

This monotypic pipit, with its colour changes, breeds in the Tundra. It enjoys one of the most northerly ranges of all passerine birds and undertakes one of the longest journeys made by an *Anthus* pipit (Simms 1992), wintering predominantly in Africa (south of the Sahara), and South-east Asia (Tyler 2004).

The identification of pipits can be difficult, especially outside their breeding season. The following description is based on brief field notes and photographs:

Description: Both birds had rather uniform olive-tinged, grey-brown and white streaked plumage. The distinct black streaks were broad on the back and flanks and narrow on the crown, nape, rump, and upper tail coverts. While the breast was overall white with heavy uniformly dark streaks, the flanks had thick longitudinal stripes. The belly and undertail coverts were unstreaked. Prominent white stripes on mantle were conspicuous. There were two white wing bars, the upper one, on the median wing coverts, being broader and more conspicuous. The legs were the colour of pale flesh.

The crown had fine dark longitudinal streaking extending to the nape and hind neck; short thin bill; a prominent buffish-white supercilium starting at base of bill and reaching far beyond eye towards nape; dark brown ear-coverts; very prominent sub-moustachial stripe, dark malar stripe, and strong black patch (wedge shaped) on lower throat, all created a rather characteristic pattern.

In general, adult Red-throated Pipits show rufous on the supercilium, throat, and breast, although a small number of adult females may lack any trace of rufous and thus appear similar to first-winter birds (Alström & Mild 2003). The fresh plumage, lack of any rufous on the head, the distinct malar stripe, strong wedge shape on lower throat, white stripes along mantle indicate that the Great Nicobar birds were first-winters.

Behaviour: The habitat was typical for Red-throated Pipits, which preferentially forage in areas of short turf browsed by ungulates where, as here, they often form mixed assemblages with Yellow Wagtails *M. flava* (Cramp 1988; Alström & Mild 2003; *pers. obs.*). The birds typically foraged singly, presumably to avoid competition with both conspecifics and allospecifics.

The Red-throated Pipit is a scarce passage/winter migrant to the Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1998; Kazmierczak 2000). According to Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) it is a passage migrant in north-eastern Afghanistan, the Indus Valley (Pakistan), and occasionally through the Himalayas and North-eastern India; it winters in the Maldives, the Andaman Islands, and possibly the Nicobar Islands (old sight report from Camorta). While Kazmierczak (2000), Grimmett *et al.* (2011), and Ripley (1982) have assumed its presence on the Nicobar group of islands, probably based on Hume (1874), Tikader's (1984) statement that 'in the Bay Islands it is common but restricted to marshy grounds' is of very general nature. I wonder if this statement of Tikader is justified, for Hume (1874) quotes Davison's remarks that it 'occurs both at the Andamans and Nicobars, frequenting similar situations. At the Nicobars I observed it only on Camorta Island.' During his visits to the Nicobar Islands, Abdulali (1965, 1967, 1979) did not report the species although he reiterated that Hume recorded it from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and, 'in the latter it had only been recorded from Camotra.'

Thus, the Great Nicobar Island birds probably constitute the first confirmed photographic record from the Nicobar Islands.

References

- Abdulali, H., 1965. The birds of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 61 (3): 483–571 (1964).
- Abdulali, H., 1967. The birds of the Nicobar Islands, with notes on some Andaman birds. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 64 (2): 139–190.
- Abdulali, H., 1979. The birds of Great and Car Nicobars with some notes on wildlife conservation in the Islands. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 75 (3): 744–772 (1978).
- Ali, S., & Ripley, S. D., 1998. *Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan together with those of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. Robins to wagtails*. 2nd (Hardback) ed. Delhi: (Sponsored by Bombay Natural History Society.) Oxford University Press. Vol. 9 of 10 vols. Pp. i–xviii, 1–310, 10 II.
- Alström, P., & Mild, K., 2003. *Pipits & Wagtails of Europe, Asia and North America. Identification and systematics*. 1st ed. London: Christopher Helm (Publishers) Ltd. Pp. 1–496.
- Cramp, S., (ed.), 1988. *The birds of the Western Palearctic*, 5. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T., 1998. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 1st ed. London: Christopher Helm, A & C Black. Pp. 1–888.
- Hume, A. O., 1874. Contributions to the ornithology of India. The Islands of the Bay of Bengal. *Stray Feathers* 2 (1,2&3): 29–324.
- Kazmierczak, K., 2000. *A field guide to the birds of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and the Maldives*. 1st ed. New Delhi: Om Book Service. Pp. 1–352.
- Pittie, A., 2017. Bibliography of South Asian Ornithology. URL: <http://www.southasiaornith.in>. [Accessed on 15/10/2017]
- Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2012. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide*. 2nd ed. Washington, D.C. and Barcelona: Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. 2 vols. Pp. 1–378; 1–683.
- Ripley, S. D., 1982. *A synopsis of the birds of India and Pakistan together with those of Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka*. 2nd ed. Bombay; Oxford: Bombay Natural History Society; Oxford University Press. Pp. i–xxvi, 1–653.
- Simms, E., 1992. *British Larks, Pipits and Wagtails*. Harper Collins, London.
- Tikader, B. K., 1984. *Birds of Andaman & Nicobar Islands*. Calcutta: Zoological Survey of India. Pp. i–xxiii, 1–167.
- Tyler, S. J., 2004. Family Motacillidae (Pipits and wagtails). In: del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A., & Christie, D., (eds.). *Handbook of the birds of the world. Cotingas to pipits and wagtails*. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions. Vol. 9: Pp. 686–786.

– Harkirat Singh Sangha & Sudhir Garg

Harkirat Singh Sangha, B-27, Gautam Marg, Hanuman Nagar
Jaipur 302021, Rajasthan, India

E-mail: harkirat.sangha@gmail.com

Sudhir Garg, Vidhyadhar Nagar, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

E-mail: sudhirgarg@gmail.com

Received on 17 November 2017.

Red-naped Shaheen *Falco peregrinus babylonicus* from Belgaum, Karnataka

While birding in the morning of 06 December 2017, at Belgaum (15.81°N, 74.53°E; 662 m asl), we noticed a falcon perched on the branch of a tree and feeding on some prey it held in its talons. When we got a better view, we were surprised to see that it was a Red-naped Shaheen *Falco peregrinus babylonicus* feeding on a Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala* [46]. A few crows were harassing the bird, and ultimately, it flew away with its prey. While flying off it uttered a *kee-kee-kee* call.

We compared the images of the falcon to the illustrations in Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), and in Bhatt & Ganpule (2017), confirming our identification. The photos clearly show the rufous nape, and the rufous wash on cheeks and underparts—diagnostic of this race. We also discussed the identification with Nirav Bhatt, Prasad Ganpule, and J. Pranay Rao; all concurred with our identification.



The Red-naped Shaheen is known to winter in the western and north-western parts of India. There are hardly any published records of the bird from southern India. Bhatt & Ganpule (2017) include two photographs by J. Pranay Rao, taken in Hyderabad in 2010, which appears to be the only published record. It is not listed in Praveen *et al.* (2017) and hence, our record must be an addition. The bird is known to winter in desert and semi-desert parts of India, and its occurrence in a totally different habitat, in Belgaum, probably indicates that it's a vagrant.

References

- Bhatt, N., & Ganpule, P., 2017. The identification of the Red-naped Shaheen *Falco peregrinus babylonicus*, its separation from *F. p. calidus*, in the field, and its status and distribution in north-western India. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (4): 85–92.
- Praveen J., Subramanya, S., & Raj, V. M., 2016. A checklist of the birds of Karnataka. *Indian BIRDS* 12 (4&5): 89–118.
- Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2012. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide*. 2nd

ed. Washington, D.C. and Barcelona: Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. 2 vols. Pp. 1–378; 1–683.

– **Niranjan Sant & Vidhyadhar Shelke**

Niranjan Sant, 27, Adarsh nagar, Vadgaon, Belgaum 590005, Karnataka, India
E-mail: niranjansant@yahoo.co.uk

Vidhyadhar Shelke, Shelke Medicals, Bazaar Galli, Vadgaon, Belgaum 590005, Karnataka, India.
Received on 07 December 2017.

Letter to the Editor

The European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris* from Ladakh is a Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*

Bharadwaj (2017) reported, with images, the first record of European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris* from the Indian Subcontinent. We analysed the published pictures, as well as the picture set hosted in Oriental Bird Images, and the bird in question does not seem to be a European Greenfinch, but instead a Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*. Here we list the arguments on why this is not a European Greenfinch.

Bill: In European Greenfinch, the bill is rather long and conical, with straight edges and longer culmen. However, in this bird, the bill is rather short and bulging, showing curved edges to both upper and lower mandible and is less conical in shape. The bill colour of a European Greenfinch should also be paler than in this bird. In shape, size and colour, the bill of this bird matches that of a Common Rosefinch.

Moult: The pattern of the feather wear, very evident with heavy worn coverts and tertials, is a strong indication of a Common Rosefinch, which moults in winter quarters. The European Greenfinch invariably moults on the breeding grounds after the breeding season, usually showing a complete moult in adults and a partial moult in first year birds. The greater and median coverts, as well as the tertials, of the Ladakh bird are very worn, and are not moulted for at least six months, which would be highly unlikely in a European Greenfinch; in September, a European Greenfinch is invariably in fresh plumage.

Plumage patterns: There is a hint of worn wing-bars, the remains of what were more marked bars when the feathers were fresh, on the greater as well as on the median coverts. This is a diagnostic character of Common Rosefinch when compared with a European Greenfinch, which lacks these wing-bars. Similarly, the worn tertials show clear remnants of pale edges, diagnostic of Common Rosefinch, and again absent in European Greenfinch.

As the only claim of European Greenfinch from the Indian subcontinent it has to be withdrawn; we propose that the species should be dropped from the checklist for India and the Indian subcontinent.

Reference

- Bharadwaj, A. K., 2017. European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris* in Ladakh: An addition to the avifauna of the Indian Subcontinent. *Indian BIRDS*. 13: (6) 162–163.

– **Magnus Hellström & José Luis Copete**

Magnus Hellström, Ottenby Bird Observatory, Ottenby 401, S-386 64 Degerhamn, Sweden
E-mail: magnus.hellstrom@ottenby.se

José Luis Copete, Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive, Lynx Edicions, Montseny 8,
E-08193 Bellaterra, Barcelona, Spain. E-mail: jlcopete@hbwm.com

On looking at these photos again I agree that this isn't a European Greenfinch and that it more closely fits a female Common Rosefinch in post-breeding moult—contrary to the opinion I provided earlier, and which was quoted in Bharadwaj (2017). On more considered reflection the bill is a fairly obvious indicator that this isn't a Greenfinch's bill from any part of its range and the moult pattern and forked tail also are not right.

In mitigation, I think I was persuaded by the green edges to the primaries and the base of the tail which are (or appear) to be very bright for a rosefinch and unlike the majority of female or first-winter Common Rosefinches but there are several photos on OBI of birds in fresh plumage that get close to this colour though none of the field guides or handbooks mention this, nor admittedly does Clement *et al.* (2011), and may well be worth further investigation. In addition, the head and nape appear to be grey and not at all streaky, it has a small dark eye and in one photo the lores appear to be dark, all features more closely associated with European Greenfinch. In other photos of the Ladakh bird the face and mantle appear to be tinged dark green or olive green also a colour found in female Greenfinch compared to the brown or olive-brown in Common Rosefinches but this could be more apparent than real and a colour distortion of the camera. Finally, the photo of the bird in profile—the only one which shows the underparts well—shows no, or at least very little, streaking that is at all obvious thus giving the impression of rather plain underparts but this again could be a distortion.

In summary, I agree with the conclusion that this record should be withdrawn, despite the oddities in plumage.

Reference

- Clement, P., Harris, A., & Davis, J., 1999. *Finches & sparrows*. 2nd ed. London; Princeton: Christopher Helm; Princeton University Press. Pp. 1–500.

– **Peter Clement**

Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, PE13 1RL, UK

Editorial comment: The European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris* has now been removed from the India Checklist.

