

## European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris* in Ladakh: An addition to the avifauna of the Indian Subcontinent

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Bharadwaj, A. K., 2017. European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris* in Ladakh: An addition to the avifauna of the Indian Subcontinent. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (6): 162–163. Anil Kumar Bharadwaj, Commissioner of Income Tax, Room No 601, Aykar Bhawan, G. S. Road, Guwahati 781005, Assam, India. E-mail: [irsanil1@gmail.com](mailto:irsanil1@gmail.com)  
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My longtime wish of a birding trip to Ladakh (Jammu & Kashmir) was fulfilled when I joined a birding tour led by Sarwandeep Singh, at the end of August 2015.

Our group, comprised Mubarak (the driver), Sarwandeep Singh, Kartik Patel, me, started from Delhi on 20 August 2015, and continued via Srinagar, Kargil, Rumbak, Leh, Khardung La, Pangong Tso, Hanle, and Tso Moriri, reaching our last destination, Tso Kar, on 02 September 2015. Till this time, the trip was great with many good sightings of mammals and birds, including a Pallas's cat *Otocolobus manul* with four kittens. At Thukjey village (33.36°N, 78.02°E; 4565 m asl), situated on the north-eastern bank of Tso Kar Lake, birding was dull, and so we decided to explore new areas. Next morning, 03 September 2015, we explored areas on south-eastern parts of Tso Kar Lake. We reached Nangjurak (33.24°N, 78.05°E; 4550 m asl), a shepherds' abandoned settlement, situated on the south bank of the freshwater lake called Startsapuk Tso, situated south of Thukjey. After lunch, 500 m westwards from Nangjurak, towards another shepherds' settlement, a bird crossed our vehicle. Though I was keen to check it out, the others felt it was a Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*, a common species there, and so we did not stop. However, as the road was un-navigable further on, we turned back Half a kilometer before Nangjurak, I saw a bird fly across the front of the vehicle and perched on a rock. I requested the vehicle be stopped, and clicked two photographs of it [220-221]. Having recognised it as a finch, I showed the photographs to Sarwandeep Singh who instantly dismissed it being a rosefinch *Erythrina* sp./*Carpodacus* sp., as it did not have any streaking. I managed to click a few more photos when the bird changed its perch [222]. Before my other friends could have a glimpse of the bird in question, it flew away. I tried to identify



Pics: Anil Kumar Bharadwaj

221. European Greenfinch.

the bird using Grimmett *et al.* (2011), but could not place it. After consulting Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), I narrowed my search to two species that showed yellow in their primaries and tail, and had a typical finch-like bill—Eurasian Siskin *Spinus spinus*, and European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*. As the former has a smaller bill, the most suitable option was the latter. Though the book did not provide an illustration of a female European Greenfinch, I was sure that the bird I saw fitted the description well. Later, I suggested to my friends that we should try again for that bird, but we could not visit the area again.

Back in Keylong, I managed to check images of the female European Greenfinch on the Internet. I concluded that my photos matched the species. I transmitted the image to a friend, who was initially puzzled by the species, but later agreed with my



220. European Greenfinch in Ladakh.



222. Another view of the European Greenfinch in Ladakh.

identification. She directed me to send my photos to Kryš, editor of Oriental Bird Images (OBI) website, for further confirmation. Back home, I sent the photos to Kryš, stating it as the first European Greenfinch from India. I got a reply within four hours, and he stated that the bird looked like one but he wanted higher resolution images, which I duly forwarded. Next day Kryš wrote saying the bird seemed to be a first winter female. I consented to his idea to forward the pictures to Peter Clement, the finch expert. Peter confirmed the identification and provided the additional notes below.

"...There's not much doubt that it is anything other than a 1st w [winter] female Greenfinch (European Greenfinch) with traces of juv [juvenile] plumage showing. Everything fits including the beady eyes, dark lores and the slightly greyer tones and slightly larger bill found in southern and eastern races. All other Greenfinches have bright yellow flashes in the wing, different head patterns and slightly finer or more pointed bills and none of the juv/1st w rosefinches come close.

"As the race *C.c. turkestanicus* breeds east to central and eastern Kyrgyzstan and winters south marginally into N Afghanistan it was probably only a matter of time before one made it into (or was at least found in) NW India." (Peter Clement, pers. comm., in e-mail dated September 2015).

He also speculated whether this bird was a vagrant to the area or perhaps had recently expanded its known breeding range.

Although the nearest breeding area of the species is in eastern Kyrgyzstan (950 km northward of Ladakh), that is probably an unlikely origin for this bird given the unsuitable habitat in between and the fact that all records in China, from the first in 1994 up to at least 2007, have been from due eastwards of Kyrgyzstan, in northern Xinjiang (Ma *et al.* 2000; China Ornithological Society 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008). The next nearest breeding area is in western Tajikistan (950 km north-westwards from Ladakh)

and is perhaps the likely origin of this bird, given that there are winter records from Afghanistan (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012); the nearest, to this Ladakh record, being from Kabul (800 km westwards of Ladakh) by Kaestner (2014a, b) in January 2014.

In conclusion, this appears to be the first record of this species for India, as well as for the Indian Subcontinent.

## Acknowledgments

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**Editors' comment:** Based on this record, the European Greenfinch is accepted into the India Checklist.

# Mottled Wood Owl *Strix ocellata* in West Bengal

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On Sunday, 30 April 2017 we were birding in the Arabari forest range (22.69°N, 87.34°E), Paschim Medinipur District, West Bengal. At 0835 hrs we noticed a big bird flying from one tree to another. At first we thought that it was a raptor, but when we got closer to the sal tree *Shorea robusta* it was perched on, we realised that it was a big owl, with a splash of white, rufous, and brown all over its body. It was constantly peeping out from the leaves of the sal and watching us. We noticed that other birds, like Red-vented Bulbuls *Pycnonotus cafer*, Jungle

Babblers *Turdoides striata*, Black Drongos *Dicrurus macrocercus*, etc., were constantly mobbing the owl. We photographed the owl [223, 224]. There appeared to be only one individual, and it seemed to be restricting itself to this area as it was coming back to the same trees after being mobbed by the birds.

Back from the field, we looked at the images in an attempt to identify the owl. The whitish-dark brown ventral barring and the prominent white 'half-collar' on upper breast indicated that it was a Mottled Wood Owl *Strix ocellata*. When we discussed