collected by S. D. Ripley in Nagaland on 03 December 1950 (Yale Peabody Museum 2017), and the other (UMMZ birds #178643) collected by Walter Koelz in Karong, Manipur, on 23 November 1950 (University of Michigan Museum of Zoology 2019). A search of images posted on www.orientalbirdimages.org and specimens collected on portal.vertnet.org indicate that while *dabryi* has been recorded in China and Thailand, *isolata* has been recorded in Myanmar, and Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, and Mizoram in India. Therefore, it seems that during its winter/seasonal movements, the distribution of *dabryi* may be limited to an area where it meets *isolata*: south of the Brahmaputra in India on the west, and Myanmar to the east. We could not trace any photographs of this race from India, and hence ours appears to be a first record after nearly 70 years from India.

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Reference

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Asian Desert Warbler Sylvia nana in Lava, West Bengal
On 25 October 2019, I visited Lava (27.01°N, 88.63°E; Kalimpong District, West Bengal) to photograph a few specific species of birds. Souvik Deb Nath, Rishov Pal, and I were busy on the Lavadam Road, photographing birds in a narrow creek, when I saw a movement on the ground and spotted a small bird. It was not at all shy and I took a single photograph [234]. It had a yellow iris and orbital ring, and a rufous rump and tail. At that time, we were not sure about the species and thought it was either a Desert Wheatear Oenanthe deserti or a Lesser Whitethroat Sylvia curruca. Suddenly the bird landed right in front of us and I was able to take more pictures [235]. Later, with the help of Sandeep Chakraborty, Kanad Baidya, and Biswapriya Rahut we figured out that it was an Asian Desert Warbler S. nana. Identification is easy as there are no similar species with such a distinct white eye-ring, yellow iris, and rufous tail.

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Common Merganser Mergus merganser specimen shot at Isarda Dam, Tonk District, Rajasthan, and its status in peninsular India
The Common Merganser Mergus merganser is a fish-eating diver and pursues prey with great agility. It is long-bodied and streamlined, with a long, narrow, hooked red bill that has toothlike lamellae along its cutting edges, enabling a better grip of its main prey, fish (Mullaney et al. 1999). It obtains its food by diving from the water’s surface, swimming with its head underwater until it detects prey, which it pursues underwater (Kear 2005). It is a partial migrant, with birds moving away from areas where rivers and major lakes freeze in the winter, but resident where waters remain open. Northern breeding populations are fully migratory (Snow & Perrins 1998) although breeders in temperate regions are sedentary or only travel short distances (del Hoyo et
Correspondence

Outside of its breeding season the species is typically found in small parties, with groups of up to 70 individuals feeding together on shoals of fish during winter (Kear 2005).

It is a winter visitor to the Indian Subcontinent, rare in northwestern India and Nepal, and fairly common in the Himalayan foothills. Ali & Ripley (1978) stated that the nominate race has been taken in winter in Sind, the Makran coast, Uttar Pradesh, Mumbai, Raipur, and north-eastern Assam, but the status of the two races is uncertain within the Indian Subcontinent. There are two recent records from Bangladesh (Rahi et al. 2014).

A Common Merganser pair was sighted by local people who had gone fishing to Isarda Dam (26.10°N, 76.00°E) in Tonk District, Rajasthan, on 31 December 2017. They fired a shotgun on the pair and killed the male (most of the red in the bill changed to black after death) [236].

Curious to know what they had bagged they took it to my old friend, Aziz Mian, a scion of the erstwhile royal family of Tonk and veteran shikari, who identified it as a male Common Merganser. However, for confirmation he sent the images of the dead bird to me, which I confirmed. At my behest Aziz Mian noted the features of the specimen; extent of black on mantle, grey on lower back and rump, and colour of underparts. He was of the opinion that the specimen was the Central Asian comatus (=orientalis).

Status in Rajasthan and Chambal Valley

Though it has not been reported from Rajasthan in any contemporary work (Ali & Ripley 1978; Grimmett et al. 1998 & 2011; Kazmierczak 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005, 2012), the sighting and killing of the bird at Isarda Dam did not surprise me as the Central Asian comatus breeding in Tibet, the Himalayas, Altai, and Afghanistan, mostly resident, winters inland ‘as far south as the Godaveri’ River (Dewar 1923), and the mouth of Indus River and its tributaries (Roberts 1991) including rivers of northern India and Myanmar (Madge & Burn 1988). A bird was shot in ‘December last [=1877]’ Ajmer. Hume (1878) mentions that, ‘in December last Captain O’Moore Creagh shot a fine male Merganser or Goosander (Mergus castor) near Ajmere [=Ajmer]’. This was subsequently recorded, as such, but without the date by Oates (1899), Salvadori (1895), and Baker (1921). However, there seems to be no specific record of this bird in later works. Even Baker (1929: 472–473) states that in winter it occurs on ‘the plains immediately adjacent’ [=north India]. Thereafter, the trail runs dry and later works miss out the Ajmer record. I have not been able to trace a reason for this.

Moreover, during the inaugural angling competition at Bisalpur Dam, Tonk District, a local shikari informed me that a small flock of eight to ten birds was sighted at Gehlod Ghat, Banas River, in

Records of Common Merganser from Chota Nagpur plateau

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Site/Locality</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chybassa [=Chabasa]</td>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
<td>1842</td>
<td>Blyth (1842); Jerdon (1864)</td>
<td>Procured by Tickell; probably on the Roro River.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bararkur [=Barakkur]</td>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>~1869</td>
<td>Parker (1874)</td>
<td>A male shot by Robert Campbell and seen by Parker from a ‘great many, some hundreds’ from a large lake ‘7 miles’ from ‘Barakkur’ on the Grand Trunk Road.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sambilpur</td>
<td>Odisha</td>
<td>Pre-1873</td>
<td>Hume (1873)</td>
<td>About nine specimens in the collections of F. R. Blewitt, probably from Mahanadi River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Arang, Raipur</td>
<td>Chattisgarh</td>
<td>Pre-1874</td>
<td>Ball (1874), Salvadori (1895)</td>
<td>On Mahanadi River and part of Hume’s collection in the NHM, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Siruguja</td>
<td>Chattisgarh</td>
<td>Pre-1874</td>
<td>Ball (1874)</td>
<td>On the Rihand [=River], seen by V. Ball.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Palamu [=Palamow]</td>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
<td>Pre-1874</td>
<td>Ball (1874)</td>
<td>A specimen shot by Captain Money, which V. Ball felt does not accord well with Jerdon’s description.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bankura [=Bankurah]</td>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>Pre-1878</td>
<td>Ball (1878)</td>
<td>Probably on Dwarakeswar River.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bardhaman [=Bardwan]</td>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>Pre-1878</td>
<td>Ball (1878)</td>
<td>Probably the dozen to 30 individuals seen by Ball (1874) on the Subarnarekha River.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Manbhum</td>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
<td>Pre-1878</td>
<td>Ball (1878)</td>
<td>Probably the dozen to 30 individuals seen by Ball (1874) on the Subarnarekha River.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Dhalbhum</td>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>Pre-1881</td>
<td>Hume &amp; Marshall (1881)</td>
<td>Probably the dozen to 30 individuals seen by Ball (1874) on the Subarnarekha River.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ib River (a tributary of Mahanadi)</td>
<td>Odisha</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Abdulali (1968)</td>
<td>Ruler of Gangapur shot one from a flock of 15 birds on the Ib, a tributary of Mahanadi.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
early December 2017. He promised to inform me in case the flock was located again. Unfortunately, he did not see the flock again at the site.

Further downstream, after the Banas River joins the Chambal River, there are a couple of records from Chambal Wildlife Sanctuary, Dholpur District, Rajasthan: of two on 08 December 2010 (Guy 2010), and one on 14 February 2005 (Prince 2005). Six further records support this, from along the Chambal River, Agra District, Uttar Pradesh, during the 2005–2011 period (Gast 2010; Lamb 2005; Martin 2005; Surya 2009; Hochgraf 2010; Dreyer 2011; Jannes 2011). Thus, this species winters along the Chambal River and its tributaries in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

Status in western India

There is also an old record from Kachchh, Gujarat, wherein Stoliczka (1872) was ‘tolerably certain’ that he found this species at a ‘large lake near Dinodhar hill or a lake southwest of Chavvar range.’ Ganpule (2017) accepts this report as the first for Gujarat despite it being devoid of details. E. H. Aitken shot one individual in Shewa, just across the Mumbai [=Bombay] Harbour in 1886. However, the latter’s correct identity, contra Red-breasted Merganser *M. serrator* was debated (see Oates 1899) while Baker (1921) discounted Oates’ doubts, but gave no reason for doing so. Prasad (2004) quoted Abdulali (1981) who listed it only as *Mergus* sp. Recent records of Red-breasted Merganser from the Mumbai region additionally cast doubt over this old record. Apart from these two uncertain records, there are no other claims from western India (www.orientalbirdimages.org).

Status in Chota Nagpur Plateau south of the Ganga River

Apart from this region, it has been reported/procured at least 14 times from the eastern parts of peninsular India—i.e in the Chota Nagpur plateau region: these sites now form the states of Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh (Table 1). Surprisingly, very few of these nineteenth century records have made it into the maps of contemporary works like Grimmett et al. (2008), and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), and I take this opportunity to provide fuller details of all such historical records. It is surprising that there has been only one twentieth century record from this region since then and one recent record from Chapgoan (20.58°N, 81.51°E), Chhattisgarh, of a single on 14 December 2019 in the twenty-first century (Naidu 2019).

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A dark colour-aberrant Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus*

On 05 December 2019, BV was on one of his routine birding trips along the beaches of Chennai specifically looking for shore- and seabirds. He noticed two unusually dark-coloured Grey Francolins *Francolinus pondicerianus* on Thiruvanmiyur Beach (12.97°N, 80.26°E). These birds looked almost black [237]. The birds ran into the bushes and disappeared while he barely managed to take a photograph.


Mahabal et al. (2016) mention one instance of a dark-coloured Grey Francolin reported from Surendranagar of Gujarat in 2010 (Roy 2011). Ours might be the first instance of this colour aberration in Grey Francolin from southern India.

**References**


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**Tundra Swan *Cygnus columbianus* in Kaziranga National Park, Assam**

On 23rd December 2019, at 1500 h I saw a solitary Tundra Swan *Cygnus columbianus* in Daphlong Beel (26.60°N, 93.20°E) in the central range of Kaziranga National Park, Assam. On the same day, Bablu, Takib, Parag Hazarika, and Pallab Saikia also saw it. Next day it attracted more birders and was photographed [238]. It was initially thought to be a Whooper Swan *C. cygnus* but when the images were circulated over social media, the correct identification as Tundra Swan (the Eurasian race *bewickii*) got established. The key identifiers were: yellow bill patch was not pointed or triangular as in a Whooper, the head was rounded unlike flattened and triangular in a Whooper, and the neck was relatively short. The bird stayed for four weeks, which enabled birdwatchers from around the country to visit and see this rarity. It was last recorded on 26 January 2020. Most of the time it was spotted in Daphlong Beel, and also in Donga Beel in the western range of Kaziranga National Park.

238. Tundra Swan in Kaziranga National Park, Assam.

The Tundra Swan is a rarity in India. There are two documented historical specimens: A *bewickii* subspecies from Haryana, and a *jankowskyi* subspecies (not always recognised) from Gujarat (Praveen et al. 2014). A photograph of a swan taken in Gandhigram, Changlang District, Arunachal Pradesh, in December 2008 was believed to be this species. Two sight records of flocks of swans from the same area, in 1998 and 1999, though claimed to be Whoopers, could also have been this species (see Praveen et al. 2014 for details of all past records of swans from India).

**References**


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**Gould’s Shortwing *Heteroxenicus stellatus* and Chestnut-crowned Bush Warbler *Cettia major* in the Great Himalayan National Park, Himachal Pradesh**

On 15 June 2019, at 0915 h, while birding in the Great Himalayan National Park (hencforth, GHNP) in Kullu District, Himachal Pradesh, at 3,500 m asl, two kilometers from Gumtrao, on the trail from Gumtrao to Dhel (31.72°N 77.48°E), we observed one adult male Gould’s Shortwing *Heteroxenicus stellate*, and two Chestnut-crowned Bush Warblers *Cettia major*. The two species were sighted c. 100 m away from each other.