When AD discussed this sighting with Kanad Baidya, we realized that it is a rarity in West Bengal. We revisited that place in next few days, regularly, and the bird was still there and was last spotted by BM on 06 January 2019.

The White-capped Bunting breeds from the mountains of Central Asia up to Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh, while it winters mostly in north-western India, apart from Pakistan and southern Afghanistan. The known eastern limits of the bird in India are from Madhya Pradesh, north-eastern Maharashtra, and central Uttar Pradesh; and Nepal (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; eBird 2020; Madge 2020). We are not aware of any records from West Bengal or eastern India: Bihar, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, or Odisha, nor from further east in north-eastern India or Bangladesh.

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Records of Merlin Falco columbarius in Himachal Pradesh

The Merlin Falco columbarius is a small, dashing, sexually dimorphic falcon, with short pointed wings. It has Holarctic, northern Neotropical and marginally Indomalayan distribution (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001; Warkentin et al. 2020). This short note describes Merlin records from Himachal Pradesh.

1. On 25 February 2009, at 0845 h, during his first visit to Nagrota Surian, Pong Lake, Himachal Pradesh (32.03°N, 76.06°E; c.420 m asl), CA saw an unfamiliar falcon that was much smaller than a Peregrine Falcon F. peregrinus [72]. It was perched on a stone, in the vast flats around the lake. At the slightest disturbance it took a short flight to settle on a nearby, similar, low perch. It had blue-grey upperparts and whitish underparts that were heavily streaked. Its moustachial stripe was weak, which differentiated it from an Eurasian Hobby F. subbuteo. The limited amount of rufous on head and different undertail markings, differentiated it from a Red-necked Falcon F. chicus. It was identified as a male Merlin. It was, overall, a dark individual, with darkish blue-grey upperparts.

2. On 06 November 2011, at 0830 h, CA saw a falcon in recently ploughed fields, around the lake, at Nagrota Surian [73, 74, 75]. It had a greyish-blue crown with some rufous. The posterior part of weak supercilium, nape, ear coverts, weak moustachial stripe, and sides of throat were rufous-brown with fine, dark streaking. The upperparts were greyish-blue while the underparts, excluding the throat, were pale rufous with prominent dark rufous-brown streaking. The throat was whitish with fine streaking. It was initially identified as an adult male Merlin. Later, Prasad Ganpule pointed out that it was, in fact, a blue-tinged female because of the multiple broad bands in tail, face pattern, and the marking on underparts (in litt., e-mail dated 14 May 2020).
3. Suryawanshi (2014) observed and photographed a male Merlin, from a distance, at Thinam, Spiti, Lahaul & Spiti District (32.31°N, 77.59°E; c.4,100 m asl) on 13 September 2013. It was a clear day and the bird was flying at a low altitude. The brown upperparts and boldly streaked underparts could be easily noted since the bird was flying at an altitude of about 100 m above the ground level. The face was rather plain and no striking features were noted. It was identified as female Merlin.

Ganpule & Bhatt (2013) reported *pallidus* as the commonest race in the Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat; but at Pong Lake, the observed individuals didn’t look like this race, as they were darker, with strongly marked underparts (in both male and female). The female seen by CA [73,74] is particularly interesting as the blue-grey upperside, the strongly patterned underparts, and the tail barring is suggestive of *aesalon* or of *aesalon*-type; the racial identification of other individuals seen here was not attempted by us as a detailed paper on the racial identification of Merlins in India is under preparation (Prasad Ganpule, in litt., e-mail dated 28 May 2020).


The neighbouring states of Punjab, and Haryana, and the Union Territories of Jammu, and Kashmir are in its regular wintering range, and in Ladakh, it is a rare passage migrant (Pfister 2004; Naoroji 2006). Mohan & Sondhi (2017) did not mention the species from Uttarakhand, but, there is one sight record from Kanchala, Amrutganga Valley, Kedarnath, Rudraprayag District at 2,600 m asl (Dixit et al. 2016; Viral Joshi, pers comm., dated 26 May 2020).

The record of Merlin from Pong Lake, on 25 February 2009, is probably the first properly documented record of this species from Himachal Pradesh. All other records of Merlin in Himachal Pradesh have been noted during its migration, except for the first sighting, which was in February, and could be treated as a late winter sighting. These few records suggest that the Merlin is a rare passage migrant in the state.

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First record of the Chinese Rubythroat *Calliope tschebaiwei* in Uttarakhand, India

The New Forest campus of the Forest Research Institute (FRI) is located in the Dehradun Valley in Uttarakhand. It is rich in avian diversity, including both migratory as well as resident birds. Its avian checklist stands at a phenomenal 252 species within its small area of 4.5 sq. km (Kumar 2018). New Forest is surrounded by extensive human inhabitation, except for a weak linkage to degraded forests on its northern side, at the base of the Mussoorie Range of the outer Himalaya. A tributary of Yamuna River runs through its north-western boundary.

On 17 February 2020, HC was birding in New Forest, near the rivulet, in an area dominated by dense thickets of *Lantana camara* (30.354°N, 77.988°E; c.610 m asl). At 0857 h, HC heard a bird singing. On approaching the singing bird, he spotted a Rubythroat perched on the branch of *Lantana camara* [76]. It had a striking red throat, bordered by a black breast band. It had prominent white supercilium and moustachial stripe. The