

More visitors ...

On day four, being the last day on the ship, I was up early and was scanning the vast open seascape hoping to see pelagic birds. The many leaf-warblers seen the previous day appeared to have gone except for a lone Greenish Leaf-Warbler that was still on deck. There was neither any sign of the rail nor the waterhens; maybe they were still there among the heavy machinery at the rear end of the ship. The pipit was still there. There now appeared to be another pipit, though slightly larger, and paler, but could not identify it. At around 0800 hrs a very familiar-looking bird flew out from the side of the ship. It was the Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*, yet another bird to the list of surprises. However, that was not all, a little later I heard screeching calls coming from atop a tall pole near the deck. A Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*! There were two others around, and one of them looked like *L. c. lucionensis*. Following this, and in the midst of the bird sightings, I managed to spot a single olive ridley sea turtle surface at 0840 hrs, and about 200 m from the ship. The turtle appeared coming from the west, from the direction of the Orissa coastline, and was likely on its post breeding migration. While the turtle was going south I wondered where the birds seen on the ship were heading, whether they were going south or were they on their way north. The leaf-warblers, reed-warbler, Brown Shrike were definitely heading north for they are winter visitors to the Indian Subcontinent. While, the direction the Pond Heron, White-breasted Waterhen, Slaty-breasted Rail, Paddyfield Pipit were heading

in is a mystery, for they are widespread residents of the Indian Subcontinent.

Later that afternoon, while waiting for the chopper to arrive for my return to the mainland, I spotted a yellow-coloured bird at around 1540 hrs, flying up from the ship and perching on top of a tall pole. As if the list of surprises was not enough, here was yet another addition—a male Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*, a resident of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and a winter visitor to the mainland.

From the number of birds recorded on the ship it appeared that the ship was an important refueling point for them. I still wonder why terrestrial birds would fly 100 km into the Bay of Bengal, away from the mainland, or nearly 900 km from the northern part of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, the closest landmass in the eastward direction. In March 2007, during offshore surveys for olive ridley turtles, closer to the Orissa coast, I came across a Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops* nearly 5 km out at sea. The bird was flying low and heading landward. Why would a slow flier such as the Hoopoe fly out to sea at all? And from where exactly this bird had set out may never be known.

Soon the chopper arrived and I was on my way back. Looking through the window at the open waters of the Bay of Bengal, I wondered at the indomitable spirit of the birds that cross such vast open seascapes en route to their breeding and wintering grounds every year.

New easterly locations of Impeyan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus* from Arunachal Pradesh

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Impeyan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus* is a fairly common galliform distributed in the Himalaya, from Kashmir to Arunachal Pradesh (Ali & Ripley 1987; Sathyakumar & Kaul 2007). In Arunachal Pradesh, it is known from two disjunct locations, western areas in Tawang and West Kameng districts, and in the east, in the Dibang valley, and Lower Dibang valley districts (Choudhury 2006). The 'gap' area in Arunachal Pradesh may not be so but for the paucity of field works in remote mountains of upper areas of Siang and Subansiri basins (Choudhury 2008). The maps in Grimmett *et al.* (1998), Kazmierczak (2000), Choudhury (2006), and Sathyakumar & Kaul (2007) also largely showed the same general area for the species. Here I report of new easterly locations, some very close to the India–Myanmar border.

While on a field trip to Anjaw district in eastern Arunachal Pradesh in December 2008, I observed evidences of Impeyan, and Sclater's *L. sclateri* Monal at a number of places. These were mostly in the form of feathers, tail, and crest—all very distinctly characteristic of the species. Since both are sympatric in the area, these features help segregate them. The local villagers, especially

the hunters, are familiar with these species, and have assigned different names to them.

Both the monal spp., were recorded near Chaglagam (28°18'N 96°33'E), Walong (28°08'N 97°01'E), and Kibithu (28°18'N 97°01'E). At Walong, Dong, Kharoti, and Kibithu, hunters reported that they shot both species from both sides of the Lohit River. In all these places the birds were shot from the higher elevation areas nearby. Shooting, and trapping with snares, mostly take place in winter when the monal descend to lower altitudes, owing to snowfall in higher elevations. These records have extended the known eastern range of Impeyan Monal in India from 96°15'E to 97°20'E up to the India–Myanmar border (Fig. 1). In case of Sclater's Monal, the range has already been extended recently (Choudhury 2006).

There is a historic record of Impeyan Monal from northern Myanmar (King *et al.* 1975). A major conservation issue in Walong–Kibithu area seemed to be the Myanmar poachers who regularly snared, and shot monal alongwith other species in Dichu reserved forest. These foreign poachers need to be apprehended, perhaps with the help of the paramilitary forces, and the army—as the area involved is located near the international boundary.

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Crest of Impeyan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus* is often kept as decoration item by hunters or other locals. One is seen here fixed on a red goral *Naemorhedus baileyi* head at Walong.



Tail of Impeyan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus* with that of a Kaley Pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos* and skin of a leopard cat *Prionailurus bengalensis* in a house at Walong.

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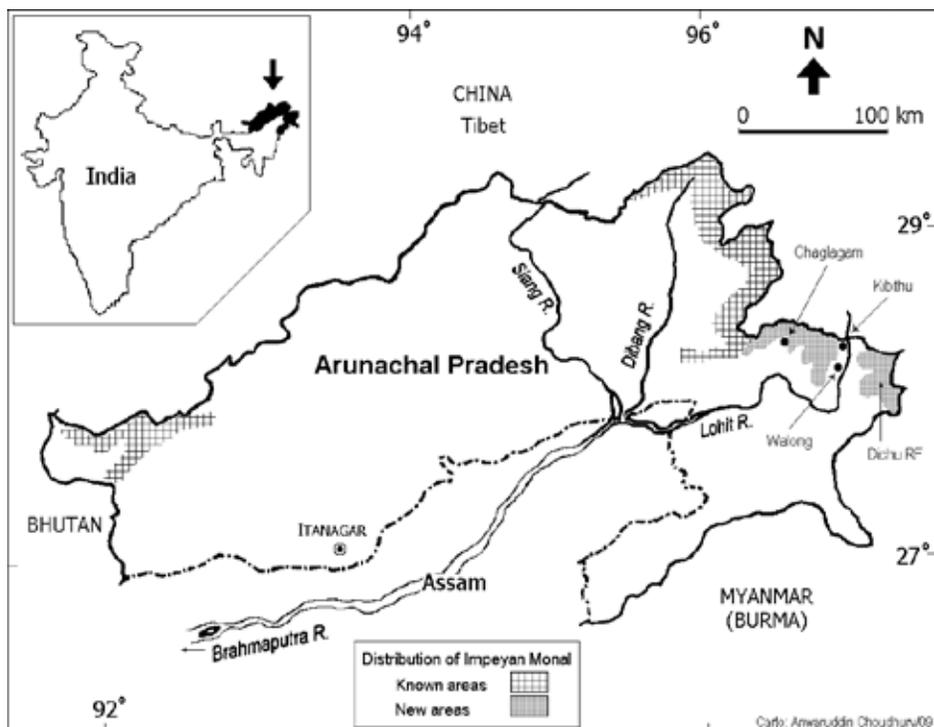


Fig. 1. Map of Arunachal Pradesh showing the range of Impeyan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus*.