

A report of the Hooded Pitta *Pitta sordida* from southern West Bengal, India

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The Hooded Pitta *Pitta sordida* (Passeriformes: Pittidae) has an extremely large distributional range. It is common in some parts of this range, for which it has been categorised as 'Least Concern' by the IUCN (BirdLife International 2015).

This species is a summer visitor to the Himalayan foothills, from Himachal Pradesh to Arunachal Pradesh (*cucullata*), north-eastern Bangladesh (Sylhet), and perhaps, Meghalaya, and Nagaland. It is present in the Himalayas mostly during May–August. It migrates (at least) through Meghalaya, and eastern Bangladesh, staying mostly below 400 m, but may go up to 2000 m (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

Bibhutibhusan Wildlife Sanctuary (23.18°N, 88.77°E; 0.64 sq km) is locally known as Parmadan Forest, and is located on the banks of the Ichhamati River, in North 24 Parganas Forest Division, North 24 Parganas District, West Bengal. Its natural vegetation comprises a varied assemblage of deciduous, and non-deciduous trees, while the undergrowth is thick and dense, comprising mostly ferns, tall grasses, and arum bushes. The core area of the forest, which houses over 200 chital *Axis axis*, is fenced off; visitors are permitted to walk along the road by the fence.

Amit Ghosh first observed a single Hooded Pitta on 14 June 2015 (Amit Ghosh, *verbally*). On 23 June 2015, a pair of Hooded Pitta was spotted during our survey in the area (Fig. 1). One bird was collecting food from the forest floor (core area). Later, a second bird flew over our heads and perched beside it. We photographed them. Initially, we heard frequent calls, and the birds seemed to be interacting with each other. Another pair was



Fig. 1. Sighting locations of Hooded Pitta in Bibhutibhusan Wildlife Sanctuary, West Bengal, India.



96. Hooded Pitta courtship display.

sighted on 29 June 2015; one bird stood erect, in a stretched posture, assumed to be courtship behaviour [96]. The survey was interrupted for the next few days, due to heavy rain. On 11 July 2015, we spotted a bird carrying nesting material [97]. Now the frequency of calls, and the second bird's response to them, was significantly lower. We didn't hear them call during our next two visits (15, and 18 July 2015). The breeding season of the species is May–July (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). We could not continue our survey of these two nesting pairs after 18 July 2015 due to heavy rains. The buffer, and some parts of the core area of the sanctuary were flooded.



Photos: Sourav Mondal

97. Hooded Pitta with nesting material.

The Hooded Pitta had been reported from Buxa Tiger Reserve (Allen *et al.* 1997), along with some scattered photographic documentation from Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary, Khunia Forest, in northern West Bengal. But it has not been reported in several works from southern West Bengal, spanning the districts: Murshidabad, Nadia, Kolkata, Hooghly, Howrah, and parts of North-, and South 24 Parganas (Roy Chowdhury 1984; Mookherjee 2004; Ghosh 2010). So, these sightings could be the first for the region. Further monitoring in, and around, the sanctuary during summer is needed to elucidate whether its occurrence at Parmadan was accidental or regular.

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White-browed Crake *Amauornis cinerea* in Maguri-Motapung Beel, Assam, India: A new species for South Asia

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Maguri-Motapung Beel (27.57°N, 95.36°E; hereinafter, the Beel) is a ten square kilometer waterbody situated in Tinsukia town (Tinsukia District, Assam, India). It is an important birding destination for tourists from across the world. This wetland complex is part of the Dibru-Saikhowa Important Bird Area (IBA IN-AS-13) (Islam & Rahmani 2004) but is located just outside the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park and Biosphere Reserve. The Beel (=wetland in Assamese) is located on the southern bank of the Dibru River, which is a tributary of the Brahmaputra. The Beel is connected to the Dibru River by a system of channels, and is very rich in aquatic life. The grasslands adjacent to the northern, and western, parts of the beel are an essential habitat for important grassland species like Black-breasted Parrotbill *Paradoxornis flavirostris*, Marsh Babbler *Pellorneum palustre*, Jerdon's Babbler *Chrysomma altirostre*, Swamp Francolin *Francolinus gularis*, and Swamp Prinia *Prinia cinerascens*. The main grass species here include: *Andropogon* species, *Arundinella bengalensis*, *Arundinella nepalensis*, *Narenga porphyrocoma*, *Saccharum reynaudiana*, *Saccharum arundinaceum*, *Saccharum procerum* (Meghela, Bhutang), *Seacharum spotaneum* (Kohua), *Arundo donax* (Nal), *Cynodon dactylon* (Dubori), *Imperata cylindrica* (Ulukher), *Erianthus ravennae* (Ikora), *Phragmites karka* (Khagori), *Themeda villosa*, *T. arundinacea*, and *Vetiveria zizanioides* (Birina).

On 05 March 2016 we went birding at the Beel with the prime target of photographing the Critically Endangered (CR) Baer's Pochard *Aythya baeri*, which is a winter visitor to Assam Valley. We were accompanied by Dipankar Phukan, a local bird guide from Maguri. At 1612 hrs, on our way back, we saw a crake in the floating marshes [98]. We took few photographs of the bird; it had a gray-black crown, yellowish-green bill, and a black eye stripe that intersects white patches on its eyebrows, and upper cheeks [99–102]. The bird had very large, yellowish-green, feet that allowed it to walk on lily pads. After a few minutes we saw another bird in the same marsh, along with a pair of Ruddy-breasted Crake *Porzana fusca*, and a Rusty-rumped Warbler *Locustella certhiola*.

We observed the bird for 38 mins, while sitting quietly on a country boat. The bird was quite bold and most of the time ignored our presence. It walked, and ran, on lily pads and other aquatic vegetation, just like a jacana (Jacanidae). The bird was flicking their tails most of the time while feeding in shallow water full of aquatic vegetation.



98. The marsh where the White-browed Crake *Amauornis cinerea* was spotted.

Photo: Porag Jyoti Phukan



99. White-browed Crake *Amauornis cinerea*.

Photo: Deborshee Gogoi