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Red-footed Falcon
Meadow Pipit
White-cheeked Starling

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Photographer: Santosh Kumar Iganti

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Robert P. Prŷs-Jones, Adrian Skerrett, Hazel A. Jackson, Lisa M. Smith & Praveen J.

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Radde (1863) first distinguished *Falco vespertinus* specimens from eastern Siberia as the separate "variety" *amurensis*. However, over ten years later Hume (1874: 527) was still concerned "…whether the birds that we obtain in India belong to the Eastern or the Western form", and pleading that "…some competent European ornithologist would point out how immature specimens of *Erythropus vespertinus* and its Eastern representative *E. amurensis*, are to be distinguished…". Sharpe (1875: 303) helpfully responded to this, adding to information already published in Sharpe (1874), by providing a key giving "…the differences between the Eastern and Western Red-footed Kestrels in all their respective plumages…". Within a few years the status of Amur Falcon *amurensis*, as very much the predominant species present on the Indian Subcontinent, was clear, and Hume (1879: 76, 81) only mentioned *vespertinus* [=*Cerchneis vespertinus* Lin.] in italics in his India (*sensu lato*)

76. Ventral, lateral, and dorsal views of Biddulph's 1880 *Falco vespertinus* specimen from Gilgit (NHMUK 1897.12.10.1733). Note that the ventral surface seemingly has some staining on it.

checklist, indicating a "…species whose occurrence within our limits…I disbelieve or seriously doubt."

On 19 October 1880, Maj. J. Biddulph collected a juvenile male falcon at *ca* 1500 m in Gilgit (35.91ºN, 74.31ºE) [now in Pakistan-administered Kashmir]. In a subsequent paper on birds from the area, Biddulph (1882: 268) recorded of this specimen: "Length 11.25 inches, wing 8.8, tail 5.1, tarsus 1.12; irides light brown; legs and cere orange; claws paler. I have compared this specimen with those of *C. amurensis* and *C. vespertina* in Mr. Seebohm's collection, and have no doubt of its identity with the latter species, though the immature specimens are difficult to discriminate." Despite this clear statement, subsequent standard handbooks covering the region either failed to mention the occurrence of *Falco vespertinus* (Baker 1928; Ali & Ripley 1978; Roberts 1991), or treated it as hypothetical (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

However, Naoroji (2006: 575) cites T. J. Roberts (*pers. comm.*) as noting that "…a specimen of the Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* from Gilgit, Pakistan, is in the British Museum", now the Natural History Museum (NHMUK). A search for this in 2015 turned up the Biddulph specimen, on whose original label Biddulph (presumably) had initially pencilled "*amurensis*", but then inked the species name over this as *vespertinus* **[76]**. On arrival in NHMUK it had been registered as 1897.12.10.1733 under the name *vespertinus*, but in 2015 the specimen was found stored as an *F. amurensis*.

Standard identification guides (*e.g.,* Clark 1999; Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001; Forsman 2016) indicate that discriminating between young birds of these two species is not straightforward, a view reinforced by the detailed studies of Corso & Dennis (1998), Corso & Clark (1998), and Corso & Catley (2003). Initial assessment of the specimen by NHMUK Bird Group staff, and of photographs of it by external authorities with experience of the species, provided strong but not unanimous support confirming Biddulph's (1882) identification as *vespertinus*. Notably, members of the Seychelles Bird Records Committee, who have to deal with both species as vagrants to Seychelles, concurred on this basis in assessing it as *vespertinus*: gingery fringes to its coverts, and lack of both the overall black-and-white appearance of *amurensis* and also of any transition of its flank streaking to larger blackish marks on the lower flanks. Subsequently, following a visit to NHMUK during which they compared the specimen directly to an array of both species, they unanimously maintained this opinion, with which RPP-J agrees, stressing in particular the dark brown (not black) streaking and strong ginger wash of the underparts; the latter feature, in their opinion, not accounted for by staining alone.

[77] provides a comparison of Biddulph's Gilgit specimen (in the centre) with similar-aged specimens of *vespertinus* and *amurensis* in the NHMUK. Although the head, and underpart markings, of specimen 1897.12.10.1733 are somewhat darker than the typical, rusty, warm-toned, broadly pale fringed, pale-

77. Comparison of specimen 1897.12.10.1733 (centre) with similar-aged specimens of *Falco vespertinus* (1894.6.16.421; Egypt, September 1878; left), and *F. amurensis* (1960.12.37; Maldives, 14 December 1958' right) in the NHMUK collection.

headed juvenile *vespertinus* as shown in field guides, there is a poorly-known plumage variant that has darker crown (more like juvenile *amurensis*), narrower pale fringing on upperparts, and duller and broader dark markings below (A. Corso, *in litt.*, e-mail dated 28 April 2017). However, the dark tail barring is always broader than in juvenile *amurensis*, as shown in **[77]**.

Although strongly indicative, the lack of unanimity in morphological identification of the specimen caused us to seek molecular corroboration via two separate laboratories in the Natural History Museum, and in the University of Kent respectively. Both concurred in producing identifications pointing to *F. vespertinus.*

At the University of Kent, DNA was isolated from the specimen using a Bioline Isolate Genomic DNA extraction kit (Bioline UK) in a sterile UV-irradiated fume hood, and a negative control was included to ensure no contamination during the extraction or PCR process. The sample was suspended in 400 µl of lysis buffer with 25 µl of proteinase K and digested overnight at 55°C. DNA was washed through a spin column, and suspended into 50 µl of elution buffer. Amplification of 325bp of the mitochondrial cytochrome b gene was conducted using a suite of three newly designed overlapping fragment primers. PCRs were conducted using volumes of 25 µl containing 2 µl of template DNA, 12.5 µl MyTaq HS redmix (Bioline), 0.5 µl of each primer and 9.5 µl of dH_2O. Cycle parameters comprised an initial hot start of 95°C for 01 min followed by 35 cycles of 95°C/ 15 secs, 52°C/15 secs, and 72°C/10 secs followed by a final 10 min 72°C incubation period. To confirm the specimen's identity, the 325bp sequence was then compared to other published sequences using the BLAST function in Genbank. The sequence was found to be a 100% match to available cytochrome b sequences for *F. vespertinus*, and was between 3–6% different to other sequences for *F. amurensis* (Genbank accession no. LT852756).

At the Natural History Museum, DNA was isolated from the specimen using a Qiagen DNeasy Blood and Tissue Kit (Qiagen); the sample was suspended in 180µl of lysis buffer with 20µl of proteinase K and digested at 56°C overnight. Following digestion, the sample was washed through a spin column and suspended in 200µl of elution buffer. Amplification of 127bp of the cytochrome oxidase I (COI) gene was conducted using the primers FalcoFA (Kerr *et al*. 2007) and Uni-MinibarR1 (Meusnier *et al.* 2008). PCRs were conducted using volumes of 25µl containing 2µl of template DNA, 12.5µl of GoTaq Green Master Mix (Promega), 1.25µl of each primer, and 8µl of dH_2O. Cycle parameters were 94°C for 04 min, followed by 40 cycles of 94°C /30 secs, 48°C/30 secs, and 72°C/45 secs, followed by a 05 min incubation at 72°C. To confirm the species identity, the resultant sequence was compared to other published sequences using the BLAST function in Genbank. The sequence was found to be a 100% match to other COI sequences for *F. vespertinus* (Genbank accession no. LT852757).

The species-rich genus *Falco* has radiated very recently, within the past 5–8 million years (Fuchs *et al.* 2015). Although frequently considered conspecific historically, a recent comprehensive molecular analysis of *Falco* phylogeny indicates that *F. vespertinus* and *F. amurensis* are best viewed as sister species that diverged approximately one million years ago (Fuchs *et al.* 2015). They form geographical replacements: with *F. vespertinus* breeding across a wide swathe of the north-central Palearctic, from eastern Europe to just into north-west China, and wintering predominantly in western-, and central-southern Africa (del Hoyo *et al.* 2017a); whereas *F. amurensis* breeds further east in the Palearctic and predominantly winters in south-eastern Africa (del Hoyo *et al.* 2017b). Their main autumn migration routes diverge substantially. *F. vespertinus* undertakes an unusual westwards loop migration to cross from the Palearctic to Africa via the central-eastern Mediterranean region *sensu lato* (Corso 2005; Kirwan *et al.* 2008; Katzner *et al.* 2016). By contrast, *F. amurensis* predominantly pass across India from the north-east in autumn, before undertaking a trans-oceanic flight to eastern Africa (Clement & Holman 2001; del Hoyo *et al.* 2017b), probably taking advantage of an equivalent large-scale trans-oceanic migration by dragonflies, on which they prey (Anderson 2009). Between these migration paths, in Iran *F. vespertinus* is merely a rare passage migrant, mainly in the north-west of the country (Scott & Adhami 2006; Scott 2008), and only a single Iranian record of *F. amurensis* has been published, from the south-east (Lantsheer *et al.* 2009). East of Iran, the few sight records of *F. vespertinus*—only from Afghanistan (*e.g.* Meinertzhagen 1938; Smith 1974)—require verification (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The situation in the Indian Subcontinent reinforces this picture, with the present confirmation of the occurrence of a single specimen of *F. vespertinus* from the extreme north-west being the first record of this species from the region.

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A reassessment of Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* records from India, and their rejection

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The inclusion of the Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* in the list of Indian birds has been ambiguous. Hume (1879: 76), stated, '…a species whose occurrence within our limits…I disbelieve or seriously doubt.' This species does not find a place in Oates (1890), but Baker (1930) included it, based on records from Pakistan. Ali & Ripley (1987) included this species on the basis of records from both India and Pakistan. All subsequent works (Kazmierczak 2000; Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) base its inclusion solely on records from Pakistan, carried down from the earlier works. The species has been excluded from the latest 'India' checklist (Praveen *et al.* 2016). This note evaluates each of the historical claims from Indian Territory.

A. O. Hume (1869) procured a specimen(s) from Ferozpur [=Ferozpoor] (30.92°N, 74.60°E), one of which he sent to Jules Verreaux, whose rationale for identifying it as *A. pratensis* was published in Hume (1871). However, Hume (1878: 455) retracted this, stating, 'I now believe that we were both wrong, and I very much doubt whether *A. pratensis* occurs at all in India', a position maintained in Hume (1879). Oates (1890) and Baker (1930) followed Hume in excluding this particular record. Strangely, Ali & Ripley (1987) endorsed this record, citing Hume (1869), but later Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) treated it as 'verification required'. PCR, while researching Rasmussen & Anderton (2005), searched unsuccessfully for this specimen in the Hume Collection in the Natural History Museum, UK (*henceforth*, NHMUK), and also failed to locate it in the register of that collection.

While investigating this issue, RPP-J found three pipit specimens, collected by A. O. Hume in Ferozpur before 1869, recorded in the NHMUK registers. Two of these (NHMUK 1887.2.1.3101 and 3102) are Tawny Pipits *A. campestris*, collected on 11 and 09 November 1867 respectively. From the original label of 3101 (3102 was not located), there is no doubt that Hume identified the species correctly, at the very beginning, as '*Agrodroma campestris*' (the name on the label, and in Hume 1871). The third specimen (NHMUK 1887.2.1.3612; **78, top**) is that of an adult female, collected on 09 November 1867, which was entered into the specimen register at NHMUK as '*Anthus spipoletta* Linn.' [*sic*], a formerly used variant on the name *spinoletta*, which is currently correctly held as *Anthus spinoletta blakistoni/coutellii* [=Water Pipit]. Its original label, however, shows that it is, almost certainly, one of the specimens that Hume (1869, 1871) thought was *A. pratensis*. Hume's

78. Labels of Ferozpur specimen NHMUK 1887.3.1.3612, now reidentified as *A. spinoletta*.

79. NHMUK *Anthus pratensis* specimens 1908.11.12.65 (upper), and 1908.11.10.248 (lower) from Pakistan.

Pics: Harry Taylor © Natural History Museum

original label **[78, bottom]**, in ink, named it '*Anthus cervinus*?' [=Red-throated Pipit]. '*Cervinus*' was subsequently crossed out, and '*pratensis*' written below it. Probably much more recently, both these specific names were overwritten with a heavy hand, in pencil (not by Hume) with '*spinoletta*'. On the reverse of the label **(78, middle)**, '*Anthus Blackinsoni* [*sic*]' seems to have been written, in ink, by Hume. This label clearly reveals Hume's changing opinion on the specimen's identity! We concur with Hume in discounting his own claims of the Meadow Pipit in India.

The second claim of *A. pratensis* from India was by B. B. Osmaston, who collected a specimen from Tehri-Garhwal on 25 May 1894, supposedly from its nest, and later another one from among many more in that neighbourhood. The first specimen was sent for identification to Alfred William Alcock, Superintendent, of the Indian Museum, Calcutta (Osmaston 1894). Birds may not have been Alcock's primary interest; his only ornithological publication dealt with avian parasites (Alcock 1914). The known breeding range of this species is distant from the Himalayas, in the northern Palearctic and the Caucasus (Tyler & Sharpe 2017), and it seems unlikely it would have been overlooked subsequently, had it bred there. In August 2016, while working on the 'India Checklist' (Praveen *et al.* 2016), Gopinathan Maheswaran searched the pipit collections (313 specimens) of the Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata (formerly the Indian Museum) for a possible species as an alternate explanation, to no avail (Aasheesh Pittie, *in litt.*, e-mail dated 08 October 2016). Earlier, Meinertzhagen (1927) too could not locate Osmaston's specimen in the Indian Museum. This record did not find its way into any standard reference on Indian ornithology, presumably due to its unlikelihood, until listed in Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) with the qualification, 'verification required'. While we did not find an alternate identification for Osmaston's specimen, it is clear that there is great uncertainty about the validity of this record.

The first definite record for the Indian Subcontinent was that of H. A. F. Magrath's (1908), who collected specimens in Bannu District (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan), in January–February 1908; he found it to be a cold weather visitor. NHMUK originally registered seven pipit specimens taken by Magrath in Bannu as series 1908.11.12.60–66. Of these, three (64–66) were registered as Meadow Pipits. One of these (64), taken on 19 January 1908, was subsequently re-identified in the register as a Water Pipit *A. spinoletta japonicus* by Beryl Patricia Hall, who was an authority on African pipits. Although RPP-J could not locate the specimen, we are confident that Hall would have revised the species-level identification correctly. Incidentally, Magrath's specimens '60–62' were also Water Pipits, whereas '63' was a Paddyfield Pipit *A. rufulus*. Numbers '65' and '66' were adult males, taken on 12 January, and 06 February 1908, respectively. NHMUK 1908.11.12.65 **[79, top]** is held in the NHMUK collection, and is indeed a Meadow Pipit. Its label states that it was 'shot out of a mixed flock of present species [*pratensis*] & *A. spinoletta* on grass farm. Shot by Mr. G. Dennys 31st Punjabis.' Specimen 66 is discussed below. On 19 March 1908, C. H. T. Whitehead (1909), who worked closely with Magrath and used the latter's overwritten labels, collected a 'solitary specimen shot in a lucerne field' (NHMUK 1908.11.10.248; **79, bottom**) in neighbouring Kohat (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province), which stands as the second distinct record of Meadow Pipit for the Indian Subcontinent.

Magrath felt certain that he saw Meadow Pipits about Lake Gangabal (34.43°N, 74.91°E), Kashmir, in June–July 1914 when he saw a few pipits resembling the Tree Pipit *A. trivialis*, along with breeding Rosy Pipits *A. roseatus* (Magrath 1921). In the absence of a specimen, Magrath did not definitively claim this species, and it remains unclear which pipit would have occurred there in June–July. Richard Meinertzhagen (1927) subsequently claimed to have collected two male Meadow Pipits in the Vale of Kashmir on 06 March 1925, now held in NHMUK as 1965.M.9301 and 9302; his collection further contains a male (1965.M.9299), and a female (1965.M.9300) that he later collected in Bharatpur, Rajasthan [=Rajputana], on 03 January 1952. Each of these four specimens is prepared in different styles, with specimen 1965.M.9302 very closely resembling Magrath's specimen 1908.11.12.65; it may well be the now missing Magrath 1908.11.12.66 (Rasmussen & Prŷs-Jones, unpubl.). None of Meinertzhagen's Meadow Pipit records can be considered valid, given his documented propensity for stealing, and for relabelling specimens with fraudulent data (Rasmussen & Prŷs-Jones 2003; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

The final claim for an Indian specimen of the Meadow Pipit was from Parwali, Hisar [=Hissar] (29.15°N 75.70°E), Haryana, collected by Walter Koelz on 28 February 1933. PCR did not

examine it during the production of Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), but PJ located it later, on VertNet (vertnet.org), which showed it was held by the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology (*henceforth*, UMMZ). PCR examined this specimen (UMMZ Birds 234593) on 25 January 2017, and found it was a Buff-bellied Pipit *A. rubescens japonicus*. Probably the worn plumage of this specimen partially accounts for its previous misidentification, along with the fact that another *A. r. japonicus*, UMMZ 179840, from Girishk, Afghanistan, in similar plumage, was also misidentified as *A. pratensis*, until PCR studied it in January 2017. The previous identification of 234593, as *A. pratensis*, was doubted because of the fairly strong pale supercilium, and more strongly streaked underparts, so other possibilities were evaluated, as follows. First, UMMZ 234593 was clearly not a Tree Pipit, which has a much shorter hind claw than *A. pratensis*. Second, the Red-throated Pipit *A. cervinus* was ruled out, because that species has a very strongly streaked rump, and a strongly pale-streaked mantle, unlike UMMZ 234593. The possibility of it being an *A. roseatus* was evaluated, but UMMZ 234593 is much too weakly streaked above, and lacks any hint of greenish on the wing. Once PCR realised that UMMZ 179840 was also a misidentified *A. r. japonicus*, it became clear that UMMZ 234593 must be too **[80–82]**.

For additional confirmation of the re-identifications of these two specimens, PCR took further morphological data of the UMMZ specimens, and at the Field Museum of Natural History, of the three most similar-appearing species. Measurements (Table 1) were taken for 15 definite *Anthus pratensis*, 17 non-breeding plumaged *A. roseatus*, and 20 non-breeding plumaged *A. rubescens japonicus*. Plumage features and colours of the dried bill and leg were scored from these same specimens using a 1–9 scale for each of 11 variables (briefly described in Table 1).

82. Specimen of *Anthus rubescens japonicus* UMMZ 234593 from Parwali, Haryana, formerly identified as *A. pratensis*. Dorsal view.

80. Specimen of *Anthus rubescens japonicus* UMMZ 234593 from Parwali, Haryana, formerly identified as *A. pratensis*. Ventral view of UMMZ 234593 (top of four) with UMMZ 179840 (second from top) from Girishk, Afghanistan, also formerly identified as *A. pratensis*, and two other UMMZ *A. r. japonicus*.

Pics: Pamela Rasmussen

81. Specimen of *Anthus rubescens japonicus* UMMZ 234593 from Parwali, Haryana, formerly identified as *A. pratensis*. Lateral view.

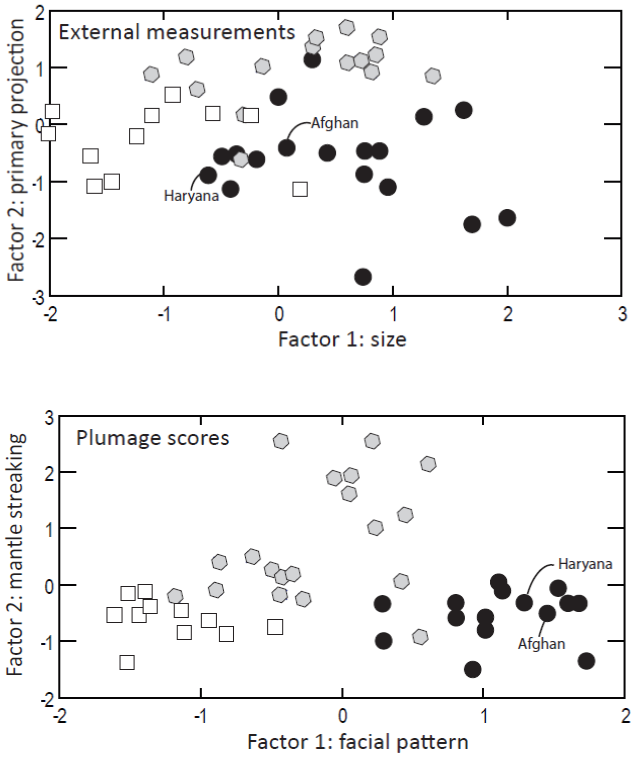

Fig. 1a, b. Principal Components Analyses of a) external measurements and b) plumage scores of *A. pratensis, A. roseatus*, and *A. rubescens japonicus*, showing Haryana and Afghan specimens previously identified as *A. pratensis* and now reidentified as *A. r. japonicus*.
Key: □ *pratenis* ⬡ *roseatus* ● *japonicus*

1 Principal Components Analyses, an ordination exercise, aims to identify, from among several variables, key independent factors that best describe or define the subject of the study. Each factor can be seen as a unique combination of different variables that are significantly correlated with each other and as such represents one particular attribute that explains the subject.

Table 1. Principal Components Analyses summary statistics for measurements and plumage scores of *Anthus pratensis, A. roseatus,* and *A. rubescens japonicus*. The most important component loadings are given in ***bold italic***, less important ones in **bold Roman.**

Component loadings	PC1	PC2	PC3
External measurements			
Culmen length from skull	0.43	-0.21	0.23
Wing length	***4.27***	0.51	0.13
Primary projection	**1.42**	***-3.09***	-0.24
Primary 1 length	***3.24***	-0.09	**1.05**
Primary 1 shortfall	-0.12	0.43	-0.23
Tail length	***4.07***	0.71	0.01
Tail graduation	0.02	0.19	-0.08
Tail fork	0.49	**-1.07**	0.04
Undertail coverts from tail tip	**1.57**	**0.19**	***-2.5***
Tarsus length	0.5	-0.06	0.27
Tarsus distal width	0.04	0.02	0.03
Variance explained	50.45	11.75	7.6
% variance explained	63.44	14.78	9.56
Plumage scores			
Crown streaking (1=none, 9=very strong)	**0.51**	-0.58	***1.18***
Mantle streaking (1=none, 9=very strong)	**-0.52**	***1.5***	0.37
Rump streaking (1=none, 9=very strong)	-0.14	**0.3**	0.16
Eyering (1=none, 9=very strong)	**0.7**	**-0.38**	0.02
Supercilium (1=none, 9=very strong)	***1.51***	**0.61**	-0.29
Auriculars color (1=gray, 9=rufous)	-0.08	**-0.49**	-0.12
Breast streaking(1=none, 9=very strong)	**0.8**	**0.34**	0.6
Flank streaking (1=very thin, 9=very broad)	0.04	0.16	**0.93**
Belly color (1=white, 9=buff)	**-0.59**	**0.93**	-0.08
Lower bill base color (1=pale pink, 9=black)	***1.38***	0.27	-0.22
Hindclaw color (1=pale pink, 9=black)	***1.7***	0.19	-0.14
Variance explained	9.12	4.55	2.95
% variance explained	37.54	18.75	12.13

Principal Components Analyses[1] of these morphological datasets (using covariance matrices, sexes combined due to small sample sizes of females; SYSTAT Corp.) show that, on external measurements, the two UMMZ specimens (both of which are labelled as females) could be any of these three species, although being on the smaller side for an *A. r. japonicus* is consistent with their sexing, but not for a female *A. pratensis*, which would cluster towards the small (negative) end on Factor 1, a strong size axis (Fig. 1a). On plumage scores, however, they clearly group with *A. r. japonicus* (Fig. 1b), confirming the re-identification.

The most recent records of *A. pratensis* from the Indian Subcontinent are from Bridge Lake (32.45°N, 71.38°E; Dera Ismail Khan District, Pakistan) from 26 March 1990, 18 December 1992, and 14 March 1993 (Kylänpää 2000). This is slightly south of where Magrath and Whitehead collected their specimens. Though these are sight records, they may well be correct, as the species is known from that general area in winter.

In conclusion, this study confirms that no records of the Meadow Pipit exist from India, while it appears to be, at least, a casual winter visitor to north-western Pakistan.

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Further ornithological observations from Tripura, north-eastern India

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The ornithology of the state of Tripura, in north-eastern India (22.93°–24.53°N, 91.17°–92.35°E; 10490 km²), had been relatively poorly covered in published literature, until the publication of an annotated checklist by Choudhury 2010). Presented below are further observations on birds found in the state, made during a trip in 2016, which also update the state checklist. All these records were direct observations through binoculars, apart from a few where birds' calls were noted, and some interviews with local forest staff and villagers on conspicuous species. Direct observations were made while walking along existing paths, and from vehicles along roads. This trip lasted for 20 days, from 28 January to 16 February 2016; for convenience, observations from single day visits on 22 November 2016 and on 05 May 2017 have been clubbed here.

83. Typical habitat in Boromura-Gandhari RF.

Pics: Anwaruddin Choudhury

84. The gorge of the Gumti River near Chhabimura is a good birding site.

85. Sepahijala NP & WS is small but important for birds.

Details are provided for the more interesting, and significant records, including rarities (one Threatened, and three Near Threatened species; IUCN 2016), and new records. Apart from the status listed in Choudhury (2010), online information from eBird (2017), and records from a trip report (Chatterjee 2010) are discussed here.

Oriental Darter *Anhinga melanogaster* [Near Threatened] (*henceforth*, NT)

One seen perched on a dead tree standing in a small waterbody inside Boromura-Gandhari Reserved Forest (RF) **[83]** in Gomati District, on 05 February 2016. Another seen on 07 February 2016 near Bison Point in Trishna National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary (*henceforth*, NP & WS). It has also been reported once from Gumti (Dumbur) Lake, Dhalai/Gomati (Krishnan 2016b) **[84]**.

Asian Openbill-Stork *Anastomus oscitans*

Many sightings of small groups. Rudrasagar Lake on 29 January 2016 (more than ten birds); near Sepahijala NP & WS **[85]** on 30 January 2016 (one bird); around Belonia on 31 January 2016 (three birds); in Gumti Lake on 01 February 2016 (two birds); between Sonamura and Kathalia (three birds); in Trishna NP & WS (one bird) on 07 February 2016; near Lalgiri (three birds) on 13 February 2016; and *enroute* Rajnagar tower, near Trishna NP & WS (15+) on 15 February 2016. There are also many records of this species in eBird (Choudhury 2014a,b, 2015,

86. Black-headed Ibises in flight in Trishna NP & WS.

2016;Dutta 2015a, b; Krishnan 2015, 2016a,c; Sarkar 2016; Sinha 2017a,b,c,d; Viswanathan 2010a,c,g).

Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* [NT]

Three, and nine birds were seen near Bison Point in Trishna NP & WS on 31 January 2016. Flocks of six, and seven ibises were seen in the same area on 07 February 2016. Earlier, a lone bird flew over Udaipur town in the morning on the same day. More than six were seen foraging in a watered field at the outskirts of Agartala on 02 February 2016. Six were seen near Bison Point, and seven *enroute* Rajnagar Tower in Trishna NP & WS on 15 February 2016 **[86]**. It was not listed in Choudhury (2010), and Chatterjee (2010). Subsequently there are at least eight reports in eBird (Choudhury 2014a,b; Dutta 2015a; Krishnan 2016c; Sarkar 2016; Sinha 2016a, 2017c,e).

Grey-headed Fish Eagle *Icthyophaga ichthyaetus.* [NT]

Not listed in Choudhury (2010). One was seen perched in a tall tree near a reservoir in Sepahijala NP & WS on 30 January 2016. Again, a lone bird was seen perched in a tall three near the rest house in Trishna NP & WS on 31 January 2016; there was an active nest in a nearby gurjan tree *Dipterocarpus turbinatus*. The local forest staff informed that nest is in regular use. Two birds, an adult, and an immature, were seen in flight between Kathalia and Trishna NP & WS (*c.* 2 km from former) in Sipahijala District on 07 February **[87]**. These birds were not Lesser Fish Eagle *I. humilis* as the white tail of the adult bird had a well-defined black terminal band. Also listed by Chatterjee (2010), and in eBird (Choudhury 2014a; Krishnan 2016c).

Pics: Anwaruddin Choudhury

87. Grey-headed Fish Eagles (adult and immature at right) in flight between Trishna NP & WS and Sonamura.

Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*

Two lone birds were seen, near Bison Point, in Trishna NP & WS on 31 January 2016, and one in flight in the Anandapur area between Boxanagar and Sonamura in Sipahijala District on 04 February 2016. There are at least seven records in eBird (Choudhury 2014b, 2015c, 2016d; Dutta 2015a; Krishnan 2016c; Sinha 2016a, 2017b).

Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus*

Listed as uncommon in Choudhury (2010). A lone bird seen perched high up the banks of the Gumti River, *c.* 2 km downstream of Chhabimura, in Gomati District on 03 February 2016.

Buzzard *Buteo* sp.

A lone bird seen perched in a tree in a rubber garden in the Anandapur area between Boxanagar and Sonamura, in Sipahijala District on 04 February 2016. It continued to perch allowing good views. The upperparts appeared brownish, with white edges to feathers. Underparts brown with white patches on breast, which were clearly visible. The tail was paler grey. The bird could be a Common/Himalayan Buzzard *Buteo buteo/refectus.* **[88]**.

Shikra *Accipiter badius*

Resident, with several sightings of lone birds. A bird was seen perched in a low shrub on the right bank of the Gumti River at Chhabimura on 03 February 2016. Another was seen in a shrub near Boromura-Gandhari Reserve Forest (*henceforth*, RF) along the Udaipur–Amarpur road on 05 February 2016 **[89]**; both in Gomati District. Several reports exist in eBird (Sinha 2016a, b; Viswanathan 2010a, d, e, f, g).

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

One in low flight over the Gumti River, *c.* 2 km downstream of Chhabimura on 03 February 2016 in Gomati District,and another near Bison Point in Trishna NP & WS on 07 February 2016. Four reports exist in eBird from March and December (Choudhury 2015c; Dutta 2015a,b; Viswanathan 2010g).

88. Buzzard *Buteo* sp. in Anandanagar.

89. A Shikra in Boromura-Gandhari RF.

Kaleej Pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos*

A female of the black-breasted subspecies *lathami* was seen in the Babushai area of Gumti WS on 11 February 2016, and a male in Teponia Eco-park (part of Radhakishorepur RF) in Gomati District on 14 February 2016. It has also been reported from Subalsingh, West Tripura (Viswanathan 2010c).

Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus*

Seen on many occasions. Also, there are at least five records in eBird (Viswanathan 2009, 2010a,d,g,h). Up to ten birds (not in a single flock) were seen in Sepahijala NP & WS on 30 January 2016 **[90]**. Several birds were seen in Boromura-Gandhari RFs on 08 February 2016. Eleven (in groups of seven and four) were seen in Teponia Eco-park (part of Radhakishorepur RF) on 12 February 2016.

Grey-headed Lapwing *Vanellus cinereus*

Near Pitra, two, and one respectively on 08 and 09 February 2016; near Amarpur (a few) on 10 February 2016; and near Lalgiri (11+) in the fields on 13 February 2016: all in Gomati District. Choudhury's (2010) was the first published record. There are also two records in eBird (Choudhury 2014a; Sarkar 2016).

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Two were seen in Rudrasagar Lake on 29 January 2016. The prominent white trailing edge to wing (seen when they made short flights) separated these two from similar looking Pintail *G. stenura*, and Swinhoe's *G. megala* Snipes. There is a clear photographic record in eBird (Sarkar 2016), and four other sight records (Choudhury 2014a; Dutta 2015b; Krishnan 2016c; Sinha 2017f), without notes. Sight records are treated here as tentative as snipes are notoriously difficult to identify unless well seen.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Two were seen in Rudrasagar Lake on 29 January 2016, and nine near Amarpur on 10 February 2016. Records exist in eBird from November (Sarkar 2016), and February (Choudhury 2014a).

Pale-capped Pigeon *Columba punicea* [Vulnerable]

One seen in slow flight in Churaibari RF (24.87°N, 91.36°E), North Tripura District on 22 November 2016. The site is *c.* 1.5 km, as the crow flies, from Longai RF of Assam's Karimganj District. Its pale cap and glossed chestnut-brown upperparts made its identification straightforward. These features, and its slightly longer tail and larger size, removed any doubt of confusion with Pompadour Green Pigeons *Treron pompadora*. The habitat was mixed, with bamboo, trees, and also a few hutments. Although not listed in Choudhury (2010), a bird was photographed at Lembucherra near Agartala, West Tripura District (Sinha *et al.* 2015).

Wedge-tailed Green-Pigeon *T. sphenurus*

Not listed in Choudhury (2010) but reported since then in eBird (Viswanathan 2010h). Three perched in a tree in the Babushai area of Gumti WS on 11 February 2016.

Vernal Hanging Parrot *Loriculus vernalis*

Two were seen, one after another, flying to a tree, and then out of it, in Boromura-Gandhari RF in Gomati District on 05 February 2016 **[91]**. Also, two lone birds in Trishna NP & WS on 07 February 2016, a few in flight in the Pitra area of Boromura-Gandhari RF on 09 February 2016, and one in flight in West Kalajari RF, also in Gomati District on 10 February 2016.

Pics: Anwaruddin Choudhury

90. Red Junglefowl in Sepahijala NP & WS.

91. A Vernal Hanging Parrot in Boromura-Gandhari RF.

92. An Oriental Pied Hornbill in flight in Chandichara.

94. An Olive Bulbul in West Kalajari RF. It is rare and localised in north-eastern India.

Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris*

Three perched, and then in flight, in the Anandapur area between Boxanagar and Sonamura on 04 February 2016; call heard in Radhakishorepur RF on 14 February 2016 and a pair in Chandichara near Taibandul on 16 February 2016 **[92]**. Both these sites are in Sipahijala District. Forest staff showed me photos, taken of breeding birds, from north of Ampinagar in Gomati District. There are two records in eBird (Viswanathan 2010c,d). The species, however, is under threat owing to loss of mature trees, and opportunistic hunting.

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

One seen foraging in shrubs on the banks of Rudrasagar Lake at Melaghar on 29 January 2016. There are two other records from January in eBird (Hussain 2017; Krishnan 2016c).

Greater Yellownape *Picus flavinucha*

Two birds seen in Boromura-Gandhari RF on 05 February 2016; several lone birds in Sepahijala NP & WS on 06 February 2016 **[93]**, in the Pitra area of Boromura-Gandhari RF on 09 February 2016; and in West Kalajari RF, Gomati District on 10 February 2016. There are five other records in eBird (Viswanathan 2009, 2010a,d, 2010f,g).

Olive Bulbul *Iole viridescens*

Several lone birds were seen feeding on flower nectar in West Kalajari RF in Gomati District on 10 February 2016 **[94]**. It is a rare bird in India with a restricted range in the southern part of north-eastern India only. It was not listed in Choudhury (2010). There is a single record in eBird (Viswanathan 2010a), and in Chatterjee (2010).

Black-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus atriceps*

Two birds were perched in a leafless shrub near the Gumti River, c. 2 km downstream of Chhabimura in Gomati District on 03 February 2016; and three to four birds feeding in Trishna NP & WS on 15 February 2016 **[95]** and a lone bird in Rowa WS on 5 May 2017. It is a rare bird in India with a restricted range in the southern part of NE India only. There are more records in eBird (Bhutia 2015; Viswanathan 2010a,b,g).

Orange-headed Ground Thrush *Zoothera citrina*

An uncommon species (Choudhury 2010). A lone bird was seen perched in a shrub near the rest house in Trishna NP & WS on 31 January 2016.

Pics: Anwaruddin Choudhury

93. Greater Yellownape in Sepahijala NP & WS.

95. A Black-headed Bulbul in Trishna NP & WS. It is rare and localised in north-eastern India.

Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata*

An uncommon species, not shown in range maps in Kazmierczak (1998), and Grimmett *et al*. (2011). Listed in Choudhury (2010) as uncommon. Two birds were seen at the edge of fields between Maharani and Chandrapur RF in Gomati District on 02 and 04 February 2016. There is a record in eBird (Viswanathan 2010b).

Large Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus hypoleucos*

A single bird was seen south of the Udaipur–Amarpur road in Boromura-Gandhari RF in Gomati District on 09 February 2016. It was scratching on the ground, at the base of a tree, on a slope, when I noticed it. It allowed close observation for a moment, showing its dark olive-brown back, stout down-curved bill, and dark eyes. It could be confused with only the Spot-breasted Scimitar Babbler *P. erythrocnemis*, but the latter is smaller, and has a finer bill, yellow eyes, and brown spotting on breast. It is generally an uncommon bird, with small range in India (Grimmett et al. 2011). There is another record of this species in eBird, which was reported from near a wetland (Sinha 2017d), and hence, needs confirmation.

Maroon Oriole *Oriolus traillii*

Not listed in Choudhury (2010), and not shown on the range map in Kazmierczak (1998), or Grimmett *et al.* (2011). A lone bird was seen perched in a shrub high up the banks of the Gumti River, *c.* 1 km downstream of Chhabimura in Gomati District on 03 February 2016. Two more records exist in eBird (Viswanathan 2010a,g).

Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus remifer*

An uncommon species in the state (Choudhury 2010). A lone bird was seen in Babushai area of Gumti WS on 11 February 2016. Its larger cousin, the Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *D. paradiseus* is, however, common, and sighted regularly. Another record of this species is present in eBird (Bhutia 2015) without accompanying notes; however the Greater Racket-tailed Drongo is not present in this list, and hence worth rechecking; therefore this record is treated here as tentative.

Discussion

Choudhury (2010) had mentioned the paucity of fieldwork in Tripura in the past as well as in recent decades. The lack of records of common species means that trends in the avifauna are hard to discern. Altogether 277 species were listed for Tripura in Choudhury (2010). The present work adds Black-headed Ibis, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Common Kestrel, Pale-capped Pigeon, Wedge-tailed Green-Pigeon, Olive-backed Pipit, Olive Bulbul, and Maroon Oriole to the state's checklist. Nowadays, given the popularity of photography, birders visiting the region should try to photograph as many species as possible and upload them to websites like eBird so that the records can be assessed independently.

Some common species were seen in large numbers during this work. These included Cotton Pygmy Goose *Nettapus coromandelianus* (250+ in Rudrasagar on 29 January 2016), Lesser Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna javanica* (500+ in Rudrasagar on 29 January 2016, and in Sepahijala NP & WS on 30 January 2016; 800+ in Trishna NP & WS on 31 January 2016; and *c.* 1500 in Chandichara near Taibandul on 16 February 2016), and Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger* (150+ in Rudrasagar on 29 January 2016).

The Gumti (Dumbur) Lake, which had several species that Choudhury (2010) documented, including a few Critically Endangered Baer's Pochard *Aythya baeri*, did not result in any significant sightings this time around. The level of disturbance in both Gumti, and Rudrasagar wetlands has increased owing to growth in human population and their activities.

A major conservation concern is the clearing of forests found in the plains, even inside reserved forests, for paddy cultivation. Then there is the expansion of rubber cultivation, irrespective of the status of the land. At some places, land allotted to tribal communities, under the Forest Dwellers (Rights) Act, is converted into rubber estates. The four-laning of the national highway, from Churaibari to Sabroom, and the extension of the railway, from Agartala to Sabroom, have also seriously affected (loss, disturbance, and fragmentation) several reserved forest areas, including Sepahijala NP & WS. In the Sepahijala NP & WS sector, the four-lane highway must be diverted along the railways.

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Notes on the diet of a Jerdon's Leafbird *Chloropsis jerdoni* chick

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Jerdon's Leafbird *Chloropsis jerdoni* **[96 A, B]** is endemic to Peninsular India, and Sri Lanka (Jathar & Rahmani 2007). It is widely distributed in Gujarat, and is found in several protected areas (Ganpule 2016). It prefers wooded habitats in relatively drier areas. Here we present some aspects of its behaviour including, parental care of young, food brought to the nest, feeding habits, and vocal mimicry of other birds' calls during the study period.

Study area

Observations were carried out in the Benakoyi area in Bhat village (22.40°N, 73.62°E) of the Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary (*henceforth*, JWS; Panchmahal, and Vadodara Districts, Gujarat). The terrain is undulating and hilly, as this is the southern-most extension of the Aravallis, forming the western fringe of the Vindhya Mountain Range (Pandya & Oza 1998). The vegetation in the sanctuary consists of the Southern Tropical Dry Deciduous type forest (Champion & Seth 1968). The mean annual temperature in the sanctuary is 25.5°C, with a maximum of 45°C (May), and a minimum of 07°C (January). The annual precipitation in the area ranges between 800–1200 mm.

Methodology

Our study was carried out for 19 days i.e., from 08 to 26 October 2015, till the fledgling left the nest. Direct visual observations were made from the ground, from a distance of 30–40 m using binoculars (Olympus 10x50), to prevent disturbing the nesting pair. Three observers were involved in the study, with at least two on the lookout for the birds' activities at any given moment during observation time. Invasive observations, like of the assessment of nesting material, and the measurement of the nest, were carried out only after the entire family, including the fledgling, had left the nesting site. We used a calibrated measuring tape for all measurements such as, the nest's height above the ground, its dimensions, tree girth, etc. To document the food items brought to the nest, we started our observations at 0600 hrs, and stopped only at 1900 hrs, when the parents stop feeding the chick. As soon as an adult arrived with prey on a nearby tree, we took photographs of the bird (Canon EOS 550D). Later, we studied these photographs to analyse the prey brought to the nest. The prey items that inadvertently fell, or which slipped from the adults' beaks in the removing of insects' wings, and legs, were also included in the list. All prey was identified up to generic

96. A. Jerdon's Leafbird male, and; B. Female with abdomen of katydid insect in its beak (legs and wings of insect removed).

level using standard works (Richards & Davies 1977; Tikader 1982; Borror *et al.* 1989; Majumder & Tikader 1991). Whenever the adults mimicked another avian species, we noted down the name of the species that was being mimicked, as most of such birds are common in the JWS, and later verified our identification of the call by downloading, and listening to, the pre-recorded calls on the open source website, www.xenocanto.com. This was done on the same day of observation to avoid mistakes. We did not record bird calls during the study.

Nesting

On 08 October 2015 we located a nest of the Jerdon's Leafbird when we spotted a bird, with an insect in its beak, on a teak tree *Tectona grandis* **[97]**. The nest was constructed about six meters above the ground, and situated on a branch *c.*1.5 m from the main trunk. This tree was located on the periphery of a pigeon pea *Cajanus cajan* field. The teak tree was 12 m high, with a girth of *c.* 1 m at shoulder height. Though we were unable to see it, we realised that there was a chick in the nest, since both the parents were seen bringing food to the nest.

The nest was a small open cup, partially hidden in tree's thick foliage **[98]**. It comprised dry fibres of the leaf, and bark of the Asian palmyra palm *Borassus flabellifer*; a few blades of the grass *Themeda quadrivalvis*, and a few small, thin, twigs of an unidentified plant, all plastered together with cobwebs. The outer diameter of the nest was 7.5 cm, the inner diameter was 5.5 cm, and it was 2.5 cm deep.

On 13 October 2015, we heard one nestling begging loudly, in the nest, as soon as the female leafbird approached the nest. When the parents were away from the nest, the chick

97. The teak in which the Jerdon's Leafbird nested.

Pics: Kartik Upadhyay

98. Nest of Jerdon's Leafbird on teak.

remained silent, and perched on the rim of the nest, with its beak open. It was active, and opened its beak whenever the parents approached to feed it. It was covered in pin feathers, and its eyes were slightly open. Based on these observations, and since these characters are age-specific in altricial passerines (Hardy 2003;

Kartik Upadhyay

99. *C. jerdoni* fledgling on its nest (ready to leave the nest).

Jongsomjit *et al.* 2007), we estimated its age to be between nine and ten days, which would mean that it hatched during the first week of October.

On 21 October 2015 the chick had grown bigger, appeared fully feathered, and seemed similar in size to an adult, except that its feathers were darker than those of the parents, and those of the throat were not developed; the colour of the throat patch being indicative of sexual dimorphism in the species. On 25 October 2015 the fledgling abandoned the nest. It still lacked the diagnostic throat patch **[99]**. The adults continued to take care of the fledgling. But on the very next day we were unable to locate the family.

Feeding behaviour and prey

On any given day, there were times when the feeding activity peaked, i.e., parents would come back, with food, to the nest in less than ten minutes, and there were times when there was no activity at all. Food passing frequency was highest between 0700 and 1300 hrs (Fig. 1). In general the parents brought food to the nest, alternately, but sometimes both parents arrived simultaneously, in which case, one fed the hatchling while the other perched either on the nesting tree, or another nearby, awaiting its turn. If a threat was detected when one parent was feeding the chick, the other uttered loud alarm calls. Both parents participated in keeping the nest clean by removing faecal sacs.

The major prey comprising the chick's diet were arthropods, which were gleaned by the adults from the surrounding

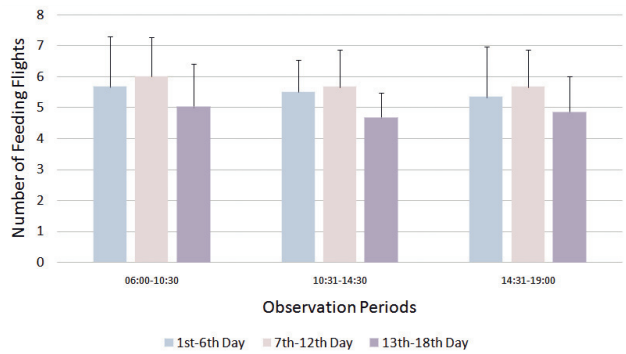

Fig. 1. The pictograph of feeding flight frequency of Jerdon's Leafbird *Chloropsis jerdoni* in various time slots of each day during entire observation period

Table 1. Prey fed to chick of Jerdon's Leafbird *Chloropsis jerdoni*

Class	Family	Serial No.	Common/Species Name
Arachnida	Araneidae	1.	*Argiope sp.*
		2.	*Neoscona sp.*
	Eutichuridae	3.	*Cheiracanthium sp.*
	Sparassidae	4.	*Olios sp.*
Insecta	Tettigoniidae	5.	*Katydids*
	Mantodea	6.	*Mantis sp.*
	Pentatomidae	7.	*Nezara viridula*
		8.	*Piezodorus hybneri*
	Pyrrhocoridae	9.	*Dysdercus cingulatus*
		10.	Unidentified caterpillars
	Apidae	11.	Bees
		12.	Wasp

agricultural fields. Very rarely were they seen flying farther than those, in search of food. Sometimes they spent considerable time searching the branches of the neighbouring trees, acrobatically peering under leaves for insects and larvae. A total of 261 feeding flights of the parents was recorded within 19 days of observation. The first meal brought for the chick was between 0600 hrs and 0630 hrs whereas the last meal was brought between 1830 hrs and 1900 hrs. After 1900 hrs there was no food passing activity, but the female stayed in the nest, and the male perched on a nearby branch of the nesting tree.

When we began studying this nest, the chick had already hatched, as mentioned above. We, therefore, missed recording the food passing frequency, from parents to the chick, for that duration, and hence, the observations presented here are for the period from when the chick was approximately ten days old. It is possible that had our observations covered the entire nesting period, the feeding frequency might have varied. During this period the fledgling was fed 12 different types of invertebrate species, belonging to the classes—Arachnida, and Insecta (Table 1). Both parents actively participated in feeding, and taking care of the hatchling. On an average the hatchling was fed 14–15 times daily. Initially, the parents appeared to feed the chick with small and soft invertebrates, like spiders and caterpillars, which would be easy to swallow **[100, 101]**. As the chick started developing feathers, and grew in size, they brought bigger prey like bees, wasps, bugs, mantids, and katydids **[102]**. Bees, wasps, and bugs were de-winged before feeding them to the youngster. In the case of mantids, and katydids, both, wings, and legs were removed prior to feeding the chick.

Mimicry, and vocalisations

During our study we heard the Jerdon's Leafbird mimic the calls of 17 different species of birds (Table 2), and one mammal (northern palm squirrel *Funambulus pennantii*). Of the birds mimicked, three were potential predators of the Jerdon's Leafbird, namely, House Crow *Corvus splendens*, Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela*, and Shikra *Accipiter badius*. Of these, the House Crow was a frequent visitor in the area surrounding the nesting tree. When this happened, both parents defended the nest either by chasing the crow, or by uttering loud calls. The latter two potential predators were only seen flying over the nesting tree;

100. Male Jerdon's Leafbird with *Olios* sp. of spider in its beak.

Pics: Rahul Bhatt

101. Female Jerdon's Leafbird with *Cheiracanthium* sp. of spider in its beak.

Kartik Upadhyay

102. Male Jerdon's Leafbird feeding bug insect to its 17–18 days old fledgling.

they never approached the nesting tree. Twice northern palm squirrels were observed approaching the nest, and were chased away by the parents who uttered loud calls.

Summary

In our partial study (19 days of an estimated 29) of the nesting cycle of the Jerdon's Leafbird, we noted 12 species of invertebrate prey being brought to the chick by its parents. On an average, the hatchling was fed 14–15 times a day. The nestling feeding frequency of the Jerdon's Leafbird may seem low, but a study of breeding Great Tits (Mägi *et al.* 2009) showed 'that relatively high nestling feeding rates in birds may reflect the low quality of available food rather than the quality of parental care or an abundance of food in the environment,' and vice-versa. It should be noted that earlier studies (Palkar 2010; Nair *et al*. 2012; Wells 2017) record the nesting season of Jerdon's Leafbird from May to September, but we report late nesting in the month of October, which corroborates with the observations of Ali & Ripley (2001).

We also noted that the leafbirds mimicked 17 species of birds; 12 of these were not previously documented amongst the Jerdon's Leafbird's mimicry repertoire.

Table 2. A list of birds that the Jerdon's Leafbird *Chloropsis jerdoni* mimicked

Serial No.	Species
1.	Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis**
2.	Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela**
3.	Shikra *Accipiter badius*
4.	Yellow-fronted Pied Woodpecker *Dendrocopos mahrattensis**
5.	Coppersmith Barbet *Psilopogon haemacephalus**
6.	Small Minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus**
7.	Common Woodshrike *Tephrodornis pondicerianus**
8.	Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*
9.	Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*
10.	House Crow *Corvus splendens**
11	Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus**
12.	Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata**
13.	Cinereous Tit *Parus cinereus**
14.	Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis**
15.	Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*
16.	Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus**
17.	Jungle Babbler *Turdoides striata*

*Species not listed in Ali & Ripley (2001), Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), or Wells (2017)—as being mimicked by the Jerdon's Leafbird.

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First record of White-cheeked Starling *Spodiopsar cineraceus* from India

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On a recent birdwatching trip to Arunachal Pradesh we observed and photographed one unidentified starling (Aves: Sturnidae) at Dirang in West Kameng District (27.36°N, 92.24°E Alt: 1600m), on 17 April 2017 at 1600 hrs. The bird was later identified from the photographs as a White-cheeked Starling *Spodiopsar cineraceus*, a species that had never been recorded in India earlier **[103]**.

The lone bird was seen, in flight, following a flock of Spotted Doves *Streptopelia chinensis* on a farmland (mixed cultivation of rice and corn) bordered with groves of bamboo. The starling and the doves alighted in a field of corn, which had recently been harvested. We saw it foraging by walking on the ground and probing the soil with its bill to capture insect prey. Its back was dark brown; it had a black crown, and a greyish belly contrasting with a darkish breast **[104, 105]**. There was a conspicuous white patch extending from the sides of the crown to the cheek, under the eye and up to the base of the lower mandible. Its beak was bright orange, with a dark base on the lower mandible, and its legs were bright orange as well. Though the sexes of the White-cheeked Starling are distinguishable in the field, individual variations in plumage characteristics are reportedly high, often precluding a positive identification of gender unless a pair is seen together (Yamaguchi 2011). We re-visited the site on 18 April 2017 from 1500 hrs to 1730 hrs, but could not locate the bird.

The White-cheeked Starling breeds in eastern Asia from south-eastern Transbaikal to the Ussuri River, southwards through central and eastern Mongolia, Manchuria, northern China west to eastern Qinghai and the Sichuan Provinces, and eastwards to Korea, the southern parts of Sakhalin, southern Kurile Islands, and Japan. The species is notably migratory, wintering in southern China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan and has been known to straggle into Myanmar, Thailand and the Philippines (Feare & Craig 1999). In China it is common throughout its breeding range (Cheng 1987), and is seen in flocks of thousands in its regular range. This is also a bird of flat lowlands, although locally common up to 1200 m.

Subhadeep Ghosh

103. White-cheeked Starling in Arunachal Pradesh.

104. White-cheeked Starling feeding in an open field.

105. White-cheeked Starling showing greyish belly contrasting with a darkish breast.

Pics: Subhadeep Ghosh

There are no previous records of the White-cheeked Starling from the Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett *et al*. 2011), and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) treat it as possible in the extreme north-eastern part of the region. As such, this species is not included in the India Checklist (Praveen *et al.* 2016). Our report, therefore, makes it the first confirmed record of the species from India.

Given its propensity towards vagrancy in winter, evident from the isolated reports from South-east Asia, we believe that the bird we saw was probably also a vagrant.

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Editorial comment: The White-cheeked Starling *Spodiopsar cineraceus* is accepted into the India Checklist, based upon this note.

Records of Mishmi Wren-babbler *Spelaeornis badeigularis* in the Anini area, northern Mishmi Hills

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The Mishmi or Rusty-throated Wren-babbler *Spelaeornis badeigularis* was long known only from a single specimen (USNM #390355) collected on 05 January 1947 at about 1900 m at Dreyi (Ripley 1950), SE Lohit Frontier Division (28.05ºN, 96.20ºE; Lozupone *et al*. 2004; Fig. 1). After many years, during which the Mishmi Hills were inaccessible to ornithologists, permit regulations were relaxed and the species was rediscovered on 18 November 2004 by King & Donahue (2006) near the 'km 44' sign along the Roing–Hunli road, Rt. 313. King & Donahue (2006) eventually encountered a total of 17 individuals at various locations between 1700–2400 m asl as far north as between Mayodia Pass and Hunli, but noted that they seemed much less common on the northern side of Mayodia Pass.

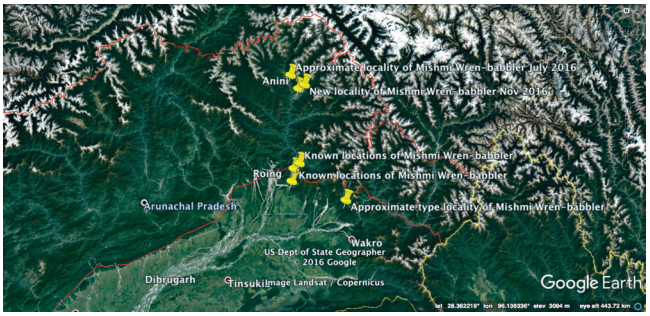


Fig. 1. South-east Lohit Frontier Division

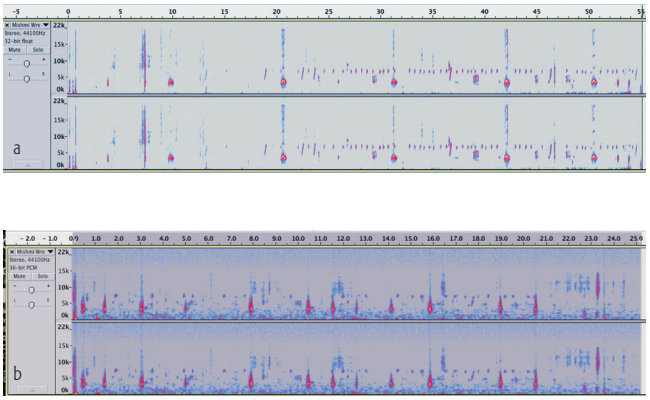
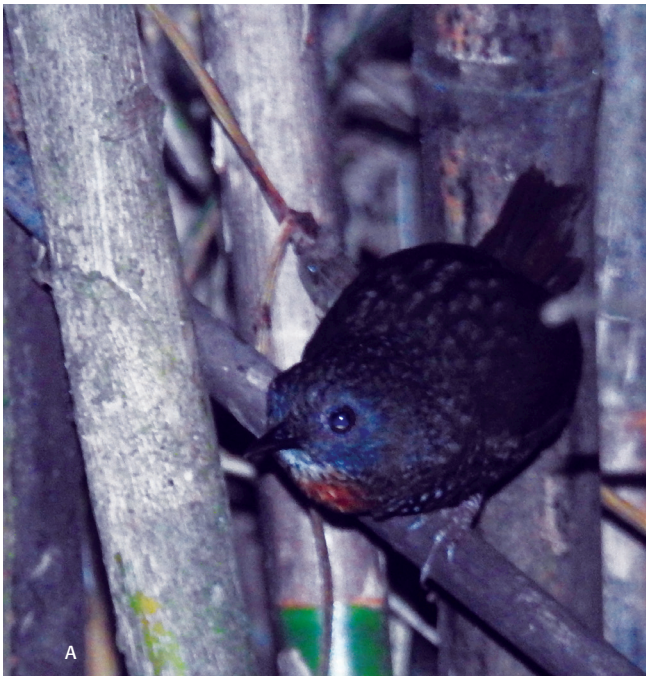


Fig. 2 a, b. Mishmi Wren-babbler, Sound recordings of calls. pitch of 2.5-5 kHz, rate >1 note/s.

Since then, many birders have visited the Mishmi Hills, and the Mishmi Wren-babbler is now commonly, and rather readily, found with the aid of aural playback of its call in dense moist understory of broadleaved evergreen forest, including degraded secondary forest, mostly from 1400 to 2000 m asl (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). BirdLife International (2016) shows the range of the species as extending from the Lohit drainage, where the type was obtained, to Hunli in the north-west, and Roing in the south-west (the extension of the polygon, just into the plains, being a minor inaccuracy). Records entered into eBird from prior to the current trip extend from just north-west of Roing, all along Rt. 313, to Hunli, and are concentrated along the southern side of Mayodia Pass, but this concentration is likely partly influenced by observer effort. Although King & Donahue (2006) found many more individuals south of the pass than north of it, one of us (SD) has found the species to be common north of Mayodia Pass in a section starting, roughly from 5 km north of the pass, up to 40 km.

Because of the much drier, patchier, deciduous and coniferous-dominated forests, and colder, more seasonal climate of the Anini area—compared to that south of Mayodia Pass—we assumed it unlikely that the Mishmi Wren-babbler would occur there. In addition, this area is about 60 km northward, in a straight line, from any previously published record (to our knowledge), and King & Donahue (2006) did not record it north of Hunli, despite visiting the Anini area and beyond during the same time of year as our trip.

Nevertheless, at about 1530 hrs on 27 November 2016, near Alinye (28.82ºN, 95.95ºE, about 15 km NE from Anini), PCR & BH encountered an individual of this species in dense bamboo understory at 1507 m asl. The bird initially attracted our attention by its soft, indistinct calls. Both calls had a pitch of 2.5–5 kHz, rate >1 note/s (see sonograms; Figs 2A, 2B), which, when played back, elicited further calling. Near dusk, the bird repeatedly came into full view in the dim light of the dense understory, and then began singing. We obtained diagnostic views of the specific characteristics, the dark brown scaled upperparts, dark grey auriculars, extensively white chin, small dark chestnut throat patch with dark brown throat streaks, dark brown flanks, and heavily black-and-white spotted lower underparts from breast down. Photographs **[106 A, B]** confirm the identity of the Anini



Pics: P. C. Rasmussen

106 A, B. Mishmi Wren-babbler, Alinye, 27 November 2016, showing its dense mainly bamboo habitat (the bird is in the center of 'b'). Because of the dark conditions, a flash was used.

individual as a Mishmi Wren-babbler. Sound recordings deposited in the Avian Vocalizations Center (AVoCet; avocet.zoology.msu.edu: AV# 20013, 20014) include songs that strongly resemble those of birds from farther south. Thus, there is no reasonable doubt as to the identity of the Alinye bird being a Mishmi Wren-babbler. The bird was extremely confiding and demonstrative, making no attempt to remain hidden, coming out several times onto low branches, and remaining there for several seconds before moving to another one. It eventually moved into a hidden position from which it sang repeatedly. Prior to this sighting, RM had documented at least five individuals of this species from Anini–Mipi road (*c.* 28.62°N, 95.90°E) on 08 June 2016, and 02 July 2016, in roadside undergrowth around 1610 m asl.

Given that the species is considered globally Vulnerable (BirdLife International 2016), this new locality strongly suggests that the distribution of the Mishmi Wren-babbler encompasses a considerably larger area than previously documented, and that its habitat and climatic preferences are fairly broad. Further surveys are needed in the Anini area, and elsewhere, to the west and east of the Dibang Valley. If it were found in further locations it would probably warrant downlisting to Near Threatened, as BirdLife International (2016) indicated would be appropriate if it is found to be more widespread. However, it has apparently not been reported from the Walong road, not far to the east of the Lohit Valley where the type was collected. Areas immediately to the west of the Roing–Anini road are poorly explored ornithologically, so the western extent of the species' range is unknown. Although Alinye is just 33 km from the Line of Control (between China and India), the border is along ridges above 3500 m asl and mostly much higher, so this species seems unlikely to have been able to cross into Tibet, even though small areas of apparently suitable habitat, and elevation, occur in valleys there.

Acknowledgements

We thank the Government of Arunachal Pradesh for permission to enter the state. Our travel and birding companion, Roon Bhuyan, also provided transport. Nikhil Devasar, Asian Adventures, organised our travel. Praveen J. provided helpful information. Aniko Mihu and Wendu Miso of Alinye Tourist Lodging gave welcome hospitality. PCR thanks the Delia Koo Global Faculty Endowment, and Siddharth Chandra, Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University, for travel support.

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Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus* from Irinjalakuda, Thrissur, Kerala, India

Raphy Kallettumkara

Kallettumkara, R., 2017. Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus* from Irinjalakuda, Thrissur, Kerala, India. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (3): 76–77.
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Manuscript received on 10 May 2017.

On 02 April 2017, at 1230 hrs, my children alerted me about a 'kite' that was flying over a small wetland next to my house. I was surprised to see that it was a harrier *Circus* sp., as I had never seen any near my home. Through binoculars I saw that it was a largish harrier, potentially one that could be a Pied Harrier *C. melanoleucos*. It was upon a dead Lesser Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna javanica*, and was trying to pick it off the ground **[107]**. I did not see how the duck had been killed; if at all by the harrier.

I would have entered the knee-deep water to get closer, but numerous crows were already mobbing the harrier, and so I decided not to disturb it further. I continued taking pictures of it perching, and in flight **[108-110]**, till I had to leave on work.

Upon checking the photographs later, I realised the bird was not easily identifiable. Having suspected it to be a Pied Harrier, by its size, I posted a picture to the Whatsapp group that had many bird-watchers from Kerala, as a potential Pied Harrier. Praveen J. suspected it was a Pied- or an Eastern Marsh Harrier *C. spilonotus*. Further discussions in various groups also suggested that this was a potential, or a definite, candidate for an Eastern Marsh Harrier. Meanwhile, Chaiyan Kasorndorkbua from Thailand, who is familiar with both the species, confirmed that it was an adult female Eastern Marsh Harrier. I discuss below the reasons why it is identified as such.

- The bird is obviously a female or a juvenile male – as all adult male harriers are well-marked birds with pale grey as the prominent body colour, with black primaries, and white underparts.
- The bird has wide wings, with five prominent primary 'fingers' **[108]**; that eliminates the smaller Pallid- *C. macrourus*, and Montagu's *C. pygargus* Harriers Additionally, females and juveniles of both the species have strongly marked face, and head marking, unlike this bird **[107]**.
- The bird has a paler, streaked body, predominantly pale underwings, barred upperwings, and lacks the typical head

107. The Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus* perched on a Lesser Whistling Duck.

108. The Eastern Marsh Harrier wide wings, with five prominent primary 'fingers'.

109. The Eastern Marsh Harrier banking to show the dorsal wing pattern.

Pics: Raphy Kallettumkara

110. The soaring Eastern Marsh Harrier.

pattern of a juvenile, or a female Western Marsh Harrier **[108, 109]**

- Well-barred primaries (lacking black tips), barred secondaries (*compare* uniformly coloured in Western Mash), well-marked median- and secondary underwing coverts **[109]**, and lack of uniform pale primary upper coverts, and upper secondaries eliminate a male Western Marsh Harrier **[108, 109]**.
- Lack of any sort of facial pattern **[107]**, and less well-marked underwing **[110]** eliminates a juvenile or female Hen Harrier.
- That leaves only Pied- and Eastern Marsh Harriers for discussion.

A Pied Harrier should, ideally, show a hooded, owl-like appearance even in juvenile plumage. The face of this bird is plain, with no prominent pale border around the eyes, with just a dark eye patch, and lacks a prominent pale collar **[107]**. Overall, the bird appears to have a stronger bill, and slightly larger than a Western Marsh Harrier. Other features, like the hint of a carpal patch, rufous-brown underparts and thighs, also favour a female Eastern Marsh Harrier, over a female Pied Harrier **[107, 108]**.

The images were sent to Chaiyan Kasorndorkbua, who is familiar with both the species, and he confirmed that it was an adult female Eastern Marsh Harrier, based upon several features such as: Less buff patagial band **[108]**; less contrasting brown and grey upper wing **[108]**; bold streaks on buff (*compare* white of female Pied) underparts **[108]**; and wide black sub-terminal band on trailing edge of the wings **[110]** (Chaiyan Kasorndorkbua *in litt.*, e-mail dated 27 April 2017).

Jonathan Eames reported one bird on 08 February 1991 from Periyar Tiger Reserve (9.46°N, 77.24°E), Kerala (Robson 1991), but there is no field description with it. Due to lack of well-substantiated records, Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) considered it hypothetical. Later, it was accepted into the list of birds of South Asia in Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) based on photographs from West Bengal (Kesavabharathi & Sundaran 2016). From southern India, Eastern Marsh Harrier was photographed in Chennai (Kesavabharathi & Sundaran 2016), and that remains the only published report from India, apart from a photograph in Naoroji (2007). There is another photographic report from Telengana this year in eBird (Pradhan 2017). This is an addition to the birds of Kerala (Praveen 2015), and the third record for southern India (see p. 83 of this issue).

Acknowledgements

I thank Praveen J for all his help; he took the initiative to collect details, discussing it with the experts, and passing on the information to me. I am also grateful to Chaiyan Kasorndorkbua for his expert advice in confirming this record. Several editors of eBird helped in providing their opinion and contributed to the discussion – Rajah Jayapal, Dipu Karthedathu, C. Sashikumar, and Rajneesh Suvarna, and I thank them.

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Occurrence of the Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti* in Navsari and Valsad Districts of Gujarat, India

Jenis Patel, Anirudh Vasava & Niyati Patel

Patel, J., Vasava, A., & Patel, N., 2017. Occurrence of the Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti* in Navsari and Valsad Districts of Gujarat, India. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (3): 78–79.
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Manuscript received on 15 April 2017.

The Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti* was rediscovered after 113 years, in 1997 (King & Rasmussen 1998). This rediscovery resulted in concerted Forest Owlet surveys, and further ecological studies on the species. These provided an encouraging perspective about the distribution, and ecology, of this endemic, and Critically Endangered species (BirdLife International 2017). In the 20 years after its rediscovery, the Forest Owlet has been reported from nine locations in eight districts of India (Mehta *et al*. 2015), including a recent sighting in Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary (Laad & Rohidas 2015). In addition to these, we present here two more sighting locations from two different districts of Gujarat (**Fig: 1**).

In November 2014, a pair of Forest Owlets was recorded in Dang District (Gujarat) (Patel *et al*. 2015). Subsequently, intensive studies have been carried out in the district, to understand the bird's distribution, and conservation needs. During this study, 82 individual birds have been recorded so far; 71.42% in teak *Tectona grandis* dominated agricultural landscape, 20.40% in degraded forest, 6.12% in riverine habitat, while only 2.04% was recorded in forest area (Patel et al. *in press*). Considering these recent findings, we carried out a five-day survey at 19 different locations in Valsad, and eight locations in Navsari Districts. All these survey sites are located in non-protected forests, and had not been surveyed earlier. All these locations were chosen on the basis of habitat and terrain similarity with the locations in the Dang District, where the Forest Owlet was known to occur.

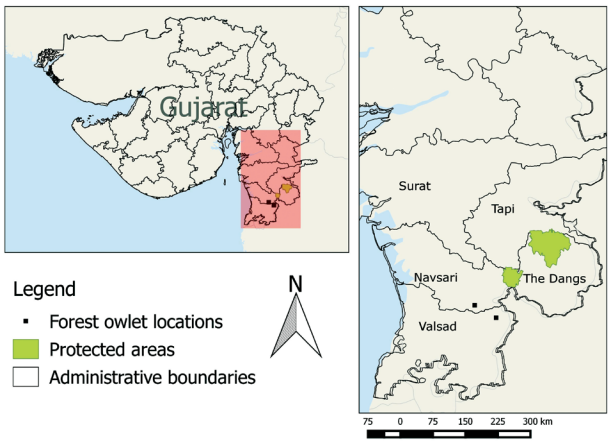
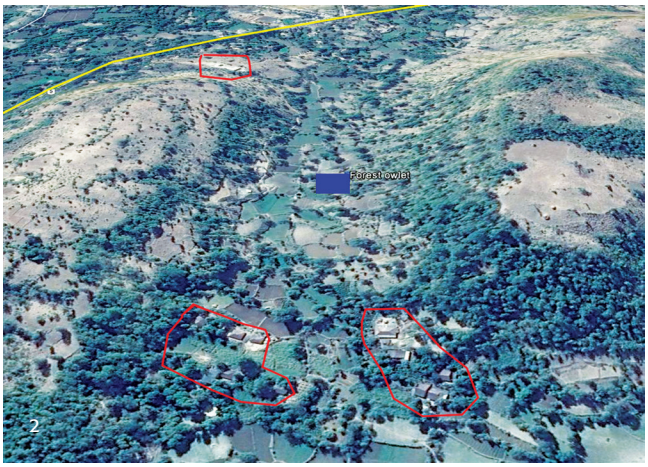


Fig. 1. New distribution records of Forest Owlet in Navsari District and Valsad District, Gujarat.

At each location, we walked two kilometers from the main road, towards the agricultural farms, and at intervals of 500 m, we played the Forest Owlet's territorial call for one minute, and waited for five minutes. We repeated this process one more time before moving on to the next point.



Figs. 2 & 3. Satellite image of forest owlet sighting sites in Navsari District (top), and Valsad District (bottom) where red polygons are indicating human settlement, Blue blocks show Forest Owlet locations and yellow lines are indicating main roads. (Sourced from Google Earth).

Table 1. Parameters collected from Google Earth satellite images and field observations

Parameters	Navsari District	Valsad District
Habitat	Mahua dominated agricultural landscape	Teak dominated agricultural landscape
Terrain	Slightly undulating	Slightly undulating
Altitude (mts.)	133	244
Avg. aerial dist. from nearest human settlement (mts.)	319	78
Avg. aerial dist. from nearest main road (mts.)	498	320
Aerial dist. of nearest sighting record from Dang (km)	38.34	34.71
Distance from the nearest sea coast (km)	39.47	51.6
Number of local people working in proximity of 150 m. during the sighting	6	4

On 24 December 2016, at 1100 hrs, while conducting the survey on Vansda–Dharampur State Highway #5, a Forest Owlet responded to the territorial call near Anklach village (20.62°N, 73.27°E). The call was coming from a mahuva tree *Madhuca indica*. A local farmer, standing just beside that tree, helped us to spot it. Ten minutes later one bird flew out to another mahuva tree. We observed that individual for the next 45 min. During this period, it stayed hidden behind the leaves of the tree. This was a mahuva dominated agricultural landscape, as most of the teak trees were very young, and not taller than two to three meters (Table 1; Fig: 2). On the next day, we surveyed forest patches near Dharampur in Valsad District. At 1720 hrs, a Forest Owlet responded near Ganva village (20.55°N, 73.38°E) in a teak dominated agricultural landscape, similar to the Dang forest (Table 1; Fig: 3). The owlet was perched on a teak tree, behind huge leaves. As it was a winter evening, and the sun was getting low, and we could not make any further observations. At both locations, we asked people, who were working nearby, about this species. They identified the Forest Owlet by its call, and diurnal habits. The local name of the Forest Owlet is '*Dhudo*', similar to that given by the tribes of Dang District. According to them, the Forest Owlet is fairly common and they often see it perched on trees on their farms; which is also a very common reply from people in the Dang forest (Patel *et al*. in press).

Conclusion

Our surveys confirmed the presence of Forest Owlets outside the Dang forest, which indicates that it may not be rare in Gujarat, as presumed. Further surveys, and detailed studies, are needed in other locations with similar habitats. Our study suggests that Forest Owlets prefer to live near agriculture fields, but rely on small patches of nearby forest for roosting and nesting (pers. obs.). Our brief interactions with tribal communities embolden us to collaborate with them in future, for monitoring, and protecting the owlet.

Acknowledgements

We thank the Rufford Foundation, and the International Bird Conservation Network for funding this study. We also thank Kuldeep Gamit, and Shashank Patel for their logistics support. Finally, we wish to thank all the local villagers who helped us in the field.

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Sighting of the Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti* in Harsul, Nashik District, Maharashtra

Bishwarup Raha, Rahul Gadgil & Shobha Bhoye

Raha, B., Gadgil, R., & Bhoye, S., 2017. Sighting of the Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti* in Harsul, Nashik District, Maharashtra. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (3): 80–81.
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Manuscript received on 24 April 2017.

The forests of Harsul (20.11°N, 73.45°E), in Trimbak Taluka of Nashik District, Maharashtra, comprise tall tree species such as teak *Tectona grandis*, sadada *Terminilia tomentosa*, mahua *Madhuca indica*, mango *Mangifera indica*, *Bombax insignia*, pangara *Erythrina* species, among other trees, shrubs, and grasses. The Nature Conservation Society of Nashik, along with the forest department, has been conducting surveys of forest birds, in this area, for the past decade, besides advocating wildlife conservation in the surrounding villages of Waghera, Chinchwad, and Harsul—especially in discouraging the use of catapults to kill birds.

Pics: Bishwarup Raha

111 A, B. Forest Owlet (A) ventral view, (B) dorsal view.

Map: S. Subramanya

Fig. 1. Distribution range of Forest Owlet in Nashik District.

On 10 December 2016, we were following a flying Shikra *Accipiter badius* when we noticed an owlet perched on a mahua tree about 4–5 m above the ground, and preening itself. The time was 1000 hrs. The owlet did not appear to be disturbed by our presence. It looked different from a Spotted Owlet *Athene brama*. On closer observation we saw that its crown was grey-brown and lacked prominent spotting, its eyes were bright yellow, its neck and upper breast appeared dark brown, and abdomen and legs pure snowy white. Leafing through Manakadan *et al*. (2011), we found it matched the illustration of the Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti*. Photographs **[111 A, B]** of the bird were sent to Ranjit Mankadan, and Vibhu Prakash of the Bombay Natural History Society (*henceforth*, BNHS), who subsequently confirmed it as a Forest Owlet.

This is the first record of this Critically Endangered owlet from Nashik District. However, this is not unexpected, as Nashik lies within its known current range (Fig. 1), and the current site lies 90 km south-south-westard of Purna Wildlife Sanctuary (*henceforth*, WLS), Gujarat, and 65 km north-north-eastward of Tansa WLS, Maharashtra, almost in a straight line between these sites, and our record now fills this gap of 150 km. Though we have been involved in several bird surveys in this area, all of them were diurnal surveys in which aural playback was strictly not used in all these years – hence, a species like the Forest Owlet has eluded our observation.

We feel that using aural playback here could be detrimental to wildlife, as these gadgets are easily available, and local ethnic

communities may misuse them by luring birds with the played-back calls, and kill them with catapults.

Acknowledgement

We are grateful to Ranjit Mankadan, Dy. Director, BNHS, for his help in identification and going through this manuscript.

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Status of Northern Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* at Harike, Punjab, India

Harkirat Singh Sangha

Sangha, H. S., 2017. Status of Northern Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* at Harike, Punjab, India. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (3): 81.
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Manuscript received on 09 April 2017.

The Northern Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* is essentially a Palearctic bird. It has been recorded throughout the Punjab, and Sind, as a sparse and uncommon winter visitor (Roberts 1991). Ali & Ripley (1981) describe it variously as 'a vagrant, rare, and as locally not uncommon…'. It is mainly a winter visitor to parts of north-western India: Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Punjab (Grimmett *et al.* 1998), who also assign the 'rare' status to this owl in India. The Northern Long-eared Owl is 'a summer visitor' (Biddulph 1881), arriving early in March, and is common up to the middle of May in Gilgit (Scully 1881). Its breeding is reported from Baluchistan, Chitral, and western Kashmir, but confirmation is needed (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

While birding with Per Undeland, at Harike (31.17°N, 75.21°E), Punjab, ten Northern Long-eared Owls were found roosting in trees of *Acacia catechu* on 18 December 2015. They were roosting on different trees, spaced 10-15 m apart. These trees were part of a *c.* 150 x 150 m plantation of mixed trees surrounded by agricultural fields, and the owls were confined to the densest part of the plantation. They were very well hidden in the foliage, and flushed at close range. They rested during the day in the plantation and issued from it, to hunt, about sunset. On one side, beyond the fields, was the River Sutlej, with wide flood plains dotted with tussocks of sarpat grass *Saccharum* sp.. I had observed four birds on 08 March 1999 in a shisham *Delbergia sissoo* plantation, in Harike, along the Sutlej. At that time the trees were almost bare, and the birds were extraordinarily exposed. Contrary of the present observations, all the birds were then roosting on a single tree, at the edge of the plantation, where signs of tree cutting were evident. Although fresh leaves of spring had just started sprouting on some trees, they failed to conceal the owls (Sangha 2001). Those birds were extremely confiding. While constantly alert, they permitted photography from close quarters, and did not fly away. However, the birds observed on 18 December 2015 were very shy. When flushed by our approach they flew a short distance, and then suddenly alighted again. They were reluctant to leave the roosting site.

There have been prior reports of similar roosting congregations from this site, and the details are given in Table 1.

Considering the foregoing facts, these recent sightings of Northern Long-eared Owls at Harike, Punjab are not unexpected. Harike is well within the range of the species and the above records suggest that the birds are fairly regular during winter at Harike.

Table 1: Roost congregations of Northern Long-eared Owl in Harike

Date	Count	Observer	Reference
23 March 1997	17	Per Undeland	Robson (1997)
7 February 1998	4	Per Undeland	Robson (1998)
2 February 1999	6	Ben King	Verbally, 2 February 1999
8 March 1999	4	Harkirat Sangha	Sangha (2001)
18 December 2015	10	Per Undeland & Harkirat Sangha	This work

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Does the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx erithaca* breed in southern Gujarat?

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The Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx erithaca* is a summer visitor to the eastern Himalayan foothills, and is resident in south-western India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It was not recorded from Gujarat (Parasharya *et al.* 2004; Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) until 2015, when Jat (2015) reported it from Vansada National Park in the Dang forest. In this note, we report a second sighting of the species from the Dang forest, substantiating the hypothesis that it might be a visitor to the area during its breeding season (Jat 2015) and its inclusion in the checklist of the birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2016).

On 20 July 2016, VM and DMR were surveying Odonata on a small stream of Ambika River near Ahwa in Dang district, Gujarat. A small kingfisher, which flew across the stream from less than a meter away from us, drew our attention. The kingfisher disappeared into the vegetation, but it looked different, as it had characteristic pink colour. Next day, we saw it again, at the same location, when it flew *c.*300 m along the stream. This time we could confirm that it was an Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher. On the fourth day, while collecting damselflies in a damp area of the stream, we saw the kingfisher again, perched in vegetation at the edge of the stream. The bird had mud on its beak. During the next few minutes, we observed it attempting to dig a burrow 1.5 m above the water, in the mud bank. Intermittently, it returned to perch upon the short vegetation nearby. We took a few record photographs of the bird **[112]**.

MUJ joined us on the morning of 24 July 2016 to document this sighting. The kingfisher was spotted at a little distance from the place where it was seen digging into the mud bank.

Jat (2015) recorded the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher from Vansda National Park (*henceforth*, VNP) on 14 June 2014 for the first time. MUJ had tried to locate it again in VNP during June–July 2015 but failed. This sighting is the second record of the species in the Dang forest, and that too, during its breeding season. However, its current location is at least 30–40 km west of the previous one, and is outside the protected area. In this sighting the bird was actually seen attempting to dig a tunnel, and photographed with a mud-soiled beak. This is evidence enough to suggest that the species probably breeds in the area. It is quite likely that it is a regular breeding visitor to the Dang forest during the south-western monsoon. Birdwatchers might have missed it, as it remains close to the water in forested areas, and during the monsoon, people usually avoid walking down to the stream as it is slippery and risky. Both these sightings, from Dang forest, are the result of intensive searches near the stream during the monsoon. If attempts are made, the species might be sighted from many more locations in the Dang forest, which is the northern most extension of the Western Ghats (Rathod *et al.* 2016), which comprise its main range (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen and Anderton 2012). Its wider distribution in southern Gujarat is evident from another record from Surat: On 05 November 2016, Bharatsinh Rathod (ITI, Majura Gate, Surat) found a dead bird in his office (photograph on local Whatsapp group, shared by Palak Thakor, Jugalkishor Patel). The previous two records (Jat 2015), and the current two, are either from the beginning, or the end of its breeding season. It has not yet been recorded here during its non-breeding season. Hence the species could be considered a breeding visitor to southern Gujarat. The four records also justify its inclusion in the Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2016). It could be classified as a summer/breeding visitor to southern Gujarat.

Vishal Mistri

112. Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher perching between bouts of digging nesting tunnel.

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The first sighting of an Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotous* from Telangana

Ashis Kumar Pradhan, Bhagyashree D. Rao & Raghuram Reddy

Pradhan, A. K., Rao, B. D., & Reddy, R., 2017. A report of an Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus* from Telangana, India. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (3): 83–84.
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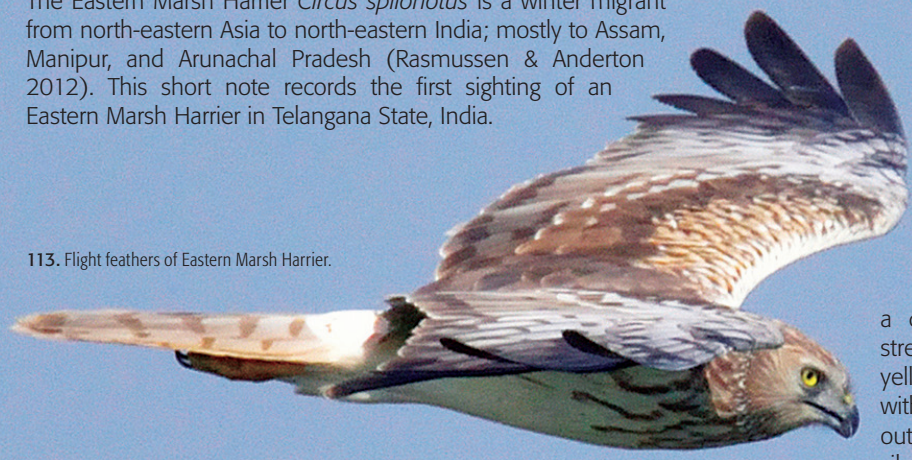
India is one of the largest wintering grounds for harriers [Aves: Accipitridae: *Circus*] worldwide, and harbors six species of harriers of the 16 found across the globe (Verma 2007). The Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus* is a winter migrant from north-eastern Asia to north-eastern India; mostly to Assam, Manipur, and Arunachal Pradesh (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). This short note records the first sighting of an Eastern Marsh Harrier in Telangana State, India.



113. Flight feathers of Eastern Marsh Harrier.

On 05 February 2017, Big Bird Day, we were offered an opportunity, by the Hyderabad Birding Pals (HBP) group, to visit Manjeera Reservoir (17.64°N, 78.06°E) to record birds. While birding at a location that is about four kilometres from Manjeera Dam (17.64°N, 78.07°E), at 1000 hrs, a harrier was seen gliding low over the marshes, and paddies. Western Marsh- *C. aeruginosus*, and Montagu's- Harrier *C. pygargus* are known to winter here. This harrier had a distinctive greyish head with brown streaking, and the colour of its iris was yellow. Its flight feathers were pale grey with black tips, and we could count five outermost blackish primaries. Its tail was silvery grey with blackish-brown barring, and it had a distinct white rump **[113]**. Underparts were mostly white; the throat and upper breast were heavily streaked with black stripes, while lower breast, belly, and thighs were white **[114]**. Features like the tail with brown barring, and bold black streaking on the breast, separate it from adult male and female Pied Harriers (Grimmett 2011). Based on the observations described above, we believe this bird is a variant of the Eastern Marsh Harrier and is an adult male though it lacks a uniform black head and neck (Naoroji 2007; Wong & Wong 2016).

We re-visited the place a few times, in a hope of finding more individuals, and a roosting site, but were unsuccessful. As this is the first report of the species from the state, it is difficult to conclude whether it is a passage migrant, or a vagrant in Telangana.

114. Underwing pattern of Eastern Marsh Harrier.

Pics: Ashis Kumar Pradhan

While going through the past records of Eastern Marsh Harrier in Telangana, and south-eastern India, we found a handful of records from Odisha, and one from Tamil Nadu, but no reports from erstwhile undivided Andhra Pradesh (Taher & Pittie 1996; eBird 2017). Tim Inskipp has compiled several instances of the occurrence of Eastern Marsh Harriers in Odisha (Inskipp 2015). Last year, an Eastern Marsh Harrier was documented for the first time in Chennai, Tamil Nadu (Kesavabharathi & Sundaram 2016). Hence, this appears to be the first record for Telengana.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Srinivas Mulagala who first identified the bird, and informed us that it is a rare record from south-eastern India. We also thank Gopalakrishna Iyer, and Sriram Reddy for helping us in writing this report and providing literature related to Eastern Marsh Harrier. We thank Praveen J. for his valuable suggestions, and for updating us about the reports of Eastern Marsh Harrier in India.

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Letter to the Editor

A report of the Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis* from southern West Bengal

The Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis* is found in the southern Western Ghats, the Himalayan region from eastern Himachal Pradesh up to Arunachal Pradesh, and the hills of north-eastern India—on the mainland of the Indian Subcontinent (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). During our year-round citizen science biodiversity monitoring program we recorded a single bird at Kumar Mangalam Park, Durgapur, West Bengal (23.56°N, 87.30°E), on 09 October 2016 (Maulick 2016) **[115]**. We identified the bird readily by its dark greenish/bluish breast and belly, reddish legs, blackish head, orange bill, and glossy-blue throat.

Rajib Maulick

115. Oriental Dollarbird at Kumar Mangalam Park, Durgapur.

The range maps found in standard works (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), and online sources (BirdLife International 2017; eBird 2017), indicate that the species is mainly found in the Himalayan foothills of West Bengal (the districts of Darjeeling, Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, and Cooch Behar). This is probably the first record of this bird from southern West Bengal. Khan (2005) reported it as a resident species from the Sundarbans of Bangladesh. So, this individual could be a vagrant from that population.

We thank all the members of Birding Durgapur for their continuous support in this citizen science effort. We are also thankful to Utpal Singha Roy for his constant encouragement.

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Snapshot sightings

Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis* from Chennai, Tamil Nadu

Vikas Madhav & Rama Neelemegam


116

On 26 November 2016, at 0720 hrs, a solitary Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis* was seen and photographed at Guindy National Park (13.00°N, 80.23°E), Chennai, Tamil Nadu. It perched in clear view for almost 15 min before flying away. The species has a disjunct distribution with populations along the Himalayas, eastern India till the Sundarbans, the Andaman Islands, Sri Lanka, and the Western Ghats (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Subspecies could not be ascertained, but the northern races are known to be strongly migratory (Fry & Boesman 2017).

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Crested Goshawk from Gadchiroli city, Maharashtra

Abhijeet Bayani


117

During bird surveys in Gadchiroli Reserve Forest, on 28 December 2016, I observed a Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus* perched high on a dry tree in the campus of Gadchiroli Forest Rest House (20.18°N, 80.02°E) situated on Potegaon Road, Gadchiroli. The geographically closest sightings of this species are from Nagpur (Kasambe & Tariqui 2009), which is *c.* 200 km north-west, and Kawal Wildlife Sanctuary, Telangana (Srinivasulu 2004), which is *c.* 140 m west-south-west of the present location.

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Whistling Hawk Cuckoo from Shoal Bay, South Andaman

Harish Thangaraj & Vikram Shill


118

We photographed a Whistling Hawk Cuckoo *Hierococcyx nisicolor* from Shoal Bay (11.83°N, 92.72°E), South Andaman Island on 19 February 2017. Identification was straight forward as the species had a small whitish tertial feather with rufous bars. There are no reports of this species till date from the Andaman & Nicobar Islands (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

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A leucistic Kalij Phesant from Japguda, Uttarakhand

Harshul Thareja & Krish Thareja


119

On 30 March 2017, we photographed a leucistic Kalij Pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos* in woodlands near Jagpuda (30.47°N, 79.14°E), Chopta, Uttarakhand. This appears to be an addition to the colour aberrant species reported till date from India (Mahabal *et al.* 2016).

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