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Pied Crow
Grey-tailed Tattler

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- To publish a newsletter that will provide a platform to birdwatchers for publishing notes and observations primarily on birds of South Asia.
- To promote awareness of birdwatching amongst the general public.
- To establish and maintain links/liaison with other associations or organized bodies in India or abroad whose objectives are in keeping with the objectives of the Trust (i.e. to support amateur birdwatchers with cash / kind for projects in ornithology).

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Photographer: Sanjay Pandita

Polygyny and kleptoparasitism in the Indian Spotted Eagle *Clanga hastata* in Belgaum, Karnataka, India

Niranjan R. Sant, V. D. Shelke & S. D. Shelke

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Introduction

Diurnal birds of prey are believed to be predominantly monogamous, but alternative mating systems, like polygyny, polyandry, and co-operative breeding have also been recorded (Newton 1979). While such behavior has been recorded in about 16 species of raptors, there is no published instance of polygyny in the Indian Spotted Eagle *Clanga hastata* (Prakash 1996; Naoroji 2006).

The Indian Spotted Eagle is a widespread species in the lowlands of the Indian Subcontinent, where it occurs in low densities (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Prakash (1996), Sharma & Chanda (2010), and Shivaprakash *et al.* (2006) have studied the breeding biology of this species in India in general, while, Sant *et al.* (2013) have studied it Belgaum, Karnataka, in particular. Additionally, there are casual historical (and contemporary) reports of the species' nests, or records of its breeding (Anderson 1875; Jesse 1903; Davidson 1908; Whymper 1908; Chakdar *et al.* 2017). In this paper, we present observations on a case of polygyny, and traits of potential kleptoparasitism in this species.

Study area

This study was conducted in the south-eastern part (15.82°N, 74.53°E, *c.* 750 m) of Belgaum town, in north-western Karnataka, lying in the outer zone of the Western Ghats as they gently descend to the Deccan Plateau. Belgaum is a municipal corporation and the fourth-largest city in the state. The average annual rainfall here is 125–135 cm and the temperature ranges from 08ºC–40ºC. The area where the breeding pair was observed is located on the eastern edge of the city, quite close to human settlements. On the southern side of Belgaum is a hill with an old fort on top, and a small village at the base. The nesting area is three kilometers from this hill, and less than a kilometer from human settlements. The area is mostly cultivated; paddy being the main crop, though cereals, and mustard, are also grown in winter. A rain-fed stream, named 'Ballari', and its small tributaries, drain the area. Large trees of mango *Mangifera indica*, arjun *Terminalia arjuna*, jamun *Syzigium cumini*, gular *Ficus racemosa*, and *Eucalyptus* sp., stand on the banks of the stream and its tributaries. Big trees of the aforementioned species are also scattered in the fields.

Methodology

We have been observing the breeding of a pair of Indian Spotted Eagles since 2009, in the above-mentioned area. For ease of identification, we name this nest N1, and the pair, 'M1' (male 1) **[183]**, and "F1' (female 1) **[184]**. These birds were not tagged, and hence it is impossible to be certain that the birds that nested in N1 were the same individuals throughout our study period of three years. However, circumstantial evidence, such as reusing the same nest, and the size of the male, which was the largest male amongst all Indian Spotted Eagle pairs in that area, almost approaching the size of the female, led us to assume this pair to comprise the same birds reusing N1 across years.

183. Indian Spotted Eagle male M1 in June 2015.

184. Indian Spotted Eagle female F1 in April 2012.

Pics: Niranjan Sant

185. Indian Spotted Eagle female F2 in April 2016.

In March 2012, another pair of Indian Spotted Eagles (M2 and F2), which was nesting nearby (N2), abandoned their traditional nesting tree due to some disturbance, and the subsequent loss of the lower branches of that tree. They moved to a tree closer (*c.* 400 m) to N1. Again, one cannot be certain, but we believe they were M2 and F2. We observed them as they built their new nest (N3), and successfully fledged one chick, in their first year, from it. In March 2013, a female, presumably F2 of N3 (henceforth F2) **[185]**, repaired this nest; but M2 seemed to have disappeared. Ultimately, F2 abandoned N3. Meanwhile, M and F1 successfully fledged one chick in 2013.

The two nests (N1 and N3) **[186, 187]** were in such close proximity that one was visible to the other. NRS observed one nest, VDS the other, and SDS observed the activity of the birds from a point in between the two nests. They kept in contact with each other, discussing the activity of the eagles at both nests, using cell phones.

The majority of the observations were made between 0600 and 0930 hrs. On a few occasions we observed the nests between 1500 and 1900 hrs, and on 15 occasions, spread over three years, we observed the nests from dawn to dusk. The total time spent on nest observation was 105 days (*c.* 350 hrs) in 2014, 96 days (*c.* 300 hrs) in 2015, and 134 days (*c.* 425 hrs) in 2016.

To observe and document nesting activity, binoculars (10x40), and 600 mm, and 800 mm super telephoto lenses were used. We identified each bird by the details of its plumage, which we photographed extensively. It was important to differentiate between M1, M2, F1, and F2 in each season if we were to come to any meaningful conclusions. However, we make no claims of certitude as to whether M1, M2, F1, and F2 were the very same individuals across the three years we studied them. Circumstances indicated that they probably were, but we cannot be certain, as we did not mark any birds.

Below, we present the significant activities at each nest through tables, while the rest of the observations are detailed in the text.

Observations

2014

We began seeing F2 around N3 from the third week of January. She was initially seen collecting sticks and placing them in N3, and thereafter was regularly seen around the nest site. We wanted to observe and document the presence of a new male that might have replaced her lost mate (M2), and the process of a new pair bonding. On 20 January, we saw an adult Indian Spotted Eagle perched on a tree some distance away from N3; F2 saw the bird and called a few times. The new eagle flew closer to F2. F2 flew some distance away and the eagle followed her. This 'pursuit' culminated in copulation between the two birds. Though we thought this male was a new individual, the images **[188, 189]** we took that day confirmed, to our surprise, that it was actually M1.

Daily, between 0730 and 0830 hrs, M1 would arrive at N3, mate with F2, and then return to N1. When F1, as well as F2 were incubating, M1 frequently visited N3, mating occasionally with F2; but during the latter part of the incubation period M1's visits

186. March 2014: Indian Spotted Eagle nest N1 with female F1 brooding, and male M1 (R).

Pics: Niranjan Sant

187. April 2015: Indian Spotted Eagle male M1 (R) at nest N4 of female F2.

188. March 2014: Indian Spotted Eagle male M1 approaching female F2 to copulate.

189. March 2014: Indian Spotted Eagle male M1 copulating with female F2.

became fewer, and mating with F2 stopped. When M1 arrived at N3, F2 usually flew away for some time. The longest duration of such an absence was 25 min. Interestingly, M1 played no role in the incubation of F3's egg, but sat on the N3 till F2 returned. In May, F2 abandoned incubation activities; whereas, F1 fledged one chick from N1 **[190]**.

Pics: Niranjan Sant

190. May 2014: Indian Spotted Eagle Female F1 with its chick in its nest N1.

Table 1. A detailed description of observations made at N1 and N3 nests in the 2014 breeding season.

Date	N1	N3
24-Feb	Pair on nest	
28-Feb	Copulation	
04-Mar		Copulation
12-Mar		Copulation
15-Mar		Copulation
19-Mar	F1 got green leaves	
28-Mar		Copulation
01-Apr		Copulation
06-Apr	Copulation	
11-Apr		Incubation
17-Apr	Incubation	
21-May		M1 on nest
22-May		F2 abandoned incubation
29-May	Egg (s) hatched	
29-Jul	One chick successfully fledged	

2015

In February 2015, F2 was seen arranging sticks on a new tree (N4), very close to the previous nest tree (N3). She indulged in a lot of calling, and was seen flying in the typical manner known as courtship display flight. This courtship flight was probably to attract the attention of M1 from N1. M1 responded to this behaviour,

191. June 2015: Indian Spotted Eagle female F2 with its chick in its nest N4. Subsequently, this chick died.

Table 2. A detailed description of observations made at the N1 and N4 nests in the 2015 breeding season.

Date	N1	N4
14-Feb	Pair on nest	
17-Feb		F2 collecting sticks
01-Mar		F2 vocalising and performing flight display
08-Mar	Copulation	
18-Mar	Copulation and M1 got sticks	
19-Mar	F1 got green leaves	
02-Apr	Incubation started	
05-Apr		Copulation
12-Apr		Copulation
22-Apr		M1 brought a small twig to nest
23-Apr		Copulation
25-Apr		F2 brought green leaves
26-Apr		F2 brought green leaves
29-Apr		Copulation
30-Apr		Copulation
05-May	M1 brought prey to nest	Incubation started
10-May		M1 brought prey and copulated
15-May	Chick hatched and F1 feeding	
10-Jun		Copulation
12-Jun	M1 caught a rodent and took it to F1 nest	
14-Jun		Egg (s) hatched and M1 came to the nest in evening
15-Jun		M1 came to nest
17-Jun		M1 on nest and F2 brought green leaves
19-Jun		Chick dead
08-Jul	Chick on nest	
14-Jul	Chick successfully fledged	

and flew towards F2. As soon as F2 saw M1 approaching, she flew to a branch on which the birds copulated. This routine continued whenever M1 visited F2. After copulation, F2 usually flew deliberately to a nearby tree, e.g., *Terminalia arjuna, Acacia nilotica,* or *Eucalyptus* species, and collected twigs for her nest. We observed M1 bring twigs to N4 (four times); in doing so, M1 was participating in the nest-building activities with F2 for the first time. On 10 May, M1 brought a small rodent to the incubating F2, which she accepted, and swallowed immediately. Then she flew to a nearby tree, followed by M1, and they copulated. After copulation, M1 flew back to N1, and F2 immediately returned to N4, to incubate. This behaviour continued intermittently throughout the incubation period. On 10 June M1 visited N4, copulated with F2 and picking up a rodent from N4, carried it to N1.

On the 14 June, M1 came to N4 in the evening, and was seen watching F2's chick in the nest **[191]**. On 19 June, F2 was seen trying to feed the chick, but the chick did not respond, and we presumed that it had died. F2 was not seen on N4 from this day onwards throughout the monsoon season.

2016

F2 was seen near N4 on 18 February, and was heard calling. On the morning of 28 February, F2 was seen perched on a tree near N4. M1 flew onto this tree, and copulated with F2. A few minutes later, F2 swooped into a bush below, and caught a big rat. She took it to a nearby tree, and from there she took the rat to N4. M1 followed F2, and she eventually gave the rat to him. It was surprising to see that M1 took the rat away, to feed F1. F2 was later observed calling intermittently, and looking in the direction of N1. We observed regular copulation between M1 and F2, and as in the previous years, M1 always returned to N1 soon afterwards. We also observed that a few times, when M1 was soaring near N4, or was with F2, F1 continuously called in an 'agitated' manner. Though this alertness of F1 was observed in previous years, this behavior of continuous calling was only observed in 2016.

In the earlier years, we had observed that M1 approached F2 indirectly, hopping from tree to tree till he gradually came up to F2. But this nesting season, M1 directly approached F2 and copulated with her.

During early incubation at N4, M1 regularly visited F2, and sometimes they copulated. But these visits reduced in frequency towards the later part of incubation. During the incubation period, F2 hunted small rodents in the fields near N4. She usually located her prey while incubating and dived directly from onto it, from the nest, to catch it. The prey was almost always consumed where it was caught. M1 brought a half-eaten rodent to F2 on 05 May, which F2 swallowed. We observed M1 taking prey to N1, and feeding F1 very frequently during incubation. Prey deliveries were mostly made in the early mornings, or very late in the evenings.

On 27 May F2's chick hatched **[192]**. On 28 May we observed M1 visiting F2. She stood up in the nest as soon as M1 arrived. M1 observed the chick for a few seconds, after which, to our surprise, he took the half-eaten rodent from the nest and flew off with it to F1. This behavior seemed strange, and to further record the behavior, we decided to observe the nesting activity at both the nests from dawn to dusk. On 05 June, we observed the M1 visit F2 nine times during the day, during which he 'stole' four rodents hunted by F2 and delivered them to F1. This behavior continued for the next three weeks **[193, 194]**. We observed that

192. June 2016: Indian Spotted Eagle female F2 with its chick in its nest N4. On its third nesting attempt, the chick fledged successfully.

193. May 2016: Indian Spotted Eagle male M1 picking remains of rodent from nest N4.

194. June 2016: Indian Spotted Eagle male M1 stealing food from nest N4 of female F2 and flying off.

Pics: Niranjan Sant

as soon as F2 caught any prey, M1 visited the nest and stole it. M1 seemed to keep a constant vigil on F2's movements, and as soon as he saw F2 with prey, he immediately visited N4 and stole it from her.

On the 09 June, M1 visited F2's nest when she brought prey, and tried to take away the prey as usual, but the F2 held on to it with her talons, and did not allow M1 to steal. M1 flew off, and perched on the top of the nest tree as F2 fed her chick. After feeding the chick, F2 jumped onto a nearby branch and cleaned her beak. In that instant M1 dropped to the nest, and took the preys' remains to N1. From this day onwards, F2 resisted the thieving of prey, but M1 then took whatever remains of the prey he could get to F1's nest. Once F2's chick was about four weeks old, it started to swallow the smaller prey whole, and M1 no

Table 3. A detailed description of observations made at the N1 and N4 nests in the 2016 breeding season.

Date	N1	N4
18-Feb	Copulation	
27-Feb	Copulation	
28-Feb		Copulation. F2 caught a rodent and gave it to M1; M1 took the prey to F1 nest
09-Mar	The pair brought sticks to nest	
19-Mar		Copulation
21-Mar	Copulation	
28-Mar		Copulation
30-Mar		Copulation
01-Apr	Incubation started	
02-Apr		M1 arranging sticks in N4
06-Apr		Copulation
12-Apr		F2 and M1 soaring and F1 constantly vocalising from N1
14-Apr		Incubation started
18-may	Egg(s) hatched	
27-May		Egg(s) hatched. F2 feeding chick(s); M1 came and took prey remains to N1
28-May		M1 took prey from nest to N1
29-May		M1 came to nest and looked for prey and flew to N1
02-Jun		M1 took two prey remains to N1
05-Jun		F2 caught four rodents and M1 took all of them to N1
07-Jun		M1 took prey remains to N1
09-Jun		M1 took prey remains to N1 after F2 finished feeding chick
10-Jun		M1 tried to take prey from N1 but F2 resisted; M1 flew away after the failed attempt
11-Jun		F2 caught a rodent and M1 took the prey to N1
13-Jun		M1 visits N4
14-Jun		M1 took prey remains to N1 after F2 finished feeding chick
15-Jun		M1 tried to take prey from N1 but F2 resisted; M1 flew away after the failed attempt
17-Jun		M1 fed the chick and then took the remains to N1
18-Jun		Copulation. F2 caught a rodent, fed the chick and M1 took remains to N1
23-Jun		M1 visits N4
26-Jun		M1 took prey remains from F2 nest to N1
27-Jun		M1 took prey remains to N1 after F2 finished feeding chick
01-Jul		M1 took prey remains from N4 to N1
05-Jul	Chick successfully fledged and flying around nest	M1 tried to snatch prey from F2 but F2 resisted with a lot of calling; M1 flew away
28-Jul		M1 brought a rodent to N4 and fed the chick
30-Jul		M1 brought a rodent to N4 and fed the chick and consumed the remains on a nearby tree
09-Aug		Chick fully-fledged

Table 4. A brief summary of observed behavior during the 2013- 2016 breeding seasons.

Year	Behaviour observed at F2 nest
2013	Disappearance of F2's mate (M2) and abandonment of nesting attempt
2014	Polygyny and one abandoned nesting attempt
2015	Polygyny and one unsuccessful nesting attempt
2016	Successful polygyny and kleptoparasitism by M1

longer had as many opportunities to steal it.

On 30 July, M1 brought a large rodent to N4, while F2 was perched on the top of the nest tree. He proceeded to feed the chick even though the chick was old enough to feed on its own. After feeding 30 morsels to the chick, he took the remains to a nearby tree and swallowed them. By this time, his visits to F2 and N4 had almost stopped.

On 04 August F2's chick was seen jumping on the branches of the nest tree. F2 brought it mostly rodents, but on two occasions we also recorded bullfrogs; the chick grabbed, and immediately ate whatever prey was delivered. On 09 August, N4 was empty; the chick was seen perched on a nearby tree, calling repeatedly. Soon it started flying, and a successful breeding attempt was observed at both nest sites.

Discussion

Various hypotheses have been presented to explain polygyny in raptors. Korpimäki (1988) hypothesised that abundant food supply and nomadic tactics of breeding dispersal are crucial factors promoting polygyny in raptors. Two of the reasons given by Korpimäki are relevant here: polygyny was more common in birds of prey that fed on rodents, than in those that fed on birds; and polygyny is more common in nomadic birds of prey with annual pair bonds and weak territoriality, rather than in resident raptors with longer term pair bonds and stronger territoriality. Verner & Willson (1966), Weatherhead & Robertson (1979), Orians (1961), and Alatalo *et al.* (1981) have all propounded various hypotheses on the presence of polygyny.

The reasons for polygyny in our study are not very well understood. The non-availability of males in the area may not, perhaps, be reason as the area has a good density of Indian Spotted Eagles. Since 2009 we have observed that this patch of about three kilometers square has at least six active nests during every breeding season (Niranjan Sant, *in prep.*). The availability of nesting sites is also

not a likely reason as there is no shortage of suitable trees. The possibility of deception is less, as F1 often vocalised agitatedly to M1 when he was with F2; and this was more intense in 2016. We also considered the possibility that F2 was inexperienced in obtaining a mate. However, age-wise, F2 was an adult, as it had bred for three successive years with M1, and it had a previous mate (M2) with which it had raised two chicks. Hence, the factor of inexperience due to age seems unlikely.

A possible reason could be that the territory of the male was particularly rich in food supply and/or that M1 was a healthier, and more successful individual than the other males in the area. But this is conjecture. However, it is interesting to note that F2 was unsuccessful in fledging any chick(s) for the first two years it mated with M1, and was successful in doing so only in the third year, making it seem strange for the female to continue with this arrangement, when there was limited success in raising chick(s). Van Cleef & Bustamante's (1999) observations of polygynous Red Kites *Milvus milvus* showed that during brooding the male's attention was exclusively directed to one female while the other female raised the nestling alone. In this case, M1 visited the other female's (F2) nest, and in fact, took prey from her to N1. Another curious behaviour observed here is a potential case of kleptoparasitism. Though kleptoparasitism in birds has been studied in detail (Brockmann & Barnard 1979), as far as we are aware, this behaviour has not been reported or documented previously in a polygynous arrangement.

195. December 2015: Indian Spotted Eagle female F1 (L) and male M1 (R).

Pics: Niranjan Sant

196. April 2015: Indian Spotted Eagle female F2 (L) and male M1 (R).

Though these observations give evidence of polygyny and potential kleptoparasitism in the Indian Spotted Eagle, a more detailed study with tagged birds is required, in other breeding areas of this species, to determine if the behaviour we observed was a one-off case, or whether polygyny exists in the species. In our case, we had the luxury of monitoring two nests and hence identifying the individuals was possible, however it may not be always possible without tagging the birds. We believe the birds (M1, F1, and F2) **[195, 196]** were the same individuals in all three years. However the cases for polygyny, or potential kleptoparasitism do not weaken even if any of these birds were different. The Indian Spotted Eagle is not a well-studied raptor, and thus it is possible that further study could reveal more interesting aspects of its behaviour.

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Pied Crow *Corvus albus* at Jodhpur, India: Where did it come from?

Pranjal J. Saikia & Vinod Puri Goswami

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The Pied Crow *Corvus albus* is Africa's most widespread member of the genus *Corvus*. It occurs from almost the whole of sub-Saharan Africa southwards from Mauritania and Mali, central Chad and on the Red Sea coast of Sudan till Cape of Good Hope, apart from the islands of Bioko, Zanzibar, Pemba, Mafia, Comoro, Aldabra, Glorioso, and Madagascar (Madge & de Juano 2017). Although the species is still a vagrant north of the Sahara, one case of a breeding bird, and a number of long-staying birds have been observed during the last few years in Morocco. This note describes an exceptional sighting of a Pied Crow, from Jodhpur, India, and discusses its probable origins.

Observations

On 13 August 2017, we (VPG & PJS), along with Digvijay Singh Rathore, observed and photographed an adult Pied Crow **[197, 198]** together with few Common (Punjab) Ravens *C. corax laurencei* and House Crows *C. splendens* at a cattle carcass dump, known as "Keru Dump" (26.30°N, 72.88°E), about 20 kms from Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India. Identification was straightforward, as we did not know of any other similar looking species. The bird looked healthy and was attempting to socialise with the other corvids. However, the ravens and crows seemed to be avoiding it. The bird was present at the same location at 1100 hrs on 14 August. During our subsequent visits on the following days, and on 20 August, the bird was not found. No other birder seems to have come across this species during its brief stay.

Pics: Pranjal J. Saikia

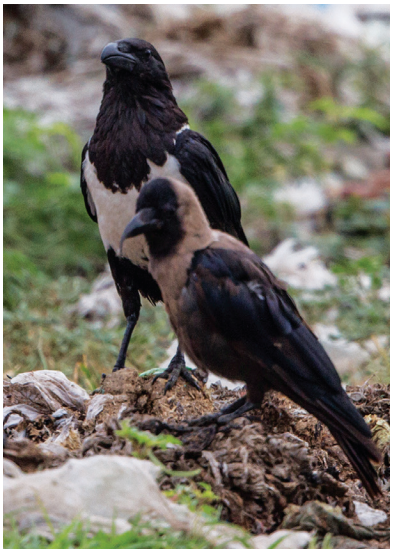
197. A Pied Crow made a mysterious appearance at Jodhpur.

198. Pied Crow in flight.

Identification

Though identification of the bird was beyond doubt, the possibility of aberrant and hybrid Corvids needs to be discussed. The Pied Crow is known to hybridise with the Somali Crow *C. edithae*—exhibiting a variety of grey shades, or speckled breast and collar areas of the body (Madge & de Juano 2017). No such characteristics were observed on this bird and hence it presumed to be a bird from the pure stock. It is smaller than a Common Raven **[199]** and larger than a House Crow **[200]**; and seemed matching perfectly in size with a Pied Crow. Structurally, the bird does not have the peaking head and bill length of a Large-billed Crow *C. macrorhynchos* and is more similar to the larger Common Raven. The Brown-necked Raven *C. ruficollis*, which occurs only in Pakistan (Praveen *et al.* 2017b), is similar in size, and is also known to hybridise in captivity with Pied Crow. However, that species has a more elongated bill than a Pied Crow. The Jodhpur bird is an adult, in prefect plumage, without any aberration whatsoever, leaving little doubt that it is indeed a Pied Crow.

199. The Pied Crow and a Common Raven. Note the former's smaller size.



Pics: Pranjal J. Saikia

200. A Pied Crow and a House Crow. Note the former's larger size.

Vinod P. Goswami

201. Pied Crow showing moulting feathers.

Discussion

Though we have been visiting this spot often in the past seven years, we have never seen a Pied Crow here. A discussion on Facebook brought forward claims of the bird having been sighted earlier in Rajasthan. However, no photographs or other documentary evidences were available to support these claims, and in such light, these previous claims cannot be verified. The species is not reported from South Asia (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Praveen *et al.* 2017a;) and, in fact, not from anywhere in the Oriental Region (Inskipp *et al.* 1996). Different possibilities, about how it could have arrived in Jodhpur, are discussed below.

Wild vagrant

The Pied Crow is largely a sedentary species. Some movements have been noted, post breeding, in wet years. Vagrants have been recorded from southern Algeria (Madge & de Juano 2017), and southern Libya (Anonymous 2013), and it was discovered breeding in the Western Sahara (Batty 2010). A few records, probably of a few long staying individuals, have been subsequently reported from Morocco, Gibraltar, and Portugal (MaghrebOrnitho 2015a,b). The only record from the OSME region,[1] and also the nearest to India is from the island of Socotra off the coast of Yemen in 2003–2004 (Blair *et al.* 2017), though there are a couple of records from Egypt. Socotra is more than 2500 km from Jodhpur, across the northern Arabian Sea; and is farther away from it by the land route. Essentially, the Pied Crow is an African bird and its regular range is nearly 3000 km away and it has not occurred, till date, in the large intervening area with suitable habitats in the Middle East. Hence, it would really be exceptional for a wild vagrant to have reached India after crossing the Arabian Sea or via land. Strong monsoon winds have the potential to blow weak individuals to the northern Indian coast, where they can get lost. However, typically wind-blown birds are recovered, dead or dying, even 10-20 km from the coast (Prasad Ganpule, *pers. comm.* 27 August 2017). Additionally, it is usually inexperienced and immature birds that get caught in these storms, and get disoriented before they are blown ashore. Our bird appeared quite healthy and Jodhpur is nearly 450–500 km inland from the nearest coast in Gujarat. Though it is true that Pied Crows seem to have been enterprising enough to cross the Sahara to reach northern Africa, they have not yet been recorded crossing oceans without the assistance of ships.

Ship assisted

Some corvids like House Crows are well-known to have dispersed widely with assistance of ships (Cheke 2008), and many records of Pied Crow from the western Palearctic from Britain, the Netherlands, southern Spain and the Canary Is, apart from Brazil are believed to be escapees or ship-assisted (Madge & de Juano 2017). Hence, the possibility of a bird being transported across the Arabian Sea and landing in Gujarat, or Pakistan, and then wandering a bit in search of feeding areas (or mate), until it reached Jodhpur, cannot be discounted. Kandla and Mundra, the nearest ports in Gujarat to our site, are *c.* 450 km away from it, while Karachi (Pakistan) is *c.* 650 km away. It could also have been swept by the monsoon winds from a ship that crossed the northern Arabian Sea to another seaport and not necessarily docked in Gujarat or Pakistan. After reaching the shores, the individual must have wandered before reaching Jodhpur. It has been hypothesised that at least some of the individuals seen in north-western Africa and southern Europe could be the same individuals and hence such nomadic behaviour is not unknown for this species (Pepe 2017). However, treatment of the Pied Crow in that region is equivocal – while the birds in Morocco are accepted as wild vagrants, the birds in Spain and Portugal are not (Pepe 2017). In India, ship-assisted migration was discussed in the case of the White-eyed Gull *Ichthyaetus leucophthalmus* (Jamalabad 2016), which was admitted as a wild vagrant—despite the possibility of it having been ship-assisted—because it is a pelagic species and ship assistance is not hampering its free will to fly off. However, it is unclear how this would apply to Corvids which are land birds but are strong fliers in general.

Escapee from zoo/cage

There are several Pied Crows kept in various zoos in Europe (http://www.zootierliste.de).

1 Region between Egypt and Afghanistan including Central Asia demarcated as OSME region by Ornithological Society of Middle East.

202. Pied Crow showing simultaneous moult of primaries and secondaries.

Pics: Vinod P. Goswami

203. Pied Crow with wing feathers in moult.

However, Indian zoos did not hold any, as per a published list by Central Zoo Authority in 2009-2010 (Anonymous 2009–2010). This is not a recent list and it may not be comprehensive. We could not trace records of escapees from Pakistan zoos (if they held any).

The Pied Crow is a popular cage bird and hence it is expected to be traded as a pet. However, there appear to be no known private collections in India that hold this species currently though it is held in private collections in Pakistan (Rajat Bhargava, *in litt*., e-mail dated, 02 September 2017). A large private collection in Jamnagar, Gujarat, has two Pied Crows, but they are still present there and have not escaped (Prasad Ganpule, *in litt*., e-mail dated 31 August 2017). In any case, these investigations do not eliminate the possibility that the bird could be an escapee from Pakistan, Afghanistan, or the Middle East, wandering to reach Jodhpur.

The individual kept a distance from us, just like any other wild bird, and did not behave like a pet bird. If it was an escapee, it would not have been held captive immediately prior to our sighting because its feathers show no obvious signs of unusual plumage wear. Birds kept in wire cages invariably show some signs of wear, especially to the tips of the flight feathers and around the base of the bill. Also the legs and feet of the bird were in very good condition, which would be unusual in an escapee, especially a recent one. On the contrary, the wings are moulting and the moult sequence is congruent with that of wild birds (Gwahaba 1975) with both primaries and secondaries moulting together **[201–203]**. Moult timing itself is not useful as they moult immediately after breeding and they are known to breed throughout the year (Gwahaba 1975).

Hence, despite the fact that Pied Crows may be present in captivity in our region, this particular bird is unlikely to be of captive origin.

Conclusion

Though identified correctly, the origin of the 'Jodhpur' Pied Crow is still uncertain. Of the three possibilities of its arrival presented above, ship assistance appears to be the most plausible. However, the 'India Checklist' (Praveen *et al.* 2016) needs an unambiguous policy for dealing with such cases. We propose that such a framework be first developed and then this record be evaluated.

Acknowledgments

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Editors' comment: The 'India Checklist' (Praveen *et al.* 2016) does not provide a clear framework for dealing with records of dubious origin, and specifically, instances wherein ship assistance is involved. A review of the current policy, and framing a more forward-looking strategy ,would be needed for handling these cases. This will get defined in the near future, and we shall re-look at this record in the light of such new rules. Until then, the Pied Crow shall be excluded from the 'India Checklist.'

Records of Eastern Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla tschutschensis tschutschensis* and *M. t. taivana* from India

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Introduction

The yellow wagtails (Motacillidae) are a particularly complex taxonomic group of birds that breed throughout the Palearctic and in Alaska (Alström & Mild 2003). All yellow wagtails were thought to belong to a single monophyletic, but highly polytypic, clade (Alström & Mild 2003) until Ödeen & Alström (2001), Alström & Ödeen (2002), Voelker (2002), and Ödeen & Björklund (2003) demonstrated that the group is paraphyletic, and consists of a 'western' clade, and an 'eastern' clade. The 'western' clade breeds primarily in the western Palearctic, east up to Mongolia and central Russia (Alström & Mild 2003, Tyler & Christie 2017), and the 'eastern' clade breeds in the eastern Palearctic in far eastern Asia and in Alaska (Alström & Mild 2003, del Hoyo & Collar 2017). Although 'eastern' yellow wagtails are genetically closer to citrine wagtails (the *Motacilla citreola* complex) than to their 'western' counterparts (Ödeen & Björklund 2003), some 'eastern' and 'western' races are morphologically similar (or even identical) probably as a result of convergent evolution (Alström & Mild 2003). The systematics of yellow wagtails is still under flux but the group is currently thought to include at least two polytypic species, the Western Yellow Wagtail *M. flava*, and the Eastern Yellow Wagtail *M. tschutschensis* (Banks et al. 2004, Dickinson & Christidis 2014, del Hoyo & Collar 2017, Tyler & Christie 2017). Alström & Mild (2003) and Dickinson & Christidis (2014) recognise three subspecies under *M. tschutschensis*: the nominate subspecies (with which *simillima*, *angarensis*, and *zaissanesis* are often synonymised), *taivana* ('Green-headed' Yellow Wagtail), and *macronyx* ('Manchurian' Yellow Wagtail). The east Siberian race *plexa* (that chiefly winters in Southeast Asia and questionably in mainland India), is placed either under M. flava, wherein it is usually synonymised with *thunbergi* (Alström & Mild (2003), or under *M. tschutschensis* as a distinct subspecies (Clements et al. 2017, Tyler & Christie 2017).

An adult male *M. t. tschutschensis* (Alström & Mild 2003) has a long, thin, and white supercilium that is prominent in front of, and behind the eye. In breeding plumage, it has a pale grey forehead, nape, and crown that are paler than in *M. f. thunbergi*, and a yellow throat with varying amounts of white near the chin. Its ear-coverts can range from pale grey to almost black and are usually darker than the crown. Females and wintering birds often resemble dull males, and some are inseparable from males based upon plumage alone (Red'kin & Babenko 1999, Red'kin 2001, Alström & Mild 2003). This subspecies can be distinguished from *M. f. thunbergi* as the latter lacks the long supercilium and (broken) eye ring (if present). Occasional individuals, with very pale ear coverts, can resemble *M. f. beema*, but *M. f. beema* often shows a white sub-ocular stripe that *M. t. tschutschensis* lacks. Birds with very dark ear coverts cannot be easily separated from *M. flava* 'dombrowskii', which is an intergrade between *M. f. beema* and *M. f. feldegg*. *M. t. tschutschensis* can sometimes show a yellowish supercilium possibly due to individual variation or hybridization with *M. t. taivana*. Such birds may be confused with *M. t. taivana* but will not show any shades of yellow/green on the forehead, crown, nape, and ear-coverts unlike *M. t. taivana*.

An adult male *M. t. taivana* (Alström & Mild 2003) has a long, broad, and yellow supercilium (broader and often longer than that of a *M. t. tschutschensis*). In breeding plumage, its forehead, nape, and crown are dull greenish grey and concolourous with its upperparts, unlike *M. t. tschutschensis*, and it has a yellow throat. Its ear-coverts are always darker than its upperparts, and the colour of the ear-coverts can range from brownish-black to dark greenish-grey. Females resemble dull males, have a slightly paler and thinner supercilium, and ear coverts that are only slightly darker than, or concolourous with, upperparts. A female *M. f. lutea* can also show a (usually paler) yellow supercilium but has paler, browner ear-coverts, paler underparts, a whitish throat, and a whitish sub-ocular stripe, which *M. t. taivana* lacks. Wintering males resemble breeding males but have more greenish brown crowns, less blackish ear coverts, and paler yellow underparts. Wintering females have the brownest (least green) upperparts, pale buffish-yellow underparts and supercilium, and ear coverts that can range from pale to blackish brown.

Some *M. t. tschutschensis* and *M. t. taivana* individuals, and especially young birds, have prominent broken eye rings below the eye. First winter birds of both subspecies sometimes resemble adult females but can often look similar to each other (white to buffish superciliums and dull grey/brown upperparts), and to young *M. citreola* and *M. f. beema*. They can however be told apart when they begin to attain any "adult like" plumage in the first phase of their pre-breeding moults in their winter quarters during February–May. Both subspecies can be distinguished from the *M. flava* intergrades '*superciliaris*' and '*xanthophrys*' as both intergrades usually have black crowns.

Observations

On 21 November 2006, MP was birding at Sippighat, South Andamans (11.6029°N, 92.6918°E), and observed a total of eight yellow wagtails. One particularly distinctive individual **[204a, b]** was observed closely. It had a blue-grey crown with ear coverts of the same shade or slightly darker, and a very long and relatively broad pure white supercilium, tapering down over the ear coverts. The throat was yellow and the chin appeared white. The mantle was brownish-green, and the lower back and rump pale grey. The wingbars and tertial fringes were worn and off-white. The plumage suggested a male, although it was not possible to be sure of the sex. The bird was suspected to be an "eastern" Yellow Wagtail at the time and photographed, although in the field MP was not aware of specific features to confirm the subspecies. This individual was later identified as *M. t. tschutschensis*. The predominantly white belly, flanks and undertail coverts (from what is visible) coupled with grey upperparts (green feathers appear newly moulted) suggest that this was a first winter bird.

On 16 December 2016, AV and BS saw a yellow wagtail **[205a, b]** at 1450 hrs on the grassy banks of Maguri Beel, Tinsukia District, Assam (27.5733°N, 95.3702°E; *c.* 115 m asl), close to where the boat drops off visitors. In an area overwhelmingly dominated by *M. citreola* and with few yellow wagtails, they closely examined each yellow wagtail, including this one. The wagtail was by itself, separately from the flock. It did not call. Unlike other yellow wagtails they had seen in Assam that were primarily *thunbergi*/'plexa' type males (no supercilium to short supercilium behind eye), *beema* type males (concolourous light grey crown and ear coverts) or non-descript young birds, this wagtail had a prominent, long, thin, and white supercilium that extended well beyond the eye and dark greyish-black unbroken ear coverts that were distinctly darker than the pale grey forehead, crown, and nape. It had some yellow on the throat, a predominantly white chin, some brownish mottling on the breast and whitish underparts with yellow restricted to the belly. It had a predominantly grey mantle with a hint of green. The bird was suspected to be *M. t. tschutschensis* and was photographed. This individual was later confirmed as *M. t. tschutschensis*. The grey/brown mottling on the breast, yellow restricted to belly, relatively grey upperparts, and prominent white tips to the greater coverts (contrasting with dark centres and with newly moulted, more greyish tipped median coverts) suggest that this was also a first winter bird. However, the relatively well-marked face and some tinges of green on the mantle suggest that it had partially moulted into "adult like" plumage. The well-marked face also suggests that the bird was male but it is difficult to sex the bird with certainty.

In both birds, the long white supercilium rules out *M. f. thunbergi* and *M. t. taivana*. The dark lores **[204a, b; 205a, b]**, also dark ear-coverts in Bird 2), thin supercilium, and the lack of sub-ocular stripes rule out *M. f. beema*. *M. flava* 'dombrowskii'

204a. Yellow Wagtil from Sippighat, South Andamans, showing long, pure white supercilium.

Pics: Bhanu Sridharan

205a. Yellow Wagtil at Maguri Beel, Assam, with prominent white supercilium.

Pics: Mike Prince

204b. Yellow Wagtil from Sippighat, South Andamans, showing brownish-green mantle with pale grey lower back and rump.

205b. Yellow Wagtil at Maguri Beel, Assam, with dark greyish-black ear coverts.

shows almost black ear coverts and was therefore ruled out in both cases. The intergrade *M. flava* 'superciliaris' shows a long white supercilium but has a dark (almost black) crown and ear coverts, and can therefore be ruled out in both cases.

At 0530 hrs on 31 October 2016, PK and AK saw a yellow wagtail **[206]** on Neil Island (11.8322°N, 93.0522°E), which they photographed assuming it was *M. flava*. It had a prominent broad yellowish supercilium, a yellow throat with white sides, buffish underparts with yellow restricted to regions near the belly, and some indistinct mottling on the breast. Its lores were prominent and noticeably darker than the crown. Its ear-coverts were dirty greenish-brown and concolorous with the forehead. It had light grey upperparts with only the slightest hint of green on the mantle. This individual was later identified as *M. t. taivana*. The non-descript grey upperparts, some white in the supercilium, mottling on the breast, possibly retained juvenile coverts with prominent white tips and a possible moult contrast, and yellow on the underparts restricted to the belly suggest that it may have been a first winter male (like the previous two). The age and sex of this bird, however, cannot be judged with certainty from the images. This bird may again have partially moulted into "adult like" plumage as is suggested by the hint of green on the mantle, mostly yellow supercilium, and the greenish ear-coverts and forehead.

The yellow supercilium rules out *M. f. beema* and the relatively dark, greenish ear-coverts, dark lores, yellow throat, and the lack of a sub-ocular stripe rule out a female *M. f. lutea*. *M. t. tschutschensis* will not show any tinges of green on the ear-coverts and forehead, or such a broad supercilium, and can therefore be excluded. The intergrade *M. flava 'xanthophrys'* shows a yellow supercilium but has a dark (almost black) crown and ear coverts with no hint of green, and can be ruled out.

These wagtails were identified tentatively in the field, and conclusively from photos, as they were relatively well marked individuals that showed some characters of adults. "Adult type" *M. t. tschutschensis* and *M. t. taivana*, even in winter, can show characteristic facial patterns. Some birds in winter may however appear pale and can be difficult to distinguish from *M. f. beema*. Although the three individuals discussed in this paper were documented in winter, perhaps the best time to look out for well-marked *M. tschutschensis* in the Indian Subcontinent is from February to April when they are likely to be close to the completion of their pre-breeding moult and may be seen in fresh, near-breeding plumage (Alström & Mild 2003). Recordings of their calls can be very useful to ascertain identity as *M. tschutschensis* has a harsher call than *M. flava* that closely resembles the call of *M. citreola* (Alström & Mild 2003, Bot *et al.* 2014). Until their status in the Indian Subcontinent is resolved, photographs will be important documentation. Given the position of the Indian Subcontinent, relative to their known wintering ranges, we speculate that the species may in fact be a scarce but regular winter visitor to the region, particularly to the Andaman Islands and north-eastern India.

Parag Kokane

206. Yellow Wagtil from Neil Island.

Discussion

Several races of *M. flava* winter in the Indian Subcontinent (Kazmierczak 2000, Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) but the status of *M. tschutschensis* in the region is still unclear. Ali & Ripley (1998) state that *M. f. simillima* (= *M. t. tschutschensis*) is a common winter visitor to Kerala, Sri Lanka, and the Andamans, passing through northern India. These claims, however, remain unsubstantiated. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) and Robson (2009) treat it as hypothetical to the Indian Subcontinent, citing uncorroborated reports of '*simillima*' and '*zaissanensis*'. There are two specimens labelled *M. f. simillima* (= *M. t. tschutschensis*) from Edanad, Kerala, being housed at the Bombay Natural History Society (Unnithan 1995), and these evidently require re-examination. It was possible that this taxon was identified on the basis of 'longer and straighter' hind claw (Ali 1962, Ali 1964, Ali & Ripley 1987), a feature conventionally believed to be diagnostic of the species (see Red'kin & Babenko (1999); Red'kin (2001); but Alström & Mild (2003) found considerable overlap of this trait between the Eastern- and Western- Yellow Wagtails. Alström & Mild (2003) include the Andaman Islands in the wintering range of *M. t. tschutschensis* (=*M. f. simillima*), citing Ali & Ripley (1998), who in turn quote Vaurie (1959). Grimmett *et al.* (2011) do not mention *M. t. tschutschensis* but include *M. t. taivana* as a rare winter visitor; which is treated as a subspecies of Western Yellow Wagtail in Rasmussen & Anderton (2012). Alström & Mild (2003) state that *M. t. taivana* was said to be a vagrant to the Indian Subcontinent with one potential record each from Nepal (Inskipp & Inskipp 1991), Pakistan (Khanum & Ahmed 1988), Bhutan (Ali & Ripley 1998), and Calcutta (Walton 1903, Ali & Ripley 1998). They, however, also state that the specimen from Bhutan was a misidentified Citrine Wagtail *M. citreola* on closer inspection, and that the specimen from Calcutta was untraceable (*in litt.* communication from Pamela Rasmussen in Alström & Mild (2003)). There is another potential, more recent, record from Gujarat (Varu 2016).

North-eastern India shares a border with northern Myanmar, and the Andaman Islands are geographically closer to southern- and western- Myanmar than to peninsular India. Given that *M. t. tschutschensis* winters in northern, central, southern, and south-western Myanmar, and *M. t. taivana* winters in central, southern, and western Myanmar (Robson 2009), both species are not unexpected winter visitors to the Indian Subcontinent. There have been several recent, unverified, reports of *M. tschutschensis* from the Indian Subcontinent, primarily from north-eastern India and the Andaman Islands. Field identification of the Eastern Yellow Wagtail, however, remains hugely challenging and is further complicated by the presence of hybrids between races (both within, and across, the 'Western' and 'Eastern' taxa) that can superficially resemble a third race (Alström & Mild 2003). Some of these records are misidentified *M. flava*, or types

'superciliaris'/'xanthophrys', but many others are still potential candidates and remain unconfirmed. In this paper, we do not intend to claim these verified reports as first records of the species in the Indian Subcontinent. Instead, we show that *M. tschutschensis* can no longer be considered hypothetical to the region as we document the occurrence of *M. t. tschutschensis* from the Andaman Islands and from Assam, and the occurrence of *M. t. taivana* from the Andaman Islands.

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We are grateful to Per Alström (*in litt.,* e-mail dated 01 May 2017), and Pamela Rasmussen (*in litt.,* e-mail dated 01 May 2017) for confirming the identity of these birds. AV thanks Ramit Singal for convincing him that there were potential *tschutschensis* in Assam, and we thank Praveen J and Dipu K for a stimulating discussion about the yellow wagtail complex.

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Editors' comment:

Molecular taxonomy and breeding ranges of the 'western' and 'eastern' clades of the Yellow Wagtail, and their relation to other species, like the Citrine Wagtail, are still being worked out. With this note, we accept the Eastern Yellow Wagtail as a species into the 'India Checklist', and more specifically, we accept the nominate subspecies, and the *taivana* subspecies, into the checklist.

Errata: Vol. 13 No. 5: On page 130, the status of the following species should be 'M' (=migratory species); Grey-headed Lapwing, Curlew Sandpiper, and Common Snipe.

207. Falcated Duck in Pong Lake, Himachal Pradesh. Pic: D. S. Dhadwal

Falcated Duck *Mareca falcata*: An addition to the avifauna of Himachal Pradesh

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Abhinav, C., Dhadwal, D. S., 2017. Falcated Duck *Mareca falcata*: An addition to the avifauna of Himachal Pradesh. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (6): 154–156.
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Manuscript received on 02 May 2017.

The Falcated Duck *Mareca falcata* is a beautiful dabbling duck of eastern Asia. It breeds in the southern portion of eastern Siberia, westward to the Angara Basin, southward to northern Mongolia, Heilungkiang (China), and Hokkaido (Japan), and northward to southern Sakhalin and Kuril Islands. It winters in much of lowland eastern Asia, chiefly in eastern China, Korea, and Japan, southward to Vietnam. Its winter range extends to north-eastern India and it is rare further westwards across India and Nepal. In years of drought, in western portion of its winter range, vagrants have occurred westwards to Afghanistan, western Siberia, Iran, Jordan, Iraq, and Turkey (Madge & Burn 1988). Most of the European records are considered to involve escapees, as this species is popular with aviculturists, with just a few being genuine (Svensson *et al.* 2009). It is categorised as Near Threatened under the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (BirdLife International 2016) because of moderately rapid decline of its population in China. This short note records two sightings of this duck in Himachal Pradesh.

On 03 December 2011 DSD was checking areas around the submerged Bathu Temple (32.04°N, 76.00°E; *c.* 430 m) in Pong Lake, Kangra District, Himachal Pradesh, in a motorboat. He spotted a duck with unfamiliar plumage, and behaviour, in a larger flock of commoner ducks, and identified it as a male Falcated Duck in breeding plumage **[207]**. It had a green head, broad black neckband, and long tertials. He took some photographs from a distance. He tried to approach it but the duck flew away before further observations could be made.

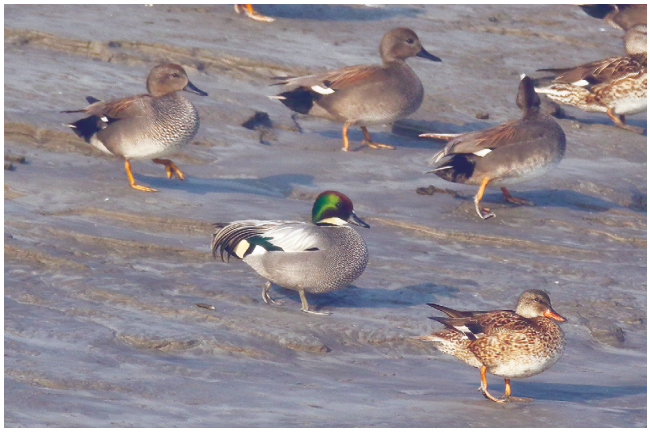
On 01 February 2017 at 1700 hrs, CA went to Sunder Nagar Lake, a man-made reservoir (31.54°N, 76.89°E; *c.* 860 m asl) situated in the middle of Sunder Nagar town along NH21 in Mandi District, Himachal Pradesh. On the lake, amongst *c.* 300 ducks of seven species, CA saw a distinct duck with a shiny green head, which was immediately identified as a male Falcated Duck **[208]**. It remained on the lake during winter, and was last sighted on 16 March 2017. During this time CA saw it on 12 different days and the made the following observations.

It was an adult male in breeding plumage with iridescent green-and-chestnut head, which appeared dark when not in full sunlight. Its tertials were long and touching the water. It could be identified from a distance, without binoculars, as its tertials were making its rear end appear broader rather than pointed as in other ducks, and because of its energetic movements. When it was resting on a small island in the middle of the lake, its dark grey legs, and the black-bordered yellow patch on its rear, were also seen. It seemed bulkier than a Gadwall *M. strepera* **[209]**.

In the early morning it preferred to rest and preen on the island, and start feeding after 0930–1030 hrs. It preferred to feed in an area where a canal opened into the lake, perhaps bringing in a greater abundance of food items. A couple of times it was also seen searching for food in the garbage that had accumulated in the outflow area. Most of the times it was seen alone, or in loose association with the Gadwall, but sometimes it was seen with Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*, Tufted Duck *A. fuligula,* or Common Teal *Anas crecca*. It is usually shy and wary in our region, keeping close to cover (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), but here it was always seen in the open, as no cover was present. It was a 'bold' individual and on several occasions came within ten meters of CA, and continued feeding without any sign of alarm. It was silent throughout the observation period.

Pics: C. Abhinav

208. Adult male Falcated Duck in breeding plumage



209. Falcated Duck with Gadwall.

Pics: C. Abhinav

210. Falcated Duck swallowing a marigold flower.

211. Falcated Duck tearing a cabbage leaf.

Tabel: Sightings of Falcated Teal from neighbouring states of Himachal Pradesh

Location	Date	Reference
Rahun, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar District, Punjab	15 February 1908	Glascock 1908
Zira, Ferozepur District, Punjab	27 November 1915	Waite 1916
Ropar, Rupnagar District, Punjab	January 1997	Robson 1997
Harike Wetland, Punjab	February 2003 (hybrid); one undated	Rahmani & Islam 2008
Roorkee, Haridwar District, Uttarakhand	13 January 1910, 03 March 1910, 14 February 1914	Kelly 1910; Bignell 1914
Jogiwala jheel, near Laksar, Uttarakhand	1913	Wall 1913
Asan Barrage, Dehradun District, Uttarakhand	1989	Mohan 1989
Rajaji National Park, Uttarakhand	Between 1986 and 1992	Pandey *et al.* 1995
Karnal, Haryana	February between 1869 and 1879	Hume & Marshal 1881
Sultanpur, Gurgaon District, Haryana	February between 1869 and 1879	Hume & Marshal 1881
c. 20 miles north to Karnal, Haryana	15 February 1940	Nicholas 1940
Anta, Jind District, Haryana	25 December 1955	Croix 1956
Near Sonipat, Haryana	January 1969	Ganguly 1975; Harvey *et al.* 2006
Sultanpur, Gurgaon District, Haryana	5 March 2013	An adult male, clearly seen with a spotting scope, while birding with a group (Harkirat Singh Sangha, *pers.comm.* April 2017)
Dighal, Jhajjar District, Haryana	11 December 2016 (hybrid)	Ghosh 2016

Its diet is described as mainly vegetarian (Baker 1921; Ali & Ripley 1987). It was picking food items from, or near, the surface. While feeding it made rapid side-to-side movements of the neck and was making rapid turns. It mainly feeds by upending (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), but it was never seen doing so in this lake. Most of the food it consumed was not visible, but on several occasions CA saw it swallow leaves, and whole marigold flowers **[210]**. During the last few days of its stay, it seemed to spend longer time feeding. It started feeding at dawn, and was seen feeding on cabbage also, which it had ignored earlier **[211]**. It seems that the bird was opportunistic in its feeding habit as it was preparing for migration.

In India its range extends from the northern plains to the Assam Valley, the lower parts of the southern Assam hills, south-western Bengal, and western Gujarat. It is uncommon in north-eastern India, and very rare in western India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

There are several sightings from West Bengal and north-eastern India, where it seems to be regular in small numbers (Choudhury 2006; Rahmani & Islam 2008; Grimmett *et al.* 2011). But there are only few sightings in other states. These two sightings from Himachal Pradesh were not unexpected, as this duck has been recorded in the neighbouring states as given in Table 1.

This bird is not mentioned by either den Besten (2004), or Dhadwal (2011). Therefore, the two records mentioned above, are the first for Himachal Pradesh.

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Grey-tailed Tattler *Tringa brevipes* in Pazhaverkadu (Pulicat) Lake, Tamil Nadu: An addition to the Indian avifauna

Sivakumar Shanmugasundaram & Sundaravel Palanivelu

Shanmugasundaram, S., & Palanivelu, S., 2017. Grey-tailed Tattler *Tringa brevipes* in Pulicat Lake, Andhra Pradesh: An addition to the Indian avifauna. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (6): 156–157.
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Manuscript received on 04 October 2017.

End September is early in the birding season, for watching migrants around Chennai. We heard of Eurasian Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* having being seen in Pulicat Lake (very close to Chennai), and so, on 30 September 2017, at 1445 hrs, we hired a boat from Pazhaverkadu fishing harbour (Tamil Nadu), to explore Pulicat Lake. Around 1515–1530 hrs, on one of the mudflats (13.4331768°N, 80.3136546°E) adjoining a small island of bushes and trees, south-east of Sriharikota Island, we observed a bird along with a few Ruddy Turnstones *Arenaria interpres* and Terek Sandpipers *Xenus cinereus*. From a distance it looked like a Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, but seemed a little smaller than one. On closer inspection we thought it was a Green Sandpiper *T. ochropus*. The bird had a striking supercilium with a dark eye stripe and short yellow legs ('short' in comparison to those of sandpipers). Its breast was scaly, and hence it looked like a 'different' bird. We took a few photographs **[212, 213]** before it hid from sight. The bird could not be located again.

On returning home, we shared the pictures on the Facebook group '*Ask Ids of Indian Birds*'. Ganesh Jayaraman felt that the bird was not a Green Sandpiper, and suspected it to be a Grey-tailed Tattler *T. brevipes*: subsequently several group members agreed with this identification. Below we provide detailed field notes and our rationale for the identification.

Sivakumar Shanmugasundaram

212. Grey-tailed Tattler in Pulicat Lake, Andhra Pradesh.

Sundaravel Palanivelu

213. Grey-tailed Tattler in Pulicat Lake, Andhra Pradesh.

The general appearance of the bird was of that of a sandpiper/Greenshank; it was a bit bigger, and stouter, than a Green Sandpiper with very obvious, shorter, yellowish legs. It had a prominent supercilium and contrasting black eye stripe that presented a striking face pattern. The breast and flanks were scaly with grey wavy crossbars on a dull-white background. This combination of features eliminated all other waders. The bird was found amongst a small flock of Ruddy Turnstones, and was shy. On spotting our boat approaching the mudflat, it quickly hid behind the sandbar, not to be seen again.

Subsequently, a few other birders made several trips to see the bird. One of them, travelling alone on 04 October 2017, reported seeing a bird with similar features, but was not certain. The bird wasn't seen again at this location when we visited it on 08 October 2017 along with other birders. The vast expanse of Pulicat Lake, combined with travelling constraints between small pockets of sand bars, or islands, posed a challenge in searching for the species. Many birders continued searching for this bird at identical sites around the lake, using the services of the same boatman. After some intense searches, it was sighted on a few occasions in mid-October. A few birders, including Ganesh Jayaraman, who first identified this from Facebook posts, had spotted the Gray-tailed Tattler near the same location and also had taken photographs of the same (Jayaraman 2017). This tattler has since been spotted on 17 October 2017 (Aravind Venkatraman and Ramakrishnan Rajamani), on 20 October 2017 (Ganesh Jayaraman and Sambath Subbaiah), and on 24 October 2017 (Pradeepkumar and Arun Prasad).

Arun Prasad

214. Grey-tailed Tattler photographed in 2016.

In a new turn of events, on seeing the pictures in the social media, Arun Prasad reviewed his images from the previous year, and realised from his records that on 18 September 2016, he had indeed photographed a Grey-tailed Tattler **[214]**, during his visit along with Pradeepkumar Devadoss (Arun Prasad, *verbally*, 26 November 2017). Unfortunately, he had not identified it properly and left it to be a sandpiper. Now, on reviewing this, he identified it rightly and has since corrected his records and updated the sighting on www.ebird.org (Prasad 2016).

Sighting the bird a few times, over a span of around 20 days, could mean that this individual is wintering here at Pulicat, and has not made a stopover en-route to some other destination. However, two tattlers have not been sighted together here. Probably, there is only one individual wintering at Pulicat. Moreover, if the bird was indeed seen in 2016, then it is probably not a rare vagrant but an annual visitor. The Gray-tailed Tattler is definitely a bird that one needs to look out for in future annual migratory season.

The Grey-tailed Tattler breeds in the Siberian region and winters in South China, Southeast Asia, some of the Pacific Islands, and in Australia (Van Giles *et al.* 2017). In the Indian Subcontinent, it is recognised as a rare spring migrant to the coast of south-eastern Bangladesh, mainly in the Patenga region, near Chittagong (Thomspon & Johnson 2003; Praveen *et al.* 2017). The only photographic evidence of this bird from South Asia is from the Chagos Archipelago (Carr 2015). The only prior report of a tattler from India was from Goa (Robson 2002), but that record has now been withdrawn by the observer (Tim Inskipp, *in litt*., e-mail dated 10 June 2015; Praveen J., *in litt*., e-mail dated 11 October 2017). Hence, this is an addition to the Indian avifauna and is probably the first photograph of the species from the Indian Subcontinent.

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Records of Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* from Gujarat, India

Devvratsinh Mori & Yogendra Shah

Mori, D., & Shah, Y., 2017. Records of Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* from Gujarat, India. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (6): 158–159.
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The Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* is a polytypic species that breeds widely in Eurasia, from central Europe, all the way till northern and central China, and migrates southwards to winter in the arid zones of southern Europe, Africa, and Asia (Orta *et al.* 2017). The colour variation of its plumage is clinal from west to east, as birds tend to become overall paler, and their upperparts become increasingly barred (Forsman 1999). Though their taxonomy is in flux, four subspecies are recognised worldwide (Dickinson & Remsen 2013; Orta *et al.* 2017), of which, the nominate, and *milvipus* occur in India in winter (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012); only recently was *milvipus* recorded breeding in Ladakh (Sangha *et al.* 2014). *F. c. milvipus* is considered a rare to uncommon migrant to the Indian Subcontinent, between October to April, with the nominate race wintering throughout north-western India, including Gujarat (Naoroji 2006). Though Butler (1879), and Ali (1945), did not list this species from Gujarat, Dhamrakumarsinhji (1955) considered it, 'not uncommon in the desert tracts of northern Saurashtra, Kachchh and north-western Gujarat.' It is presently considered a rare winter visitor, restricted to the Little Rann of Kachchh (*henceforth*, LRK), and the Greater Rann of Kachchh (*henceforth*, GRK) (Ganpule 2016). Here we review all known reports of the Saker Falcon from Gujarat, including our own to understand its status in the state.

The Saker Falcon is much browner than a Peregrine Falcon *F. peregrinus*, but very similar to an adult Laggar Falcon *F. jugger*. However, it can be distinguished from the latter by its paler brown upperparts, the feathers boldly-edged with orange-buff, giving a more barred appearance; a less distinct moustachial stripe; uppertail usually barred, at least on all but central tail feathers; underparts paler, less heavily spotted and without the dark brown thighs of Laggar Falcon (Kazmierczak 2000). Racial separation is difficult and hence not attempted here.

The Saker Falcon has been listed as 'Endangered', under the IUCN Red List category because a revised population trend analysis indicates that it may be undergoing a very rapid decline (BirdLife International 2016).

DM saw this species during a raptor survey on 04 January 2012 around at 0945 hours in area below Nanda Bet (Island) and above Rupen River, LRK (23.48°N 71.23°). From a distance it appeared to be a large-sized falcon. After getting closer, good views of the bird could be obtained through binoculars. This large-sized, broad-chested falcon was perched quite upright with its long spotted tail and wings that fell well short of it. It had a small head, compared to its overall body, with a darkish crown and prominent dark eyes. The moustache, which looked thin, was curved and appeared broken between the eye and the bill. The underparts had spots and the falcon had greyish legs and talons. These features eliminated other species, including the

Table 1. Records of Saker Falcon in Gujarat

No.	Place	Date	Observer	Remark	Reference
1	Bhavnagar district	Pre-1955	Dharmkumarsinji	Irregular visitor in small numbers to the Bhal region.	Dharmkumarsinhji (1955)
2	Wankaner district	Pre-1955	Dharmkumarsinji	Seen occasionally.	Dharmkumarsinhji (1955)
3	LRK	January 1990	William Clark	A juvenile photographed.	Naoroji (2006)
4	LRK	31 January & 01 February 2004	Indra Gadhavi	Included in checklist prepared by author during wild ass census conducted in southern and eastern fringes of LRK. No further details available.	Gadhavi (2004)
5	LRK	16 February 2008	Chiku Vora & others	Included in the checklist prepared by authors during Houbara survey conducted in LRK. No further details available.	Vora (2009)
6	LRK	21 January 2009	Nirav Bhatt	Adult photographed.	Bhatt (2009b), Bhatt (2009c)
7	LRK	February 2009	Nirav Bhatt	Adult photographed.	Bhatt (2009a)
8	LRK	February 2011	Yogendra Shah	See text.	This work
9	LRK	04 January 2012	Devvratsinh Mori	See text.	This work
10	LRK	06 February 2015	Jainy Maria	Adult photographed.	Maria (2015)
11	LRK	03 December 2015	Yogendra Shah	See text. Photographed.	This work
12	GRK	25 December 2015	Prasad Ganpule	A single bird reported from close to Indo-Pakistan border. Identified by large size, wings falling well short of tail, white underparts with spotting, and smaller whitish head with light brownish upperparts.	Ganpule (2015)

Yogendra Shah

215. Saker Falcon in Little Rann of Kachchh.

Laggar, and the Peregrine. It flushed on closer approach, took a long flight and disappeared in the *Prosopis* bushes nearby. Efforts to relocate it were in vain and hence no photograph could be obtained.

While discussing this sighting, YS updated two other sight records of this species from LRK.

1. In February 2011, in an area below Nanda Bet and above Rupen River, at around 0945 hrs, a bird was seen flying low, and identified as an adult Saker Falcon due its large size, pale head with narrow moustache, broad dark coverts band. No photographs could be taken.
2. On 03 December 2015, an adult bird was photographed **[215]** in southern area of Zinzuvada village of LRK (23.27°N, 71.63°E).

We have attempted to collate all available records of the Saker Falcon (Table 1), from different websites and publications, to provide a consolidated view of its status and distribution in Gujarat. It appears to be a rare winter visitor to LRK and GRK.

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– Aasheesh Pittie & Praveen J.

Little Owl *Athene noctua* at Se La Pass, Arunachal Pradesh, India

Wich'yanan Limparungpatthanakij, Jay Packer, Amy Packer & Firoz Hussain

Limparungpatthanakij, W., Packer, J., Packer, A., & Hussain, F., 2014. Little Owl *Athene noctua* at Se La Pass, Arunachal Pradesh, India. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (6): 160–161.

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On 19 December 2016, at Se La Pass (27.51ºN, 92.11ºE; 4200 m asl), Arunachal Pradesh, India, led by Khandu Tamang, we spotted a small owl perched on a rock at 0830 hrs. The bird was observed for at least five minutes before it flew to a more distant rock near crevices. The habitat was open areas with rocky terrain and scattered trees. Its identity as Little Owl *Athene noctua* is confirmed with certainty as many photographs were taken. The elongated brown breast-streaks seen clearly in **[216]** readily rule out the similar Spotted Owlet *A. brama,* which differs in having brown spots and bars on the underparts (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Photo **[217]** revealed that the owl had preyed upon a pika *Ochotona* sp., most likely *O. curzoniae*. Having birded in the area previous, Khandu Tamang and FH pointed out that this could be a significant record for the region.

The only documented record of a Little Owl in Arunachal Pradesh was a specimen collected in the Mishmi Hills (Baker 1926) *c.* 400 km to the east; the same paper wherein Baker described the *ludlowi* subspecies of this owl. He remarked that the bird from the Mishmi Hills was closest to the Tibetan *ludlowi* though smaller and darker, but Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) did not include its regional distribution further east of Sikkim. Further details of the Mishmi specimen are unavailable and it is unclear where exactly in the Mishmi Hills it was recorded, and the season when it was collected. However, the species is treated as resident in north-eastern Sikkim (Ganguli-Lachungpa *et al.* 2011), wherein a recent photograph is included, and was recently added to the Bhutan list, based on a record from Nub Tshonapatra in far western Bhutan (Wangdi 2015).

Wich'yanan Limparungpatthanakij

216. Little Owl.

Jay Packer

217. Little Owl on pica kill.

Though mainly crepuscular, the Little Owl is also active during daytime (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Frank Ludlow found birds sunning in winter on walls and ruins (Baker 1927). The species is widespread in North Africa and temperate Eurasia, ranging from western Europe to eastern Asia. The individual at Se La Pass is presumed to belong to the Tibetan subspecies *ludlowi* as that is the subspecies known closest from the site. This is further supported by its chocolate-brown upperparts, rather than the paler sandy-brown of *bactriana*, which is another subspecies known to occur in the Himalayas (König & Weick 2008). However, it is important to note that bird, in much of its range in India, from Ladakh and the inner Himalayas, is believed to be intermediate between *bactriana* and *ludlowi*, except probably in Sikkim (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

Despite being, largely, a resident species, juveniles are stated to settle as far away as 600 km from natal sites (König & Weick 2008). The Little Owl may be resident at Se La Pass, as it is known to be sedentary on the Tibetan Plateau, and nearby mountainous regions of the Himalayas (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). The subspecies *ludlowi* is stated to be present throughout the year, at all elevations, between Gyantse and Phari (Baker 1927). Another sighting at the same site, on 01 May 2017, by Jainy Maria, Yann Muzika, and Rufikul Islam seemingly supports its likely resident status. Nevertheless, further investigation, and more reports of sightings from the area are needed to confirm its seasonal status.

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Rustic Bunting *Schoeniclus rusticus* from Bhutan

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Lilje, M, 2017. Rustic Bunting *Schoeniclus rusticus* from Bhutan. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (6): 161.
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219. Rustic Bunting showing its tuft.

The Rustic Bunting *Schoeniclus rusticus* is a Palaearctic bunting with a large breeding range from Fennoscandia to eastern Siberia. It winters further south in central- and eastern-Asia (Copete *et al.* 2017). In the Indian Subcontinent it has been treated as a vagrant to Nepal (Grimmett *et al.* 2011), or as 'hypothetical' to South Asia (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Recently, it has been assessed as definitive for the subcontinent based on two sight records from Nepal (Praveen *et al.* 2017). It is not included in the 'India Checklist' (Praveen *et al.* 2016) though it is listed from north-western India (Copete *et al.* 2017) without further references. This note describes a 2014 photographic report of the Rustic Bunting from Bhutan.

While leading a birding trip to Bhutan in March–April 2014, we spent the last few days of birding in Paro Valley. On 09 April 2017, we climbed out of the valley and began our memorable climb up Chele La Pass, where the road tops out at 3988 m. This pass is undoubtedly the best place to find the resplendent Himalayan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus*, of which we got eight near the top, apart from 14 Blood Pheasants *Ithaginis cruentus*, and 11 Kalij Pheasants *Lophura leucomelanos*. After a full day of birding, we returned to the hotel at Paro (27.40°N, 89.40°E; *c.* 2270 m) where we saw and photographed a male Rustic Bunting, which was in its breeding plumage **[218, 219]**. Identification was straightforward: it was a 'tufted' bunting with black forehead, crown, and ear coverts, with a small white spot behind the eye and a prominent white supercilium. The throat and malar area were white, with a thin dark brown stripe separating the throat from the malar region. This is a facial pattern not present on any other bunting: Tristram's Bunting *S. tristrami* does not have a tuft and has a black throat, while Little Bunting *S. pusillus* does not show such a strong white facial pattern.

This is the first record of the Rustic Bunting for Bhutan (Spierenburg 2005), and the first photographic record for the Indian Subcontinent (Praveen *et al.* 2017b).

Pics: Markus Lilje

218. Rustic Bunting in Bhutan showing clear facial pattern.

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

Anil Kumar Bharadwaj

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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 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

Pics: Anil Kumar Bharadwaj

221. European Greenfinch.

220. European Greenfinch in Ladakh.

222. Another view of the European Greenfinch in Ladakh.

identification. She directed me to send my photos to Krys, editor of Oriental Bird Images (OBI) website, for further confirmation. Back home, I sent the photos to Krys, 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 Krys 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.

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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 (22.69ºN, 87.34ºE), 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

Pics: Ayan Khanra

223. Mottled Wood Owl photographed in the Arabari forest range, Paschim Medinipur District, West Bengal

this photograph with several expert birders like Sujan Chaterjee, Kanad Baidya, and Shantanu Manna we realised that this was a very rare sighting for West Bengal. There was only one 1968 record from Durgapore (Gauntlett 1986).

The Mottled Wood Owl is a large owl that is resident in India and parts of Nepal. It is found in gardens and thin deciduous forests adjacent to dry thorn forests or farmland. Ali & Ripley (1987), and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) include West Bengal in its range, probably based on Gauntlett (1986). Inglis (1902) reported it from Dharbhanga District, Bihar; two specimens are held in the collection of the Bombay Natural History Society (Abdulali 1972), two in the Yale Peabody Museum (YPM VZ YPM ORN 042621-22, taken on 04 August 1907), and one in the Royal Ontario Museum, from Munger, taken on 01 July 1911 (ROM Birds #42027). It is listed for Hazaribagh National Park (Ara 1960), and Saranda (Gupta 2006) of Jharkhand, though without further details. Ball (1878) reported it from Sambalpur, Odisha, and one of his specimens is in the National Museum of Ireland (#1887.2902.564; Sigwart *et al.* 2004). There are at least three recent photographs documented in Tim Inskipp's bibliography for Odisha (Inskipp 2015), and more recently Rabin Panigrahi photographed one individual in Ganjam District, Odisha,

224. The cryptic Mottled Wood Owl.

in October 2016 (Rabin Panigrahi, *in litt.,* 02 May 2017). Ali & Ripley (1987) treat the race found in Odisha as the nominate, while that in West Bengal and Bihar is thought to be *grisescens*. Ali & Ripley (1987) state that it is not found in Bangladesh or Assam. However, the American Museum of Natural History lists a male, and a female, collected from Cachar, Assam. by Walter Koelz on 24 April 1946 (AMNH Birds SKIN-462004-5); a careful perusal of the locality details (Bheraghat) reveals that the site in in Madhya Pradesh and not in Assam.

Hence, the two West Bengal records, Gauntlett (1986), and this, seem to be the eastern most limit of this species.

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The Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* re-using an old Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* nest

A pair of Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* was seen nesting in July 2016 on a *Eucalyptus* sp. tree at Bhindawas Wildlife Sanctuary (28.532°N, 76.551°E; 212 m asl; **[225]**), the largest wetland of Haryana, India. The nest was 11 m above the ground, and was an abandoned, two-year-old nest of a Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*. The nest was built in the fork of the lower branches of the tree. The pair occupied the nest in the second week of July and by third week the birds were incubating eggs. The eggs hatched in the last week of August and three nestlings were first observed on 01 September 2016. An incubation period of about 40 days was recorded. Both adults participated in all the nidification activities, like nest building, incubation, and feeding the nestlings. The nestlings fledged during the second week of October.

In India, only a few species of birds have been recorded nesting on eucalyptus trees: Darter *Anhinga melanogaster* (Niangthianhoi & Khudsar 2015), and the Indian Spotted Eagle *Clanga hastata* (Sharma *et al.* 2010)—because of its pattern of branching. Therefore, it was quite interesting to see a big bird like the Woolly-necked Stork selecting the eucalyptus tree as a nesting site, and nest successfully. The species is known to breed in large leafy trees like *Salmalia* sp. (Ali & Ripley 1987), *Mitragyna parvifolia*, and *Dalbergia sissoo* (Ishtiaq *et al.* 2004), which have strong branches and forks that provide a stable nesting platform. Some nesting records of the species are also on mobile phone towers (Vaghela *et al.* 2015), and on rock cliffs (Rahmani *et al*. 1996), which are also strong and sturdy nesting sites. The observations of its nesting on an eucalyptus tree appears very interesting as it is very different from the strong and sturdy nesting sites of tall and strong native trees, mobile towers and rocky cliffs. Agricultural fields surround the Bhindawas Wildlife Sanctuary and the peripheral embankment of the wetland is demarcated by *Eucalyptus* sp., *Acacia* sp., *Azadirachta* sp., and *Zizyphus* sp. Thus, may be the absence of tall leafy native trees in this area forced the bird to select the eucalyptus tree as nesting site.

Although, the reuse of its own nests has been recorded (Ali & Ripley 1987), this pair had occupied an abandoned nest of the Grey Heron. I have not come across any reference in the literature, of this species re-using the nest of another species. However, quite a few large birds are known to occupy the nests of smaller species, especially amongst raptors (Newton 1979; Collias *et al.* 1984; Fernández *et al.* 1991). The re-using of the nest was, perhaps, an opportunistic behavioral strategy of the Woolly-necked Stork pair, as it was a readily available, and suitable to their purpose, in a habitat that was otherwise not conducive to nesting.

225. Woolly-necked Stork nesting in an abandoned Grey Heron nest, in an eucalyptus tree.

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A Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* rescued from Godda district of Jharkhand, India

On 01 April 2017, a few people of Chanda village captured a Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* **[226]** from a waterbody (25.15°N, 87.45°E) in Godda District, Jharkhand (India). The waterbody is adjacent to agricultural land, and its water is less than five meters deep, with partial algal growth. The highway patrol police registered a case of poaching and seized the bird, later handing it to the Boarijor range officer of Godda forest division. We visited all surrounding waterbodies to check for flamingos, but did not find any. The captive bird was taken to Bhagawan Birsa Biological Park (Ranchi Zoo) on 02 April 2017, where it died the next day. A post mortem showed the cause of death due to an internal injury.

A formal state checklist does not exist for Jharkhand (Rahmani *et al.* 2016: 850–851). Avibase (http://avibase.bsc-eoc.org/checklist.jsp?region=INggjh&list=howardmoore) lists 436 species


Sanjay Xaxa

226. The rescued Greater Flamingo in Godda District, Jharkhand.

from the state and credits their source to Delhibird (www.delhibird.net). Delhibird has one checklist from Jharkhand and that is from Palamau Tiger Reserve (http://checklists.delhibird.net/internal/jharkhand/palamau.htm), which is sourced from the official website of the Tiger Reserve; evidently the list is not comprehensive. However, the Greater Flamingo is not listed on any checklist for Jharkhand State. Neither field guies (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), nor online sources (www.ebird.org; www.orientalbirdimages.org) show any records from Jharkhand, though some records from adjacent Bihar are depicted. Hence this might be the first formal record of the species for the state. The Greater Flamingo is considered rare in eastern India (Ali & Ripley 1987), and hence this record is of additional interest.

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First photographic record of Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus* from West Bengal, India

A Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus* was photographed on 05 July 2016 at *c.* 1600 hrs in the Kotulpur block (23.03°N, 87.60°E) of Bankura District, West Bengal. The bird was foraging in a ploughed paddy field that had remnants of grasses and weeds. Nearby, a small pond, and irrigation canal had patches of tall kans grass *Saccharum spontaneum*.

The bird had a maroon chestnut head and neck, and slate or bluish-black back, and hence it was identified as a Chinese Pond Heron in breeding plumage. The next day I revisited the place and saw the bird. It remained at the site at least till 08 July 2016, after which I did not see it despite many visits. This appears to be the first photographic record of this species from West Bengal.


Sovan Gupta

227. Chinese Pond Heron in West Bengal.

Interestingly enough, again in 2017, an individual of the same species was sighted at the same site. The bird was first noticed on 09July, but I could not take a photograph then. The next day I revisited the place but the bird could not be found. On 11 July, I found the bird once again and could take some pictures **[227]**. I visited the spot almost regularly, and after a gap of 15 days I saw the bird again in that area on 27 July. In 2016 the bird stayed there, presumably, for three days, and in 2017 it stayed for 19 days though it remained undetected during most of my visits. It was generally noticed during a drizzle, or just after heavy showers, presumably coming out into the open paddy fields to catch insects. Whenever I saw the bird, it was feeding by itself, despite there being Indian Pond- Herons *A. grayii* in the vicinity.

These repeat sightings of the Chinese Pond Heron from this site,during the same period of the year, and the fact that it remained in the area for 19 days in 2017, is interesting. In the Indian Subcontinent, it is mainly found in north-eastern India, the Andaman Islands, and in Bangladesh (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Vagrants have been reported from Bhavnagar, Gujarat (Parasharya 1983; Parasharya *et al.* 2004), Tal Chhapar Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajasthan (Poonia *et al*. 2013), the Kelambakkam backwaters of Tamil Nadu (Kaninde 2013), and from Pakistan (Khan *et al*. 2015).

I thank Subhankar Patra for his encouragement, and for confirming it as the first photographic record from West Bengal, and Debansu Paramanik and Anagha Deb for their help and encouragement during fieldwork. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Sachin Ranade for guiding me in the preparation of this note.

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Adaptations of the Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyceros birostris* in an urban environment

The Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyceros birostris* is only known to nest in tree cavities (Hall 1918; Ali & Ripley 1987; Santhoshkumar & Balasubramanian 2010), or inside artificial nest boxes (Nagare 2014). But on 15 April 2015 I spotted an unusual nesting site of an Indian Grey Hornbill pair—a hole on the concrete wall of the second floor of a multi-storied residential building in Indore city (Madhya Pradesh) **[228, 229]**. The hole was beside the window of one of the apartments and was approximately eight meters above the ground. It had been properly sealed by the female hornbill, leaving only a small slit for the male to feed the incarcerated occupants. The male used the window's ledge as a perch from which it would fly up to the nest cavity. The building stood beside a large playground, which would be crowded in the mornings and evenings. Many fruit-bearing trees like *Ficus bengalensis, F. religiosa, F. glomerata,* and *Azardirachta indica* were present in the vicinity. This nest has been successfully occupied for three consecutive years: 2015–2017.

In another instance I installed a high resolution CCTV camera, with zoom-in and zoom-out feature, to record the hornbill's nesting behaviour. The camera was fixed on a pole and was five meters away from the nest. The nest was located at the biodiversity nursery inside the forest campus, Indore. The camera was covered by an outer casing so as to protect it from rain. A DVR with 500 GB harddisk capacity was put in the nearby forest officer residence. The same was connected to a personal computer and the data was downloaded on it. The live feed was seen on the computer and depending on the type of footage required, the CCTV camera was zoomed in, or out. Apart from this, DSLR cameras with zoom lens, and binoculars, were also used to record the observations of the nest.

On 20 May 2013 I spotted a male regularly providing pieces of dry chapattis **[230]** and biscuits to the chicks.This food was obtained from a feeding table in a nearby residence, where the residents encouraged squirrels to feed off it. The hornbill was observed scaring away squirrels and taking the food. I later placed pieces of Indian milk-based sweets on the table, which the male readily took to the nest. I also observed that the male brought fruits of *F. religosa*, *F. glomerata*, and *Syzygium cumini* to the nest. The chicks were also fed beetles and grasshoppers before they fledged (Patil *et al.* 1997; Santoshkumar & Balasubramaniam 2015).

Pics: Ajay Gadikar

228. Male Indian Grey Hornbill approaches nest cavity, with a beak-full of food to feed its chicks.

229. Male Indian Grey Hornbill inserting food into nest cavity.

230. Male Indian Grey Hornbill feeding chapattis to its young.

The unusual nesting site, and the acceptance of 'different' food, indicate that this species has adapted remarkably to living in human-dominated environments.

I thank P. C. Dube, APCCF (R&E) Madhya Pradesh Forest Department, for supporting me wholeheartedly during the CCTV camera-based study. I also thank Raju Kasambe and Anil Pimpalpure for their inputs during the study. A special thanks to Praveen J., for encouraging me to write this note.

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Bronzed Drongo *Dicrurus aenea* and Hair-crested Drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus* from Jammu & Kashmir, India

This note reports the addition of Bronzed Drongo *Dicrurus aenea* and Hair-crested Drongo *D. hottentottus* to the avifauna of Jammu and Kashmir.

On the sunny afternoon of 21 June 2016, NS noticed a medium-sized bird perched on a cherry-bark elm *Ulmus villosa* tree (32.89ºN, 75.82ºE; *c.* 2547 m asl), about five kilometers south of Padri, falling within the administrative jurisdiction of Jammu and Kashmir State along Bhaderwah–Chamba interstate highway. The bird was identified as a Bronzed Drongo **[231]** from its glossy bluish-green body, with a flatter bill, and less deeply forked tail (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The bird stayed on the tree for about three minutes and then flew away towards the dense mixed stand of a nearby temperate broadleaved forest. It is a resident of the Himalayas and has, so far, been reported up till Himachal Pradesh (Shah *et al.* 2016) in the north-western Himalayas (Ali & Ripley 2001; Grimmet *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), and so its appearance near the state border is not unexpected, though it's an addition to the avifauna of Jammu & Kashmir.

231. Bronzed Drongo *Dicrurus aenea*.

Pics: Neeraj Sharma

232. Hair-crested Drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus*.

Two Hair-crested Drongos were sighted near Samba (32.58ºN, 75.20ºE; *c.* 471 m asl), and one near Kathua (32.58ºN, 75.35ºE; *c.* 570 m asl) on 03 and 15 March 2016 respectively, by Parvez Shagoo (2016a,b). On the evening of 03 February 2017, while walking around the main campus, we noticed a group of five individuals feeding and fluttering around the blooming silver oak *Grevillea robusta*, Indian bottle brush *Callistemon citrinus*, and Silk floss tree *Ceiba speciosa* near the administrative block (32.71ºN, 74.86ºE; *c.* 318 m asl), University of Jammu, Jammu. The species was spotted again at the same location on 18 February 2017 by NS (two individuals) and on 11 April 2017 (five individuals) by AS. NS recently sighted a group of seven individuals hovering over a *Toona ciliata* canopy near Dalhori in Rajouri District (33.30ºN, 74.45ºE; *c.* 1075 m asl) on 06 August 2017. The species **[232]** was recognized by its glistening blue-black plumage, highly iridescent wings, sickle-shaped heavy bill, long filoplumes over crown, and steeply triangular tail with curled corners (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Its frequent sightings in and around Jammu and up to far west in Rajouri, in the recent past, suggests a possible range extension of the species further westwards of Kangra, Himachal Pradesh (den Besten 2004; Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

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Snapshot sightings

Hume's Short-toed Lark at Chandigarh

Munish Jauhar

On 03 May 2017, at around 1700 hrs, I photographed a Hume's Short-toed Lark *Calandrella acutirostris* at Sukhna Lake (30.74°N, 76.82°E), Chandigarh, along with a flock of Common Sandpipers *Actitis hypoleucos*. Picture showed a dark patch on the lores, uniform ear-coverts, weakly streaked crown, and dark ridge on bill. Generally a rare bird in winter quarters, it has not been reported from the Chandigarh ISCR although it is mapped as migrating through Punjab (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

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Pale/Sand Martin from Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu

Anoop R

On 09 September 2017, at 1341 hrs, three Pale/Sand Martins *Riparia diluta/riparia* were noted flying above the waters of Salt Lake, Plot 1, Puthalam (8.17°N, 77.77°E), Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu, along with several Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica*. Though identification to the exact species is impossible from this photograph, this appears to be the first report of either species south of Alappuzha (Harikumar 2017), along the western coast of India, though there are more reports from the eastern coast (Santharam 2003).

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European Roller from Darjeeling, West Bengal

Bijoy Adhikary

On 07 October 2017, an European Roller *Coracias garrulus* was photographed in Kalyani (22.97°N, 88.37°E), West Bengal. A passage migrant through north-western India, this is probably

the first record for the state and the eastern-most record, till date, from the country (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

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Bristled Grassbird from Belgaum, Karnataka

Niranjan Sant

On 16 October 2017, a male Bristled Grassbird *Chaetornis striata* was observed singing from a bush at Avachar Hati village (15.77°N, 74.77°E), near Belgaum, Karnataka. In a span of 150 mins, it displayed seven times by rising in flight and circling the grassland, singing. The bird was seen on subsequent visits until 22 October 2017. There have been two recent records of this species from Karnataka (Lakshmi 2015; Kamath 2016) but this is probably the first time it was seen displaying.

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