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Crested Treeswift *Hemiprocne coronate,* Crow-billed Drongo *Dicrurus annectens*, and Black-naped Monarch *Hypothymis azurea* in Col. Sher Jung National Park, Simbalbara: Additions to the birds of Himachal Pradesh

Col. Sher Jung National Park (*henceforth*, CSJNP), previously known as Simbalbara National Park, is located in the lower Shivalik region of Sirmaur District in southern Himachal Pradesh. Formerly a hunting reserve of the Maharaja of Sirmaur, it was declared a Wildlife Sanctuary, and subsequently a National Park on 07 June 2013 (27.88 sq km; 350–650 m asl). It is listed as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area of India by Rahmani *et al.* (2016; IBA Site Code 'IN–HP–31'). Kalesar National Park and Kalesar Wildlife Sanctuary of Haryana are adjacent, on its southern side. These three protected areas form a large inter-state conservation unit in the Shivalik Hills, with a total area of *c.* 162 sq km (Bhargav *et al.* 2007; Rahmani *et al.* 2016).

CSJNP falls within the larger Kiarda Dun region, which marks the western limit of sal *Shorea robusta* forests. A large part of CSJNP comprises moist Sal forests and northern dry mixed deciduous forests. Sal-dominated landscapes have a profusion of associates such as *Syzigium* sp., *Mallotus philipensis*, and *Terminalia elliptica* that form the top, and mid-level canopy. The understorey is littered with shrubs such as *Millettia extensa,* Boehmeria macrophylla and *Ardisia solanacea*, with the last being restricted to damp areas. Riparian forests, and chir pine forest patches are not uncommon. Plantations of *Eucalyptus* sp., bamboo and poplar exist along a fair-weather road that runs from the entry gate to a rest house located at the south-western end of the park (Negi 2000; Bhargav *et al.* 2007; Rahmani *et al.* 2016). This note describes three new bird records from CSJNP.

Crested Treeswift *Hemiprocne coronata*

We visited CSJNP on 23 June 2017 and explored a trail close to the road (30.43°N, 77.49°E). At 1310 hrs, we saw two slender swift-like birds overhead, on the other side of the trail that ran alongside a dry streambed. The birds had long and thin tails. The underparts were greyish to greyish-white and the wings appeared dark from below. The birds were immediately identified as Crested Treeswifts *Hemiprocne coronata*. On 25 June 2017, at 0730 hrs, CA and PD saw two perched Crested Treeswifts **[217]** in the forest canopy on the same trail. Very long wing tips, and a long thin tail were prominent. The crests of these two birds became visible, when they lowered their heads to look downwards. One of the birds had dull orange cheeks, while the other, dark grey, indicating they were a pair. They remained there for about 20 min.

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217. A Crested Treeswift pair seen on 25 June 2017.

On 04 January 2018, CA and AV visited CSJNP. At 1430 hrs, they saw a flock of 22 Crested Treeswifts, flying over the same stream, *c.* 300 m from the spot where they had spotted the species earlier.

The Crested Treeswift is a resident along the base of the Himalayas, from Uttarakhand to West Bengal, and from south-eastern Gujarat, and eastern Rajasthan to southern West Bengal, southwards to Sri Lanka. It is absent in most of north-eastern India. Further eastwards it is found in Myanmar, south-western Yunnan in southern China, Thailand, and southern Indochina (Grimmett *et al.* 1998; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Wells & Kirwan 2018). Its status is considered 'uncommon' in the western part of Uttrakhand, which is close to CSJNP (Pandey *et al*. 1995; Mohan 1997; Singh 2000).

Sharma *et al.* (2009) mention the Crested Treeswift for the region, but their checklist includes several doubtful/erroneous records: Blue-fronted Robin *Cinclidium frontale*, Tytler's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus tytleri*, Himalayan Cuckoo *Cuculus saturatus*, and Plain Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus neglectus* are included in the list which are unlikely for the region; White-bellied Minivet *Pericrocotus erythropygius*, Streaked Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron lineatum*, Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*, and Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* are wrongly described as breeding residents; several rare/vagrant birds to the state are listed without any further details, e.g., Rufous Woodpecker *Micropternus brachyurus*, Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*, Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark *Eremopterix griseus*, and Rain Quail *Coturnix coromandelica*; the status of several birds, like Orange-headed Thrush *Geokichla citrina*, Blue-capped Rock Thrush *Monticola cinclorhynchus*, Short toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*, *etc*., is also wrongly described—because of these discrepancies we have ignored the record of Crested Treeswift by these authors.

Neither Harvey (2006), nor Kalsi (1998) mention the Crested Treeswift from the region. Kalsi (2016) first saw and photographed it in Kalesar on 06 March 2016. Then, Sharma (2017) saw 20 birds on 16 April 2017, and Sharma & Goswami (2017) saw three birds on 28 May 2017. Since the Crested Treeswift was recorded in CSJNP and Kalesar in both, summer, and winter, it is perhaps a resident in the area. CSJNP is perhaps the northern-most extent of its range (Meyer de Schauensee 1984; Wells & Kirwan 2018).

Crow-billed Drongo *Dicrurus annectens*

On 23 June 2017, at 1400 hrs we were birding along the same trail where the Crested Treeswifts had been seen. AV first saw a drongo **[218]** that appeared different from the commonly seen drongos of the region, namely, Black *D. macrocercus*, Ashy *D. leucophaeus*, Bronzed *D. aeneus*, and Spangled *D. hottentottus*. The bird was seen in a degraded forest patch, with the predominant trees being eucalyptus. The understorey had

dense, impenetrable thickets of *Lantana camara*. Subsequently, a similar bird was seen on an adjacent tree. These drongos had thicker bills with hooked tips **[219]**. Their tails were broad, with a shallow, wide fork. The tail tips were out-turned and slightly twisted upwards. Their upperparts had a bluish gloss. We identified these birds as Crow-billed Drongos. The images were sent to Manoj Sharma, who confirmed the species (Manoj Sharma *pers comm*.). These birds differed from the Black Drongo as they had a heavier bill, a shallower tail fork, were stouter, and lacked the white rictal spot. Besides, the forest habitat was also suggestive of Crow-billed Drongo. They differed from the other similar species, like the Bronzed Drongo by their larger size, stouter bill, broader tail, and lesser amount of gloss; and from the Ashy Drongo by the bill and tail structure, black, rather than ashy-grey plumage, and dark red iris instead of bright red (Wells 1999; Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

On 25 June 2017, at 0800 hrs, CA and PD saw the birds at the same spot. The birds remained mostly on the upper branches of trees, descending occasionally to lower branches. They sat unperturbed on the branches and intermittently hawked insects. The birds were observed in the same patch for about two hours. One bird came within 25 m of us, allowing us to observe the fine white-tipped feathers of its belly and undertail coverts.

218. Crow-billed Drongo on 25 June 2017 showing a broad tail with a shallow, wide fork.

All: C. Abhinav

219. Close-up of Crow-billed Drongo showing its heavy bill.

The Crow-billed Drongo breeds in the Himalayan foothills, eastwards from Uttarakhand to north-eastern India, southern China, northern and central Myanmar, northern Thailand, and northern and central Indochina. It winters in far north-eastern India, Bangladesh, probably southern China and from southern South-east Asia, through the Malay Peninsula to Sumatra, Borneo, and western Java in the south (Wells 1999; Rocamora & Yeatman-Berthelot 2018). This drongo is rare in the Indian Subcontinent (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). In Uttarakhand, it is found only in the eastern part (Kumaon) of the state (Ali & Ripley 1987; Barua 2000; ebird 2008a). Pandey *et al.* (1994), and Singh (2000) do not mention the species in their work from western Uttarakhand.

This is the western-most and northern-most record for the species (Meyer de Schauensee 1984; Rocamora & Yeatman-Berthelot 2018). Birders may have overlooked it due to its superficial resemblance to other drongos (Ali & Ripley 1987). Also, few birders visit the park, and even fewer in summer. Further observations are required to ascertain if we saw a vagrant bird, or the species is a regular summer visitor, and whether it is breeding in the region.

Black-naped Monarch *Hypothymis azurea*

On 23 June 2017, we stopped at a water tank near a road surrounded by forest in CSJNP. At 0700 hrs, we heard a distinctly ringing birdsong coming from near the outlet of the tank from where the water made its way to a stream, flanked by a dense mosaic of shrubs. We identified the songster as a Black-naped Monarch *Hypothymis azurea* whose song cannot be confused with the vocalizations of any other species known from the region. A few minutes later, we had a fleeting, but clear, view of an individual that perched on one of the lower branch of a nearby tree. This male, in fresh blue plumage, was unmistakable against the contrasting green background. During our drive to the rest house, a kilometer away, we saw another male **[220]**, and a female, at two different places. We got a good view of the second male, which was flitting about shrubs under a *Mallotus phillipensis* tree. It was very vocal and sang unabatedly, not minding our presence. The birds might be breeding in the area, though no nesting activity was seen. On 25 June 2017, two individuals were seen again, along the road at different locations. There was no sighting of this bird in the ensuing winter, nor was it recorded in visits during earlier winters (February 2015, January–February 2016).

220. A male Black-naped Monarch seen on 23 June 2017.

The Black-naped Monarch's range is known to start from Gujarat in western India, through Madya Pradesh to central Uttar Pradesh, along the Himalayan foothills to Uttarakhand, through southern Nepal to Arunachal Pradesh, and southwards through the Indian Subcontinent to Sri Lanka and, the Andaman & Nicobar Islands (Grimmett *et al.* 1998; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It is a resident in southern China and most of South-east Asia (Moeliker *et al.* 2018). It is uncommon in western Uttarakhand

(Pandey *et al.* 1995; Mohan 1997; Singh 2000).

Stewart (1886) claimed to have collected a specimen of the Black-naped Monarch near Fagu, in Shimla District, on 06 October 1885. But this species is usually found in the plains and hills upto 1050 m asl, sometimes upto 1300 m asl (Grimmett *et al.* 1998). It is unlikely for the bird to be in Fagu, which is situated at *c.* 2400 m asl, that too not in summer. The habitat in Fagu, as described by the author, was Rhododendron, oak, and juniper forest, which would be unusual for the bird. Perhaps due to this reason, Oates (1890), which was published just four years later, ignored Stewart's claim. Oates (1890) also mentioned that it doesn't ascend the Himalayas above *c.* 1000 m asl. Moreover, this specimen couldn't be traced, and this record is not mentioned elsewhere. Perhaps some other species was involved, so we have ignored this record.

Kalsi (1998) does not mention the Black-naped Monarch from Kalesar, nor does Harvey (2006) from Haryana. The bird was first sighted in Kalesar on 16 April 2017, and was seen several times during the next three months (Sharma 2017; eBird 2018b). The maximum number of individuals seen was four (Sharma & Goswami 2017). Tambe & Salunki (2015) reported it from Chandimandir, Panchkula, Haryana, but did not provide any photographs, or other details. Further studies are required to ascertain its status in these protected areas.

Bhargav *et al.* (2007) do not record these three species in CSJNP / Simbalbara National Park, and there are no reliable published records of these birds from Himachal Pradesh (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Hence, this is the first time they are being reported from Himachal Pradesh. These sightings were not, however, unexpected, as these species are present in the neighbouring state of Uttarakhand. Moreover there is an almost continuous stretch of forested area along the foothills of the Himalayas, from Corbett Tiger Reserve, through Rajaji Tiger Reserve, till CSJNP, and Kalesar. It is important to preserve this habitat to ensure long-term conservation efforts. CSJNP marks the northern-most end of the distribution range of these three species, and is a unique area in Himachal Pradesh, especially in terms of the habitat, and further studies might uncover new species for the state.

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