

Updates to the checklists of birds of India, and the South Asian region—2019

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Abstract

The checklists of birds of India, the Indian Subcontinent, and South Asia (www.indianbirds.in/checklists) have been updated with the recent taxonomic changes and 14 additional columns have been added to the India Checklist. Of the 36 species that went through taxonomic updates, 30 involved change of genera, three had their specific epithets changed, two had their English names updated, and one had both its genus and specific epithets changed. Henceforth the India Checklist spreadsheet will include columns that indicate the vagrant and historical status of a species, their IUCN threat category, CITES and CMS Appendices, Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 (WPA) Schedules, and their presence in ten Endemic Bird Areas. The India Checklist will also carry two new appendices that will list species whose origins/provenance were uncertain and species that have occurred in the country by means of human assistance. We re-analysed the past records of 11 contentious species in relation to these new appendices, and this resulted in inclusion of Pied Crow *Corvus albus* into the India Checklist and shifting of Cape Petrel *Daption capense* from the India Checklist to the appendix that lists species of unknown origin.

Taxonomic updates

The first definitive checklist of the birds of India (Praveen *et al.* 2016)—now in its eighth version (Praveen *et al.* 2019a)—and later that of the Indian Subcontinent (Praveen *et al.* 2019b), were drawn from a master database built upon a putative list of birds of the South Asian region (Praveen *et al.* 2019c). All these checklists and their subsequent online updates, incorporating additions to the region's avifauna (available at www.indianbirds.in), initially followed the taxonomy of Howard & Moore World Checklist 4th edition (*henceforth*, H&M4) (Dickinson & Renssen 2013; Dickinson & Christidis 2014), and was updated subsequently based on a consensus model in 2018 (Praveen *et al.* 2018), which was based on the taxonomies being followed by other major global authorities, namely, HBWAlive & BirdLife International (2018; *henceforth*, HBWAlive/BLI), eBird/Clements (Clements *et al.* 2018), and the International Ornithological Congress (Gill & Donsker 2019; *henceforth*, IOC).

Since December 2016, the taxonomy followed by HBWAlive/BLI has, unfortunately, been in limbo, with no major taxonomic updates reaching the system; the three versions published since then could hardly be termed as taxonomic updates, as they largely focused on revision of threat categories for IUCN Red List. Consequently, we have no new species splits to add this year to this taxonomic update, though both, eBird/Clements, and IOC has effectuated some splits that concern the South Asian region. Though we have the option of reducing the consensus model to eBird/Clements and IOC alone, we believe that it is too early to make any radical changes in our approach. We expect 2019 to see greater flux in this space with two independent threads – (a) the collaboration of Cornell University and Lynx Edicions in bringing the ecosystems of eBird and Merlin from former and HBWAlive and IBC [=Internet Bird Collections] from the latter under one umbrella, forcing a taxonomic alignment between eBird/Clement and HBWAlive/BLI, and (b) Round table discussions at IOU Congress at Vancouver, Canada where all

these parties, working on the taxonomic conundrums, expressed their intention to create a truly global checklist for Aves. Hence, we follow a wait and watch approach here while we support the constitution of a truly global taxonomy.

With this taxonomic update [Table 1], the total number of bird species, including the hypotheticals, recorded from the South Asian region [comprising Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and the Chagos Archipelago] now stands at 1570. The updated checklists of South Asia (v. 4.0), the Indian Subcontinent (v. 3.0), and India (v. 3.0), may be downloaded from the URL: <http://www.indianbirds.in>. Whilst the total bird species from the Indian Subcontinent (as limited by the political boundaries of India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives) is 1392, that from within the geographical boundaries of India (as recognised by the Government of India) is 1317. Taxonomically, the Indian avifauna covers 26 orders, 111 families, and 491 genera.

Categories for the India Checklist

The India Checklist (Praveen *et al.* 2016) and its subsequent updates until version 2.3 (Praveen *et al.* 2019) did not provide a clear framework for dealing with species records of unknown origin—particularly of records that may have possibilities of multiple origins, namely, wild vagrants, cage escapees, vagrants from an extralimital introduced stock, or ship assistance, or illegally smuggled into the country. In the absence of rules that deal with such criteria, a clear decision often becomes contentious when a 'new' species is proposed as an addition to the list. An editorial note under Saikia & Goswami (2017) acknowledged these lacunae and called for a review of the current practice, and the framing of a more forward-looking policy. This note attempts to frame such a policy for the India Checklist. It is also to be noted here that well-established bird checklists, like those of the United Kingdom (maintained by British Ornithologists Union) and the

Table 1. Annotated list of taxonomic changes to the checklist of birds of India and the South Asian region

Sl. No	English name	Scientific name	Notes on taxonomy
1	Velvet Scoter	<i>Melanitta fusca</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Treated by H&M4 as conspecific with extralimital <i>deglandi</i> . Given species rank here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC. We adopt the English name of the regionally probable taxon.
2	Yellow-fronted Pied Woodpecker	<i>Leiopicus mahrattensis</i> (Latham, 1801)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Dendrocopos</i> . Placed in <i>Leiopicus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
3	Andaman Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta bayleii</i> Tytler, 1863	Specific name corrected, from <i>baileii</i> , to <i>bayleii</i> following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
4	Himalayan Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus leucogenys</i> (J.E. Gray, 1835)	Specific name corrected, from <i>leucogenis</i> , to <i>leucogenys</i> following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
5	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i> (Bechstein, 1793)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Rhadina</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
6	Chinese Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus yunnanensis</i> La Touche, 1922	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Abrornis</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
7	Brooks's Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus subviridis</i> (W.E. Brooks, 1872)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Abrornis</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
8	Yellow-browed Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i> (Blyth, 1842)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Abrornis</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
9	Hume's Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus humei</i> (W.E. Brooks, 1878)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Abrornis</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
10	Lemon-rumped Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus chloronotus</i> (J.E. & G.R. Gray, 1847)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Abrornis</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
11	Sichuan Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus forresti</i> Rothschild, 1921	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Abrornis</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
12	Pallas's Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus proregulus</i> (Pallas, 1811)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Abrornis</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
13	Buff-barred Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus pulcher</i> Blyth, 1845	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Abrornis</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
14	Ashy-throated Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus maculipennis</i> (Blyth, 1867)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Abrornis</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
15	White-spectacled Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus intermedius</i> (La Touche, 1898)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Seicercus</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC. Note that the specific epithet is changed to its junior synonym <i>intermedius</i> as <i>affinis</i> is preoccupied.
16	Grey-cheeked Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus poliogenys</i> (Blyth, 1847)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Seicercus</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
17	Green-crowned Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus burkii</i> (E. Burton, 1836)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Seicercus</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
18	Grey-crowned Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus tephrocephalus</i> (Anderson, 1871)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Seicercus</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
19	Bianchi's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus valentini</i> (E. Hartert, 1907)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Seicercus</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
20	Whistler's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus whistleri</i> (Ticehurst, 1925)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Seicercus</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
21	Eastern Crowned Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus coronatus</i> (Temminck & Schlegel, 1847)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Seicercus</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
22	Chestnut-crowned Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus castaniceps</i> (Hodgson, 1845)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Seicercus</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
23	Green Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus nitidus</i> Blyth, 1843	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Seicercus</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
24	Greenish Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i> (Sundevall, 1837)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Seicercus</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
25	Two-barred Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus plumbeitarsus</i> Swinhoe, 1861	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Seicercus</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
26	Arctic Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus borealis</i> (J.H. Blasius, 1858)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Seicercus</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.

Table 1. Annotated list of taxonomic changes to the checklist of birds of India and the South Asian region

Sl. No	English name	Scientific name	Notes on taxonomy
27	Pale-legged Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus tenellipes</i> Swinhoe, 1860	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Seicercus</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
28	Large-billed Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus magnirostris</i> Blyth, 1843	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Seicercus</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
29	Yellow-vented Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus cantator</i> (Tickell, 1833)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Seicercus</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
30	Claudia's Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus claudiae</i> (La Touche, 1922)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Seicercus</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
31	Blyth's Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus reguloides</i> (Blyth, 1842)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Seicercus</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
32	Western Crowned Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus occipitalis</i> (Blyth, 1845)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Seicercus</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
33	Grey-hooded Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus xanthoschistos</i> (J.E. & G.R. Gray, 1847)	Assigned by H&M4 to the genus <i>Seicercus</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here, following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
34	White-tailed Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus intensor</i> Deignan, 1956	Treated by H&M4 as <i>Seicercus muleyitensis</i> . Placed in <i>Phylloscopus</i> here and treated as a subspecies of <i>Phylloscopus intensor</i> , following consensus among HBWAlive/BLI, eBird/Clements, and IOC.
35	Wayanad Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax delesserti</i> (Jerdon, 1839)	English name corrected to Wayanad from Wynaad, reflecting the official spelling for the name of the region and the district. https://wayanad.gov.in/
36	Ashambu Laughingthrush	<i>Montecinla meridionalis</i> (Blanford, 1880)	Specific name corrected to <i>meridionalis</i> from <i>meridionale</i> (for gender agreement with the new genus name), following consensus among eBird/Clements and IOC

United States (maintained by American Birding Association), already have a policy framework to handle such cases.

In order to align our policy with the actual requirements of the birding community—the clientele of the India Checklist—we analysed their needs.

Who are the users of the India Checklist?

1. Birdwatchers/Birders: Amateurs who have a passing, or serious, interest in birds and would like to learn or list the birds they have seen.
2. Checklist compilers: Serious amateurs or professional ornithologists who sub-list a national checklist to create similar definitive lists for individual regions, states, districts, Protected Areas (PAs), Ramsar sites, or Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs).
3. Landscape ecologists/Conservation biologists/Zoologists: Professionals who use a national checklist as a basis for their studies in ecology and biodiversity conservation and may partition it in ways they deem fit for their analysis.
4. Conservationists: Independent or affiliated workers, professionally qualified or otherwise, working towards the conservation of an area, landscape, habitat, or species/species group.
5. State forest departments / Biodiversity boards: Administrators and executives within the government, or working for the government, who are entrusted to enlist the biodiversity of an administrative boundary, track threats, identify areas of concern, and measure their conservation actions.
6. Citizen science initiatives: Managers or coordinators of citizen science initiatives that involve birders in data collection.
7. Authors of books: Professionals or serious amateurs who publish books for mass readership on birds or bird conservation.

8. Government legislation: Administrators and executives in the government who frame national, or state level, policies on birds (e.g., Wildlife Act schedule).

9. Nature educators: Independent or affiliated workers who use available material, or produce new material, to impart nature education to the people from different walks of life, but mainly children.

Analysis of user needs

The intention of this analysis (see Table 2) is to formulate the best design catering to every user's primary and secondary needs.

The following key observations emerge from this analysis.

1. All users need regularly occurring species along with naturalised species as a primary need.
2. Segregation of vagrants in the current India Checklist is, perhaps, warranted, as five users would want to identify them separately as distinct from regularly occurring species.
3. Only two users have 'Species of unknown origin' as their primary need and two users have the same as their secondary need.
4. Only two users have the need to separate species with only 'Historical' records.
5. Human assisted species records are only a secondary need, and that is applicable only to four users.

Admittedly, the size and impact of various user groups are not the same and hence the urgency of definition of these categories is not directly derivable from the above conclusions. 'Birdwatchers/Birders', for example, are a much larger community than nature educators while authors of books or government legislation are small in numbers, but their impact is significantly higher. However, the above analysis is still useful in framing the next course of

Table 2. What do users of the checklists want?

No	User groups	Primary needs	Secondary needs
1	Birdwatchers/Birders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly occurring species • Naturalised species • Vagrants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical • Human assisted species records • Species records of unknown origin
2	Checklist compilers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly occurring species • Naturalised species • Vagrants • Historical • Species records of unknown origin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human-assisted species records
3	Landscape ecologists/ Conservation biologists/ Zoologists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly occurring species • Naturalised species • Historical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vagrants
4	Conservationists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly occurring species • Naturalised species • Historical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vagrants
5	State forest departments/ Biodiversity boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly occurring species • Naturalised species • Historical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vagrants
6	Citizen science initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly occurring species • Naturalised species • Vagrants • Historical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human assisted species records • Species records of unknown origin
7	Authors of books	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly occurring species • Naturalised species • Vagrants • Historical • Species records of unknown origin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human-assisted species records
8	Government legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly occurring species • Naturalised species • Historical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vagrants of conservation concern
9	Nature educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly occurring species • Naturalised species 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical

actions, listed below in order of urgency.

1. Define a 'naturalised' species. There is no need to sub-classify the current India Checklist based on this tag, as there are no takers yet for such a classification.
2. Define a 'vagrant' and sub-classify the current India Checklist with this tag.
3. Create a new provisional list of human-assisted species records (Appendix I). This list is 'provisional' as a majority of these records will remain unpublished.
4. Define an explicit new category for species of unknown origin (Appendix II).
5. Define a 'Historical' tag and sub-classify the current India Checklist with it. The 'date' before which a species is considered historical should be decided after a wider consultation.

Naturalised species

Definition: A species that has been imported to a region, either deliberately or accidentally by human agency, and it has established in the wild in self-maintaining and self-perpetuating populations independent of [humans] (Lever 2010).

Rationale: The fact that the species did not occur historically, but is now a part of the biota via human intervention is certainly relevant. However, its contribution to the biomass of the region

may not be different from any truly native species and hence, keeping it aside is not a requirement for all different users of the checklist. In a large country like India, there would be naturalised populations in pockets but we do not have any accepted case of a countrywide naturalised species. Users of more localised regional lists (e.g., Andaman & Nicobar Islands) should make their own lists of naturalised species for their use. However, vagrants from a naturalised population will be treated as no different from vagrants from wild populations.

Vagrant species

Definition: An extralimital species, migratory or otherwise, that has been reliably reported fewer than ten times from India. Vagrant individuals observed for a longer period, e.g., Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* in Kerala, or multiple individuals seen together, e.g., Horned Grebe *Podiceps auritus* in Delhi, are considered single reports respectively.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that we do not treat ship-assistance as different from natural vagrancy. If a land bird species survives a sea journey as a stowaway aboard a ship once, it could be a precursor to a repeat performance by other birds of the same species in future as well; multiple such instances could build up a case of genuine vagrancy in the long run. Unlike other scenarios (like escape from pet trade or captivity), ship-

assistance is a vicariant event and one of the prime agents of vagrancy in avifauna.

Resident species that are data-deficient in terms of their status, e.g., Chinese Francolin *Francolinus pintadeanus*, are not treated as vagrants.

Rationale: Vagrants constitute nearly ten per cent of India's total avifauna. Including them in ecological analyses would disproportionately influence the species richness, contra their actual influence, on local biodiversity; they are best excluded from analysis (see Magurran & Henderson 2003).

Historical species

Definition: A native species, whether resident (e.g., Himalayan Quail *Ophrysia superciliosa*), or migratory (e.g., Siberian Crane *Leucogeranus leucogeranus*), which has not been reliably reported from India since 01 January 1950.¹

Rationale: Historical species are often peripheral to Protected Area management as the latter caters to developing action plans

¹ We carried out a survey amongst a network of our clientele, and 01 January 1950 seemed to be the most preferred cut-off date (25%) over other options: 15 August 1947, 01 January 1961, 01 January 1968, 01 January 1972, and 01 January 2000.

for species survival and habitat restoration for extant taxa. In the case of historical species that are of grave conservation concern, e.g., Manipur Bush Quail *Perdica manipurensis* in Manas, local area managers may filter the historical species list for any relevant taxon for a given area.

Handling species of unknown origin

The most challenging task for a checklist manager is to establish the provenance of a species; whether it is from natural or naturalised stock. This is a daunting task unless such birds are ringed, or colour-marked. Hence, some guiding principles must be framed to handle such cases. The first articulation should be to ascertain if a species is known from pet trade in the country or from adjoining countries. If the odds are in favour of an escapee from a zoo, or the pet trade or a private collection, then the case should be categorised as such and may well be excluded from the checklist and listed only in Appendix I (a new provisional list of human-assisted species records). On the contrary, if the odds favour a wild origin, then there is no reason to doubt its inclusion in the checklist.

We, however, understand that some cases may not be easily resolved and, as such, may warrant extensive deliberations. Exceptionally, such deliberations may remain inconclusive. Such cases should be explicitly documented as a new list and excluded from the checklist (Appendix II: new category for species of unknown origins).

With the introduction of these special categories, we review here a few contentious cases from the India Checklist and reassign them to appropriate lists.

Case studies

Cape Petrel *Daption capense*

Praveen *et al.* (2013) included this species [1] in the India Checklist, as was done by other authorities in the past, based on a single bird 'killed' between India and Sri Lanka. But they were not aware of the work of William Bourne who documented that all northern hemisphere records of this species were suspected to be of birds captured and kept on ships (as 'Cape Pigeon'), before

subsequent release (Bourne 1992). This brings in a dimension that was not previously considered, and Haas & Crochet (2009) discounted all nineteenth and early twentieth century records from the Western Palearctic for want of provenance, retaining it in their checklist on the basis of a 1979 sight record from Gibraltar. The details of how the Indian specimen was obtained—whether freshly collected or obtained dead—are not available. Keeping a seabird captive on a ship is not the same as ship assistance, and amounts to the bird being an escapee from captivity. Concurring with this view and the policy of rejecting nineteenth century records by bird record committees elsewhere (Marcel Hass *pers. comm.*, 27 January 2019), we find it prudent to treat this as a case of unknown origin and hence move it to Appendix II.

Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens*

Praveen *et al.* (2014) discuss the only record from Gujarat as a possible stray from either a true wild population or a naturalised population (particularly from the Western Palearctic); even the possibility of it being an escapee from an aviary, though not necessarily in South Asia. As mentioned earlier, a true wild vagrant and a vagrant from a naturalised population are no different for the India Checklist. Praveen *et al.* (2014) discussed various possibilities and, since expert opinions were equally divided on its origin, chose to retain the Snow Goose record as of 'unknown origin'. But the Gujarat State Checklist (Ganpule 2016), while acknowledging the 'divided opinion' on the matter, decided to include it. In the absence of any new information, we maintain the status quo in Praveen *et al.* (2014); this is an ideal candidate for Appendix II.

White-eyed Gull *Ichthyaeetus leucophthalmus*

Rasmussen & Anderton (2005, 2012) treated this species as hypothetical, citing uncertainty over the provenance of the Maldives records as potentially ship-assisted. When Jamalabad (2016) reported this bird from the south-western coast of India, this possibility was acknowledged, as the latter observation was particularly close to a seaport. However, we argued therein (in an editorial comment) that ship-assisted records of coastal or pelagic birds could be admitted as wild vagrants since such birds are free to fly off the ships. In line with our policy, as outlined here, treating ship-assisted taxa as true wild vagrants, we retain the species in the India Checklist.

Green Peafowl *Pavo muticus*

Though considered resident just across the Indian border, in Myanmar, almost all past reports from India have been anecdotal; with many of them suspected to have been escaped individuals from captive stock.

Baker (1899) described an instance from North Cachar where he shot a fine male specimen of Green Peafowl in the wild while pursuing the "owner" of five eggs that were brought to him in 1888; but the bird's origin remained unclear as Baker subsequently found a few captive individuals with a local chieftain, who reportedly claimed that the birds belonged to his grandfather and were caught from the wild at a time when the birds were apparently more common in the wild in Cachar and Manipur. Later, Baker (1915, 1928), citing the chieftain, clarified that a few individuals still found in North Cachar during the late nineteenth century came, possibly, from feral stock of tame birds imported from Imphal, generations ago.



Ramit Singal

1. Cape Petrel *Daption capense* was included in India Checklist based on a 19th century specimen, but it is now treated as of unknown origin and moved to an Appendix.

A male shot on the Diana River (26.92°N, 89.03°E), Jalpaiguri District, northern Bengal in 1952, is widely believed to be from a feral population (Daniel 1957) that might have been once established, but has now died out (Choudhury 2009b questions the feral population theory). Further northwards, an individual was kept in captivity at the Rumtek Monastery (27.28°N, 88.56°E) in Sikkim until the early 1990s; the bird had apparently been brought across from Tibet (McGowan *et al.* 1999), based on a verbal communication from Usha Lachungpa in 1997) and was more likely to be of captive origin. In this regard, reports of Green Peafowl from two counties in south-eastern Tibet, by Yin Binggao & Liu Wulin (1993) were considered doubtful by Li Zhu-mei in McGowan & Garson (1995). [These two 'Tibetan counties', namely, Mêdog and Cona, fall across eastern and western Arunachal Pradesh, India.]

Higgins (1934) shot the male of a pair on 28 January 1928 in the extreme northern part of the Manipur Valley, at the same spot where he reportedly saw a hen some two or three years earlier; he added that the species was "practically extinct" in Manipur by then. The whereabouts of this specimen is, however, unknown; yet, a male of this species is sufficiently distinctive for a reliable collector to identify with certainty – and this is considered here as the only definite report for Manipur. The slim chance of the individual being a feral bird exists, but the locality of its sighting is very close to its known range in Myanmar and hence the feral possibility is discounted here. Choudhury (2009b) reproduced a photograph of a Green Peafowl that was injured by either a snare or slingshot, from Mizoram in 2007; but no further information is available as to the exact origin of the bird. In recent times, Choudhury (1992; 1998; 2005; 2009a, b) has documented several anecdotal reports of the species from north-eastern India, particularly Manipur and Mizoram, and claimed that the species has vanished from most parts of its known range in north-eastern India, mainly due to hunting (Choudhury 2007).

However, there seems to be no other independent record of the species from India, with known provenance, barring the male shot by Higgins in 1928, which is considered here for including it in the India Checklist.

Japanese Quail *Coturnix japonica*

Farm-bred individuals of this species have now become increasingly popular in the poultry industry across the region, where wild birds were believed to winter in eastern India in small numbers. Note that the legality of its trade in farmed individuals vis-à-vis Wild Life (Protection) Act of India 1972 was unclear until a recent clarification from the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change removed the farm-bred individuals from the purview of the Act's Schedules (Ahmed & Rahmani 2012; also see the Gazette of India #2765 dated 12 December 2013). Escapees, mostly reported as Common Quails *C. coturnix*, have been very difficult to assess and, even well documented records, with photographs, are not beyond suspicion as having escaped from quail farms. However, there is a definite record from Baghownie² (25.93°N, 86.05°E), Darbhanga District, Bihar, collected by C.M. Inglis on 23 February 1923 (YPM ORN

042102) that has been well accepted as a wild individual and we retain the species in the India Checklist based on the same.

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

The nearest distribution of its wild population is in Afghanistan where two races, *principalis* and *bianchii* occur, and in Myanmar where the race *elagans* occurs (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Within Indian limits, there were attempts to introduce it in Himachal Pradesh, but the population did not survive. Hence, we do not consider this species for the main checklist and it is relegated to Appendix I.

Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*

When Trivedi & Trivedi (2018) and Patel & Raol (2018) independently reported a single Namaqua Dove from Gujarat, it was widely thought to be a cage escapee. However, further research, as documented by the editors of *Flamingo*, brought out other possibilities like ship assistance and natural vagrancy. The species has recently spread northwards of its normal range in Africa, occupying recently transformed agricultural landscape, and is also spreading eastwards into Iran, with an additional record from offshore Pakistan. Ship assistance was also considered, particularly in the wake of the record from Pakistan, but was discarded as a remote possibility without further discussion. The species is found in the pet trade in Gujarat, but the age of the bird and the state of its plumage discounted the possibility of it being a cage escapee. While there is some reticence in accepting this record, the pattern of its colonisation of the Middle East suggests this to be a case of genuine vagrancy and we retain it in the India Checklist.

Blue-throated Bee-eater *Merops viridis*

Manekkara (2016) presented reasons for treating it as a genuine wild vagrant, rather than a cage escapee, and these have not been challenged. Our decisions in this paper do not relate to these arguments and the decision to retain this species in the India Checklist stays.

Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*

The report by Bharti (2017) was analysed by the editors of *Flamingo*, who concluded it was a wild vagrant. They compared that report with that of the Woodchat Shrike *L. senator* (Nandgaonkar 2013), that has a similar range and migration route. There is a possibility, that the bird was an escapee from an aviary in Gujarat, where affluent hobbyists are known to keep exotic bird species as pets. However, evidence to the contrary is so overwhelming, in terms of its geographic range, possible vagrancy, and migration that its being an escapee can be safely discounted; hence the species is retained in the India Checklist.

Pied Crow *Corvus albus*

Saikia & Goswami (2017) argued that the most likely origin of this bird [2] was ship-assistance, and considered the possibilities of natural vagrancy or captive origins remote. We (in an editor's note) decided to keep it out of the India Checklist until a clear policy was in place for handling species of unknown origin. Subsequent to deliberations with experts, we agree with Saikia &

² There are several places with the name 'Baghownie' in the erstwhile Darbhanga District; however, going by the writings of Inglis (1901), what is referred here is most likely the one near the Baheri village cluster, and not the one near Tirut in Madhubani District (then a sub-division of Darbhanga District) (Nachiket Kelkar, *in litt.*, e-mail dated 08 December 2014).



Pranjal J. Salkia

2. Pied Crow from Jodhpur that was reported in August 2017 (see IB 13 (6): 147–149) was not considered for 'India Checklist' due to lack of a clear framework in dealing with records of dubious origin, particularly where ship assistance is involved. With this new framework where we consider ship assistance in par with natural vagrancy, this species is accepted into the 'India Checklist'.

Goswami (2017) that the particular bird would most likely have been brought to Indian coasts as a stowaway on a ship(s), as has been known to occur for other corvids; in conformity with our revised policy, of keeping ship-assisted individuals as true vagrants, we add this species to the India Checklist.

Variable Sunbird *Cinnyris venustus*

Report of the first male Variable Sunbird by Jeetu Jam from Jamnagar, Gujarat, in September 2009 gave rise to several theories of its origin: cage escapee, ship assistance, and nomadic migration. However, Ganpule (2017) decided to keep it out of the Gujarat State checklist for want of clarity on its provenance. However, eight years later, another male, differently plumaged, was photographed in Gir National Park, Gujarat, in February 2018 (Devmurari 2018). These records were re-evaluated by the editors of *Flamingo*, who discussed all the three possibilities, and accepted the species for the state checklist, with the proviso that these records will be subject to re-evaluation when more information is available.

The cage escapee theory was discounted, as this species was not known from any captive facility in the state. Interestingly, amongst all sunbirds of the world, the Variable Sunbird is the most popular pet despite the difficulties of managing captive sunbirds (Rippenburg 1991). Long-distance migration seemed equally remote, as no species in this family is known to undertake intercontinental migration across the sea, though short distance nomadism/movement is shown by some species, including

Variable Sunbird. Ship assistance, [that too in both these disjunct cases], also seemed unlikely for a sunbird considering the long voyage from any African port to India. So, we treat these couple of records as 'of unknown origin' and the species is, therefore relegated to Appendix II.

Java Sparrow *Lonchura oryzivora*

Though it was an introduced species, Ali & Ripley (1987), Grimmett *et al.* (2011), and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) include it in the Indian avifauna based on presumed naturalised populations in Colombo, Kolkata, and Chennai. This is a popular cage bird that escaped into the wild, and reports of its occurrence from near Chennai, India, in the wild, date back to the nineteenth century (Jerdon 1863). Similar reports were also found in early works like Oates (1889), Wait (1925), and Baker & Inglis (1930). Another significant report from 1931 was of a presumably breeding flock found near Agarpara railway station (22.68°N, 88.39°E) near Kolkata, West Bengal, (Law 1932). Under the same note, the editors added that a nesting pair of Java Sparrows was reported from Pune in the *Girl Guides Magazine* of 1928. Saxena & Parihar (1999)

report that there were no recent instances of its occurrence in Kolkata, indicating that the local population had perished. It was once collected in the Gujrat District of northern Pakistan in 1937. Though it was reported several times, in the wild, from Sri Lanka, breeding around Colombo (Legge 1880; Wait 1925), up to 1966 or 1967 (Phillips 1976), it has been removed from Sri Lanka's avifauna, as there is no surviving population of this introduced species (Warakagoda & Sirivardana 2009; Ceylon Bird Club 2010–2013).

Today, no viable local population is extant anywhere in India, or in South Asia and it must be assumed that the historical, introduced populations were not sufficiently naturalised to become a part of Indian avifauna. The species therefore continues to be excluded from the India Checklist, and is moved to Appendix I.

Handling Indian state checklists

After the authors of the 'Goa Checklist' (Baidya & Bhagat 2018) desired that the *Indian BIRDS* website host their published checklist and online updates, we realised that state checklists based on the India Checklist may benefit from the addition of some key indicators on threat categories, legal status, and endemism of bird species. To cater to these requirements, we bring in five new columns to the India Checklist, as outlined below.

1. IUCN threat category

While we continue to publish the Red List of Indian avifauna based

on the annual global assessment by IUCN-BirdLife International as a separate file (Praveen *et al.* 2018b), we will now insert a column in the India Checklist indicating the current IUCN Red List status of each species.

2. Wild Life (Protection) Act of India, 1972 (WPA) Schedules

All species that are listed under various schedules of the Wild Life (Protection) Act of India 1972 shall be specifically marked in the India Checklist with their corresponding Schedule. Note, the taxonomy used by the Act is remarkably different from the one we use today in India Checklist, and as such some of our assessments may be open to re-interpretation.

3. CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) Appendices

All species that are listed under the various Appendices of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) shall be specifically marked with their corresponding category. This will be updated annually for any changes effected by CITES periodically.

4. CMS (Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals) Appendices

All species that are listed under the various Appendices of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals shall be specifically marked with their corresponding category. This will be updated annually for any changes effected by CMS periodically.

5. Endemism

While the India Checklist already has a column indicating if a species is endemic to India as a country, we will now incorporate information on endemism to different bio-geographical regions of the country as well. In doing so, we aim to adopt the following principles:

- For bio-geographical regions of India, we will largely adopt the concepts of 'Endemic Bird Areas' (*henceforth*, EBA) and 'Secondary Areas' (*henceforth*, SA) as defined by Stattersfield *et al.* (2018) with some modifications for the sake of clarity and convenience to keep the endemic avifauna mutually exclusive. While BirdLife International's original classification, at the global level, allowed an endemic species to be shared between two or more Endemic Areas, we will redefine EBAs/SAs so that any ambiguity on shared endemic species is removed; for example, we intend to merge the Andaman and Nicobar EBAs as one unit, contra BirdLife International, and rename their 'Eastern Andhra Pradesh' to 'Southern Andhra Pradesh.' See full list in Table 3.
- Species that are endemic to a biogeographic region but not to India, (as the region straddles neighbouring countries), will be marked as endemic in the Checklist (e.g., Chestnut-backed Laughingthrush *Garrulax nuchalis* that occurs in north-eastern India and northern Myanmar). It is also to be noted here that any attempt to extract endemic species of such trans-boundary biogeographic regions from the India Checklist may not necessarily yield a complete list, as some species endemic to that EBA may be absent from Indian

limits (e.g. White-browed Nuthatch *Sitta victoriae* in the Eastern Himalayas EBA is only found in Myanmar).

- EBAs that nearly, or just, abut the political boundaries of India are not included here, even if small local populations of some species endemic to those EBAs existed within Indian limits (e.g., Yunnan Nuthatch *S. yunnanensis* endemic to the Yunnan mountains occurs in extreme north-eastern India).
- The presence of a small, isolated population of a species outside an EBA is, in itself, not a reason to strip off the endemic status of the species (e.g., Nilgiri Wood Pigeon *Columba elphinstonii* of the Western Ghats EBA has small isolated populations in the Southern Deccan Plateau EBA).
- Further, species that are only breeding endemics and migrate to elsewhere in the country (or outside) are not listed as endemic to the EBA (e.g., Kashmir Flycatcher *Ficedula subrubra* of the Western Himalayas EBA migrates to southern India and Sri Lanka).

Table 3. List of endemic regions in India Checklist

No	Endemic regions	No of species
1	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	27
2	Assam Plains	3
3	Central Indian Forests	1
4	Southern Andhra Pradesh	1
5	Eastern Himalayas	22
6	Indus Plains	1
7	Northern Myanmar lowlands	1
8	Southern Deccan Plateau	1
9	Western Ghats	25
10	Western Himalayas	9

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