

# Indian BIRDS



Vol. 14 No. 3

Hornbill Watch  
Yellow-browed Bunting  
Chestnut-flanked White-eye



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PHOTOGRAPHER: Pratik Humnabadkar

# Hornbill Watch: A citizen science initiative for Indian hornbills

Aparajita Datta, Rohit Naniwadekar, Manisha Rao, Ramki Sreenivasan & Vikram Hiresavi

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## Abstract

Hornbills are conspicuous and well-known birds with nine species occurring in India. While several hornbill species have been studied extensively in some parts of India, there is a knowledge gap about their distribution, population size, and adaptations to rapidly changing habitats. Most research and conservation efforts are often focused on single or few species within protected areas. Hornbill Watch (*henceforth*, HW) is an online platform created specifically to record public sightings of hornbills from anywhere in India. The idea is to encourage birders, nature enthusiasts, and photographers to share information on hornbill presence, behaviour, and conservation-related issues. The main objective is to generate baseline information using sight records and enable long-term monitoring of these species by encouraging citizen participation. HW was launched in June 2014, and up to February 2017 had received 938 records from 430 contributors across India, from 26 States and three Union Territories. States from where most sightings were reported were Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh. Species were reported from both inside (41%), and outside Protected Areas (59%; *henceforth*, PA). Hornbills were reported from 70 PAs. Fifty-one records of nesting were reported for all species from inside and outside PAs, while 27 records of communal roosting were reported for some species. The data obtained thus far has yielded some useful information and insights, and has the potential for enhancing our understanding of current hornbill distribution patterns, and for identifying important sites for conservation/protection.

## Introduction

Hornbills are among the largest birds found in the tropical forests of Asia and Africa. Most Asian species are primarily frugivores and play a critical role as seed dispersers, enabling regeneration of their important food plants and helping maintain the diversity in tropical forests. However, this relatively slow breeding group of birds is extremely vulnerable to threats from anthropogenic pressures like hunting and deforestation (Kinnaird & O'Brien 2007). Most hornbill habitat, particularly in Asia, is under severe pressure from logging and rapidly expanding commercial farms of oil palm *Elaeis guineensis*, tea *Camellia sinensis*, rubber, and coffee *Coffea arabica*. This, along with hunting, has resulted in drastic declines in the geographic ranges of several hornbill species (Trisurat *et al.* 2013) that need to travel over large distances in search of patchily distributed fruit resources (Poonswad & Tsuji 1994; Tifong *et al.* 2007; Naniwadekar *et al.* 2015). Hornbills are also specialist breeders that time their long breeding season with peak availability of fruit resources (Kemp 1995; Kannan & James 1999; Datta & Rawat 2003; Kinnaird & O'Brien 2007). However, there is little information on the extant distribution of various hornbill species and the changes in their distribution over space and time. Given the geographic extent of their distributions, it is difficult to monitor these changes through long-term focused research programs that are often restricted to single or few sites.

Online citizen science initiatives offer an interesting approach that can potentially enable documentation and monitoring of species presence over much wider geographical and temporal scales than can be sustained by focused research projects (Sullivan *et al.* 2014; Bonney *et al.* 2015; Barnard *et al.* 2017). Several of these initiatives are at a global scale, like eBird ([www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org)),

which gets five million observations every month. Data from eBird has contributed to more than 100 peer-reviewed publications till date (<https://ebird.org/india/science/publications>). Others are more local, small-scale, with a country/regional focus—sometimes aimed at a single species or particular taxon group such as some recent initiatives in India on sparrows (<http://www.citizensparrow.in>), or on jackals and carnivores outside PAs ([www.carnivore.in](http://www.carnivore.in); Hanssen *et al.* 2014), or focused in understanding long-term changes in bird migration (Quader & Raza 2008; Mendiratta & Quader 2009), and plant phenology (Quader & Mendiratta 2010). Often some citizen science projects are time-bound and short-term such as the sparrow, and the jackal and the carnivore projects, and/or centered on a single question to solve a specific problem (Kummer *et al.* 2016). These initiatives can also aid in large-scale data collection of basic biological or ecological parameters that do not require significant training or specialization. However, data thus gathered often provide insights on large-scale phenological patterns, and bird migration, including the impact of climate change (Quader & Raza 2008; Mendiratta & Quader 2009; Quader & Mendiratta 2010; Mayor *et al.* 2017).

These citizen science platforms are especially relevant for hornbills as several species remain poorly studied and several are vulnerable to extinction, across their ranges, in short time spans. Given that hornbills are conspicuous, large, and easily recognisable, citizen science platforms targeted at hornbills can encourage a wider participation of citizens in documenting information on hornbills and spreading awareness of the vulnerability of these birds to the threats they face, and the importance of their conservation.

## Hornbill Watch (HW): engaging the public

We wanted to create a platform where people from all walks of life could report hornbill sightings from across India along with related information. While we were aware of larger global initiatives like eBird, where hornbill sightings were also being reported, these were usually as part of complete checklists by more experienced or regular birders. We wanted to obtain sightings from a still larger set of people who were not necessarily birders, but who would be able to recognise conspicuous large birds like hornbills. When we were planning, and starting this initiative in 2013–2014, eBird in India was still in its inception stage, and had not been time-tested. Apart from data collection, a dedicated site was also envisioned to act as a public resource for general information on the biology of Asian hornbills, and to disseminate specific information on the nine Indian hornbill species: Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*, Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*, Wreathed Hornbill *Rhyticeros undulatus*, Narcondam Hornbill *R. narcondami*, Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus*, Oriental Pied Hornbill *A. albostris*, Austen's Brown Hornbill *Anorrhinus austeni*, Malabar Grey Hornbill *Ocyrceros griseus*, and the Indian Grey Hornbill *O. birostris*. Thus, HW ([www.hornbills.in](http://www.hornbills.in)) was started in June 2014 by Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF) and Conservation India (CI) to encourage citizens to participate and share their knowledge of hornbills; to be eventually synthesised and made available for the larger audience at a single source.

Citizens can upload onto this website, sight records and/or images of their hornbill observations from anywhere in the country. The platform has the functionality to select the exact GPS location of the sighting. While HW is open for serious birders to share their hornbill observations, it reaches out to a larger demographic with contributions also coming in from photographers and interested lay people. HW is also a platform where natural history information on hornbills from across India, which is otherwise scattered across diverse fora on social media, is collated. It was established as a long-term initiative to help generate baseline information on the extant distribution of the nine hornbill species, detect and document temporal changes in their geographic distributions, and to use such information to identify important areas for hornbill conservation in the country.

In this paper, we summarise and present the information generated by the HW platform from June 2014 till February 2017 and what we've learnt from this initiative.

## Methods

HW has an interactive web interface that allows a person to report hornbill detections, which could be a call, sighting of a live bird, or a report of a dead/hunted/captive bird from anywhere in India. A contributor enters sighting information and uploads photographs through an online form on the website.

A photograph is not insisted upon, though it is desirable. The website has a format that also encourages users to document additional details of their hornbill sightings that include, bird numbers, any demographic information such as age or sex of the individuals, the behaviours they observed, and the approximate location of their sighting—all without having to register or log in to the website. This makes it a quick, one-step process where sighting details can be uploaded immediately.

This data gets recorded and stored on the site, and its editors (AD, RS & RN) are alerted by e-mail whenever a contribution is uploaded. Subsequently, the data received are reviewed at the back-end. While observations that fall within the known pattern are approved quickly, editors verify the documentation associated with all exceptional records before approving them. If an image has been contributed along with the observation, on approval, it would immediately show up on the Gallery page of the website. Detailed location information is not publicly available on the site. If the information has discrepancies or obvious errors, editors have the right to edit and then approve the sighting. Sometimes, the editors may cross-check the information by writing to the contributor. If the information has errors, which cannot be corrected, we will either quarantine the observation from public view ('REJECT' in our system) or completely remove it from our database (DELETE in our system). Obvious spam is removed from our system. We take

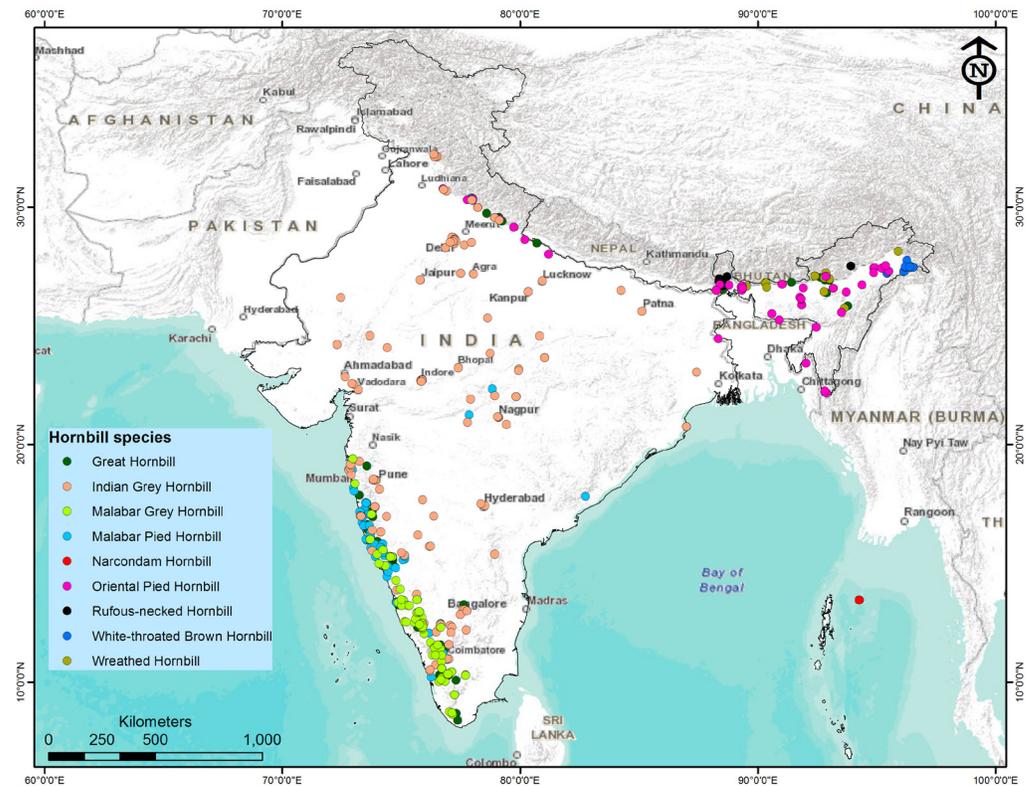


Fig.1 Map of India showing the HW sighting records for all the nine hornbill species.

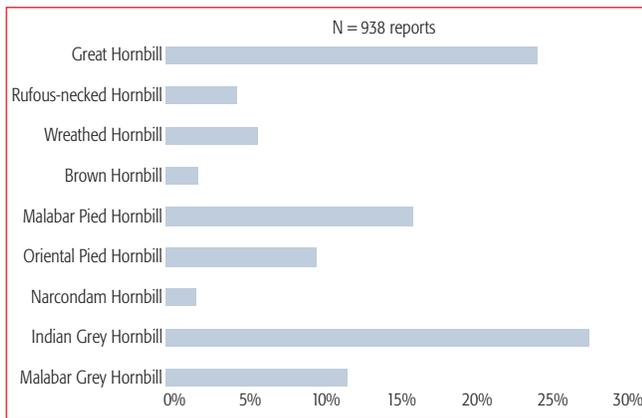


Fig. 2. Percentage reports of the nine different hornbill species from across India between June 2014 and February 2017.

every precaution at the back-end to screen the records from time to time and ensure that our system is not subject to abuse. The data can be downloaded as a comma-separated values (CSV) file, or as an Excel file. Periodic updates are provided on social media through our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/hornbillwatch/>) and the update is uploaded on the website. We also provide a bi-annual, or annual, summary of the data to all contributors, by e-mail, and the report is also uploaded on the website.

Though the website was launched in 2014, contributors can upload their observations from 2000 onwards, which roughly coincides with the time when the Internet discussion groups and digital photography boom happened in the country. This paper contains information from all records submitted between 01 June 2014 and 28 February 2017.

### Results & discussion

Since its launch, HW has received 938 records from 430 people, covering nine Indian hornbill species (Fig. 1), indicating that this platform holds a lot of promise for long-term monitoring of hornbill distribution in India.

That the reports included the Narcondam Hornbill, which is restricted to a six kilometers square remote island, is encouraging. We now have information on Vulnerable and Near Threatened hornbills like the Rufous-necked Hornbill, the Austen’s Brown Hornbill, and the Great Hornbill from several states in north-eastern India.

### Species occurrence reports

The Indian Grey Hornbill was the most reported species (249 records) followed by the Great Hornbill (218) (Fig. 2). There are fewer records of rare species like Austen’s Brown Hornbill (19), and the Narcondam Hornbill (17).

The Indian Grey Hornbill is widespread in India except in north-eastern India, and occupies a diverse array of habitats from savanna to urban landscapes. The Great Hornbill is the other wide-ranging species found in moist deciduous and evergreen forests of the Himalayan foothills and the Western Ghats. A significant proportion of sightings of the Great Hornbill were from outside PAs. It is possible that given the conspicuousness and the charismatic nature of this species, it is more easily observed even if it is locally rare.

Nine hornbill species were reported from 25 of the 29 Indian states, the National Capital Territory of Delhi, and two of the seven Union Territories—Andaman & Nicobar Islands, and Chandigarh (Fig. 3). This is an indication of the wide geographic reportage of hornbills from across the country. Three peninsular Indian states—Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu—had the highest number of hornbill reports followed by the two north-eastern Indian states of Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh (Fig. 3). Interestingly, these latter two states were among the top five in the number of contributions. It was heartening to obtain records from the states of Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya where hornbill populations have become less common (Naniwadekar *et al.* 2014). It was encouraging to see hornbill reports from states like Chhattisgarh, and Sikkim, as there is paucity of literature on the presence of hornbills there. One exciting, and unusual, record was of a flock of seven Wreathed Hornbills flying over the Rangapahar Zoo near Dimapur city in Nagaland, which is quite a rare sight. This record (along with a photograph) was reported by the forest department staff at the zoo.

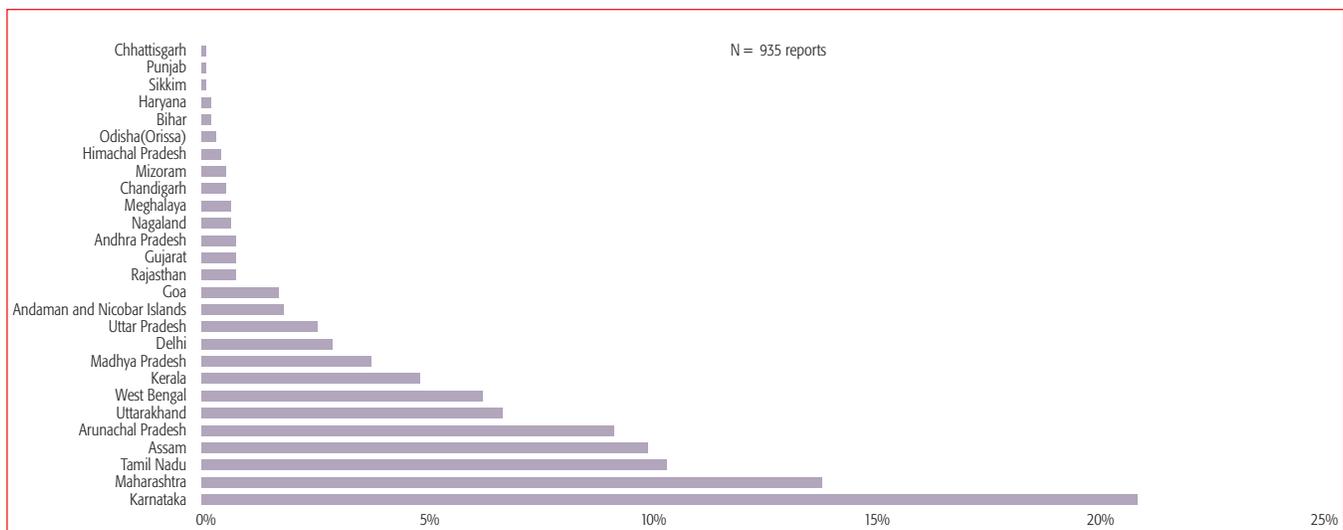


Fig. 3. Percentage of hornbill reports from different states and union territories of India.

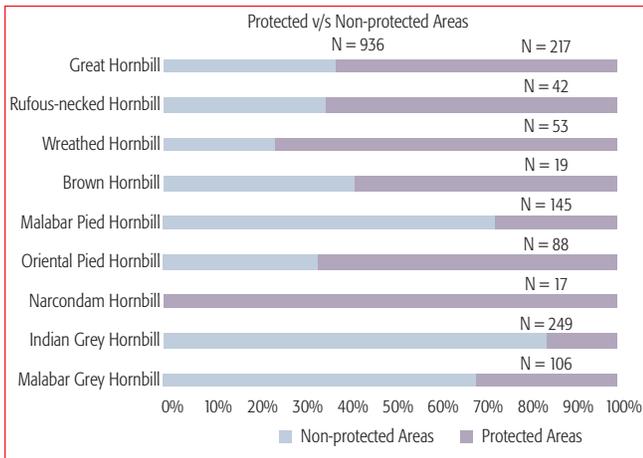


Fig. 4. Relative reports of the nine hornbill species from inside and outside PAs.

The remaining species are restricted either to the Western Ghats in south-western India or to central/eastern India. Within India, the Malabar Pied Hornbill has a disjunct distribution in two regions: central India extending into Andhra Pradesh, eastern India (Bihar and Odisha), and the Western Ghats; we received many records from central India and the Western Ghats, but none from eastern India. The range of the Oriental Pied Hornbill is known to overlap (Grimmett *et al.* 2011) with that of the Malabar Pied Hornbill in Jharkhand and the hill forests of Odisha, and north-eastern Andhra Pradesh. Although we have not obtained any records that show the zone of overlap between the species, on eBird there are records of both species from Mareduhilli in north-eastern Andhra Pradesh and two records each of both species from Odisha, although from different areas in the state. There are, as yet, no records of either species on HW or on eBird from Jharkhand or Bihar but this may be due to a general paucity of data/records from these two states.

There were reports of Oriental Pied Hornbills from Chandigarh and Delhi, which are highly urbanised cities with substantial green spaces. The Chandigarh report is among the westernmost records of this species. The report of the Malabar Pied Hornbill from Andhra Pradesh is interesting as there are relatively few

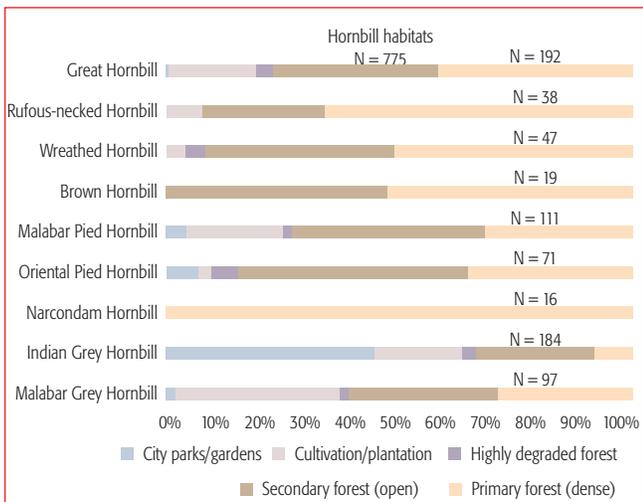


Fig. 5. Percentage reports of the nine hornbill species from five habitat types.

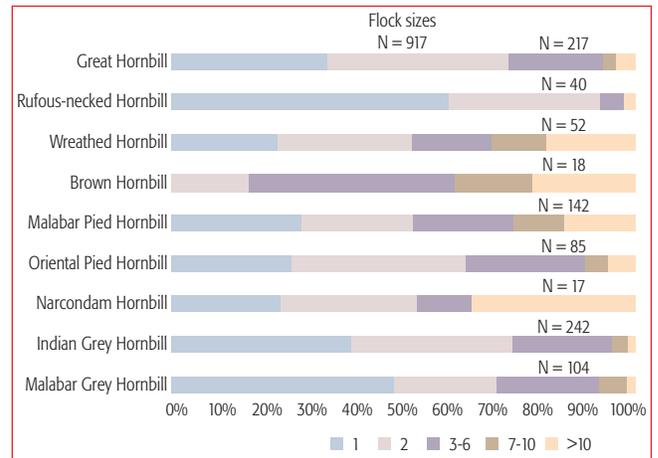


Fig. 6. Percentage reports of each of the nine hornbill species across flock size categories.

records in the literature from the state though potentially it may hold an important population of this species.

Hornbill species were reported from 70 PAs in India. At least one species was reported from 48 PAs. Four hornbill species were reported from only two PAs, Namdapha- and Manas Tiger Reserves. All hornbill species, except the Narcondam Hornbill, were reported from both, inside, and outside PAs (Fig. 4).

More than half the reports of the two smaller hornbill species occurring in peninsular India, and the medium-sized Malabar Pied Hornbill, were from outside PAs. The larger hornbills, and the two medium-sized hornbills (Oriental Pied Hornbill, and Austen's Brown Hornbill) were reported more often from within PAs than outside (Fig. 4).

Most hornbill species were also reported from human-modified landscapes like secondary forests, and rural and urban landscapes (Fig. 5). In fact, most of the sightings (45%) of the Indian Grey Hornbill, the only Asian hornbill that inhabits more open drier habitats, have been from outside PAs, in city parks and gardens (Fig. 5).

More than 50% of the reports of four of the nine hornbill species were from primary forests. However, seven of the nine hornbill species were reported from both secondary forests and

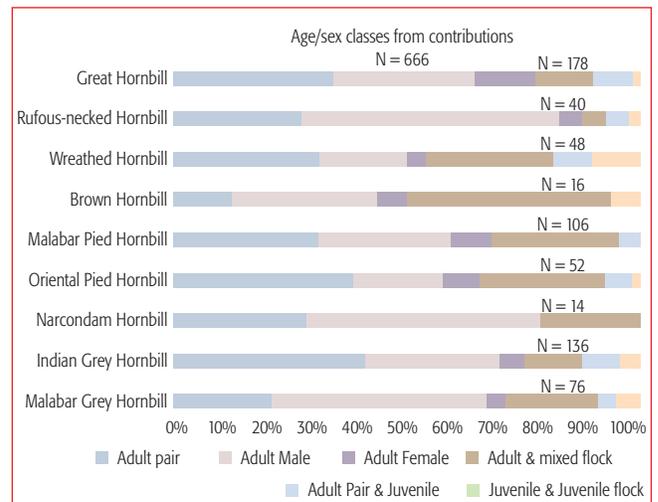


Fig. 7. Percentage reports of various age and sex classes for each of the nine hornbill species (Observations with no age/sex reported were excluded).

plantations/cultivated areas, including large hornbill species like the Great-, Wreathed-, and Rufous-necked Hornbills (Fig. 5), while four species were reported from city parks/gardens.

Almost all the hornbill species were reported either as single birds, or in large flocks of more than ten birds (Fig. 6). Austen's Brown Hornbill was the only one of which a lone bird was never seen. More than 80% of the sightings of this species comprised more than three individuals. More than 45% of the sightings of the Wreathed-, Malabar Pied-, and Narcondam- hornbills were of more than three birds. Sightings of flocks of more than ten birds of these four species were not uncommon (10–30% of sightings across the four species; Fig. 6).

People reported sightings of flocks comprising, adults, single males and females, and juveniles. Sightings of juvenile birds were reported for all but the Narcondam Hornbill (Fig. 7).

### Breeding and roosting

We solicited information on various behaviours such as roosting, breeding, and feeding. HW received feeding records (whether on animal or plant matter), communal roosting inside and outside PAs, and nesting records, although sample sizes were too low to draw conclusions.

We had a total of 36 roosting records of which 22 were from within PAs and 16 from outside, for: the Great-, Indian Grey-, Malabar Pied-, Oriental Pied-, and Wreathed hornbills. In smaller species like the Indian Grey- and Malabar Pied hornbills, roosting was more prevalent outside PAs. In the larger species (Great- and Wreathed) roosting records were mostly from within PAs. The largest reported roost was that of 120 Oriental Pied Hornbills from Rajaji National Park.

Breeding was reported for all the nine hornbill species (total nesting records: 57). Reports of nesting by the Indian Grey-, Malabar Pied- and Austen's Brown hornbills were only from outside PAs, while the number of records for the Rufous-necked-, Oriental Pied-, and Great hornbills came equally from within, and from outside PAs. Surprisingly, nesting records of the rare Austen's Brown Hornbill were reported from outside PAs, while nesting records of the more adaptable Oriental Pied Hornbill were from inside PAs. One record showed a Great Hornbill nesting in a highly degraded habitat (located on a large *Tetrameles nudiflora* tree in the middle of a village close to a resort in Assam where the surrounding forest had disappeared), and five nesting records were from habitat classified as cultivation/plantation, from the Valparai Plateau where tea estates surround forest fragments. While the number of reports are small, these records point to the adaptability of even the large hornbills in areas where they are not hunted.

### Conservation potential

The data obtained from HW is already indicating the potential uses for conservation. Hornbill presence was documented in 70 PAs. For example, PAs like Namdapha, and Manas were identified as areas harbouring four hornbill species. While these two PAs are well-known and better-studied sites, there are many other little known PAs (e.g., Neora Valley National Park in West Bengal, and Barail Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam) in which there has been little research or documentation. HW data therefore enables in identifying PAs that harbour high hornbill diversity in the country. A significant proportion of reports of several hornbill species were from outside PAs. In the long-term,

the HW platform can help identify important areas outside PAs (e.g., Kaiga, and Dandeli town in Karnataka, and Ultapani Reserve Forest in Assam) in terms of the number of sympatric hornbill species, numbers and/or nesting/roosting sites. Several hornbill species are known to roost communally in particular sites over many years, with many roost sites being located outside PAs where they may be more vulnerable to disturbance. The data from HW can identify such roosting sites in particular states (e.g., northern Karnataka, Maharashtra, Assam, and Tamil Nadu) for specific species, and help ensure their protection. Similar information can also be critical for monitoring/protection of nesting sites.

Interestingly, the small Indian Grey Hornbill is the only hornbill that was reported from gardens, parks, and forest patches within cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Bangalore, Lucknow, and Kanpur among others, highlighting the importance of these green spaces in harboring hornbill populations in urban areas. In Indore, the bird was reported to nest in a cavity in a concrete wall and recorded feeding bread, biscuits and *rotis* (Indian bread) to the female and chicks (Gadikar 2017). Even the two pied hornbills were reported from smaller cities like Pune, Dehradun, Chandigarh, and Guwahati. Surprisingly, the similar-sized Austen's Brown Hornbill was never reported from rural landscapes or plantations; only from primary and secondary forests. Our earlier research has shown that it is vulnerable to anthropogenic perturbations and has significantly lower habitat-use intensity as compared to the similar-sized Oriental Pied Hornbill (Naniwadekar *et al.* 2014). Additionally, HW can potentially identify breeding populations of hornbills at a large spatial scale, especially outside PAs. Given the vulnerability of areas outside PAs to development projects, this information will be crucial in adding to the conservation value of these areas in the future. This data will be made available on request and potentially can be used by environmental lawyers for legal purposes, or by concerned citizens for taking positive action for conservation.

### Limitations of the data

While citizen science is a great tool for data collection, there are limits to how the data generated can be interpreted or used. We can only make limited inferences on hornbill distribution/presence based on the records, since we may not receive information about sightings in some parts of the country for several reasons such as limited network connectivity, lack of awareness about platforms like HW or, lack of interest/time. The lack of records from certain locations does not mean true absence. The data is also not systematically collected and observations submitted are often one-off records from visited sites. The data will also be biased towards areas that are more accessible to people, and frequently visited areas.

### Future of Hornbill Watch

#### Promotion and contributor engagement

After the initial launch, when it was reported in the print media and on social media, the HW platform was not very aggressively promoted. Occasional appeals were made on Facebook through personal pages, the official page, or on other popular Facebook pages where bird images are uploaded frequently, and direct e-mail requests. The periodic updates sent to contributors also resulted in a sporadic spurt in contributions. Social media (Facebook and Instagram) is a good source of

photo-based sightings and behavioural observations, however the information is ephemeral, unless ways can be found to pull in that data and structure it on an ongoing basis. To encourage more participation, HW needs regular and constant promotion on social media sites.

Unlike Facebook or Instagram, where users posting images get immediate appreciation for sharing their images, the gallery on the website does not give people the positive public feedback and connection that may encourage more participation. Keeping contributors engaged through interactive features could be useful to get repeat observations from the same or different locations.

### Handling of sensitive data

One concern is ensuring that the data on HW is not accessible to poachers, or traders of animal parts. While, the data is not accessible from the website, hornbill pictures are displayed in the gallery that names the PAs where the pictures were taken. For hornbill pictures taken outside PAs, only the state name appears in the gallery and the detailed location of the sighting is not available on the website. We have not yet received any data requests but the data will only be shared after verifying the bona fides of such requests. We are constantly vigilant as we are aware that our site is hosting information about several charismatic species that can potentially be threatened by wildlife trade.

### Website security

Websites like ours are launched keeping the larger good of humanity in mind. Hence, aspects like web security, data protection, and data backups are after thoughts. Our website does have basic single-layer protection from external attacks. However, as we grow in size, these issues become paramount and we may get exposed to hackers. We intend to invest more time and energy into this aspect and plug any loopholes that may exist.

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# The status of the Black-rumped Magpie *Pica (pica) bottanensis* in India

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Prÿs-Jones, R. P., & Rasmussen, P. C., 2018. The status of the Black-rumped Magpie *Pica (pica) bottanensis* in India. *Indian BIRDS* 14 (3): 71–73.

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The presence of the Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica (sensu lato)* in India (Praveen *et al.* 2016) is predominantly based on the well-documented occurrence of the race *bactriana* in the north-western Himalayas east to northern Himachal Pradesh (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Dickinson & Christidis 2014). However, the question as to whether the taxon *bottanensis* may additionally occur, or have occurred, in Sikkim has recently resurfaced as a result of a comprehensive molecular phylogenetic study of the genus *Pica* by Song *et al.* (2018), who recognised *Pica (p.) bottanensis* to be an anciently diverged and distinctive lineage. Taking into account additional evidence from morphology (Madge 2009) and vocalizations (Kryukov *et al.* 2017), Song *et al.* (2018) advocated its recognition as a full species within their revised taxonomy of the genus. In doing so, they vindicated the far earlier conclusion of Hume (1877, 1880), who strenuously argued for the species status of *bottanensis* on the basis of its morphological distinctiveness. Song *et al.* (2018) did not suggest an English name, but we use the name Black-rumped Magpie, which has a long history of exclusive use for *P. bottanensis* (e.g., Oates 1889).

The distribution of *bottanensis* predominantly encompasses the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau region, but includes Bhutan and, putatively, Sikkim (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Its occurrence in Sikkim appears to rest on just three specimens: two collected on behalf of Louis Mandelli (1833–1880) that subsequently passed via Allan Octavian Hume into the collection of the Natural History Museum (NHMUK), where they are registered as 1886.3.1.435 (interior of Native Sikkim, Sikkim; September 1873) and 1886.3.1.436 (Sikkim; April 1873); and one in the collection of Richard Meinertzhagen (1878–1967), whose collection also passed to NHMUK, where it is registered as 1965.M.19302 (male; Gyagong, Sikkim–Tibet border; 21 November 1925). Gyagong, in fact, lies well within northern Sikkim (see: <https://www.scribd.com/doc/38056732/Map-of-Sikkim>; accessed on 02 January 2018), as Meinertzhagen (1927, plate 12) himself showed on the map accompanying his paper on the birds he claimed to have collected during his visit there in winter 1925–1926.

As previously alluded to in a synopsis of large-scale fraud in his bird collection (Rasmussen & Prÿs-Jones 2003), there is ample reason to dismiss the validity of Meinertzhagen's specimen. According to the colourful information written by Meinertzhagen on his label for the specimen, it was collected by him from "on a yak! one of a pair" [51]. However, in its make-up 1965.M.19302 is entirely typical of the Mandelli series of *bottanensis* (1886.3.1.435–445), in particular two from "Thibet" (1886.3.1.443, 444: October 1877) [52]. Both the Meinertzhagen and Mandelli specimens are extremely flattened and, most unusually, are stuffed with dried moss that is easily visible in their unsewn belly incisions [53]. Furthermore, X-rays of the Meinertzhagen 1965.M.19302 and the Mandelli 1886.3.1.444 reveal nearly identical preparation styles, lacking salient differences [54]. One Mandelli specimen (1886.3.1.445: Thibet; November 1877) is now missing from the NHMUK collection, and this must surely be 1965.M.19302, stolen and relabelled by Meinertzhagen. This conclusion was inadvertently corroborated by Meinertzhagen himself, who when discussing his 1925–26 fieldwork in Sikkim wrote: "No Magpie was met with in northern Sikkim. It seems doubtful whether *P. p. bottanensis* has ever occurred

within Native Sikkim, any such records having more probably been a mistake for southern Tibet," (Meinertzhagen 1927: 371). There is thus a clear contradiction between his own writings and the existence of his specimen, from which we deduce that he most likely stole the specimen later, relabelling it without consulting what he had previously written.

Moreover, Meinertzhagen's 1927 dismissal, without cited evidence, of the provenance of Mandelli's Sikkim *bottanensis* specimens has influenced subsequent authorities (e.g., Baker 1932; Ripley 1961, 1982; Ali 1962; Ali & Ripley 1987) to follow suit. As manager of a tea plantation in Darjeeling, Mandelli was physically isolated from other ornithologists and very restricted in his travel opportunities, so had to assemble his bird collection almost entirely through the use of native collectors (Pinn 1985; Collar & Prÿs-Jones 2012). This clearly, in principle, provided scope for errors of provenance to creep in, but based on our considerable wider study of Mandelli specimen material we are not aware of any precedents to make us doubt their stated origins, regardless of the failure of later Sikkim visitors to record *bottanensis*.

In addition to the specimen evidence



51. Close-up of reverse of Meinertzhagen's label on specimen 1965.M.19302, in his handwriting, except for NHMUK registration number.



52. Ventral view of Mandelli's specimen 1886.3.1.444 (left), and Meinertzhagen's specimen 1965. M.19302 (right).



54. Ventral X-ray images of Mandelli's specimen 1886.3.1.444 (left, 8A), and Meinertzhagen's specimen 1965.M.19302 (right, 8B).



53. Close-up of Pic. 52, showing stuffing material protruding from belly incision of Mandelli's specimen 1886.3.1.444 (left), and Meinertzhagen's specimen 1965.M.19302 (right).

cited above, Baker (1932: 24) states that "Mr. St. J. Hickley sent me nests and eggs [of *bottanensis*] which I understood from him were taken in Northern Sikkim. Since then, however, Stevens, Meinertzhagen and Bailey have not observed this Magpie in Sikkim and it is possible that they came from across the border in South Tibet." Unfortunately, Hickley's specimens appear not to have entered Baker's collection, being neither mentioned under the relevant taxonomic heading in volume 1 of Baker's hand-written catalogue, held in NHMUK, nor being physically present within the NHMUK, where much of Baker's egg collection now resides. Unless and until future research into Hickley and his collection, should it still exist, suggests otherwise, the true provenance of Hickley's Sikkim *bottanensis* egg/nest specimens must remain an open question. Finally, based on an extrapolation of comments made by Ludlow & Kinnear (1944), both Ripley (1982) and Ali & Ripley (1987) raise the possibility of *bottanensis* occurring in potentially suitable habitat in Arunachal Pradesh, which is probably also what Goodwin (1986) means when he refers to it as occurring in Assam, but no evidence to support this supposition seems to have become available.

In their account of *Pica (p.) bottanensis*, Rasmussen & Anderton (2012: 596) stated: "Mandelli Sikkim specimens here considered probably valid; Meinertzhagen's fraudulent." In this paper we have provided the available specimen facts on which this conclusion was reached in order to facilitate potential consideration as to the admissibility of this putative species to the official Indian list.

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### A comment on the status of *Pica (pica) bottanensis* in Sikkim

Prŷs-Jones & Rasmussen (elsewhere in this issue) put forward a strong case for the existence of the *Pica (pica) bottanensis* in Sikkim based on the assessment of a controversial specimen. Their work should discount all claims that Meinertzhagen has put on that particular Mandelli's specimen and cast doubts on the reliability of his subsequent comments. However, as rightly pointed out by the authors, no individual or team have actually found the *bottanensis* in Sikkim since then; and that needs further pondering.

The habitat within the Himalayas where this species is known to occur, namely, the Bumthang Valley of Bhutan, does not resemble the habitats found in northern Sikkim. It is very likely that Ludlow, Ripley and Ali have exclaimed about the possibilities of this species occurring in Arunachal especially in the extreme eastern part like Upper Dibang Valley and Anjaw which have a habitat similar to the Bumthang Valley. During my trips to Bhutan till date, I rarely found it occurring far away from human habitation and it was not a shy bird. If we consider that the species occurred in Native Sikkim during a period in history, we must also try to dig out what may have brought about its local extinction within some decades. In very recent years a few of the birdwatchers from Sikkim and even myself have ventured into the interior valleys of North Sikkim viz. Lhonak, Muguthang, etc., which can only be accessed on foot. Though most of the Tibetan Plateau species have been found to occur, no habitat having resemblance with the ones in Bhutan were observed.

Mandelli was stationed in the Darjeeling District and was in charge of quite a few tea gardens, and had no other way than appointing people for making the collections – as also pointed by the authors. During those days, only traders and Yak herders used to ply across North Sikkim to Tibet apart from a few expeditions. It is very much likely that the specimens of Mandelli's collection may have changed multiple hands, and that the origin of the collection was in Tibet. It is quite unlikely that Mandelli's local collectors ventured to extreme North Sikkim or Tibet keeping in mind the time involved in such travel during those days. The local collectors must have had to involve further recruiters or may have passed the message to the regular travellers for collection of specimens. Another major aspect in misrepresenting the place of collection was the language. Most of Mandelli's direct collectors were supposed to be Gurkhas or Nepalese because of his place of work and association with tea gardens. Whereas the traders or Yak herders were mainly Bhotias (not Bhutanese; Bhot = Tibet) who did not know the local language (Nepalese) well enough or not at all. So there is every possibility that the location names got muddled and the actual specimens were collected somewhere in Tibet.

Hence, it is highly unlikely *Pica bottanensis* have ever occurred in Sikkim and the species should still be kept out of the list of Indian birds until unassailable evidence is gathered.

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## Ethno-ornithology of Karen and Ranchi inhabitants of the Andaman Islands: An annotated checklist of local names and etymology

Nitya Prakash Mohanty & Rohit Chakravarty

Mohanty, N. P., & Chakravarty, R., 2018. Ethno-ornithology of Karen and Ranchi inhabitants of the Andaman Islands: An annotated checklist of local names and etymology. *Indian BIRDS* 14 (3): 73–78.

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The importance of community knowledge has long been recognised in ecological research and has also been adopted into systematic analytical frameworks (e.g., Pillay *et al.* 2014). Ethno-ornithology provides insights into the interactions of the local community with the avifauna of the region, including its utilitarian and cultural values. For example, Agnihotri & Si (2012) examined the ethno-ornithology of the

Solega community in Karnataka to discern dynamic processes underlying folk taxonomy and the importance of birds in folklore. Ethno-ornithological knowledge can also form the basis of community-based conservation (see Gosler 2010).

The avifauna of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands has been well documented and is subject to regular ecological research (see references in Pittie 2007; Sundaramoorthy 2010; Koparde &

**Table 1.** Annotated checklist of Karen and Ranchi names of birds of the Andaman Islands. Under 'Etymology/Remarks', 'K' and 'R' refer to the etymology of Karen, and Ranchi names respectively

English name	Scientific name	Karen name	Ranchi name	Etymology/Remarks
Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	Tho pua	Mor	Tho: bird; Pua: web (tail)
Ducks	Family Anatidae	Tho de thi	Jungli batak	K: Tho=bird; Thi=water; hence 'waterbird' R: Jungli= wild; batak=duck (as in Hindi)
Bitterns	<i>Ixobrychus</i> spp.	Tho lé wawh	Dhika/Lamba taang dhika	K: Tho=bird; Wawh= red R: Lamba taang: Long-legged (as in Hindi)
Black bittern?	<i>Ixobrychus flavicollis</i>	Lé weh	-	-
Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	Tho lé wawh/Tho lé khwa	Bakula	K: Tho=bird; Wawh=red; Khwa=grey/ashy
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	Tho lé wawh	Bakula	K: Tho=bird; Wawh=red
Egrets	<i>Bubulcus/Egretta/Ardea</i> spp.	Tho lé wah	Bakula	K: Tho=bird; Wah: white
Pacific Reef Heron	<i>Egretta sacra</i>	Tho lé khwa	Samundar Bakula	K: Tho=bird; Khwa=grey/ashy R: Samundar=sea (as in Hindi)
Sparrowhawks and Falcons	<i>Accipiter/Falco</i> spp.	Li lé	Baaz	
Besra	<i>Accipiter virgatus</i>	Li lé	Shikra	
Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>	Li lé/Tho bokho	Baaz	K: Tho=bird; Bokho=turban
Black Baza	<i>Aviceda leuphotes</i>	Baw see chaw	Dugnacha	R: Dugnacha: double-crested
Serpent Eagles	<i>Spilornis</i> spp.	Li khwa	Dhopia	K: Khwa=grey/ashy
White-bellied Sea Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	Kro kra	Samundar cheel	K: name applies to all big eagles R: Samundar=sea (as in Hindi)
Andaman Crane	<i>Rallina canningi</i>	Janglinge	Laal dhika	K: name implies 'forest bird' R: Laal=red; Dhika=name for long-legged water birds
Slaty-breasted Rail	<i>Gallirallus striatus</i>	Tho ti ti	Kabra dhika/Kharhi dhika	R: Kabra=spotted; kharhi=mangrove
White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amouromis phoenicurus</i>	Kor kwa	kala dhika	K: name onomatopoeic R: kaala=black (as in Hindi)
Watercock	<i>Gallixrex cinerea</i>	Tau	Jungli murga	K: name onomatopoeic R: translates to 'wild fowl' (as in Hindi)
Grey-headed Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio polycephalus</i>	Tau phala	-	K: Tau=name for moorhen-like birds; Phala=purple/blue/green. This is a derived name.
Eurasian Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Tau phatu	Jungli batak	K: Tau=name for moorhen-like birds; Phatu=black
Beach Thick-knee	<i>Esacus magnirostris</i>	Kring gring	-	K: name onomatopoeic
Waders	Order Charadriiformes	Bozangé/Bozangé phatu	Samundar chidiya	R: Samundar=sea; Chidiya=bird (as in Hindi)
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	Kwe nau/thaw nau/bozangé phadu	Samundar chidiya	K: Kwe nau=bent-billed; thaw nau=long-billed; phadu=large R: same as above
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquatus</i>	Kwe nau/thaw nau/bozangé phadu	Samundar chidiya	K: same as above R: same as above
Terns	Family Laridae	Bli blo wah	Samundar chidiya	K: Bli blo primarily applies to swiftlets; wah=white
Blue Rock Pigeon (feral)	<i>Columba livia</i>	Kho/Pwabi tho du klu	Bazaarwala kabutar	K: Pwabi=Domestic; R: Bazaar: Market (as in Urdu)
Green Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula aenea</i>	Tho du klu	Kabutar	K: Tho=bird R: Kabutar=pigeon (as in Hindi)
Andaman Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumboides</i>	Tho du klu	Kabutar	Same as above
Pied Imperial-Pigeon	<i>Ducula bicolor</i>	Tho du klu wah	Safed kabutar	K: Tho du klu=same as for other Imperial Pigeons; wah=white R: Safed=white (as in Hindi)
Andaman Cuckoo Dove	<i>Macropygia rufipennis</i>	Tho thaw mé	Laal padki	R: Laal=red (as in Hindi)
Red Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>	Thor kaw chhi	Kheti padki	K: Kaw= marked/collared; Chhi=rump; R: Kheti=agricultural field (as in Hindi)

**Table 1.** Annotated checklist of Karen and Ranchi names of birds of the Andaman Islands. Under 'Etymology/Remarks', 'K' and 'R' refer to the etymology of Karen, and Ranchi names respectively

English name	Scientific name	Karen name	Ranchi name	Etymology/Remarks
Andaman Green Pigeon	<i>Treron chloropterus</i>	Kwa khlé	Hariyal	-
Asian Emerald Dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>	Thor kha	Hara padki	R: <i>Hara</i> =green (as in Hindi)
Nicobar Pigeon	<i>Caloenas nicobarica</i>	Swé da nyo	Bada kabutar/ Nicobari kabutar	R: <i>Bada</i> =large; <i>Kabutar</i> =pigeon (as in Hindi)
Vernal Hanging Parrot	<i>Loriculus vernalis</i>	Jorogan/Jon-thogon/Jonoga	Latkan tota	R: <i>Latkan</i> =hanging; <i>Tota</i> =parakeet (as in Hindi)
Alexandrine Parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>	Tho lo	Pahadi tota	K: <i>Lo</i> =simple; R: Females and male parakeets have a prefix of 'kala thor' and 'lal thor' describing bill colour. These may actually refer to the bill colour of juveniles and adults.
Red-breasted Parakeet	<i>Psittacula alexandri</i>	Tho chi	Tota	-
Long-tailed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula longicauda</i>	Tho chi/Doya	Tota	-
Indian Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus micropterus</i>	Yopha khwé khaw	Dhotopako	K: name based on the call, involves a story where a person pleads to his brother-in-law (Yopha) to call (khaw) the dogs (khwé) to save him from being attacked by a tiger. R: name based on call
Violet Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus</i>	Tho oppaw	Baaz ka bacha	K: <i>Tho</i> =bird; <i>oppaw</i> =stupid. Karens claim that it rarely flies off when approached, hence stupid. R: name translates to 'chick of eagle'
Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>	Tho mou	Koyal	K: name onomatopoeic; based on a story where a child separated from his mother (mou) calls out to her
Andaman Coucal	<i>Centropus andamanensis</i>	Kaw ku	Kana kawwa/Hagra genda	K: ' <i>ku</i> ' possibly, onomatopoeic. R: <i>Kana</i> =cross-eyed; <i>kawwa</i> =crow; <i>Hagra genda</i> =dung-roller
Andaman Masked Owl	<i>Tyto deroepstorffi</i>	Tho tana	Ulu	K: <i>Tana</i> =witch (either due to the eerie nature of call or a myth). Karens don't consider it as an owl. R: <i>Ulu</i> =owl (as in Hindi)
Oriental Scops Owl (Walden's Scops Owl)	<i>Otus sunia modestus</i>	Somu sokro	Ulu	K: name onomatopoeic
Hawk-Owls	<i>Ninox</i> spp.	Do ko phadu/ Zi gwé	Ulu	K: <i>Zi gwé</i> denotes the distinct brows of the birds
Nightjars	<i>Caprimulgus</i> spp.	Tho tba	Khapu	K: name implies the raddish-like shape of the bird; R: name denotes the sitting position of the bird
Plume-toed Swiftlet (Andaman Glossy Swiftlet)	<i>Collocalia affinis</i>	Bli blo phatu	Chhota hawabil	K: <i>Bli blo</i> =swiftlet; <i>phatu</i> =small R: <i>Chhota</i> =small; <i>hawabil</i> =swiftlet
Brown-backed Needletail	<i>Hirundapus giganteus</i>	Bli blo phado/ Kaboyu	Bada hawabil	K: <i>phado</i> =large; <i>Kaboyu</i> =Airplane (due to the swishing noise the bird makes in flight)
White-nest Swiftlet (Edible-nest Swiftlet)	<i>Aerodramus fuciphugus</i>	Bli blo wah/Tho thwee wah	Chhota hawabil	K: <i>Wah</i> =white (probably refers to the white nest, as the bird itself is not white); <i>Thwee</i> =nest; R: Although Ranchis have the same name for both species of swiftlets, they are aware of the utilitarian differences. Ranchi names are accompanied by further descriptions to distinguish Edible-nest from Glossy
Oriental Dollarbird	<i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>	Nan chikwa	Tewan	R: Probably onomatopoeic
Kingfishers	Family Alcedinidae	Tho tadakhwé	Kilkila	-
White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	Tho tadakhwé phala	Neela kilkila/Kheti kilkila	K: <i>Tho</i> =bird; <i>Tadakhwé</i> =dry shrimp; R: <i>Kheti</i> =agricultural field (as in Hindi); <i>kilkila</i> onomatopoeic
Collared Kingfisher	<i>Todiramphus chloris</i>	Tho tadakhwé phala	Chhota kharhi kilkila	K: <i>phala</i> =deep-blue/blue-green colour R: <i>Chhota</i> =small; <i>kharhi</i> =mangrove (as in Hindi)
Ruddy Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon coromanda</i>	Tho tadakhwé phawo	-	K: <i>Phawo</i> =red

**Table 1.** Annotated checklist of Karen and Ranchi names of birds of the Andaman Islands. Under 'Etymology/Remarks', 'K' and 'R' refer to the etymology of Karen, and Ranchi names respectively

English name	Scientific name	Karen name	Ranchi name	Etymology/Remarks
Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>	Tho tadakhwé phado/Polé tho tadakhwé	Bada khadi kilkila	K: <i>Polé</i> =oceanic/salt water R: <i>Bada</i> =large; <i>kharhi</i> =mangrove
Small kingfishers	<i>Alcedo</i> spp.	Tho tadakhwé pho	Khari kilkila	K: <i>Pho</i> =small R: <i>kharhi</i> =mangrove
Bee-eaters	<i>Merops</i> spp.	Bazendo	Tirongo	-
Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>	Bazendo thaw naw	-	K: <i>Thaw naw</i> =long-billed
Andaman Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus hodgesi</i>	Tho talé/ Tho tlé wakho	Bada Khatkhutli/ Lal mundi Khatkhutli/Kathphodwa	K: <i>Wakho</i> =red head; R: <i>kathkhutli</i> onomatopoeic; also called <i>Police chidiya</i> locally
Spot-breasted Pied Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos analis</i>	Te taw ma/ Tho te phi	Chhota Khatkhutli	K: <i>Te phi</i> =tree bark R: <i>Chhota</i> =small
White-breasted Woodswallow	<i>Artamus leucorhynchus</i>	Bli blo wah/ Bli blo takha	Safed hawabil	K: <i>Bli blo</i> =swiftlet; <i>wah</i> =white; <i>Takha</i> =insects R: <i>Safed</i> =white; <i>hawabil</i> =swiftlet
Large Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina macei</i>	Tho kwala/ Tho poala	Kamaiya	K: <i>Kwala</i> =moon-gazing; <i>poala</i> =mature/old and wise
Andaman Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina dobsoni</i>	Tho kwala pach-haa/ Taphokla tho kwala	Kamaiya	K: <i>Pachhaa</i> =barred; <i>Taphokla</i> =forest
Scarlet Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus speciosus</i>	Bli blé phado	Lal-peela chidiya/ Lal chidiya	K: <i>Phawo</i> and <i>Phabo</i> are used as suffixes to describe red males and yellow females respectively R: name denotes this sexual dimorphism too; <i>laal</i> =red; <i>peela</i> =yellow
Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>	Bli blé pho	Lal-peela chidiya/ Lal chidiya	K: <i>pho</i> =small
Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>	Tho si kwé/ Tho ta pwemé	Kirkatta	K: Karens consider the bird's call to be a sign of summer/time of harvest
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicurus paradiseus</i>	Tho khlu thaw mé	Bhengraj/Dhechua/Barabhaswa	K: <i>Thaw mé</i> =long-tailed R: <i>Barabhaswa</i> =twelve calls
Andaman Drongo	<i>Dicurus andamensis</i>	Tho khlu/ Tho khlu phade mé/ Tho khlu khwa mé	Bhengraj/Dhechua/Barabhaswa	-
Orioles	<i>Oriolus</i> spp.	Tho takwee mibo	Piyo	K: <i>Takwee mibo</i> =ripe banana R: name onomatopoeic
Mangrove Whistler	<i>Pachycephala cinerea</i>	Kharhi saw si pho	-	K: <i>Saw si pho</i> =sunbird; <i>kharhi</i> =Hindi/Ranchi word for mangrove
Black-naped Monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>	Tho gwis gwis/ Tho phala bokho	Jin chidiya/ Dayan chidiya	K: <i>Gwis gwis</i> based on call R: name implies the ability of the bird to appear and disappear at will, like a genie ( <i>Jin/Dayan</i> )
Blyth's Paradise-Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone affinis</i>	Boglon wah	-	K: <i>Boglon</i> =bulbul; <i>wah</i> =white
Andaman Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta bayleii</i>	Tho see khwé	Bhorlenga	-
Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	Sawkhwa	Jungle kawwa	R: <i>kawwa</i> =crow (as in Hindi)
House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	Myujon sawkhwa/ not named	Bazaar kawa	K: <i>Myujon</i> : name of a city/town
Oriental White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>	Tho té té/Saw si pho	-	K: <i>té té</i> =from call; <i>Saw si pho</i> =sunbird (possibly confused because of size and colour)
Swallows	<i>Hirundo/Cecropis</i> spp.	Bli blo	-	K: <i>Bli blo</i> =swiftlet
Red-whiskered Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>	Boglon	Bulbul	-
Andaman Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus fuscoflavescens</i>	Tho phabo/Tho ro bipho/Tho pwi pho	Peela chidiya/Jin chidiya	R: <i>Peela</i> =yellow; <i>Jin chidiya</i> =name implies the ability of the bird to appear and disappear at will, like a genie ( <i>Jin/Dayan</i> )
Warblers	Family Sylviidae	Tho té té	-	K: <i>té té</i> =from call
Asian Glossy Starling	<i>Aplonis panayensis</i>	Tho phatu	Kaala chidiya	K: <i>Phatu</i> =black R: <i>kaala</i> =black (as in Hindi)

**Table 1.** Annotated checklist of Karen and Ranchi names of birds of the Andaman Islands. Under 'Etymology/Remarks', 'K' and 'R' refer to the etymology of Karen, and Ranchi names respectively

English name	Scientific name	Karen name	Ranchi name	Etymology/Remarks
Common Hill Myna	<i>Gracula religiosa</i>	Ta li ga	Salo myna	-
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	Ta li ga/ Panaa ta li ga/ Shaa ra	Kheti myna/Bail myna	K: <i>Panaa</i> =buffalo; <i>Shaa ra</i> =clever R: <i>Bail</i> =cattle (as in Hindi)
White-headed Starling	<i>Sturnus erythropgia</i>	Sara wah	Safed myna/Gobarliya myna	K: <i>wah</i> =white R: <i>Safed</i> =white
Orange-headed Thrush	<i>Geokichla citrine</i>	Tho bo cho/Tho panaaeytu phawo	-	K: <i>Panaaeytu</i> =like cow dung
Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	Tho panaaeytu	Bagsuyan	K: <i>Panaaeytu</i> =like cow dung
Andman Shama	<i>Copsychus albiventris</i>	Tho panaaeytu	Bagsuyan	K: same as above
Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>	Tho tik tik	-	K: <i>tik tik</i> : name onomatopoeic
Asian Fairy-bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>	Tho phala	Phik phik	K: <i>phala</i> =deep-blue/blue-green colour R: name onomatopoeic
Plain Flowerpecker (Andaman Flowerpecker)	<i>Dicaeum minullum virescens</i>	Tho té té/Saw si pho	Phoolchusni	K: <i>té té</i> =from call; <i>Saw si pho</i> =sunbird R: <i>phool</i> =flower; <i>chusni</i> =to suck (hence 'nectar-sucker')
Olive-backed Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris jugularis</i>	Saw si pho	Phoolchusni	R: same as above
White-rumped Munia	<i>Lonchura striata</i>	Tho pwee pho	Khuddra	K: <i>Pwee pho</i> =small intestine/filters small things; Karens compare undisciplined children to the bird due to its disregard for humans
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Tho pwee pho/Zé Tho pwee pho	Chaawal chidiya	R: <i>Chaawal</i> =Rice
Wagtails	<i>Dendronanthus/Motacilla</i> spp.	Tho taklé chhi/Tho poau chhi	Poonch-hilane-wala chidiya	Names translate to 'a tail wagging bird' in both languages.

Manchi 2013). However, the ethno-ornithology of these culturally diverse islands remains under-explored with the notable exception of Great Andamanese ethno-ornithology by Pande *et al.* (2011). For our study we aimed to document the local bird names used by two resident communities of the Andaman Islands: the Karens (originally from southern Myanmar), and Ranchis (originally from the Chhota Nagpur Plateau, central India). These communities are traditionally forest-dependent and are often employed as research assistants as they are familiar with the forest of the archipelago. Whenever possible, we also collated etymological and cultural information associated with birds.

We conducted the survey from February to April 2017 in Middle Andaman and South Andaman Islands. We interviewed four Karen respondents, and six of the Ranchi community. The selected respondents on the Andaman Islands were research assistants by profession and were considered to be informative sources. We conducted individual interviews for five respondents (four Karen respondents, and one Ranchi), and one group discussion consisting of three people (only Ranchi respondents). The respondents were presented with Grimmett *et al.* (2011) and asked to identify birds recorded in the Andaman archipelago. Apart from local names, we recorded etymological and cultural aspects of birds and bird names, when the information was voluntarily shared by survey respondents. During the course of the interviews, different or additional names suggested by respondents were simply added to the existing names for each species obtained from previous interviews. The obviously

erroneous and highly uncertain names were not incorporated.

We recorded the local names of 96 bird taxa (species level or higher) for Karens, and 84 for Ranchis (Table 1). Distinct species names were reported for 62 birds by Karens, and 47 by Ranchis. Local names were not reported by Karens or Ranchis, at the species level, for warblers, quails, wagtails, orioles, small raptors, terns, ducks, and waders. In addition to these taxa, Ranchi respondents did not distinguish between owls. For some of the birds, which are also present on the Indian mainland, Ranchi names appeared to be derived from their traditional mainland names (Table 1). In comparison to the Karens and the Ranchis, the Great Andamanese recognise 107 bird taxa, of which they have distinct names for 62 species (Pande *et al.* 2011). Similar to Karens, the Great Andamanese have phonetic names for warblers, flycatchers, and flowerpeckers, and generic names for waders. Although there are potentially interesting insights in comparing the names of Karens, Ranchis, and the Great Andamanese, this is not possible at the moment due to the absence of a well-resolved etymology for the latter.

We visualise the checklist to benefit scholars and conservationists aiming to carry out detailed ethno-ornithological studies on the archipelago, eco-tourism, and community-based monitoring and conservation programmes. It has been demonstrated that local knowledge is an important source of complementary information for scientists (Gilchrist *et al.* 2005), particularly when surveying rare species. However, in order to tap this knowledge accurately, scientists must know the names of their study species in the

local languages. Therefore, the checklist presented here can help researchers and birders in conducting field bird surveys with local Karen and Ranchi assistants. It can also be used for interview-based surveys to detect presence/absence of rare species of birds using local knowledge. The list may also allow researchers to understand the perception and awareness of recent avian invasions in the islands, which is important from epidemiological and managerial points of view, e.g., Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* (Mohanty *et al.* 2018). Apart from wildlife research, the checklist may also help anthropologists and ethnographers. Future research can focus on understanding the influence of experience (e.g., residence time in the Islands) and demography on the knowledge and perception of birds in the local communities. We believe the information provided in this note can also aid eco-tourism initiatives of the Department of Environment and Forests, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, as it will allow for effective training of Karen and Ranchi youth as bird guides.

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## Rusty-rumped Warbler *Locustella certhiola* at Pong Lake, Himachal Pradesh: An addition to northern Indian avifauna

C. Abhinav

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The Rusty-rumped Warbler *Locustella certhiola*, also known as Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler, is a scarce winter visitor to India. It is mainly found in the north-eastern part of the Indian Subcontinent, from central Nepal to the Kolkata area, Bangladesh, the western Assam Valley, and Meghalaya. It is also said to sporadically winter in Sri Lanka, peninsular India, and rarely in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). There are a number of records of this species from peninsular India (eBird 2018). This note describes the sighting of a Rusty-rumped Warbler at Pong Lake, Himachal Pradesh.

On 03–04 October 2014 I was birding at Sthana village near Talwara town in Himachal Pradesh (31.96°N, 75.90°E; 325 m asl). Sthana is situated on the northern side of the lake, which is formed behind the Shah Nehar Barrage, in the outflow area of Pong Dam. There are many small ponds near the lake with an ample growth of *Typha* sp., and *Ipomea* sp. *Saccharum munja*, and *Lantana* sp., were other predominant plants around these ponds. On 04 October 2014, at 0830 hrs, when I was walking

near one of the ponds, a small, sparrow-sized brownish bird flew from a nearby bush and settled in the lantana, a few meters away from me. I clicked some photographs and within few seconds the bird disappeared in the reeds. I couldn't observe the bird properly, and did not hear any call either, but by its jizz, the bird seemed to be a *Locustella* warbler. Later, the pictures were carefully studied, and the following observations made.

The bird was a medium-sized warbler, brownish in colour with a rufous tinge, and streaked upperparts [55]. The crown and nape were rusty brown and seemed almost un-streaked in the photograph. It had a well-defined whitish supercilium, running till the posterior part of the ear covert, bordered above by dark brown. It had an ill-defined, dark brown eye stripe and pale lores. The stout, all dark bill had a pale area near its cutting edge. The mantle was boldly streaked, while no streaking was seen on the underparts. The upper wing coverts were black with broad buffish borders. The black primaries were narrowly bordered with buff. The rump was not visible in the pictures. The throat and upper



C. Abhinav.

55. Rusty-rumped Warbler in Himachal Pradesh.

breast seemed to be white, and the flank was warm brown in colour. Undertail coverts were paler and un-streaked. A hint of white could be seen at the tips of the rectrices. The legs were dark. It was moulting, as evident by one missing primary.

Two other similar looking warblers, which are found in India, are Grasshopper Warbler *L. naevia* and Lanceolated Warbler *L. lanceolata*. A prominent supercilium, whiter tail tips, and un-streaked undertail coverts, which are visible in the photograph, ruled out the possibility of a Grasshopper Warbler. Moreover, warm colouration of the bird and the obvious contrast on its mantle, between buffish fringes and blackish feather centers, indicated a Rusty-rumped Warbler. A Lanceolated Warbler was also ruled out by the above stated features. A longer bill and un-streaked underparts of this bird additionally differentiated it from a Lanceolated Warbler (Baker 1997; Grimmett *et al.* 1998; Kennerley & Pearson 2010).

The images were sent to Harkirat Singh Sangha, and Bill Harvey, and both identified it as a Rusty-rumped Warbler (*in litt.*, e-mails dated 06 October 2014).

Five subspecies of this bird have been described in literature: those in north-eastern India, and Sri Lanka belong to *rubescens*;

whereas both, *centralasiae*, and *rubescens* have been reported from the Andaman & Nicobar Islands; *sparsimstriata* is also supposed to winter in India, although there are no substantiated records (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). There are minor differences in these races, many birds showing intermediate characters; often a bird cannot be assigned to a particular race (Kennerley & Pearson 2010; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Since I could photograph it only from one angle, it was difficult to assign it to a race.

The Rusty-rumped Warbler arrives in India in October and remains till April or early May (Ali 1987). The bird I photographed was probably migrating. Birds wintering in the southern part of the Indian Subcontinent, and those breeding in the western-most parts of its summer range, might pass through this part of northern India.

This is the first record not only for Himachal Pradesh, but also for northern India. The nearest sighting in India is from Nal Sarovar, Ahmedabad District, Gujarat (Robson 1999; Ganpule 2016), which is c. 1100 km away. The species may be a more regular migrant in northern India, but could be easily overlooked due to its uncharacteristic appearance and skulking nature.

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In Memoriam

**VIJAYKUMAR CHINTAMAN AMBEDKAR**  
(03 JULY 1932 – 03 JUNE 2018)

# Yellow-browed Bunting *Emberiza chrysophrys* in the Sundarbans: An addition to the avifauna of South Asia

Soumya Kundu & C. Abhinav

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The Yellow-browed Bunting *Emberiza chrysophrys* is a medium-sized bunting. It breeds in Siberia from the upper Nizhnyaya Tunguska River, Bratsk and Irkutsk in the west to the Vilyuy River and Yakutsk in the east, and to the Chamar Daban Range, south of Lake Baikal, and on the Vitim River in the Stanovoy Mountains to the south; it is possible that it also breeds in north-eastern Mongolia. In winter, the bird is found in central and south-eastern China, from Jiangsu, southwards to Gaungdong and Hong Kong, and westwards along the Yangtze to eastern Sichuan (Byers *et al.* 1995; Copete 2018). This short note describes a sighting of the Yellow-browed Bunting from the Sundarbans, West Bengal, India.

## Sighting

On 22 April 2018, at 0630 hrs, SK was walking on the Asit Baran School road, a human-made embankment on the Gomdi River (which is wrongly marked as 'Datta River' on Google Maps) near the Bali Island village in the Sundarbans, South 24 Parganas District, West Bengal, India. On the northern side of this road there were large open paddy fields (Fig. 1). On other side of the road, sparse mangroves grew on the banks of the river, predominant species being *Excoecaria agallocha*, *Avicennia marina*, and *Avicennia alba*. The river was approximately 0.8 km wide at that point and on the opposite bank there was the uninhabited dense mangrove forest of the Sundarban. At 0730 hrs, observed a small unfamiliar bird, the size of a House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, flitting around in the mangrove trees (22.09°N, 88.76°E). SK pursued the bird enthusiastically and succeeded in photographing it from several different angles [56, 57]. The bird remained within the trees for the entire four minutes this sighting

lasted. SK realised the bird was a bunting (*Emberiza*), but failed to identify the species. SK continued birding for more than one hour, around the same spot, but he did not see the bird again.

## Description

The bunting had a dark brown crown with a clearly visible white median crown-stripe, and brown lateral crown-stripes, all generously streaked with black [Pics. 1–2]. The broad white supercilium, which started from the base of the bill, was faintly pale yellow in the supraloral region, turning white as it passed over the eye, towards the nape. The brownish ear coverts were partially bordered by black and had a prominent white ear-spot



Fig. 1. Location of sighting of Yellow-browed Bunting on the Gomdi River, West Bengal.



56. Yellow-browed Bunting showing auricular spot and white submustachial stripe.



57. Yellow-browed Bunting with faint yellow on the supraloral region of the white supercilium.

posteriorly. A broad white submoustachial stripe and a black malar stripe were present. The underparts were mainly white with slight rufous on flanks and sides of breast. They had well-defined black streaking on the throat, breast, and the flanks; these were smaller and finer at the throat, becoming longer and bolder on the breast and flanks. The well-streaked mantle was brown with chestnut in its central part. Back and rump were rufous-brown. The median and greater coverts, and flight feathers, were dark brown with rufous-brown to whitish borders. The tail was dark with rufous-brown borders. The legs were flesh-pink in colour. The bill was stout and triangular; the upper mandible was horn black, and the lower mandible was pale pink with a black tip.

## Identification

On 23 April 2018 SK posted the photos to a Facebook group 'Wildlife of WestBengal' (Kundu 2018), tentatively identifying it as a Rustic Bunting *E. rustica*, which is described as 'hypothetical' to the region by Rasmussen & Anderton (2005). Arka Sarkar and Kanad Baidya ruled out that possibility because of the presence of the white median crown-stripe, a supercilium that starts from the edge of the bill, and the absence of a crest. Moreover, this bird had black streaking on the underparts whereas Rustic Bunting has rusty streaking on its underparts (Byers *et al.* 1995). The bird was then suspected to be a Tristram's Bunting *E. tristrami*, which is a recent addition to the avifauna of India (Naniwadekar *et al.* 2013).

At this juncture it was also posted to other Facebook groups like 'Indian Birds' as a Tristram's Bunting (Patra 2018). After looking at the images, CA opined that the bird was a Yellow-browed Bunting because of the well-defined and bold streaking on underparts, a tinge of yellow in the supercilium, and a prominent white ear-spot. The possibility of it being a Reed Bunting *E. schoeniclus* was ruled out as this species has a unicoloured buffy supercilium and a grey bill. A distinct white median crown-stripe and a white auricular spot are also absent in a Reed Bunting (Byers *et al.* 1995; Beaman & Madge 1998; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

Praveen J requested the expert opinion of Paul Leader, who confirmed that the bird in the photographs was a female Yellow-browed Bunting (*in litt.*, e-mail dated 30 April 2018), based on the following points:

- A Yellow-browed Bunting always shows a clearly bi-coloured supercilium, whereas, Tristram's Bunting has a uniform (often rather brown) supercilium.
- The very white underparts with black streaking are typical of a Yellow-browed, whereas, Tristram's shows a more extensive brownish wash to at least the flanks and breast, and has browner, less well defined streaking—making it appear rather dingy and comparatively poorly marked below.
- Tristram's typically has a rich brown rump and uppertail coverts, these are duller and greyer on Yellow-browed. The rump and uppertail coverts in the photograph are typical of Yellow-browed.
- Larger pale spot on the ear-coverts is typical of Yellow-browed and would be smaller or lacking on Tristram's.
- The fine streaking on the upper breast always extends on the lower throat in Yellow-browed (making the pale throat poorly defined along the lower border) whereas in most Tristram's the streaking stops at the lower throat resulting in a neater, well defined throat patch.

its preference to relatively open habitat, over the dense mangrove

forests on the other side of the river, additionally favour Yellow-browed Bunting over Tristram's Bunting, which is a forest species. Although the bright yellow in the supercilium can make the identification easy, it can be very inconspicuous (as in present case), or apparently absent in some females, and perhaps always is in the first years (Beaman & Madge 1998).

## Discussion

The Yellow-browed Bunting has a tendency for vagrancy. It is a known vagrant to Belgium, Britain, France, Netherlands, Poland, and Sweden (Byers *et al.* 1995; Polakowski & Niemc 2015). Coincidentally, it was also photographed in Denmark on 28 April 2018 (Copete 2018; Liebermann 2018). These sightings are far beyond the established, known distribution range of the species. Most of these European sightings occurred during the bird's migration season, as in the present record. Moreover, within China, it is known to straggle further westward of its wintering range (ebird 2018). The nearest record is from Tacheng Nature Reserve, Yunnan, China, which is c. 1250 km from the present sighting (Rasmussen 2014).

The Yellow-browed Bunting has not been recorded from our region (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Praveen *et al.* 2018) making this the first record for South Asia.

## Acknowledgements

We want to thank Paul Leader for confirmation of the species. Praveen J, Arka Sarkar, and Kanad Baidya helped with identification, and Manoj Sharma with references and comments on the manuscript.

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# Chestnut-flanked White-eye *Zosterops erythropleurus* from the Mishmi Hills: An addition to the avifauna of South Asia

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Lobo, P., Kehoe, C. V., Thomason, P. C., Stocker, M. C., Watt, J. E., Rai, B., & Mekhola, R., 2018. Chestnut-flanked White-eye *Zosterops erythropleurus* from the Mishmi Hills: An addition to the avifauna of South Asia. *Indian BIRDS* 14 (3): 82.

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The Chestnut-flanked White-eye *Zosterops erythropleurus* is the most migratory species in the family of white-eyes (*Zosteropidae*)—breeding in extreme south-eastern Russia, north-eastern China, and extreme northern Korea, and wintering in southern China and much of peninsular South-East Asia, including Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (van Balen & de Juana 2018). Though there are records of the species from just north of Arunachal Pradesh, in China (Clark 2017a, b), and as a regular winter visitor from mid-November to the first week of April in Chin State, Myanmar (eBird 2018), it has never been reported from South Asia (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Praveen *et al.* 2018). We report a sighting of this species from the Mishmi Hills.

On 27 April 2018 at 1300 hours, we were watching birds, after lunch, at the Nandan Pass (28.30°N, 95.92°E; c. 2200 m asl), which is about 14 kms from Mayodiya Pass towards Hunli, Mishmi Hills. Upon playing-back the digital call of a Collared Owlet *Glaucidium brodiei*—to attract some bird species—we saw Yellow-browed Tits *Sylviparus modestus*, Yellow-cheeked Tits *Machlolophus spilonotus*, and Green-tailed Sunbirds *Aethopyga nipalensis*, and to their surprise, CVK & PCT saw two Chestnut-flanked White-eyes along with those other species. They alerted the rest of us immediately, and we all saw the birds before they flew upwards. CVK managed to get two photographs [58] of the birds showing the diagnostic chestnut flank patch. The species was identified instantly, as we were familiar with the bird in

Thailand. As seen in these photos, both individuals have well-defined chestnut patches on the flanks, and hence appear to be males.

Incidentally, PL, along with Richard T. Vetter Jr., and Joan Mary Suther observed two Chestnut-flanked White-eyes along with a flock of Oriental White-eyes *Z. palpebrosus* on 17 February 2018, 0700 hrs at Reiek Cemetery (23.70°N, 92.61°E), c. 20 km from Aizawl, Mizoram. The flock was feeding on flowering *Bombax* trees and the chestnut flanks of those two birds, as compared to the other birds, were well seen as compared to the other white-eyes feeding alongside. However, due to bad light we could not obtain any photos. There appears to be a photograph of this species on Facebook, taken from an undisclosed locality in Mizoram in January 2018 (Chhangte 2018). As it is a regular winter visitor to the adjoining Chin State in Myanmar (eBird 2018), it should be expected in Mizoram, and probably in the rest of the north-eastern Indian states as well, at least during migration.

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C. V. Kehoe

58. Chestnut-flanked White-eyes in the Mishmi Hills, India.

# Rediscovery of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea* on the coast of West Bengal, India

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Chakraborty, A., Tripathi, S., & Bhattacharya, B. B., 2018. Rediscovery of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea* on the coast of West Bengal, India.

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The Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea* is a Critically Endangered wader, with a total world population of just 240–456 birds (BirdLife International 2018). It breeds in the Chukotsky Peninsula, and in the southern and northern regions of the Kamchatka Peninsula—and mainly winters in Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Thailand. It has also been recorded from India, Vietnam, southern China, Singapore, and the Philippines (Van Gils *et al.* 2018). Due to a number of factors, including habitat loss in its breeding, passage, and wintering grounds—which are compounded by disturbance, pollution, hunting, and the effects of climate change—the global population has crashed in the last two decades bringing this species to the brink of extinction (BirdLife International 2018).

In South Asia, the main wintering ground for this species has been the Bangladesh Sundarbans (Bird *et al.* 2010; Chowdhury 2015). Here we report a recent sighting of this species from the Indian side of the Sundarbans, at Frasergunge West Beach (21.57°N, 88.23°E), Namkhana Block, Bakkhali Forest range, West Bengal.

Biswanath Mandal, Atanu Modak and the three of us visited the beach on 01 April 2018 from 0830 hrs to 1630 hrs. At 1230 hrs AC, ST, and BBB spotted an unknown *Calidris* species among a flock of Lesser- *Charadrius mongolus* and Greater Sand Plovers *C. leschenaultii*. We observed the bird for about seven minutes before it flew off westwards. ST had good views of its characteristic bill through his telescope while AC and BBB photographed it [59], as did Atanu Modak and Biswanath Mandal (Modak & Mondal 2018).

The distinctive character of the wader's bill, and its plumage definitely identified it as a Spoon-billed Sandpiper. The sand

plovers that were alongside gave an idea of its small size, and the bill shape confirmed its identification. We observed it feeding, by moving its head in a side-to-side sweeping action, which is characteristic of this species (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

Though it has been reported from a number of sites from all over India (Collar *et al.* 2001), as per Rahmani (2012), the only two confirmed sites for this species are Chilika, Odisha, and Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu. One bird was ringed in Chilika in March 1981 (Balachandran 2009) but has not been seen since then. A total of 11 birds were ringed in Point Calimere during 1980–1990, apart from several observations (Sugathan 1985), with further sight records made in 1994, 1995, and 1997 (Rahmani 2012).

Newcombe presented a single specimen at the meeting of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, held on Wednesday, 02 March 1836 (Newcombe 1836), wherein it was noted that 'this bird is one of the rarest in the world...[and] the Curator was requested to draw a description of it for publication.' In his description of the bird the curator, Pearson (1836), mentioned that Newcombe had shot it on Edmonstone's Island [=Jambudwip] (21.59°N, 88.17°E), which is about six kilometers from the location of our sighting. Blyth mentioned the same specimen as an 'excessively rare and curious species in the Museum' (Blyth 1842: 113),<sup>1</sup> and then brought on record the theft of a specimen of this species, by an employee of the Museum, 'doubtless procured in the bazar, about three years ago, which was previous to my arrival' (Blyth 1844: 178; see also, Collar *et al.* 2001). He subsequently recorded his disappointment at not having collected or seen a specimen himself (Blyth & Strickland 1844). Hartlaub (1842) records a specimen collected by Leadbeater at Saugur [=Sagar] Island, Sundarbans, which was subsequently deposited in the Derby Museum at Liverpool as 'Holotype: D. 3186' (Wagstaffe 1878; see also, Gould 1883; Blanford 1898). The tags [60, 61, 62] and the museum catalogue (Wagstaffe 1878) clarify that this specimen, collected by Stevenson in January 1835, was the one that Blyth (1844) recorded as stolen. Hume procured a specimen from the Calcutta [=Kolkata] market (Hume 1879: 481; see also, Collar *et al.* 2001), and stated that at that time, all birds for sale in that market were thought to have come from within a 40 km radius of the city. To summarise, three specimens had been collected from West Bengal in the nineteenth century: Newcombe (1836); Leadbeater's stolen specimen (Hartlaub 1842; Blyth 1844), and Hume (1879).



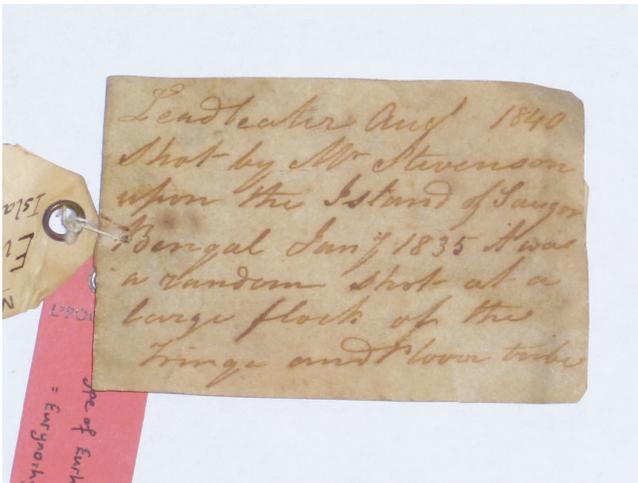
Bidyut Baran Bhattacharya

59. Spoon-billed Sandpiper at Frasergunge West Beach, West Bengal, India.

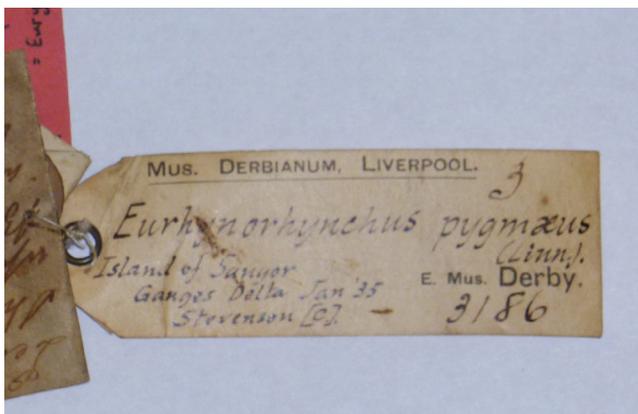
<sup>1</sup> Blyth erred in citing Pearson (1836) as 'As. Res. xix. p. 699', instead of p. 69.



60. 'Tongue of the Platypus Sandpiper.' Pics 60, 61, 62: All (c) National Museums Liverpool, UK.



61. 'Leadbeater Aug 1840 shot by Mr Stevenson upon the Island of Saugor Bengal Jan of 1835. It was a random shot at a large flock of the Tringa and Plover tribe.'



62. 'Mus. Derbiamum, Liverpool. *Eurhynorhynchus* (sic) *pygmaeus* (Linn.). E. Mus. Derby. 3186. Island of Saugor Ganges Delta Jan 35 Stevenson [C.]'

In November–December 2001, Sharma (2003) reported this species from Sagar Island, as well as seven other parts of the Sundarbans, including a single flock of 14 birds. However, Rahmani (2012) doubted these reports.

Hence, ours appears to be the first photographic record from West Bengal, after it was reported four times in the nineteenth

century, two of which, in fact, from the same general area!

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# Sighting of 'Ehrenberg's Redstart' *Phoenicurus p. samamisticus* in Thol Bird Sanctuary, Gujarat, India

Hardik Bhatt

Bhatt, H., 2018. Sighting of 'Ehrenberg's Redstart' *Phoenicurus p. samamisticus* in Thol Bird Sanctuary, Gujarat, India. *Indian BIRDS* 14 (3): 85. Hardik Bhatt, 15/1 Bimanagar Society, Opp. Umia Vijay, Satellite Road, Ahmedabad 380015, Gujarat, India. E-mail: [hardik.bhatt4@gmail.com](mailto:hardik.bhatt4@gmail.com)  
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On 16 February 2018, at 0915 hrs, I was in Thol Bird Sanctuary (23.141°N, 72.407°E) near Ahmedabad, Gujarat. I happened to come across an area with thorny trees where I heard a peculiar call. I could see some bird movement but it was too dense to see clearly. So I settled down and waited at a distance. After about five minutes, a redstart *Phoenicurus* sp., came out and perched on a nearby tree. It started preening and was aware of my presence, but was quite wary. It immediately struck me that the bird was different from a Black Redstart *P. ochruros* and I took some photos [63] while it was perched on the tree for a few seconds and I also managed to record its call.

A detailed description of this individual is given here: a redstart with a prominent white band across its forehead, with white extending beyond the eyes. It had a grey crown and mantle, black throat (with black not extending onto upper breast), orange underparts with white centre of belly and vent, and a very prominent white wing patch.

I shared the photos with other birders here and it was identified as a Common Redstart *P. phoenicurus*, of the *samamisticus* race. This race of the Common Redstart is also known as 'Ehrenberg's Redstart'. It breeds from Turkey and Greece, eastwards to the Caucasus Mountains, Iran, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, and winters in north-eastern Africa and the south-western Arabian Peninsula (Collar & Christie 2018). It differs from the nominate race in having a prominent white wing patch at all ages; the nominate race can also show some white in the wings, but it is never as extensive or solidly white as seen in *samamisticus* (Small 2009). Here, it can be seen from the photos that the wing patch is a brilliant white, extending from the tertials, across the secondaries, till the second outermost primary, leaving no doubt about its identification as *samamisticus*. It is probably an adult male. Though a Black Redstart can also show a white wing patch, it

lacks features like grey mantle, black on throat not extending onto the upper breast, prominent white band across forehead extending beyond the eyes, and white centre of belly and vent.

Grimmett *et al.* (2011) show only one record of the Common Redstart of the nominate race for India—from Leh and Ladakh. This record is of three individuals, which were trapped and photographed at Tikse in May 1982 (Delany *et al.* 2014), which was the first record of the species from India. However, there are no documented sightings of *samamisticus* so far from India. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) state about this race, 'not yet genuinely recorded but a likely summer visitor to NW Afghanistan'; it is stated that a specimen of *samamisticus* in BMNH, labelled 'Daulatpur, Sind' originated in Iran and thus, this is included in the 'rejected species' list for the avifauna of the Indian Subcontinent and Afghanistan (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Appendix 2). So, there are no records of *samamisticus* from India or the Indian Subcontinent.

This sighting of a Common Redstart from Thol Bird Sanctuary, near Ahmedabad, is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat as the species is not included in the recent checklist of birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2016) or in the first update to the Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2017). Though the nominate race of the Common Redstart has been noted in India before, the race *samamisticus* or 'Ehrenberg's Redstart', is an addition to the avifauna of India and the Indian Subcontinent.

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I'd like to thank Prasad Ganpule and Dhairya Dixit for all their help.

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63. Ehrenberg's Redstart in Thol Bird Sanctuary. Photo on left showing the prominent white wing patch.

## Correspondence

### Breeding of Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* in Bharathapuzha River Basin, Kerala, India

The Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* is a resident waterbird of central Kerala (Sashikumar *et al.* 2011). It is known to be a solitary breeder, staying away from mixed heronries (Ali & Ripley 1987). Historically, it has been known to breed only in the Periyar Tiger Reserve in Kerala (Neelakantan 1986; Jackson & Robertson 1992). However, several breeding instances have recently been recorded in the Bharathapuzha River Basin in central Kerala and documented in Sashikumar *et al.* (2011), from: Kuttipuram by Anand & Jayachandran (2002, 2006); Edappal by Ramakrishnan (2002); Mannanur by Rajeevan & Susanthkumar (2004); Kootanad by Shino Jacob & Ravindran (2004); and Thiruvilvamala by Raju & Jayachandran (2004). Here we document five more breeding sites from this river basin.

**Nest 1:** On 07 December 2015, GP, MK and VA noted a pair of Woolly-necked Storks nesting on top of a mobile-tower at Paralikkadu [64], 15 km from Thrissur. The nest, constructed with sticks, was 23 m above the ground. The tower was situated inside human settlements, 30 m away from the road. We spotted one bird on the tower, preening, and another on a nearby jackfruit *Artocarpus heterophyllus* tree. No other nest was visible on nearby trees. Local people stated that the stork had been nesting at the same location for the last three years, and that these birds foraged in the adjacent paddy fields, and on the foreshores of the Pathazhakundu Dam, which was six kilometres from the nest. Choudhary *et al.* (2013) and Vaghela *et al.* (2015) have reported similar breeding on mobile towers in northern India.

**Nest 2:** MK recorded a nest that held a young Woolly-necked Stork, which fell down when the mango *Mangifera indica* tree that held it, was cut down at Varadiyam, Thrissur, on 19 October 2017. The local people handed over the young bird to the Kerala Forest and Wildlife Department, which shifted it, after few days,



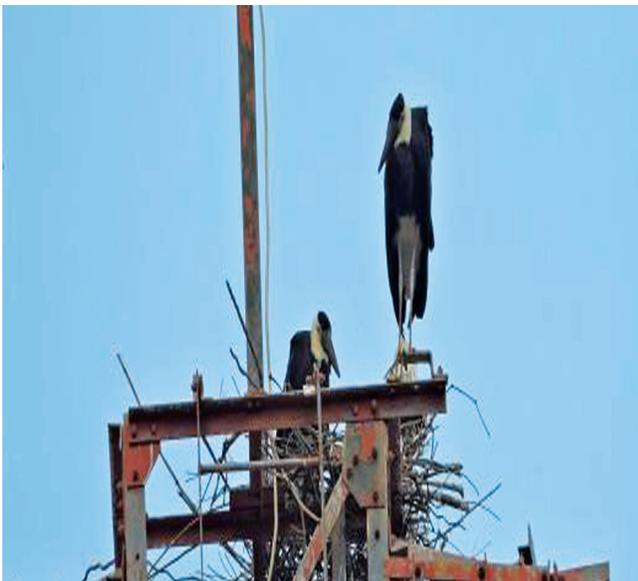
65. Rehabilitated Woolly-necked Stork at Thrissur Zoo

K. Manoj

to the Thrissur Zoo [65]. A House Crow *Corvus splendens* was later seen selecting twigs from the fallen nesting material for its own nest.

**Nest 3:** On 06 November 2017, GP saw a Woolly-necked Stork pair nesting on top of a mobile-tower near the Wadakkanchery Railway station [66]. The nest was 25 m above the ground and it was built using sticks. It held the adult storks, and a single chick.

**Nest 4:** RPN, EGS & EAJ spotted a nest on a banyan *Ficus religiosa* tree at Cheerakuzhi [67] by. The nest was 26 m above



V. Anya

64. Nest with Woolly-necked storks from Paralikkad



66. Nest with chick on mobile tower at Wadakkanchery

P. Greshma



Riju P. Nair

67. Nest on Banyan tree at Cheerakuzhi

the ground, and was built with sticks of different sizes. The tree was ten meters away from the road and the nest was on a branch directly above the road. Two adult Woolly-necked Storks were seen on the tree on 09 November 2017. One was sitting inside the nest, and other was perched nearby. The Gayathri River, one of the main tributaries of the Bharathapuzha, flowed just 100 m away from the nesting tree. The residents of the area said that these birds were seasonal visitors to the tree, for the last six years, and they had named them '*Kazhuthil munduketti*' (=dhoti wrapped around the neck)!

**Nest 5:** MK spotted a nest in a banyan tree at Paroor Siva temple, Punnayurkulam, Thrissur on 24 November 2017. Interaction with the people revealed that the nest had been active for the past four to six years.

The Woolly-necked Stork breeds in India during the rains; between July and September in southern India, and December to March in northern parts of the country (Ali & Ripley 1987). Based on our observations, its breeding period extends to December in the Bharathapuzha River Basin region. The earliest nest we

saw was on 17 October (Nest 2), but since the nest had a chick, breeding must have started much earlier. The number of breeding instances from this region since 2000, including our recent 2017 records (Fig. 1) indicate that the Bharathapuzha River Basin is an important breeding area for this stork in southern India.

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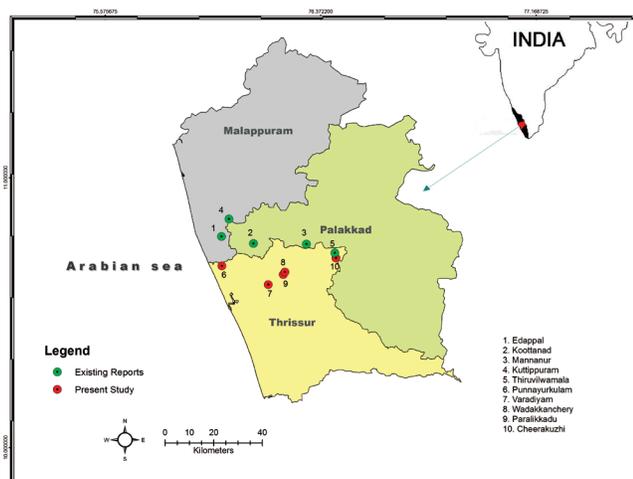


Fig. 1. Map showing the nesting locations of Woolly-necked Stork

## Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* hunts a lark

The Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* is a large, wide-ranging wader that has a varied diet comprising fish, small mammals, amphibians (frogs and salamanders), nestlings or small birds, reptiles (snakes, lizards, and skinks), crustaceans, molluscs (water snails), and insects (hemiptera, grasshoppers, dragonflies, bees, flies, spiders, beetles, and aquatic larvae) (Witherby 1943; Cachia 1984–1985; Johnson 1988; Martínez-Vilalta & Motis 1992; Kushlan & Hancock 2005). An analysis of the stomach contents of 70 adult specimens of Purple Herons, collected in the Sundarbans, showed that their diet comprised 57% fish, 21% reptiles (especially snakes), 14% crustaceans, and 8% Insects (Mukherjee 1971).

A Purple Heron will often wait motionless for prey, by hiding in vegetation, or slowly stalk its victim (Witherby 1943)—its commonest hunting strategy. However, observations of it swooping down and catching its prey are rarely observed. We present here one such observation that took place near Vastana village which is located in Matar Tehsil of Kheda District in Gujarat.

VM saw a Purple Heron catching, and feeding upon a lark (Alaudidae), at 1620 hrs on 04 January 2018, from a flock of larks and pipits (Motacillidae) that were feeding on left-over grain

in a harvested paddyfield. Suddenly a juvenile Purple Heron flew in, swooped over the flock of birds on the ground, and grabbed a lark by its wing [68]. The flock immediately scattered and dispersed. The lark tried to escape, but the heron held it firmly in its beak. The lark struggled to free itself by beating its wings, but it did not succeed. The heron put the lark down, striking it repeatedly, and then grabbed it again by the neck [69]. These activities went on for nearly five minutes. The heron seemed vigilant and frequently looked around. When the lark had totally wilted, and heron gulped it down.

In this area, VM had earlier observed Purple Herons using techniques of either chasing, or standing hunting snakes and frogs. So, it was quite unusual to see this foraging technique.

Paddy is harvested in Kheda District in November–December, at the commencement of winter. After the harvest, fields remain fallow for three months, attracting flocks of many small migratory species of birds like pipits (Motacillidae), larks (Alaudidae), and buntings (Emberizidae) that consume spilt grain.



68. The Purple Heron holding the lark by its wing.



Both: Vishal Mistry

69. The heron holding the dead lark by its throat.

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## Red-necked Falcon *Falco chicquera* nesting on an electricity pylon

While birding on 27 December 2014, around Chotila village (22.42°N, 71.19°E), Surendranagar, Gujarat, I spotted a nest of the Red-necked Falcon *Falco chicquera* on an electricity pylon [70]. The surrounding area comprised mixed open scrub, and agricultural lands. The pylon was adjacent to the national highway (NH 47) and was about a kilometer away from the village of Chotila, the nearest human habitation. The birds were observed



70. Red-necked Falcon nesting on an electricity pylon.



71. Red-necked Falcon juveniles in the nest.

Both: D. Mori

bringing nesting material to the nest. The nest was c. 20 m above the ground, and it comprised primarily of dry twigs. On a subsequent visit, on 12 April 2014, two juvenile birds were seen on the nest [71]. Both the adults were feeding the juveniles, which seemed ready to fledge.

Nesting reported on a market-place tower within Pune city for three consecutive years (Gole, 1980), and another nest on an electrical pylon in Saurashtra are the only non-tree nesting records of this species till date (Naoroji 2006).

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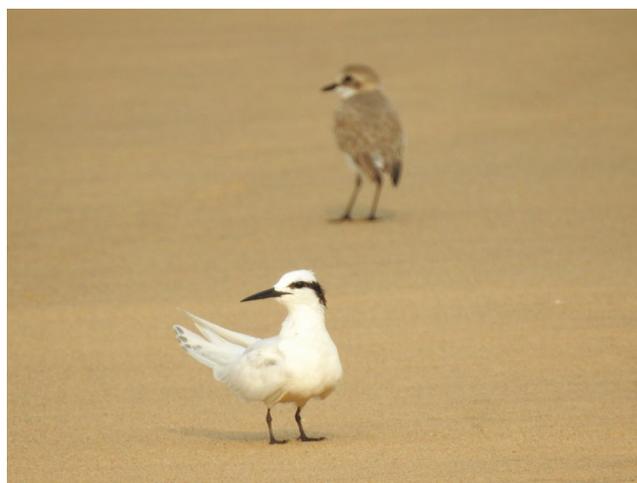
## Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana* in Kerala: An addition to avifauna of Indian mainland

The Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana* has a widespread distribution in the Indian Ocean, South-east Asia, the Indo-Malaya region, and the western tropical Pacific Ocean. Within Indian territorial limits, it has been reported only from the Andaman & Nicobar Islands (eBird 2018), and the Lakshadweep Islands. Its nearest breeding grounds to India are in the Maldives (Philips 1959) and Chagos Islands (Carr 2015), where the *mathewsi* race is found (contra nominate found on the Andaman & Nicobar Islands). There was a single sight record of a flock of eight birds at Fort Kochi on 05 May 1990 apart from 35 White-cheeked Terns *S. repressa* (Neelakantan *et al.* 1993; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), but without any documentary evidence, and hence not considered for the Kerala state checklist (Sashikumar *et al.* 2011).

On 28 April 2018, I went to Ponnani beach (10.78°N, 75.91°E), Malappuram District, Kerala with the intention of observing shore birds. I reached the spot at 0720 hrs and was observing some Lesser/Greater Sand Plovers *Charadrius mongolus/leschenaultii* and a few gulls present there, when a flock of around 30 terns came flying in from the sea. They were



73. Black-naped Tern showing black nape line, sitting along with Common Terns.



74. Black-naped Tern.

a mixed flock of Whiskered- *Chlidonias hybrida* and Common Terns *S. hirundo*. A soaring Black Kite *Milvus migrans* stooped at them and dispersed them. However, three terns from the flock settled at a distance on the shore. Upon zooming on them with my super zoom camera, I noticed that one tern amongst them looked very pale and different from others. I took some photographs and shared them immediately with my birding friends, Vivek Chandran and Praveen ES. They advised me to take photographs and videos of the individual from different angles, including flight shots [72, 73, 74, 75].



72. Paler Black-naped Tern alongside Common- and Little Terns.



75. A Black-naped Tern in flight with a deeply forked tail.

The bird in the photographs was positively identified as a Black-naped Tern, based on the following features: an overall pale appearance, black eye stripes that join at the nape, and a deeply forked tail. This is the first confirmed record of this species for the Indian mainland.

I wholeheartedly thank Dr. P. O. Nameer, Praveen. J, Praveen E.S., and Vivek Chandran for their support and encouragement.

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## Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* in Anini, Arunachal Pradesh

On 04 December 2017, we visited Anini (28.78°N, 95.90°E; 1662 m asl), the remote headquarters of the Upper Dibang Valley District (Arunachal Pradesh, India). Situated in the Mishmi Hills, Anini is the last major town in the district, and is about 100 km from the Sino–Indian border. The town mainly has a temperate habitat, interspersed with bamboo thickets.

While on a walk around the town, at about 0800 hrs, we went down a mud path when we heard a lot of bird activity, and subsequently observed several birds. As we stood there, watching and identifying the various birds, a lone Common

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* was spotted perched atop an almost leafless branch [76]. It was in eclipse plumage—where the head was much whiter and the wings lacked the iridescent green of a breeding adult; however, there was a hint of green on the breast. The eclipse form also differed from the non-breeding plumage where the head is brown in colour.

The only previous record of the Common Starling from Arunachal Pradesh is from 1999 (Kumar 2004; Choudhury 2006), of a hunted specimen in ‘winter plumage’, which was obtained from Sarali, in the Lower Subansiri District. Anini is over 600 km north-eastwards from Sarali. Apart from the Sarali record, the only other records for this species were from the Dibru-Saikhowa Biosphere Reserve, Assam in March 1998 (Allen 2002), a 19th century record from near Dibrugarh (Hume 1888), and a few records along the Brahmaputra in Assam (eBird 2018). Although, Common Starlings are frequent winter visitors to western India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; eBird 2018), there are only a few records from north-eastern India, where the species is treated as a vagrant.

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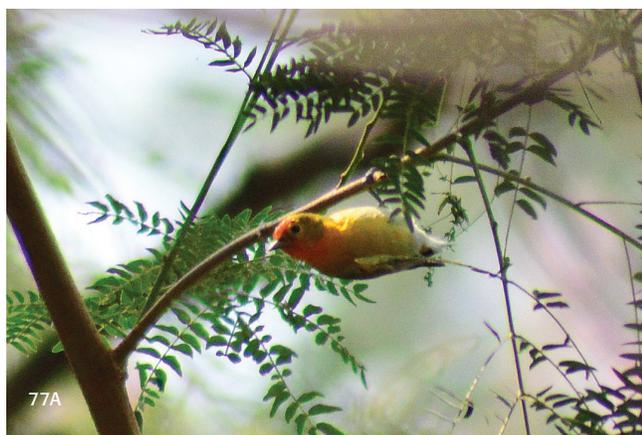


Rohan K. Menzies & Megha Rao

76. Common Starling in eclipse plumage, in Anini, Arunachal Pradesh.

## Sighting of Fire-capped Tit *Cephalopyrus flammiceps* in Ahmednagar District, Maharashtra

On 21 February 2018, we were birding at Dongargan forest (19.25°N, 74.76°E) near Ahmednagar city, in Ahmednagar District, Maharashtra. The landscape comprised hilly terrain, dry deciduous forest with trees like *Bauhinia racemosa*, *Gliciridia sepium*, *Ficus* species, and *Acacia* species. While walking along a seasonal stream, at 1200 hrs, we saw two small birds clinging upside-down to some extremely thin branches in the upper canopy of a tree. We observed them for ten minutes through 8x40 binoculars. BK managed to take some hazy record shots



Both: Bhagyashree Kulkarni

77 A, B. Fire-capped Tit in Ahmednagar District, Maharashtra.

[77A] before they moved away into slightly thick cover, after which we couldn't trace their activity. After checking Grimmett *et al.* (2011), we identified them as Fire-capped Tits *Cephalopyrus flammiceps*. We sent these photographs to Raju Kasambe, and Tim Inskipp who confirmed our identification (Raju Kasambe, *in litt.*, dated, 24 February 2018; Tim Inskipp, *in litt.*, dated, 24 February, 2018). Subsequently on 23 February 2018, we visited the same site and we found one bird at the same spot. This time we managed to take better photographs of the bird [77B]. We observed it for 20 min. It flew from branch to branch, on a ten-meter tall banyan *Ficus benghalensis* tree, and on another tall tree. Alongside it we observed other birds like Oriental White-eyes *Zosterops palpebrosus*, leaf-warblers (*Phylloscopus* sp.), reed warblers (*Acrocephalus* sp.), and Red-vented Bulbuls *Pycnonotus cafer*. The birds we saw, on both days, were males with bright orange crowns and chins, and orange-scarlet throats.

Year	Location	Coordinates	Reference	Remarks
1935	Nagpur	21.14°N, 79.09°E	D'Abreu (1935)	Specimen
2006	JamodaPadav, Melghat Tiger Reserve	21.65°N, 77.10°E	Kasambe & Wadatkar (2006)	Observation
2016	Nagpur	21.14°N, 79.09°E	Mudaliar (2016)	Photograph
2017	AmbazariLake, Nagpur	21.13°N, 79.03°E	Sahana (2017)	Photograph
2018	Dongargan forest, Ahmednagar	19.25°N, 74.76°E	This work	Photograph

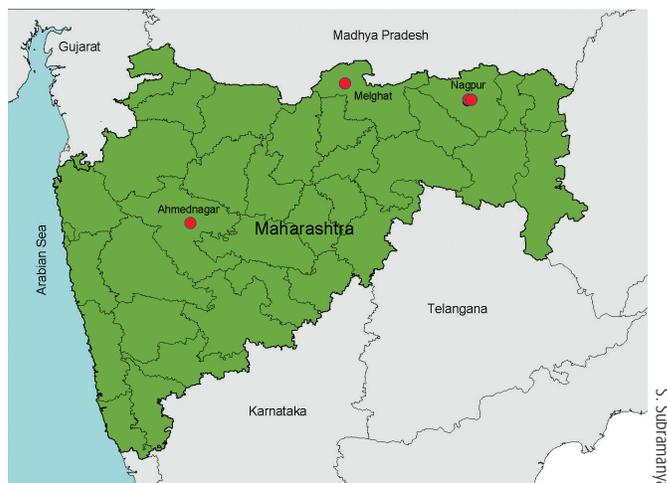


Fig. 1. Historical occurrence of Fire-capped Tits in Maharashtra.

The Fire-capped Tit is a summer visitor to the Himalayas, from Gilgit to Arunachal, and in the Murree Hills from c.1800–3000 m, often higher. Its western population (nominate race) is said to winter in the north-central plains—mostly in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), and the birds we saw might have had the same origins.

The wintering range of the Fire-capped Tit includes Nagpur, Maharashtra (Ali & Ripley 1998), and this probably refers to the specimen mentioned in D'Abreu (1935). There are more records from the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra (Table 1) including two records with photographs. To the best of our knowledge, this species has never been observed further west in Maharashtra (Fig. 1).

We are grateful to Tim Inskipp and Raju Kasambe for confirming the identification. Thanks to Ajinkya Supekar, for help in writing the manuscript.

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### Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda* extinguishing and swallowing lamp wick

On 16 December 2017, we were birding at Jassore Wildlife Sanctuary, Banaskantha, Gujarat, on our way to the Ganesh temple (a small temple complex with one dozen shrines). As part of his morning rituals the temple caretaker was offering mixed grains to the birds, while cleaning and washing the premises, and lighting of lamps for prayers. These lamps are usually earthen cups filled with oil/ghee (clarified butter) to fuel the cotton wick, which is lit as part of a praying ritual. The caretaker lit up a few of these holy lamps and placed them in front of each of the twelve shrines. Within no time, a few Rufous Treepies *Dendrocitta vagabunda* flew from across the temple premises and perched near the lit lamps. One of the birds entered a shrine and returned with a lamp in its beak; the lamp still held a burning wick [78]. The bird first played with the oil lamp [79], and then suddenly it picked up the flaring wick from the lamp [80], and tried to extinguish the wick by jerking its head. As soon as the flame was extinguished the treepie swallowed the wick [81]. We noted this behaviour in three other Rufous Treepies! The temple priest informed us that a few months ago he'd begun using pure ghee as fuel for these wicks. Ever since, he has observed this feeding frenzy amongst the treepies.

Usually, this species is an omnivorous and opportunistic feeder. There are numerous items recorded in a treepie's diet (Ali & Reply 1987; Bharucha 1988; Sharma 1993; Krishnakumar & Sudha 2002; Chhangani 2004; Basheer 2010). However, lamp wicks immersed in ghee are not on the list, and this is a first of its kind observation for the species.



78. Rufous Treepie carrying a lit oil lamp in its beak. Pic.



Pics: Raju Vyas

79.



80. Rufous Treepiebird making efforts to extinguish the lit wick.



81. Rufous Treepie swallowing the extinguished wick.

There seem to be no earlier records of corvids handling fire while foraging for food, leave alone extinguishing a flame and consumed the object that was burning. There is evidence (Bird *et al.* 2008; Gosford 2015) of the fire-spreading behaviour of a few raptors, especially Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, Whistling Kite *Haliastur sphenurus*, and Brown Falcon *Falco berigora* wherein these raptors were observed flying with burning sticks held in their talons, or beaks, and spreading bushfires in the savanna of northern Australia (Bonta *et al.* 2017). This was interpreted as a deliberate attempt to spread wildfires in order to flush out prey. But such an innovative foraging tactic is a definite sign of intelligence, a fact that holds true for most members of the Corvidae (Marzluff & Angell 2005; Seed *et al.* 2009).

### Acknowledgements

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### Sighting of Northern Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* in the Teesta grasslands, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal

On 16 February 2018, during the hot midday at the Teesta grasslands (26.52°N, 88.73°E) near Jalpaiguri, West Bengal, I found an owl roosting approximately one meter above the ground, on a branch of a small, almost naked, tree that stood under the shade of a three meter high *Zizyphus* tree surrounded by tall thick grasses and thorny bushes. As I had no camera with me, I returned to the spot on 18 February at 1615 hrs and found

the owl exactly at the same spot. Without disturbing it, I was able to take some photos of the bird [82]. On 25 February, I again visited the place with Biswapriya Rahut and at 1730 hrs found the owl perched about two and a half meters above the ground, on a branch of the *Zizyphus* tree. However, it flushed and disappeared into the tall thick 'kash' *Saccharum* sp., grasses c. 100 m away. I made no further visits to the area to avoid disturbing its roost.

On comparing the photograph with standard references (Grimmett *et al.* 2011) and photographs on websites like <http://orientalbirdimages.org/>, it was clear that this was a Northern Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*. Its long, slim, heavily streaked body, orange eyes, very long black ear tufts with pale edges, two black lines between the eyes and the white lines beside the bill eliminated all other species.

The Northern Long-eared Owl is a rare, and apparently erratic winter visitor to north-western India. It has rarely reached Gujarat, western Uttaranchal, the Delhi area, Nepal, and Bhutan (Ali & Ripley 1987; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). More recently, it has been photographed in Sikkim (Ash *et al.* 2017), and further eastwards in the Mishmi Hills, Arunachal Pradesh (Kalita & Bhuyan 2015). This is the first record of this species from West Bengal, though not unexpected, given the recent observations from the eastern parts of the country.

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### Jerdon's Bushlark *Mirafra affinis* in Midnapore, West Bengal

On 09 February 2018 we were birding in the Salua forest range (22.23°N, 87.28°E), Paschim Midnapore District, West Bengal when, at 1536 hrs, we spotted a lark (Alaudidae) near some bushes. Initially we thought it was a Bengal Bushlark *Mirafra assamica*. But its continuous call was quite different from that bird—with which we were familiar. We shot some pictures [83, 84] and also video-graphed the bird calling <https://www.hbw.com/ibc/video/jerdons-bushlark-mirafra-affinis/jerdons-bushlark-west-bengal-video-graphic-record-sourav>. There were two to three birds in the vicinity, with the same set of field features.

Back from the field, we worked on the identification. The pointed thick bill, spotted breast, a comparatively smaller tail and, most important, a call that was a dry metallic rattle, helped us confirm it as a Jerdon's Bushlark *M. affinis*. Next day we visited the same area, and could locate more than ten individuals of the species.

We discussed this observation with several birders like Sujan Chatterjee, Kanad Baidya, and Santanu Manna, who agreed with our identification, and confirmed its rarity in West Bengal. Jerdon's Bushlark is considered a resident in southern India and Sri Lanka extending till eastern Odisha (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Its



Prateek Choudhury

82. Northern Long-eared Owl in the Teesta grasslands, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal.



Sourav Ch. Dinda

83. Jerdon's Bushlark rambling on ground.



Paresh Chandra Das

84. Jerdon's Bushlark calling.

nearest congener, the Bengal Bushlark, considered conspecific until recently (Alstrom 1998), is known to occur in the Gangetic and Brahmaputra plains, including West Bengal, up to northern Odisha. Abdulali (1976) alludes to the possibility of a hybrid zone in Odisha, where birds occur with dark upperparts and little or no trace of rufous. However, the birds we saw did not seem any darker than the birds from elsewhere in the range of Jerdon's Bushlark (e.g., Karnataka), and substantial rufous was present in their wings. Also, the call notes (Fig. 1), delivered between 6–7 Mhz, are congruent with Jerdon's.

There is an earlier record of Jerdon's Bushlark from West Bengal that we have not investigated thoroughly. A specimen from Midnapore existed in the collections of the erstwhile Asiatic Society of Bengal (now probably held by the Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata) (Blyth 1847; Ball 1878; Law 1923; Abdulali

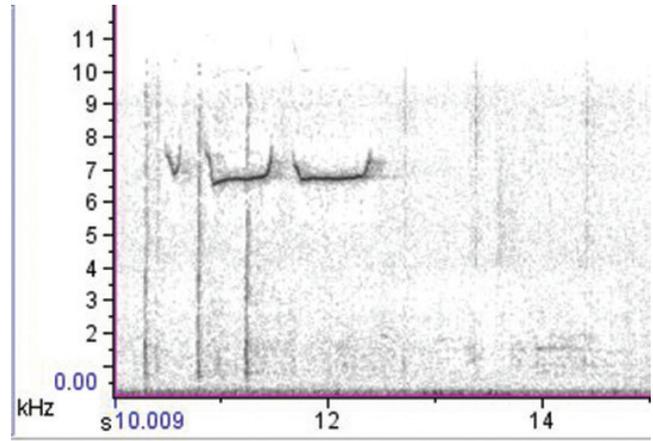


Fig. 1. Spectrograph of the Jerdon's Bushlark's song.

1976). It has been known to occur in the Chota Nagpur Plateau in Jharkhand (Ball 1878). Hence, the location from where we recorded this bird had apriori documentation for this species despite it not being covered in standard works (Ali & Ripley 1987; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). However, our photo and video documentation affirms the occurrence of this population at the edge of its range, and abutting that of the Bengal Bushlark.

### Acknowledgements

Sujan Chatterjee, Santanu Manna, Kanad Baidya, and Amit Ghosh helped us in identifying the bird, and also in the preparation of this short note. Our special thanks to Arabinda Pal, Anirban Patra, and Amit Sankar Jana Ayan Khanra. We retrieved relevant literature from the online 'Bibliography of South Asian Ornithology' (Pittie 2018).

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## Postcard from Singapore

### A new Honeyeater species: Harbinger of hope

My friend has elf ears. Believe me, he does when he goes to the forests to search for insects solely by their sound. When he called to share about his recent katydid discovery, by listening to their sounds in north-eastern Himalayas, I was doing something similar. Sitting, with my headphones on, and my eyes closed, in my lab at the National University of Singapore (NUS), I was listening to the chirpings of a honeyeater hailing from a small, remote island about 2500 km away from my location. Rote Island, a part of the Lesser Sunda Island chain to the east of Java, is one of the underexplored islands of eastern Indonesia. I grew my elf ears listening to the vocalisations of a population of myzomela (Meliphagidae: *Myzomela*) on this island. The music of nature, like the one I was listening to, or the one my friend works on, sometimes provides insights into a population when our eyes fail.

The story of the recent species discovery of the Rote Myzomela from Rote Island is an interesting one. First documented in 1990, the *Myzomela* population of Rote Island remained elusive to taxonomists as many bird guides and databases described it as the Sumba Myzomela from the nearby Sumba Island, due to its morphological similarity. Nearly 20 years after the first documentation, two Belgian ornithologists, Philippe Verbelen and Veerle Dossche, visited Rote and Sumba islands and managed to get photos and sound recordings of the birds. They were surprised by the stark differences in the vocalisations of the two populations. Further visits in 2014 and 2015 led to the collection of more sound recordings, and four bird specimens. By 2015, a team at National University of Singapore, led by Dr Frank E. Rheindt, and from the Indonesia Institute

of Sciences led by Dr Dewi M. Prawiradilaga had got involved in the fieldwork. That was when I joined the Avian Evolution Lab at NUS (in 2016), and ended up with the sound data from the field. I supplemented it with the sound recordings available from various online sound libraries. Listening to the recordings, I searched for the vocalisations of myzomela, distinguishing them from the varied sounds of the forests. This study is important because the vocalisations play an important role. Just like the old romantics serenaded their ladylove, many organisms in the wild sing to attract potential mates. Birds are no exception; they often use complex songs for mate selection and mate attraction. Other vocalisations in which birds communicate socially are through calls, contact calls, or alarm calls. Study of these vocalisations, to gather insights about the bird's world, is called bioacoustics. I

visualise these sounds through sonograms, which allow me 'to see the sounds.' Softwares like 'Raven' allow me to measure a few of the quantitative parameters of a sound and use them for comparison. Such techniques were used to distinguish between the vocalizations of myzomelas on Rote and Sumba islands. The stringent bioacoustics study showed that Rote Myzomela and Sumba Myzomela are diagnostically different. Also, they have a few unique vocalisations that are not shared amongst each other. Although previously overlooked, the Rote Myzomela is also morphologically different from the Sumba Myzomela with a relatively narrow and shorter extent of the black breast band. All these results point to the fact that Rote Myzomela is a new species.

In this Anthropocene, with the looming threat of the sixth mass extinction, like a flamboyant dancer dressed in red and black plumage, this new species, the Rote Myzomela [85] is a harbinger of hope. Named after Indonesia's First Lady, Iriana Joko Widodo, the Rote Myzomela *Myzomela irianawidodoae* is a reminder to all of us to start preserving the biodiversity as we are at the cusp of losing species not yet discovered! The discovery

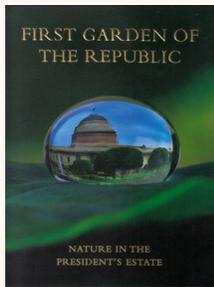


85. Rote Myzomela foraging on the ground.

Philippe Verbelen

of a species as remarkable as the Rote Myzomela, reminds us, despite all our technological advances, how limited remains our knowledge of our planet's diversity. Even as we discover this beautiful bird from the island, it struggles for survival as tourism and agricultural conversion encroach on its habitats, pushing it ever closer to the oblivion of extinction. Due to these reasons, we recommended the IUCN category of Vulnerable for the species. It is therefore paramount to conserve the remaining forests, the last refuges and habitats of wonderful organisms that we know, and are yet to know, to sustain nature's music for the generations to come. 🐦

# Book review



*First garden of the Republic:  
Nature in the President's estate*

A. Baviskar (ed.) 2016

Publications Division, Government of  
India, India

Hardback (24cm x 29cm), pp. 256

Price: Rs 1850/-

This lavishly illustrated coffee-table book presents a brief horticultural- and natural history of the grounds of the President of India's official residence, Rashtrapati Bhavan, which sprawls on a 330 acre estate, atop Raisina Hills in Delhi. It is purportedly the largest residence of a head of state anywhere in the world. The built-up areas cover approximately 15 acres; the formal gardens another 15 acres; and the remaining grounds comprise a part of the semi-wilderness area known as the Delhi Ridge, and sundry other natural, or semi-natural, or cultivated open areas.

Reading its history one realises that the estate has suffered the same fate as the forests of the country. How does one grow, or regrow a forest? The dilemma could be solved if the quiddity of the land were studied. But that was not the case. Even 16 years after re-forestation work of the Ridge began, it bore no fruit: all that the protagonists succeeded in doing was plant 'kikar', which was alien, and could not be controlled, and hence became a rampant coloniser of the landscape (pp. 92–93). Just what's happened, by and large, in Indian forests. Re-forestation is a fool's dream. Only monoculture plantations are possible along with some educated inter-cropping—all at an enormous cost. The only way to achieve the former is by providing complete protection to the denuded land, from all and every kind of usage, or exploitation. Natural regeneration is indeed possible, 'from ancient roosts long established in the soil' (pp. 15, 92).

Chapter one (Amita Baviskar) is an overview of the estate, touching upon the planning of its layout, its landscaping, a brief history of the choices of trees foresters had, the mix of cultivated areas, and the wilderness of the Ridge. It is about the helpless foisting of the tenacious and pernicious 'vilaiti kikar' *Proposis juliflora* to afforest the Ridge; and of the various pet projects of the erstwhile Presidents of India, e.g., President Kalam's 'Spiritual Garden.' That the 'natural' Ridge on the estate is as much a worked area as the Mughal Gardens is invisible and unknown to most people.

Chapter two (Amita Baviskar) deals with the horticultural aspects of the gardens, the lives of the gardeners, and their daily sweat for the maintenance of the various arboretums: the splendid, showpiece Mughal Garden, the Long Garden, and the Circular Garden.

Chapter three, by that botanising gentleman, Pradip Kishen, assesses the various schemes of tree-plantings on the estate. The which, the why, the what, the where, and the when of all the 14 species that were chosen for avenues and groves. Kishen tries to unravel the mysteries behind the choices of trees, foresters made, for this area. There is a beautiful section on the estate's relict forest, and a photo essay on the notable trees growing here. Kishen's angst bursts through in places, '...the axe has always fallen on a patch of "forest". This is because the forest is not valued in itself, is regarded as dispensable, and this has to do with the fact that the character of the forest has changed for the worse...' Yet his hope for the estate shines through when he

reassures, 'we have a wonderful opportunity today to undo some of these mistakes and create a new plan that is every bit as grand as the conception Lutyens brought to the building.'

Chapter four (Baviskar) is dedicated to the life of the gardeners. We learn that recruiting new permanent staff may be the easier task, rather than training them, for the land's quiddity seeps into the person at its own pace, like the growth of trees, and cannot be hurried under any circumstances; that mechanisation has reduced manual, back-breaking, bloodying-palm labour; and about the pride of the gardeners when they are applauded by the public that streams in annually to admire the Mughal Garden.

In chapter five, Ghazala Shahbuddin introduces the reader to the butterflies, dragonflies, insects, moths, spiders, reptiles, amphibians, and mammals of the estate. Brief topical insights, into important issues like habitat fragmentation, pollinators that are in danger, camouflage and mimicry, and keystone species of Delhi's flora punctuate this essay. This format, followed throughout the book, does not restrict itself to species descriptions, like a field guide would, but engages the reader with relevant issues, presenting a comprehensive picture of the environment.

Chapter six is on the estate's birdlife wherein Shahbuddin and Baviskar lead the reader on a walk through the various human-made and natural habitats—the gardens, the golf course and lawns, the forecourt and buildings, the Dalikhana and surrounds, and the jungle and wooded areas—which overlap into myriads of edge-habitats, all harbouring a rich avian diversity of at least 121 species. The authors touch upon various pertinent aspects of birdlife: birds and seeds, hunters and scavengers, passers-by (migrants), insectivores, etc. This is a fascinating essay for birders, for it largely deals with the ecology of birds in this restricted, multi-habitat urban-rural landscape.

The natural world comes together in the fascinating seventh chapter, where Shahbuddin takes the reader through the annual cycle of seasons, and how life transforms, or deals with, the trials and tribulations that seasonality catalyzes. The resulting narrative of the ecology of the place is gripping and clearly the sign of long, and careful study.

Five appendices at the end comprise lists of plants, mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, and insects.

Urban ecology is a new concept in India, with very few long-term studies having been published—if at all. Even the scientific documentation of urban natural history is in a nascent stage. In this relatively barren landscape, this work stands out like a beacon, a hotspot. It brings together a robust mix of social- and natural history, ecological issues, species' biology, and photographs of such high quality that once drawn into its pages, a reader will emerge after several hours of joyous immersion, enriched in knowledge, excited about the dynamic natural history surrounding her, and enthused, more than ever, to explore.

I dream of a day in the future when the First Citizen of India is also her First Citizen Scientist. This work demands a person who engages with Her estate not just on a diplomatic level, but also on a more earthly one; who records nature's changing face, the dramas of her arrivals and departures, and enters such observations into the grid of information knitting the country together; who squats amongst the gardeners and worms the soil through Her fingers, airing it, allowing some dirt to pack into Her nails. I dream of Her leading a nature trail through the property, as familiar with nature, as politics. At least part of the way to such an eventuality is cleared, the documentation done; only the protagonist is awaited. What a day that will be when it finally arrives! 🌱

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## Snapshot sightings

### Long-eared Owl in Derabasi, Punjab

Narbir Singh



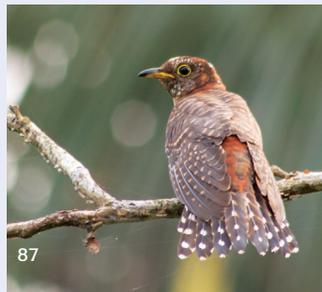
While birding in a village called Mukandpur (30.53°N, 76.83°E), Derabasi, Punjab, close to Chandigarh, on 03 December 2017, I came across an owl roosting on a tree. Though I was not able to see the bird's tufts through the foliage, the long slim build confirmed it to be this species. Known to be a regular in Harike (Sangha 2017), it is unknown from other parts of the state and is perhaps the first recent record from close to Chandigarh.

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### Lesser Cuckoo in Vasai, Maharashtra

Prashant Vartak & Ramesh Shenai

While returning from birding on 17 October 2017, at 0800hrs, a hepatic Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus poliocephalus* came up the bushes and perched on a dry branch allowing itself to be photographed for over five minutes at Mamachi Wadi (19.47°N, 72.76°E), Arnala, Tal, Vasai, Palghar District, Maharashtra. The bird remained in the same area for about two weeks (eBird 2018). Though there are several historical records from western Maharashtra (Prasad 2006), recent records from the Mumbai region seem to be quite sparse (eBird 2018).



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### Red-tailed Wheatear in Sultanpur, Delhi NCR

Mohit Mehta & Piyush Dogra

On 17 November 2017, we photographed a Red-tailed Wheatear *Oenanthe chrysopygia*, from Jhanjharola village (28.47°N, 76.86°E), Gurugaon (Delhi NCR), Haryana. The bird was around for a few days and other birders go to see it on a few occasions. There appear to be no sightings of this bird from this area apart from "...pre-1920 records from where New Delhi now stands"



(Harvey *et al.* 2006). However, it is more regular further west in Rajasthan (eBird 2018) and hence not unexpected here.

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### Water Rail in the Mumbai region, Maharashtra

Rohit Hirway & Manish Kerkar



On 02 December 2017, at 0800 hrs, we saw a Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* in the Kopar Swamps, Dombivli (19.21°N, 73.07°E), Mumbai region, Maharashtra. This species is a rare visitor to the area. This might be a second documented record for the Mumbai region after 25 December 1994, when it was photographed at Thane Creek (Punjabi 1997, Prasad 2006, eBird 2018).

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