

in winter (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), it seems likely that *fulvescens*, whose breeding range is east of *abietinus*, between the Urals and Yenisey (Russia), will reach north-western India (Alan Dean, pers. comm., email dated 09 May 2015). However, it is well known that the Common Chiffchaff has a tendency to vagrancy, with many reports of occurrence outside its known range (Clement 2016).

Hence, it is not possible to completely rule out *abietinus*. Identification, and separation, of *fulvescens* from *abietinus* is difficult. The various races of Common Chiffchaff display a considerable overlap in plumage, and it can be very difficult, if not impossible, to assign an individual to a particular race (Dean & Svensson 2005). It would be prudent to be cautious in the identification of this Chiffchaff. Thus, this individual is best treated as *fulvescens* / *abietinus*, since the call was not noted and no measurements were taken.

The occurrence of Common Chiffchaff, race *fulvescens* / *abietinus*, in India is interesting and has not been noted earlier. It is possible that it is overlooked. Bird-watchers should search

for such Common Chiffchaffs in north-western India, where they could occur.

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Chinese White-browed Rosefinch *Carpodacus dubius* in Mishmi Hills: A confirmation record for India

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The Himalayan White-browed Rosefinch *Carpodacus thura* is a polytypic species with a distribution range that extends from north-eastern Afghanistan, through the main range of the Himalayas, till central- and western China (Clement 2016). Rasmussen (2005) proposed a major update of the Asian Rosefinches, treating the two western Himalayan races—*blythii*, and *thura*—of the White-browed Rosefinch as a separate species from the Chinese races—*dubius*, and *femininus*: the former being called the Himalayan White-browed Rosefinch *C. thura sensu stricto*, and the latter, Chinese White-browed Rosefinch *C. dubius*. This was also supported by subsequent phylogenetic studies (Tietze *et al.* 2013). This split also resulted in the latter species being treated as hypothetical for South Asia, for want of verifiable reports. Baker (1926) listed the nominate race of the Chinese White-browed Rosefinch as, "a not uncommon Winter [sic] visitor to Eastern Assam", which area included present-day Arunachal Pradesh, during Baker's time. Ali & Ripley (1987) listed the *femininus* race of the Chinese White-browed Rosefinch from northern Arunachal Pradesh. However, both references do not provide an irrefutable provenance of record, or reference, from

South Asia, and hence it is listed as hypothetical (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), and not included in the India Checklist (Praveen *et al.* 2016). Through this note, we would like to establish the presence of the Chinese White-browed Rosefinch in northern-eastern Arunachal Pradesh, by presenting photographic evidence.

On 05 May 2016, while on a birding trip to Mishmi Hills (Mehao Wildlife Sanctuary), SS summoned everyone, at 0852hrs, when he spotted a bird that had a bill like that of a bunting. It was hiding in the hedges adjoining a grassy slope (28.26°N, 95.91°E; c. 2550 m asl), not far from Mayodiya Pass. The bird flushed and sat in the open, for half a minute, when everyone got good views. SS took several photographs [27, 28] at this moment. It was clearly a rosefinch, bigger than a Common Rosefinch *C. erythrinus*, mostly grey above, white below, with streaked under parts. A white supercilium was prominent, as were the white streaks on the cheeks. The bird was tentatively recorded as a female Himalayan White-browed Rosefinch using field guides (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) based on its larger size (*vis-à-vis* Common Rosefinch *Erythrina erythrina*), pale eyebrow, and heavily streaked under parts; we discounting



27. Chinese White-browed Rosefinch showing pale, bold supercilium curving down, streaked upper parts, white streaks on the cheek and yellowish brown rump-sides.



28. Chinese White-browed Rosefinch showing wide dark brown streaks on breast with no rufous on throat or upper breast and yellowish brown rump sides.

Both: Sachin Shurpali

several rosefinches that are not known to occur in the Eastern Himalayas. However, we did discuss at the time that the Chinese White-browed also needed to be checked, as the same is not illustrated in the field guides we were carrying.

When we returned from the trip, and after referring to the descriptions, illustrations, and images in Rasmussen (2005), Clement (2016), and Oriental Bird Images website (OBI; www.orientalbirdimages.org), we quickly discounted most females of rosefinches on a number of incompatible features. Though females of rosefinches like Common, Blyth's- *C. grandis*, Himalayan Beautiful- *C. pulcherrimus*, the hypothetical Chinese Beautiful- *C. davidianus*, and the, regionally possible, Pink-rumped Rosefinches *C. waltoni* show a faint supercilium, which is never as prominent as the one in bird was—boldly curving down to the sides of the nape. Females of rosefinches like Blandford's- *Agraphospiza rubescens*, Vinaceous- *C. vinaceus*, Streaked- *C. rubicilloides*, Three-banded- *C. trifasciatus*, Great- *C. rubicilla*, and Red-fronted *C. puniceus* are plain-faced; the first two being much richer toned, and not as grey as this bird. The Dark-rumped Rosefinch *C. edwardsii* has a weak, and pale supercilium, but is a richer dark-brown. The Long-tailed Rosefinch *C. sibiricus*, whose presence is considered possible in Arunachal Pradesh, is eliminated based on shorter tail, and the lack of broad white outer rectrices. Its boldly streaked, grey body eliminates the Dark-breasted Rosefinch *Procarduelis nipalensis*, which was the only other rosefinch seen during the trip. Though females of Pink-browed- *C. rodochroa*, Spot-winged- *C. rodopeplus*, and the hypothetical Sharpe's Rosefinch *C. verreauxii* have white eye-brows, none of them show yellowish-brown rump-sides, as

is visible in this bird. This leaves out only the Himalayan- and Chinese White-browed Rosefinches. However, it also became clear that females of the Himalayan White-browed Rosefinch always show rufous on throat and upper breast. This was completely absent in 'our bird'; all photographs consistently showed white ground colour to under parts, with wide, dark brown streaks, as expected on a female Chinese White-browed Rosefinch. The tail is moulting, but the longest rectrices, and the wings seem to show a rather more streamlined bird, than one with a chunky 'feel', as most pictures of the Himalayan White-browed Rosefinch seem to indicate. The sizes of bill, and tarsi are not discernable in these photographs to be of use to separate the bird from the Himalayan White-browed Rosefinch. Though the pictures depict a bird with a pale eyebrow, the eyebrow appears to be less prominent behind the eye when compared to most images of female Chinese White-browed Rosefinches on OBI. It is possible that the dark feathers on the sides of the crown are obscuring some of the pale feathers, and hence masking the width of the white supercilium.

SD showed the pictures to Pamela Rasmussen, who confirmed that the photographed bird was a Chinese White-browed Rosefinch (Pam Rasmussen, *verbally*, dated 09 May 2016). Pictures were transmitted to Per Alström, who also concurred with the identification (Per Alström, *in litt*, e-mail dated 01 June 2016). Subspecific identification is difficult from these pictures; suffice to say that this area falls within the distributional range of *femininus*. The known range of the Himalayan White-browed Rosefinch extends up to Sela Pass in north-western Arunachal Pradesh, as evident from multiple images on OBI—from the Sela Pass area. It would be interesting to note how close the ranges, of these allopatric species, are. Birders, and photographers, visiting Mishmi Hills should now specifically look out for, and photograph rosefinches in appropriate habitats.

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Editor's note: Based on this record, this species is accepted for the India Checklist.