommon, to rare, non-breeding visitor to the Malay Peninsula, Singapore, and the Philippines, and a rare non-breeding visitor to Sumatra (BirdLife International 2015). Most reports from the Indian Subcontinent are from its spring migration (Rajeshkumar *et al.* 2014); while this is probably the second time it has been recorded during autumn migration, after Choudhury (2006). Birdwatchers in the Nilgiris should carefully checkout all individuals of White-bellied Blue Flycatcher during November and March for this species.

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Photos: A. Indrajith

40, 41. Blue-and-white Flycatcher *Cyanoptila cyanomelana* in Kotagiri.

Chestnut-eared Bunting *Emberiza fucata* wintering in Jaipur, Rajasthan

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Sangha, H. S., Singh, S., & Garg, S., 2016. Chestnut-eared Bunting *Emberiza fucata* wintering in Jaipur, Rajasthan. *Indian BIRDS* 11 (1): 26–27.
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While birding at Dera Amer, adjoining Nahargarh Sanctuary in Jaipur, on 25 November 2012 SS saw a bird feeding on berries of *Salvadora oleoides* that he did not recognise. On 20 January 2013 he saw three–four of the same birds, when they were part of a larger flock of White-capped Buntings *Emberiza stewarti*, which are fairly common during winter in eastern Rajasthan; all had come to drink at a water seepage point. Three birds were seen on 19 January 2014.

SS was able to photograph the birds, and later sent the images to HSS, who identified them as the Chestnut-eared Bunting *E. fucata*. Realising its rarity in Rajasthan, HSS and SS decided to visit Dera Amer on 09 February 2014. Luckily, they saw three birds as soon as they reached the site that morning. The birds were quite shy, and flew away, but a little later they had two more views of the birds in flight.

On 07 April 2014 HSS and SG spent about four hours in the scrub forest adjacent to the Papad wale Hanuman temple in suburban Jaipur, where SG had seen the birds two years ago, on 08 March, and 08 October 2012; but they only saw White-capped-, and Grey-necked Buntings *E. buchanani*.

Description

One of the birds observed at Dera Amer was a first-winter Chestnut-eared Bunting [42] and matched with the pictures shot by SG at Papad wale Hanuman temple. Based on brief field notes, and the pictures, it was certain that it was not White-capped Bunting, or Striolated Bunting *E. striolata* that commonly occur in Jaipur. A bunting with typically "complicated" plumage, it showed characteristics associated with first-winter Chestnut-eared Bunting. The chestnut colour of the ear coverts was almost entirely lacking, but ear coverts still appeared prominent and contrasted with the grey crown, and white supercilium and submoustachial stripe. The black malar stripe merged with the black streaks on the breast and upper belly. The chin appeared prominently buffish pale compared to a white throat. The dark streaking was more prominent on upper breast, which was white, compared to a pale buff belly and undertail coverts. The flanks were white, with smudgy streaks. The eye-ring was prominently white contrasted with a dark iris.

The above description ruled out every other bunting. With caution it can be concluded that it was probably a first-winter female bird. First-winter females are known to lack obvious chestnut, or brown on the face, and are more difficult to identify.

Distribution & migration

Chestnut-eared Bunting is generally not rare, but does not occur in high numbers anywhere (Byers *et al.* 1995). It seems to be

a relictual Palearctic species with three widely scattered disjunct breeding populations in the eastern parts of the Palearctic (Roberts 1992). It has a patchy distribution in Asia: the nominate form, which is the most northerly, and the most migratory race, breeds from Baikal Lake through northern China to Japan, and winters from southern Japan and southern China to Thailand. There are two other, less migratory forms: *E. f. kuatunensis* in south-eastern China, and *E. f. arcuata* in the western Himalayas and southern China (Byers *et al.* 1995).

The Himalayan population (*arcuata*) is an uncommon resident, subject to vertical movements from Chitral and Hazara in the western Himalayas, east to Garhwal, Kumaon and Nepal (Ali & Ripley 1999; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). In winters it descends from at least 1500 m down to the foothills, and adjacent plains [Saharanpur, Ambala, Kosi barrage, south-eastern Nepal (Inskipp & Inskipp 1991; Ali & Ripley 1999). There is one definite record of a male, procured from a party, "from Cantonments" [Ambala] on 17 March 1918 (Jones 1919), but no definite information of its winter movements are known (Roberts 1992). There exists a recent record, dated 06 December 2011, from Shampura (Jaipur, Rajasthan) (Mathur 2011). The Himalayan population may be augmented by birds from China, particularly in the east (Byers *et al.* 1995).

The only other recent record of its winter movements, away from the Himalayas, is from Berwala, in Panchkula, Haryana, on 03 November 2007 (Sharad Sridhar, *verbally*).

Habitat & behaviour

In winter it is found in bushes and grasses adjoining fields and marshes (Byers *et al.* 1995); in the vicinity of streams or marshes with tall grass and reed beds, interspersed with thickets (Roberts 1992); and in wet fields (Inskipp & Inskipp 1985). However, in Jaipur we found it in dry and open scrub forest where the predominant species were dhok *Anogeis suspendula*, khejri *Prosopis cineraria*, roonj *Acacia leucophloea*, kumat *A. senegal*, kankera *Maytenus senegalensis*, kair *Capparis deciduas*, and babool *Acaacia nilotica*.

We noticed the birds either in ones, or in a small flock of up to three. On all occasions they were not really confiding and took flight at our approach.

Discussion

Most of the buntings that breed in the northern hemisphere are migratory (del Hoyo *et al.* 2011). *E. f. fucata* breeds in Amurland, Manchuria, and Japan. It winters in southern China, and the Indochinese countries; in the Indian Subcontinent it winters in



42. First winter male, or female Chestnut-eared Bunting *Emberiza fucata*; Papad wale Hanuman temple near Jaipur.

Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, the Jalpaiguri duars, most of Bangladesh, the Bhutan foothills, and eastern Nepal (Ali & Ripley 1999). The species is also known for its vagrancy; it has occurred as far west as Sweden, in October 2011 (Anonymous 2011), and on Fair Isle, Shetland, in October 2004 (Shaw 2004), in the Western Palearctic.

E. f. arcuata breeds in the Himalayas, from Pakistan, eastwards to western Nepal and southern China (north Yunnan). It winters at lower altitudes in the western Himalayas (del Hoyo *et al.* 2011). Extraliminally it has occurred in Mt. Victoria, Myanmar, and twice from the north-eastern part of that country (Smythies 1986); Yunnan, Sichuan, and Kweichow (Ali & Ripley 1999).

However, its occurrence in Jaipur (27.53°N, 76.42°E), during four successive winters, and the fact that it was there in small flocks, does point to the birds wintering regularly here, and not being vagrants to the region. It probably occurs in the area, but was overlooked as they move in small parties, and are highly cryptic, and thus inconspicuous. Moreover, females, and juveniles are tricky to identify. Their call too comprises 'very high, thin, sharp single notes' and is often not identifiable in the field, besides being inaudible to many (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Thus they are difficult to separate from other female, and juvenile buntings in the area.

Thus it seems logical to conclude that birders elsewhere in north-western India do need to consider this species when faced with an unfamiliar bunting. Chestnut-eared Bunting can be notoriously furtive species on wintering grounds.

Acknowledgements

HSS and SS thank Udajjit Singh, whose small private forest at Dera Amer, Jaipur hosted

the Chestnut-eared Bunting flock, for his generous hospitality during our visits. HSS is thankful to Manjula Mathur who shared her unpublished information about the species.

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Editorial

We are ten years old! It's a satisfying, and a sobering moment. We are happy we've been able to provide this platform for Indian ornithology, and that birders have found it worthy of publishing their notes in. We are aware of our responsibility, both, to handhold people who are writing on birds for the first time, to whet all manuscripts rigorously, and to bring meaningful content to readers. To celebrate, we've designed a cover that carries all the covers of *Indian BIRDS* from the last ten years. It is our way of thanking all those who have contributed the photographs, or artwork that adorned our covers.

I am often asked whether *Indian BIRDS* is a journal, or a popular magazine? What is the audience it caters to? How scholarly, or serious is it? These questions are spot on, as *Indian BIRDS* is a specialist publication of the birds of South Asia, and that restricted field has only so many people interested in it; either specialists, or generalists. I would not like to cast *Indian BIRDS* into a slot. Rather, I would judge its role by its utility. The question that I ask myself, about it, is whether what it publishes is reliable? I introspect about its strengths often, and here is what comes to my mind: Manuscripts are rigorously peer-reviewed; authors are, more often than not, handheld to improve their manuscripts; science is simplified for readers; both, professional ornithologists, and serious amateurs read it; manuscript submissions are from a wide spectrum of contributors; it is widely cited; and, it covers a vast oeuvre of topics (at least 20).

The ultimate feather in a publication's cap is how and where it is cited. It is a great joy to learn that the online edition of the *Handbook of the birds of the world*, (HBW Alive!) has listed no less than 128 references from *Indian BIRDS*, amongst the highest for a publication from South Asia [http://www.hbw.com/reference/all?title=&author=&year=&journal=India+n+Birds&sort_by=title&sort_order=ASC].

A large number of birders, who send manuscripts to us, are writing

something of this sort for the first time. They require guidance in this art. Our large base of peer reviewers, and members of the editorial board have supported us in this endeavor. The result is that people continue to send us manuscripts after the first one is published. It's reassuring; we must be doing something right.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the editorial team of *Indian BIRDS* and, all those who have helped us referee manuscripts in 2015: Adesh Shivkar, Asad R. Rahmani, Avin Deen, Chris Bowden, Christian Cederroth, Dipu Karuthedathu, Girish Jathar, Gobind Sagar Bhardwaj, Hans Larsson, Mohammed Dilawar, Neha Sinha, Nigel Collar, Oscar Campbell, Pamela Rasmussen, Peroth Balakrishnan, P. O. Nameer, Pramod Padmanabhan, Raju Kasambe, Raman Kumar, S. Prasanth Narayanan, Samir Kumar Mishra, Sreekar R., Sumit K. Sen, Tarquie Sani, T. R. Shankar Raman, and Umesh Srinivasan.

I would also like to thank P. Rambabu, and K. Jayaram, who have worked behind the scenes for the past ten years: the former managing subscriptions, and the latter formatting the *Indian BIRDS* issues; and Prakash Patel, and Krishna Nagarajan who helped with our website.

2015 has also seen a major change at *Indian BIRDS*. Praveen J has voluntarily taken over the management of all manuscripts, till they are ready for copy-editing, and finalising. He liaises with authors, referees, etc., till a manuscript goes to print. The energy, and efficiency that he's brought to the process has speeded it up considerably.

In the current issue, Prasad Ganpule tackles the complexities of the Great Grey Shrike—its variation, identification, and status. This is a path-breaking paper for us, and a rarity amongst the literature on Indian ornithology; Justin Jansen informs us about a collector from the eighteenth century; and Sharma & Singh document aspects of breeding of the Spectacled Finch.

We will continue bringing to you, interesting write-ups in 2016 too. We wish you a year filled with great birding.

– Aasheesh Pittie

Letter to the Editor

The way to paradise

It so happened that one cool January morning, as I was getting ready to have breakfast, the telephone rang. Would I be free to come along to the Junior School urgently? Well, I am used to such calls and the tone of the voice at the other end suggested some urgency as well as desperation. I said I would be there in a few minutes and hung up.

Life in a residential school, tucked away in the countryside, surrounded by wooded areas, fields, and scrub, is full of excitement. Calls such as these invariably mean some local crisis. It could be that a snake had strayed into one of the classrooms, or an injured creature had been spotted. Very often baby birds would be 'rescued' by sympathetic passers-by, leading to elaborate discussions on how to take care of them. I was wondering what was in store for me that morning.

Jyothi greeted, and ushered me, into to the dark, and empty, 'language' room, located at one end of the Junior School, close to the Small Banyan Tree. "There is this Paradise Flycatcher¹ female that got into the room last afternoon, and has been stuck here ever since. We tried to shoo it out but it does not seem to be able to figure its way out."

I peered into the darkness, and tried to locate the bird. In that early morning hour, the winter sun was yet to rise above the Cave Rock hill, and so, though the room had two windows and a ventilator, it was still gloomy inside. As I stepped in, I heard the flutter of wings above me, and spied the rusty-brown and white bird, with a black head and crest, land on the metal beam, several feet above my head. It seemed quite cheerful, and energetic, despite the involuntary fast enforced upon it, for the last several hours. (Birds need to feed constantly as their rate of metabolism is quite high.)

I was told that there were several attempts to get the bird out of the room, since it was trapped, and I could see the evidence of this in the form of the broomstick attached to an extra long pole, and several branches and twigs littering the room. When chased, the bird flew at top speed, from one end of the room to the other, narrowly missing the beams, and metal girders, when chased. It would fly to the roof of the room, avoiding the door, and windows, that were left open for it to exit. Even after an hour of chasing by several staff members (witnessed by eager students from a safe distance), the bird refused to leave the room. So the windows were left open overnight, hoping the bird would leave when given some privacy. But the next morning, sounds of the bird's fluttering wings, and the harsh calls, greeted people; it was still refusing to leave its high perch.

Even as I observed it, the flycatcher—a juvenile male, with the a pair of streamers just beginning to push past its tail—kept dashing from one end of the room to the other, and even when left alone, refused to come to the dry branches kept for it at window-level, and find its way out. When agitated, it would fly even higher towards the tiled roof. After observing it for a few minutes, I thought of two possible strategies to get it out: one would be to darken all the windows, and ventilator, and just let the light come in from the door; and the second was to remove a couple of tiles, so that the bird could escape through the roof,

close to which it kept moving when alarmed. Finally we felt the latter would be less-time consuming, and so we sought the assistance of the Building Department.

Within minutes, Jayaram, the trouble-shooter, was there, and had assessed the situation. He climbed onto the roof and removed the tiles. As soon this was done, I picked up the broom and chased the bird, and as predicted, it flew upwards, spotted the light from the sky, and in a minute was out in the open—free at last!

A few days later the same individual was found trapped in the Junior School's auditorium, which was open on three sides, and covered with a roof supported by metal beams, and girders. Again for the entire afternoon, the bird kept flying up and down the length of the auditorium at top speed, attracting a lot of attention from the students and staff-members, and prompting someone to suggest that the bird was practising for the forthcoming Bird Race! This time we decided to leave it to figure out how to escape, since the auditorium was open on three sides, and it did not take much intelligence to find a way out. Sometime in the evening, when all the people had left, the bird slipped out, and was missing the next morning.

Both these episodes left us wondering about how stupid the bird was, not to realise that by just coming down from its high perch, it could have escaped. A few days later I was struck by these sentences from '*The life of the Robin*', David Lack's classic study, where the author describes the method used for trapping robins to study them by ringing:

The trap found most convenient in the present investigation was a small version of the American house-trap. It consists of simply of four walls and a roof of wire-netting, five feet high with a base three feet six inches square. It could be carried conveniently by two people, and was placed on flat ground, food being scattered inside. The bird enters by a small funnel at ground level, and, once in, it hardly ever finds its way out again. This is apparently because, when alarmed, the habit of a bird is to fly upwards, hence it does not notice the exit at ground level. Of all the birds which entered the house-traps, only house-sparrows and an occasional blue tit were able to go in and out regularly without getting caught; house-sparrows are perhaps more intelligent than most birds.

Perhaps the Paradise Flycatcher too is not as smart as the sparrow. So much for its stunning looks!

— V. Santharam

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¹ Indian Paradise-Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*.

Snapshot sightings

Bean Goose at Pobitora, Assam

Ashok Kumar Das, AFS



On 04 March 2015, a single Bean Goose *Anser fabalis* was photographed at a wetland inside Pobitora WLS (26.23°N, 92.05°E), Assam, where the bird stayed at least till 15 March, enabling various photographers to take pictures. Extensive red on the upper mandible eliminates *rossicus*, and shorter neck eliminates *middendorffi*, while other races cannot be safely eliminated. Bean Goose records are very few from India: It has occurred twice in north-eastern India (Praveen *et al.* 2014), while another bird wintered in Rajasthan this year (Sangha 2015).

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Brown Rock Chat at Saundatti, Karnataka

Shashikant S Naik



Three Brown Rock Chats *Oenanthe fusca* were seen, and one photographed, near the bus stand of Yellamma Gadda (15.75°N, 75.15°E), Saundatti in Karnataka, on 31 May 2015. General habitat where the birds were seen was rocky with scanty grass. The species is rare in Karnataka (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) with no photographic records, so this may be a first.

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Malayan Night Heron at Thoothukkudi, Tamil Nadu

G. Vijaya Anand

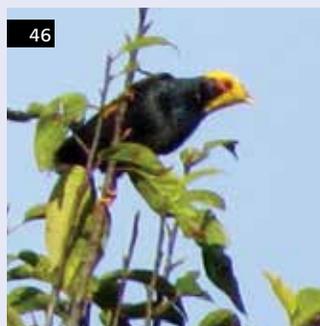


A sub-adult Malayan Night Heron *Gorsachius melanolophus* was videographed at a farm (8.68°N, 78.01°E) near Saywerpuram, Thoothukkudi District, Tamil Nadu, on 22 November 2015. The site is more than 60 km from the nearest stretch of Western Ghats but just 15 km from the sea coast. There have been two prior instances of its occurrence in Tamil Nadu plains and coasts (Satyamurthi 1970; Santharam 1981). It is possible the bird was migrating to Sri Lanka (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

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Golden-crested Myna at Namdapha, Arunachal Pradesh

Soma Jha



A flock of 15 Golden-crested Mynas *Ampeliceps coronatus* was seen while birding along Vijayanagar road, Namdapha National Park (27.44°N, 96.53°E), Arunachal Pradesh, on 07 November 2015. One of them came close enough to be photographed. The species is generally rare in north-eastern India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012); the most recent sightings for India being from Namdapha NP itself (www.orientalbirdimages.org).

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