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.

Acknowledgements

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Editorial comment: The White-cheeked Starling *Spodiopsar cineraceus* in 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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Rasmussen, P. C., Hatibaruah, B., Mekola, R., & Dalvi, S., 2017. Records of Mishmi Wren-babbler *Spelaeornis badeigularis* in the Anini area, northern Mishmi Hills. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (3): 74–76.

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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.

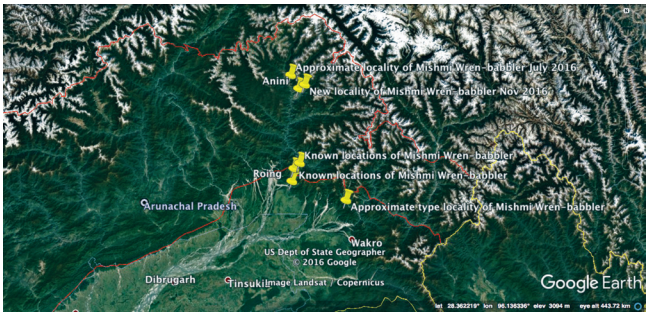


Fig. 1. South-east Lohit Frontier Division

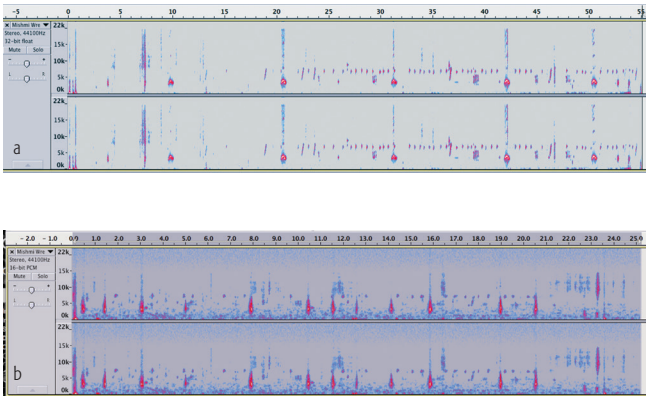
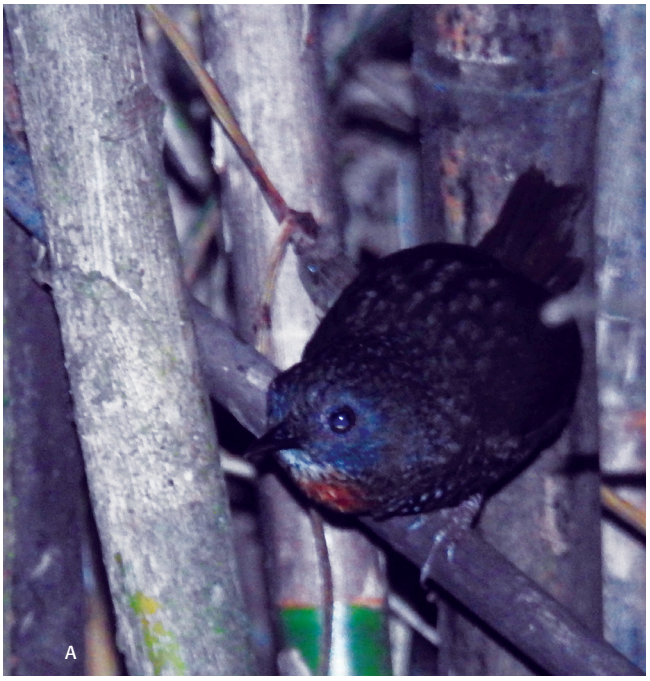


Fig. 2 a, b. Mishmi Wren-babbler, Sound recordings of calls. pitch of 2.5-5 kHz, rate >1 note/s.

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.

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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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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