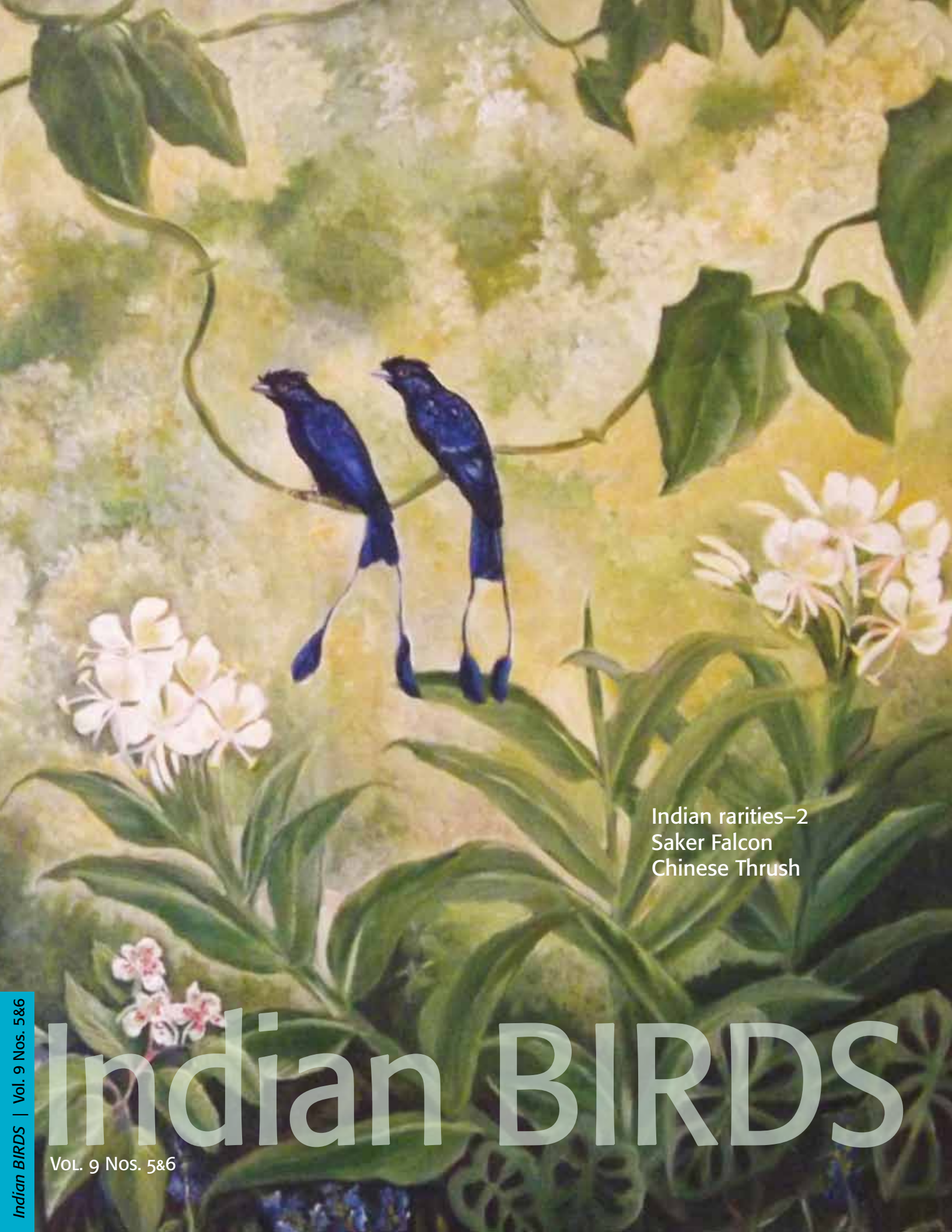

Indian rarities–2
Saker Falcon
Chinese Thrush

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Artist: Meena Subramaniam.

Notes on Indian rarities–2: Waterfowl, diving waterbirds, and gulls and terns

Praveen J., Rajah Jayapal & Aasheesh Pittie

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[Continued from *Indian BIRDS* 8 (5): 125.]

In this part, we present annotated notes on 36 species, from the following families:

- Anatidae (Swans, geese, and ducks)
- Podicipedidae (Grebes)
- Gaviidae (Loons)
- Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants)
- Laridae (Gulls and terns)

Table 1. Abbreviations used in the text

Abbreviations	Reference
AWC	Asian Waterbird Census (www.wetlands.org/awc)
BMNH	Natural History Museum, London (www.nhm.ac.uk)
BNHS	Bombay Natural History Society (http://www.bnhs.org)
BSA2	Rasmussen & Anderton (2012)
FMNH	Field Museum of Natural History (http://fieldmuseum.org)
Hbk	Ali & Ripley (2001)
OBI	Oriental Bird Images (www.orientalbirdimages.org)
ZSI	Zoological Survey of India (http://zsi.gov.in)

Methodology used in this paper is already described in Praveen *et al.* (2013); nonetheless, some basic criteria and key points in our methodology are summarised here as well. Specimens, and published photographs (in print or on the Internet), with well-established provenance followed by documented instances of birds in the hand, are given the highest priority in terms of reliability of a record. In the absence of such robust proof, detailed published notes are given preference over published / unpublished information that is found wanting in details. For this project, we follow Dickinson & Remsen (2013) for taxonomy and species sequence. In this series, we intend to provide concise accounts of rarities—species that do not have more than ten independently confirmed records, from India. These may sometimes include species not reported from India but listed in some checklists on the basis of reports from neighbouring countries. Wherever it is required to discuss the status of a species in other parts of South Asia, we have done so. For species with more than three confirmed records, a table is provided, and for species with more than five confirmed records, a distribution map is also provided. At the end of this series, an updated India Checklist, defined by political boundaries as recognised by the Government of India, will be compiled and published; this list will include all the species that have been reliably recorded, in an apparently wild state, in the country. In addition, species from naturalised populations, either established within the country or outside, from which individual birds sometimes straggle to the region would also be included in the Checklist. For this part of the series, we have excluded some anatids that have become rare in recent years having undergone a grave population decline, but were widely reported in India during the nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. This list includes White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*, Baikal Teal *Anas formosa*, Smew *Mergellus albellus*, Baer's Pochard *Aythya baeri*, and Pink-headed Duck *Rhodonessa caryophyllacea*, the last now probably locally extinct. Although these taxa fall outside the scope of this series by virtue of existence of over ten confirmed records from the country, each of them deserves separate documentation to assess their current rarity status even though most of them, being recognised as globally threatened, have already been covered in detail by Rahmani (2012). We also do not cover relatively rare and extremely localised species of terns that are often locally common in the region, namely Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* (Vengurla and Andamans), White-cheeked Tern *S. repressa* (Vengurla and Goa), and Black-naped Tern *S. sumatrana* (Andamans).

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* (J. F. Gmelin, 1789)

While BSA2 considered it a vagrant in the past, Hbk mentioned only a single sight report dated 11 November 1922, of an individual from Kasurdi [=Kesurdi], Pune–Solapur Road (18°28'N, 74°13'E), Maharashtra, India (Trevenen 1923; Prasad 2006). Original observations were sufficiently detailed for a clinching identification and the bird was thought to have been driven by 'severe storms in the north', though the author did recognise the possibility of the bird being an aviary/zoo escapee. The only other record from Indian Territory was of two birds collected in 1897 at Chilas (35°25'N, 74°05'E), Gilgit, Kashmir (McMahon 1899); but these specimens could not be traced though apparently many specimens listed by the author were examined at the Indian Museum. All wild specimens from the Indian Subcontinent in the collections of the BNHS (Abdulali 1968), the ZSI (Gopinathan Maheswaran, *pers. comm.*, June 2014), and the BMNH (Robert Prŷs-Jones, *pers. comm.*, September 2014) were from Pakistan, where it had occurred at least 15 times (Baker 1929) during cold winters (e.g., 1878, 1900, 1910, 1911). We include this species in the India Checklist based on the Kashmir specimens (though

untraceable, several specimens from Pakistan during the same period exist), while the bird from Maharashtra was also, in all probability, a wild one.

Tundra Swan *Cygnus columbianus* (Ord, 1815)

Hbk included two races, *C. c. bewickii*, and *C. c. jankowskyi*[1] (=*jankowskii*), from India based on specimens in BNHS (Abdulali 1968). However, BSA2 stated that *jankowskyi* was probably not a valid race, and Dickinson & Remsen (2013) also subsumed it within *bewickii*. Apart from a single juvenile specimen (#15241) in BNHS (Abdulali 1968), from Rajpur (29°04′N, 77°00′E) near Delhi (now in Haryana), there are no other claims of *bewickii* from India. There is confusion about this locality as the specimen is probably the same reported from 'Sutana about 45 miles north of Delhi' on 26 December 1937 (Lewis 1938; also see the editorial note therein). Rajpur is 73 km (~45 miles) north of Delhi while Sutana is further north by an additional 50 km. Incidentally, this record was shown on the Haryana–Rajasthan border in Grimmett *et al.* (1998) followed by Kazmierczak (2000), in an apparent transcription error (Tim Inskipp *pers. comm.* August 2014). K. S. Madansinhji recovered a live injured specimen in Bhuj (23°11′N, 69°39′E), Gujarat, on 09 April 1947; one of a pair seen in that locality for four–five days. This bird lived in captivity at the Mumbai Zoo till 14 April 1947 when it succumbed to injuries that were probably inflicted upon it by a crocodile (Ali 1947). This specimen (#15243), identified as *jankowskyi*, is now in the BNHS collection (Abdulali 1968). Two birds from Gandhigram (27°16′N, 96°54′E), Changlang District, Arunachal Pradesh, were tentatively identified as this species on 13 December 2008 (Srinivasan *et al.* 2010) though the photographs taken were inconclusive (Umesh Srinivasan, *pers. comm.,* August 2013); earlier, Singh (1999) had reported *C. cygnus* from the same neighbourhood. Apart from these records, a bird was observed very close to the Indian border, downstream of the Rapti- and Narayani Rivers in Nepal, on 23 February 1978 (Gooders 1979), which was the first well-documented record for Nepal. We include this species in the India Checklist based on the two specimens in the BNHS collection.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Hbk indicates less than a dozen records from the Indian Subcontinent, listing twentieth century records from Kashmir, Punjab, and Rajasthan. BSA2 does not mention any specific records. We include it in the India Checklist based on the two well-preserved specimen records and one recent photograph (**Table 2**).

Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis* (Pallas, 1769)

Hbk includes it based on three sighting reports; one from Madhya Pradesh and two from Assam. BSA2 lists it as hypothetical. After a visit to the Leiden [=Leyden] Museum, Edward Blyth in his notes on Indian birds (Blyth 1870) made a suggestion on a certain Indian specimen of this species. He referred to a probable record based on a group of four seen near Nagpur [=Nagpore] in the erstwhile Central Provinces (currently in Maharashtra, but erroneously stated as Madhya Pradesh in Hbk and BSA2) (Bertram 1836). The description is very unconvincing: 'I once, and only once, saw a very small wild goose, differing from both the above [Greylag Goose *Anser anser* and Bar-headed Goose *A. indicus*]. It was of a fine reddish brown throughout, (excepting a little variegation with white on the quill feathers,) with a crest of reddish feathers. This very lovely specimen, in company with three others only, came across me some fourteen years ago near Nagpore.' Surprisingly, Hume (1879) provided some support for this record; however, it was dismissed by Blanford (1898), and Finn (1915). We have also confirmed independently that such an Indian specimen does not exist now in Leiden Museum (Steven van der Mije, *pers. comm.*, April 2014). Baker (1904b) identified this from the description provided by M. S. Mondy [*sic.* Mundy] who saw four, on the banks of River Brahmaputra, along with Greylag Goose sometime in the 1904 winter. Though Baker mentions the observer took a, 'very careful note of its appearance', and provided a, 'minute description', these details are found wanting in his published note, apart from a mention of red on the neck. However, Baker later (1921, 1929) informed that Mundy saw only a 'single' bird, while he himself saw a 'flock of five' that went past his steamer while travelling on the Brahmaputra

Table 2. Whooper Swan records

Date	Location	Coordinates	Remarks	Reference
6 January 1900	Talwara on Beas River, Hoshiarpur, Punjab	31°57′N, 75°53′E	One shot from a flock of four, specimen (#22226) in the BNHS coll.	Aitken (1900); Osborn (1909)
1925	Khetri, Rajasthan	28°03′N, 75°47′E	A specimen (#15240) in the BNHS coll., in grey plumage	Baker (1929); Abdulali (1968)
19 February 1945	Dara Shikoh Bagh (=Badshahi Bagh), Srinagar, Kashmir	33°47′N, 75°06′E	A specimen shot by a local sportsman, examined by F. Ludlow, but probably not preserved and hence details unavailable for verification.	Ludlow (1945)
November 1998	Neo-Dehing River, Ramnagar, Arunachal Pradesh	27°10′N, 96°54′E	Sight report of two flocks of four and three birds. Reportedly, the birds readily took to wings when disturbed indicating the birds were not feral in origin. The fact that the birds were calling in flight eliminated Mute Swans. Yellow patch on the bill noted, but this could also have been *C. columbianus*, which is also possible in the north-east.	Singh (1999)
December 1999	Neo-Dehing River, Ramnagar, Arunachal Pradesh	27°10′N, 96°54′E	Sight report of three birds, no details available but probably same species as from 1998. Apparently village folk familiar with this bird and its arrival times every year. See under Tundra Swan for a record from a nearby site.	Singh (1999)
29 January 2013	Pong Dam, Himachal Pradesh	31°58′N, 75°56′E	Two birds well-photographed and seen by several birders at least till 12 February (Arora 2013)	Dhadwal (2013)

1. Original spelling as verified in Dickinson & Remsen, 2013.

in March 1907, contradicting his own earlier documentation. We, therefore, have apprehensions over the credibility of these sight-reports from Assam. A single bird was photographed on 13 March 2014 at Ganga Barrage (29°22′N, 78°02′E), Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh (Panwar & Panwar 2014), and should be treated as the first and the only well-documented record of this bird from the Indian Subcontinent. We include this species in the India Checklist based on this photographic record.

Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Hbk does not include this species while BSA2 treats it as hypothetical. The first claimed record of this goose, from India, was a mistaken partial albino Greylag Goose (BNHS Reg. # 15297) shot at Haigham Jheel, Kashmir, on 26 February 1950 (Editors 1950; Abdulali 1966). More recently, it was observed and photographed **[154, 155]** in January 1989 at Muli Reservoir (22°39′N, 71°30′E), Surendranagar District, Gujarat (Mundkur *et al.* 1992), along with Bar-headed Geese. Though photographs were not published then, photographic slides made at that time were sent to us by the author for re-examination; unfortunately the slides have now become worn out with time and the features are barely visible, yet, field notes published in detail leave little doubt as to the identity of the species. However, it is not clear if the bird was a vagrant from a truly wild or naturalised population, or an escapee from a captive facility.

Snow Geese breed in small colonies along the northern arctic shorelines from Chukotka in the Far East, westwards. The bulk of the breeders migrate to the Americas, with a very small population migrating to East Asia, at least as south as Poyang Lake (29°08′N, 116°22′E) (Markkola *et al.* 1999; Lindie 2012; Taej Mundkur, *pers. comm.,* August 2014,). It is possible that a stray wild bird from this wintering population could have moved to Tibet/Central Asia, where Bar-headed Geese would breed, joined them, and landed in India along with them.

Alternatively, a stray individual from the widely naturalised population of Snow Geese in the Western Palaearctic (Cramp 1985) could have been carried by Greylag Geese *A. a. rubriostris* to India. However, long-distance vagrancy is seldom observed in this naturalised population with the most remarkable one being only till Morocco across the Mediterranean Sea (Carboneras 1992). Interestingly, Askania-Nova Nature Reserve, Ukraine has a few semi-captive breeding birds that were originally brought from Wrangel [=Vrangel] Island, offshore Far Eastern Russia and ring-recoveries of birds from this population have been made in western Europe. However, Zubko *et al.* (1996) state that the birds of this stock apparently ceased to show any migratory behaviour by mid to late 1980s and nearly all the movements of the birds were westward with no eastward trend observed.

Another possibility is that the bird could be an escapee from captivity, as Snow Geese are a popular species in aviaries, menageries, and private collections, at least in Europe, and escapees from these facilities are not uncommon (Mike Prince, *pers. comm*., August 2014; Bill Harvey, *pers. comm*., August 2014). Though the species is not known to be kept in captivity, nor traded by aviculturists in India (Rajat Bhargava, *pers. comm*., September 2013), we are unable to completely rule out the presence of captive birds in private collections outside India including Tibet, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Middle East. Particularly interesting is the possibility of a Tibetan escapee, as carrier species for the Gujarat bird is assumed to be Bar-headed Geese that breed in Tibet (though it is not necessary that vagrants always need carrier taxa). Some of the Tibetan monasteries do keep captive animals and birds as pets, but mostly of local origin (rescued from the wild and rehabilitated) or common species in the pet trade.

As expert opinions are equally divided over these possibilities and in the absence of any further corroborative information that would give an edge to one theory over others, we conclude that the Gujarat bird, though identified correctly, is of unknown origin and therefore tentatively excluded from the India Checklist. We, however, wish to state that it would be maintained in the database in a separate category ('unknown origin') until there is evidence to the contrary.

154. Snow Goose at Muli Reservoir, Gujarat (extreme right)

Photos: Taej Mundkur

155. Snow Goose at Muli Reservoir, Gujarat (extreme right)

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus* Baillon, 1834

Ripley included it in the 1st ed., of his *Synopsis* (1961), but not the 2nd (1982). Hbk deleted it from the India list (*see* vol. 1: #76–77). BSA2 followed Hbk, but erred in its citation (2: 605), where 'HB 26' should have been *'Synopsis* (1961, p. 26)'. Baker's (1929) inclusion of this goose was challenged by Ticehurst (1930), and since then no conclusive evidence of its occurrence in India has emerged. Blyth identified it from a drawing of a specimen shot in the Punjab in 1843 (Jerdon 1864; Oates 1899), apparently by one Mr. Bartlett (Blyth 1852) [Baker (1929) erred in dating this reference of Blyth as 1849]. Gen. McLeod shot one from a gaggle of 20 near Kahnuwan [=Kanawan] Lake, Gurdaspur, Punjab, in 1853 (McLeod 1881).

Col. Irby saw a specimen killed at Alumbagh, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, in January 1858 (Irby 1861; Reid 1881), which is, perhaps, now in the Lucknow State Museum, as two specimens are listed in its collection catalogue (Reid 1886; Hume 1887). A. O. Hume shot two birds in 1864 on the Yamuna River, in Etawah District (Hume 1873); but these were not critically examined then, nor were their skins preserved (Hume 1879). Baker's comment 'In 1879 Hume again records it' (Baker 1929) was probably an error as Hume (1879) was only commenting on these birds shot in Etawah in 1864 and this record did not figure in any of Hume's writings. Col. Graham believed it to be 'not uncommon in Assam' (Hume 1879), but this must have been some other species as nobody else, since then, has come across it in that state (Hume 1888). Blanford (1898) treated all the nineteenth century claims with considerable doubt due to the lack of any preserved skins. Baker (1929) listed them all but indicated that most of them could have referred to some form of Bean Goose *A. fabalis* (see under that species) and the only record which applied beyond doubt, according to Baker, was of a goose shot from a dozen (Baker 1921) by one of his collectors in Surma [=Sarrma] Valley, Cachar, Assam. The bird had a smaller bill (40.6 mm), which eliminated the larger Bean Goose. However, Baker himself said elsewhere (Baker 1921) that the specimen was in a dilapidated condition and the bill colour was therefore of no use in eliminating the possibility that it was a first winter *A. albifrons*. Ticehurst (1930) considered the bill (40.6 mm) too small for *A. brachyrhynchus* [but see Editors (1946) for an alternate view] and rejected this as well as the earlier records. Another specimen (BNHS Reg. # 15293) that was considered a definite record of this species from Bikaner, Rajasthan (Editors 1946), proved to be a first-winter Greater White-fronted Goose *A. albifrons* upon re-examination (Abdulali 1966). First winter *A. albifrons* sports a black nail on a similar-sized bill; a feature not well appreciated earlier (Blanford 1898; Baker 1929), but considered diagnostic for *A. brachyrhynchus*. Hence, it is likely that many of the nineteenth century records of this species were first-winter *A. albifrons*. The Pink-footed Goose is a bird of rather limited, and distinctly westerly distribution, and is an extreme rarity even in Eastern Europe (Ticehurst 1930; Scott & Rose 1996). In view of all these arguments, we concur with BSA2 in excluding this species from the India Checklist.

Bean Goose *Anser fabalis* (Latham, 1787)

Included in Hbk based on historical records, a majority of which remain unverified and probably refer to other *Anser* species, and in BSA2 based on recent sightings. More than one species probably involved, but taxonomy is unresolved; most authorities recognise five taxa within the species complex—*fabalis, johanseni, middendorffii, rossicus*, and *serrirostris*. Sangster & Oreel (1996) considered the former three as Taiga Bean Goose *A. fabalis*, and the latter two as Tundra Bean Goose *A. serrirostris* (see BSA2 for details of structural and plumage differences between these two taxa). However, Ruokonen *et al.* (2008) considered *A. middendorffii* a monotypic species, with the other four being races of a single species. In view of this uncertainty in taxonomy, we follow Dickinson & Remsen (2013) who treated them as a single species with five races; nevertheless, we attempt here to scrutinise all the past records at subspecific levels as we anticipate changes in species status in the near future.

Hume & Marshall (1881) indicated that there were no specimens of *A. fabalis* from India but stated that Hume knew of its occurrence in Oudh (=Avadh, Uttar Pradesh), Central Provinces, and the Deccan (quoting Blyth 1868). Blyth's comment was based on a specimen in Gould's collection, but that specimen does not exist in BMNH where Gould's collection is housed (Oates 1899). When Oates (1906) discredited Baker's (1898, 1904c) specimens of *A. brachyrhynchus*, Baker retorted that all three (yet untraced!) specimens from Dibrugarh District, Assam, reportedly collected by Baker, Dr Moore, and N. Mundy (though Baker wouldn't make any mention of Mundy in his note in 1906) were, in fact, *A. [fabalis] middendorffii* (Baker 1906, 1929). Oates (1906) removed *A. brachyrhynchus* from the India list, suggesting that the birds that Blyth and Hume referred to were also probably this species; a statement that Baker later echoed (1929). In summary, except for the unsubstantiated claims of Oates and Baker that these birds could be *A. fabalis*, there exists no unassailable evidence for the occurrence of this species in India from historical records. Lt. Cd. J. Hurrell collected a specimen, now in BNHS (#15292; Abdulali 1968), of a Bean Goose labelled *A. neglectus* (=Sushkin's Goose) from Manipur (Hurrell 1947) shot in December 1946 (but dated 20 January 1947 on the specimen tag), with measurements as wing=467 mm (465 in Hurrell 1947), tarsus=70 mm (80 in Hurrell 1947), and bill=63 mm. Though it is clear from the photographs of the BNHS specimen that it is certainly a Bean Goose and may, structurally, belong to the long necked *fabalis / johanseni / middendorffii* group, this specimen requires critical re-examination, as Abdulali (1968) listed it under *A. fabalis* but did not ascribe a race to it (the tag is inscribed '*Anser fabalis brachyrhynchus* Sushkin'; Rahul Khot, *pers. comm.*, December 2013), and both Hbk and BSA2 are mute on this point. *A. neglectus* does not have a taxonomic standing anymore and probably refers to a mixed swarm of *A. fabalis* and *A. rossicus* (*see* Ripley 1961). Johansen (1945) treated *neglectus* as a race of *fabalis*, and later considered it merely a colour phase (Johansen 1962). The birds, which were formerly labelled '*A. neglectus*', were found to be quite diverse in morphology and genetics and were variously assigned to *A. rossicus* and *A. fabalis* (Ruokonen & Aarvak 2011).

There are three recent records of Bean Goose from India, all of them well photographed and confirmed to belong to the Bean Goose group. However, opinion about race, based upon the pictures, was equivocal. Bill Harvey and others saw and photographed one amongst a gaggle of Greylag Geese, assumed to be the carrier species, in Harike (31°09'N, 74°58'E), Punjab, in February 2003 (Harvey *et al.* 2006); opinions on the racial identity from circulated photographs (Prince 2003) varied and it is best left unassigned to any particular form (Mike Prince, *pers. comm.*, August 2014). A single Bean Goose, identified as *middendorffii*, was photographed (photographs not available now, Craig Robson, *pers. comm.*, January 2014) amongst a flock of Ruddy Shelducks *Tadorna ferruginea* and a single Common Shelduck *T. tadorna* by Craig Robson and others on 01 April 2007 on the banks of the Dibru River, Dibru Saikhowa National Park (27°34'N, 95°23'E), Assam (Robson 2007), which, interestingly, is the same region where Baker is supposed to have procured his three specimens! Another single bird was photographed along with Bar-headed Geese on Tumariya Reservoir (29°18'N, 78°57'E), near Corbett Tiger Reserve, Nainital District, Uttarakhand (Bhattacharjee 2013). Though no race was claimed in the published paper, Thomas Heinicke, of the Goose Specialist Group, Wetland International / IUCN Species Survial Commission, commented that this belonged to *rossicus / serrirostris* based on structural

characteristics and plumage (Anushree Bhattacharjee, *pers. comm.*, December 2013). Apart from this, there are two records from Nepal (Inskipp & Inskipp 1991): one of 09 February 1993 by H. Young, from Chitwan National Park, reported as *rossicus* in Robson (1993b), and another by S. Chaudhary *et al*., again from Chitwan on 15 February 2004 (Robson 2004b; Inskipp 2004). Two reports of this species from Bangladesh (Mountfort 1969; Husain 1975; Khan 1982) lacked details and hence considered unconfirmed (Siddiqui *et al.* 2008). With this background, we accept Bean Goose in the Indian Checklist based on the three recent photographic records and an old specimen. It is, however, not possible to comment on the races of these records given the poor diagnosability of all the evidences.

Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* (Linnaeus, 1758)

There are a few well-documented records from India, as presented in both Hbk and BSA2. The species is categorised as Vulnerable (BirdLife International 2014), and has been treated in detail by both, BirdLife International (2001), and Rahmani (2012). Nonetheless, a majority of these records from India are still disputed and are best considered tentative (**Table 3**). Reports that are equivocal on identification, vis-à-vis *A. albifrons*, are not considered here. Almost all confirmed records are from the northern plains drained by the tributaries of the Indus-, Ganges-, and Brahmaputra- Rivers, and it is yet to be recorded

Table 3. Lesser White-fronted Goose reports

Date	Location	Coordinates	Remarks	Reference
24 October 1859	Near Sitapur [=Seetapore], Uttar Pradesh	27°34'N, 80°40'E	Three birds of which two were shot, but specimens untraced. Author identified this species much later after seeing live individuals in Zoological Gardens, Reagent's Park. In the absence of any definite description, this report is treated inconclusive as *A. albifrons* was not ruled out and author did not report that species.	Irby (1861)
Pre–1881	Hardoi [=Hurdui], Uttar Pradesh	27°23'N, 80°07'E	A. Anderson obtained an unknown number of specimens. Further details unavailable and whereabouts of such specimen(s) unknown and hence this record is treated as tentative.	Hume & Marshall (1881)
Pre–1881	Fatehgarh, Uttar Pradesh	27°22'N, 79°37'E	A. Anderson obtained an unknown number of specimens. Further details unavailable with whereabouts of specimen(s) unknown and hence this record is treated as tentative. Hume & Marshall (1881) erred in stating this as Fatehpur [=Futtehpur], North West Provinces and this error was continued in subsequent works like Baker (1898, 1921), Hbk, and Rahmani (2012). But BirdLife International (2001) has rectified this mistake.	Hume & Marshall (1881)
Pre–1881	Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh	26°50'N, 80°56'E	One shot by Dr Bonawia near Lucknow and specimen examined by A. O. Hume; probably refered to BMNH 1894.6.1.78. The 'Oudh specimen' in various references probably related to this.	Hume & Marshall (1881); Oates (1899)
March 1870	Sultanpur, Haryana	28°27'N, 76°53'E	Listed for Sultanpur–original record not traced. A transcription error and meant to be one of the BMNH specimens from 1879 (Tim Inskipp, *pers. comm.*, August 2014)	BirdLife International (2001)
3 March 1879	Sultanpur, Haryana	28°27'N, 76°53'E	Three specimens (BMNH 1894.6.1.75–77) shot by N. W. Chill on 03, 12, and 29 March 1879	Hume (1879); Hume & Marshall (1881)
1901	Kashmir	NA	Baker's correspondent shot four at an unknown location in Kashmir. No further details available for independent assessment.	Baker (1898); Baker (1921)
October 1903	Sookerating, Lakhimpur, Assam	27°33'N, 95°33'E	A young male shot by R. Johnston. Baker examined and provided a short description of the specimen, which remains untraced. Details provided are not sufficient to ascertain the identification independently and hence we follow BSA2 in considering this record as suspect.	Baker (1904a)
Pre–1907	Wular Lake, Kashmir	34°21'N, 74°32'E	One shot 'some years back' with no further details available for independent assessment.	Ward (1907)
23 February 1911	Faizabad [=Fyzabad], Uttar Pradesh	26°48'N, 82°08'E	One (probable female) shot from a gaggle of four amidst *A. indicus* on River Ghaghara [=Gogra] by Capt. G. H. Plinston of 11th Rajputs. BirdLife International (2001) erred in treating it as Faizabad of W. Punjab, Pakistan, while Rahmani (2012) rectified it. Note that the River Gogra (*sic*) as mentioned in the original note by Capt. Plinston, flows past the Indian town of Faizabad (U.P.). Operations of 11th Rajputs included Faizabad in Uttar Pradesh during the First World War (Ahmad 1997). Specimen, now untraceable, was examined at BNHS and editors confirmed it as this species.	Plinston (1911); BirdLife International (2011); Rahmani (2012)
1918–1919	Pune, Maharashtra	18°31'N, 73°51'E	One shot in cold weather; no further details. Treated as tentative following BSA2 though Prasad (2006) considered it valid without citing any particular reason.	Trevenen (1922); Prasad (2006)
Undated	West Bengal	NA	Indicated as 'Accidental', with no details on actual records.	Savage & Abdulali (1970)
Undated	Rajasthan	NA	A record shown in maps of popular field guides from Rajasthan close to the western border of Rajasthan and Haryana (away from Bharatpur).	Grimmett *et al.* (2011)
Pre-1947	Manipur	NA	Passing mention of a record; no details.	Hurrel (1947)
15 February 1948	Karagola [=Karahgola], Sahibganj, Bihar	25°28'N, 87°22'E	Two shot from a flock of eight by J. L. Hay. Perhaps this referred to the north-eastern Bihar specimen 'traced' by BSA2; however the current whereabouts of the specimens are unknown. The description is clear enough to enable a positive identification.	Editors (1948)

Table 3. Lesser White-fronted Goose reports

Date	Location	Coordinates	Remarks	Reference
17 January 1968	Bor Beel, Bagori, Kaziranga NP, Assam	26°35′N, 93°17′E	One seen with *A. indicus* flock by Sam Mackenzie. Details unavailable.	Mackenzie (1969); Barua & Sharma (1999)
1980–1985	Bhindawas, Haryana	28°31′N, 76°33′E	An unconfirmed record of an adult shot in early 1980s reported to Suresh C. Sharma by Nirmal Ghosh (Suresh C. Sharma, *pers. comm.*, September 2014).	Harvey *et al.* (2006)
March 1981	Sultanpur, Haryana	28°27′N, 76°53′E	One adult seen by Bill Harvey and Michael (now Lord) Jay. Five adult *A. albifrons* were also present for direct comparison.	Harvey *et al.* (2006)
Undated	Harike, Punjab	31°09′N, 74°58′E	An unconfirmed record citing Islam & Rahmani (2004). However the original reference did not have this species. This probably was an error and may actually be referring to the A. fabalis record – see under that species.	Rahmani (2012)
1996	Keoladeo Ghana NP, Bharatpur, Rajasthan	27°10′N, 77°31′E	One adult seen with a flock of *A. anser* by Asad R. Rahmani. Treated as unconfirmed in BirdLife International (2001). Further details unavailable.	BirdLife International (2001); Rahmani (2012)
17 April 2003	Pong Dam, Himachal Pradesh	31°58′N, 75°56′E	One bird observed by Jan Willem den Besten (Robson 2003). No further details available. But den Besten (2004) did not list this species. Report seems to have been retracted as the bird was later identified as a juvenile *A. albifrons* (Mike Prince, *pers. comm.*).	Robson (2003); den Besten (2004)
December 2004	Chilika Lake, Odisha	19°52′N, 85°29′E	Two birds recorded in the marshes between Sundarpur and Bhusandpur in the northern sector of Chilika Lake. Further details unavailable.	Balachandran *et al.* (2009)
13 January 2008	Asan Barrage, Uttarakhand	30°26′N, 77°40′E	Recorded by Arun P. Singh on 13 January 2008 and seen by several others on subsequent days, at least until 19 January. Photographs on OBI.	Vijay & Bhutia (2008); Rahmani (2012)
24 November 2008	Dibru River, Dibru Saikhowa NP, Assam	27°35′N, 95°21′E	Recorded on the banks of Dibru River for the entire winter until last week of March 2009 from the Maguri–Motapung Beel. Photographs on OBI. Probably the same bird moved around and was photographed from Kaziranga in January 2009 (Sant 2009).	Das (2008); Robson (2009); Rahmani (2012)
3 November 2009	Maguri-Motapung Beel, Dibru Saikhowa NP, Assam	27°34′N, 95°23′E	Recorded by Binanda Hatibaruah. The bird stayed till last week of March 2010. Possibly the same bird as in previous winter. Photographs on OBI.	Rahmani (2012)
25 February 2014	Pong Dam, Himachal Pradesh	31°58′N, 75°56′E	Four birds photographed. Also suspected to have seen the same flock on 15 February 2014 (C. R. Abhinav & Devinder Singh Dhadwal *in prep.*).	Dhadwal (2014); Robson (2014)
24 December 2013	Little Rann of Kutch, Gujarat	24°02′N, 70°08′E	One bird photographed in an *A. albifrons* flock and multiple birds observed by several bird-watchers from various parts of Kachchh since then. Up to six observed on 27 January 2014.	Shreeram & Deomurari (2014)

Maps: S. Subramanya

Fig. 1. Lesser White-fronted Goose.

with certainty from peninsular India. Based on the four specimens in BMNH and five recent well-photographed records, we include this species in the India Checklist.

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Hbk considered it a rare winter straggler and listed two records for India. BSA2 stated, 'winter vagrant to scattered localities across N Subcontinent.' Two specimen records from Arunachal Pradesh, and Kashmir, exist, as do three recent photographic records from 2013 (**Table 4**). More records from the Indian Subcontinent include sight reports from two different places: Kosi Barrage—1980, 1982, 1997 (Inskipp & Inskipp 1991; Robson 1997b), and Jagdishpur Reservoir—1997 (Robson 1997b).

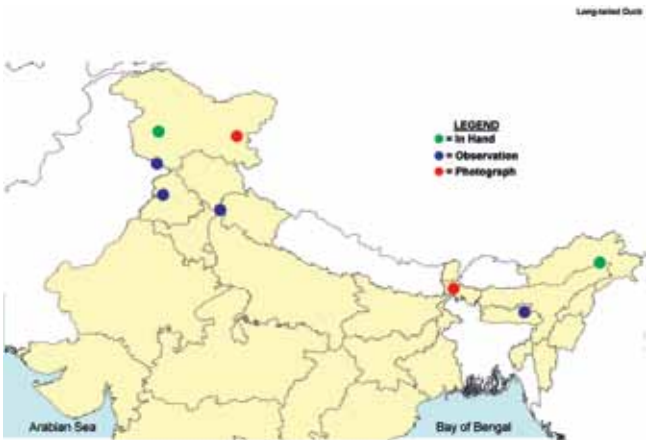


Fig. 2. Long-tailed Duck.

Table 4. Long-tailed Duck reports

Date	Location	Coordinates	Remarks	Reference
23 January 1935	Messaki (Sadiya Frontier Tract), Tinsukia District, Assam–Arunachal Pradesh border	28°00'N, 95°24'E	A male shot on the Brahmaputra River but skin not preserved. Photographs of the skin were published; its tail feathers sent to BNHS, but now not traceable there (Rahul Khot, *pers. comm.*, September 2013).	Parsons (1935); Abdulali (1968)
17 October 1939	Hokersar Lake (=Hokra Jheel), Kashmir	34°06'N, 74°42'E	A male shot by the Maharaja of Kashmir and identified by Ludlow; specimen received at BNHS but now not traceable (Rahul Khot, *pers. comm.*, September 2013).	Ludlow (1940); Editors (1940); Abdulali (1968)
19 January 1991	Asan Barrage (=Dhalipur Lake), Dehradun, Uttarakhand	30°26'N, 77°40'E	Mohan *et al.* (1992) described a single bird spotted on water and in flight, with sufficient diagnostic field details. Singh (1991) mentioned two males that were observed on the same date. We have reconfirmed that there were two birds (Arun P. Singh, *pers. comm.*, September 2013).	Singh (1991); Mohan *et al.* (1992)
07 February 2001	Harike, Punjab	31°09'N, 74°58'E	A single bird seen on two days till 10 February, sketch published.	Prasad (2008a)
23 February 2013	Gazaldoba (also spelt as 'Gajaldoba' or 'Gajoldoba'), West Bengal	26°45'N, 88°34'E	A female photographed by a few people and at least present till 03 March.	Prasad (2013)
March 2013	Gharana Wetland, Jammu & Kashmir	32°50'N, 74°35'E	One female in winter plumage apparently photographed (and identified at BNHS); but photograph could not be verified, as it is not included in the published note.	Raj (2014)
18 April 2013	Umiam Lake, Meghalaya	25°40'N, 91°53'E	Unpublished observation of a flock of five, with one drake in non-breeding plumage, and four ducks.	Aasheesh Pittie, *pers. obsv.*, April 2013
25 June 2013	Spangmik, Pangong Tso, Ladakh	33°54'N, 78°27'E	Two females photographed. Probably more birds may have been around as Hymakar (2013) photographed a male in the same wetland in September 2013.	Borse (2013); Hymakar (2013)

Almost all records from India are well documented and we include this species in the India Checklist.

Velvet Scoter/White-winged Scoter *Melanitta fusca* (Linnaeus, 1758)

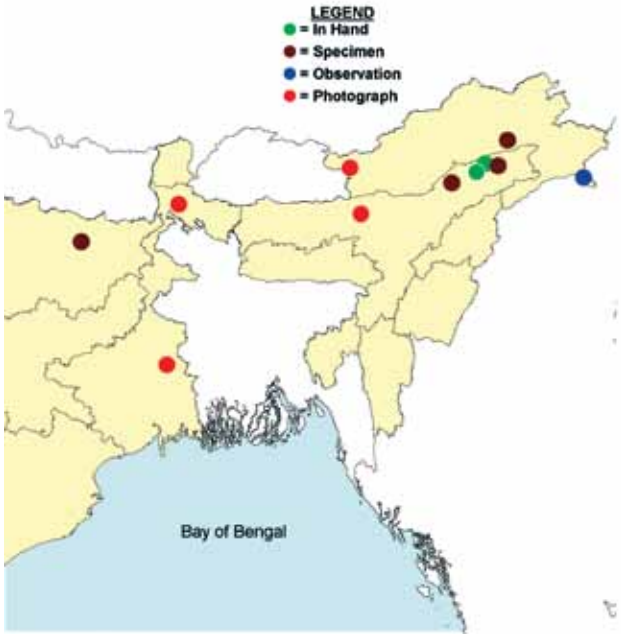
Hbk did not include this species. BSA2 considered it hypothetical for the Indian Subcontinent; presumably a winter vagrant with two records, including a sight report from the Pakistan coast, and another from Kabul, Afghanistan. The former was a flying drake at Clifton Beach, near Karachi in February 1988 (Hirschfeld *et al.* 1988); perhaps the one indicated as 'photographed' in some of the field guides (e.g., Kazmierczak 2000). When queried, the observers were confident of their identification and seemed familiar with this species and other potentially confusing taxa. Their observation notes were reportedly sent to T. J. Roberts (Erik Hirschfeld, *pers. comm.*, August 2013) but were never formally published, and are probably lost now. In the absence of any report from India, this species is not included in the India Checklist though it is a strong contender for the Indian Subcontinent list.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* Linnaeus, 1758

Included in BSA2 based on specimens from Pakistan and vaguely mentioned as a straggler to the east. Hbk listed two records for West Bengal; a specimen procured from Kolkata market on 17 December 1889, presumably collected from that neighbourhood, and citing Biswas, another collected from 24-Parganas District in January 1961. Though it is likely that the Kolkata specimen was procured locally, there had been instances (e.g., *A. erythropus*) where specimens procured from West Pakistan reached the Kolkata market, and hence the provenance of this specimen is not fully established. Though this specimen from the market was housed in the Indian Museum (Finn 1898; Baker 1900), no Indian specimen of the species is currently in the ZSI Collection (Gopinathan Maheswaran, *pers. comm.*, June 2014). At least four sight reports from Nepal, all from Kosi Barrage, include reports from 1987, 1989, 1995, and 2008 (Inskipp & Inskipp 1991; Robson 1989; Lama 1995; Basnet 2008). However, in view of the uncertainty over the provenance of the Indian specimens, which are in any case, untraceable, we do not include this species in the India Checklist.

Chinese Spot-billed Duck *Anas zonorhyncha* Swinhoe, 1866

Included in Hbk and BSA2 and long considered a subspecies of the Indian Spot-billed Duck *A. poecilorhyncha*. There are five



Map: S. Subramanya

Fig. 3.Chinese Spot-billed Duck.

Table 5. Chinese Spot-billed Duck reports

Date	Location	Coordinates	Remarks	Reference
Pre–1904	On River Brahmaputra, northern Lakhimpur	27°12′N, 94°11′E	N. Mundy collected the specimen which is now in AMNH (#731753)	Baker (1929)
06 February 1904	Kamitga on Sessa, northern Lakhimpur	27°12′N, 94°11′E	E. C. S. Baker collected the specimen which is now in AMNH (#731754)	Baker (1929)
06 March 1904	Sissi Beel, Assam	27°25′N, 94°41′E	Mr. More (=Mr. Moore? vide Higgins 1931) shot two ducks out of a flock of 40.	Baker (1904c)
28 December 1908	Sibsagar District, Assam	26°58′N, 94°39′E	J. C. Higgins and others shot three birds and the specimens probably not preserved. Exact location not clear.	Higgins (1931)
27 March 1929	Uma Jheel, Pacha-gachhia, Darbhanga District, Bihar	25°58′N, 86°34′E	C. M. Inglis collected the specimen; now in the Yale Peabody Museum (YPM ORN 042003), examined by BSA2. This is the western-most record for the species.	Inglis (1930)
06 February 1930	Manipur	NA	Col. M. Goodall shot one; specimen presumably not preserved. This was probably shot on Loktak Lake where most of the game hunting happened in Manipur. It was mentioned in the Manipur Club's game-book records alongside 3439 Spotbill Ducks shot during 1910–1931.	Higgins (1931)
18 January 1931	Loktak Lake (?), Manipur	NA	J. C. Higgins shot one; specimen presumably not preserved. Extremely rare in Manipur according to him. Just two birds (this and the previous one) noted between 1910 and 1931 of the 2267 Spot-bill Ducks he examined carefully.	Higgins (1931)
29 December 1933	North bank of River Brahmaputra, Dibru-garh District, Assam	27°35′N, 94°52′E	One out of a pair and another out of a gaggle of eight–ten birds shot by J. C. Higgins. Specimens presumably not preserved.	Higgins (1934)
26 November 1936	Pasighat, Sadiya, Arunachal Pradesh	28°04′N, 95°20′E	A specimen in BNHS (#15353) shot by R. A. Parsons; formerly considered an intergrade between *haringtoni* and *zonorhyncha* by E. C. S. Baker but established as *zonorhyncha* by Abdulali (1967).	Parsons (1937); Abdulali (1967)
1965-1966	Chabua, Assam	27°33′N, 95°08′E	Two shot by J. M. S. Mackenzie and deposited with BNHS (specimen #22255 & #22320) to prove his statement in Mackenzie (1965) that it is '…regularly found in the Assam during the cold weather.'	Abdulali (1968)
02 March 1996	Sohola Beel, Assam	26°40′N, 93°39′E	About 30 birds seen; no further information.	Choudhury (2000)
10 December 2007	Sela Pass, West Kameng, Arunachal Pradesh	27°30′N, 92° 06′E	Photograph of a bird in OBI.	Holmes & Holmes (2007)
16 February 2008	Purbasthali Oxbow Lake, West Bengal	23°27′N, 88°20′E	A male photographed. Photographs by Sumit Sen, in OBI.	Grimmett *et al.* (2011)
05 January 2009	Shidiku, Namdapha, Arunachal Pradesh	27°17′N, 96°53′E	Two ducks and a drake observed in flight and on water, identified by the 'purple (not green) colour of the speculum, dark stripe on the cheek and lack of a red bill-spot'.	Srinivasan *et al.* (2010)
26 December 2010	Gazaldoba (=Gajaldoba or Gajoldoba), West Bengal	26°45′N, 88°34′E	Up to nine seen and photographed on several days by many people; birds present at least till 29 January 2011. Photographs by Amit Thakurta, in OBI.	Mike Prince, Dipu Karuthedathu, *pers. comm.*, December 2013
January 2014	Orang National Park, Assam	26°33′N, 92°20′E	Five photographed showing all relevant field characters.	Ahmed (2014)

specimen records (six specimens), which are listed in **Table 5**; most records are from north-eastern Assam or adjoining Arunachal Pradesh, corroborating the statements in Hbk and BSA2 that it is a frequent straggler to those areas. Baker (1929) identified several of his and others' northern Lakhimpur specimens as *haringtoni*. Under this species, he wrote, 'Stevens obtained many of these ducks in North Lakhimpur; Moore and Mundy got several in Dibrugarh each year from 1902 to 1905. I obtained my first specimens in the same district in 1903 and others each year subsequently until I left'. Baker seemingly did not see any differences between these specimens and all of them could then belong to *zonorhyncha* as suggested by Abdulali (1967) and BSA2. Hbk considered it a frequent straggler to eastern Assam and from available evidence it appeared that the species was a regular winter visitor to north-eastern Assam (Abdulali 1967), and probably still is. Random reports without details do not establish that the equally likely nominate, or *haringtoni*, subspecies of the Indian Spot-billed Duck have been eliminated. We include it in the India Checklist based on the five specimen records and several recent photographs.

Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Hbk considered this an exceptional vagrant, citing two specimen-based records from Assam and Manipur, and a sighting report from Assam. BSA2 considered it a, 'winter vagrant to NE'. There are five records from north-eastern India of which three are from Manipur (**Table 6**). Apart from these records, three individuals, including one male in breeding plumage, were recorded at Sat Tal (29°20′N, 79°31′E), Uttarakhand on 13 February 1999 (Vrezec *et al.* 2006). Interestingly, this species has been recorded in an aviary at Nilesh Inn, Bhim Tal in 2003 (Rajat Bharghava, *pers.*

Table 6. Mandarin Duck reports

Date	Location	Coordinates	Remarks	Reference
Undated. Probably August 1901	Rungagora Tea Estate, Tinsukia District, Assam	27°28′N, 94°54′E	The Assam specimen in BSA was a female shot by Mr. Stevens from a flock of six on a backwater near the estate. The current whereabouts of this specimen are unknown.	Baker (1902)
July 1901	On Subansiri River, junction with the Ranganadi River in Lakhimpur District, Assam	26°59′N, 94°00′E	F. J. Greening and E. C. S. Baker saw six birds flying across the river and were confident of their identification. However, the authors did not provide any detailed plumage or field characters in the note for an independent assessment.	Baker (1902)
03 March 1934	Mayangkhang Valley, Manipur	25°15′N, 94°01′E	Four birds were shot of which two specimens (#15282, #15283) are in the BNHS collection labelled 'Imphal'. Referred to as Mayangthang Valley in Hbk.	Gimson (1934); Abdulali (1968)
1997	Sugnu, Chandel District, to-wards the south-eastern corner of Loktak Lake, Manipur	25°15′N, 94°01′E	One caught and kept in captivity at the Imphal Zoological Gardens.	Rahmani & Islam (2008); Choudhury (2009)
11 December 2013	Jawa Lamjao area of Loktak Lake, Manipur	24°35′N, 93°50′E	A male photographed.	Kasambe & Singh (2014)

comm., September 2013), which is less than two kilometers from Sat Tal. As native ducks are banned from being held in captivity, there is an increasing demand in Indian aviaries for this ornamental species, along with Wood Duck *Aix sponsa*, even in sub-Himalayan regions like Dehradun (Rajat Bharghava, *pers. comm.*, September 2013); some of them escape and are reported by birdwatchers. It is well known that feral populations of this species exist in Great Britain and Europe (Carboneras 1992; Woolham 1987), and hence care must be taken when including random records from places that are away from its regular non-breeding range in south-eastern China and Japan. For example, a Mandarin Duck was recently reported from Meenakshipuram (10°37′N, 76°51′E), on the Kerala–Tamil Nadu border (India), a few thousand kilometers away from its known regular range and the bird was tracked through aviculturists' forums to its rightful owner, who had 'lost' it from his aviary, and was thus confirmed as an escapee from captivity (Praveen 2010). Considering the circumstantial evidence, we believe the bird seen at Sat Tal, Uttarakhand had probably escaped from captivity. The only other recent records from the Indian Subcontinent are from Nepal on 21 January 1991 (Gardiner 1991), from Bangladesh on 27 January 1993 (Thompson *et al.* 1994), and a recent, much photographed one from Bhutan in March–April 2014 (Arnab Bose *in prep.*). We include this species in the India Checklist based on the two specimen records and two recent observations.

Red-necked Grebe
Podiceps grisegena (Boddaert, 1783)

Included in Hbk's Appendix based on sight-reports from Pakistan. BSA2 considered it a winter vagrant to NW of the region with records from 'W India in W Gujarat, NW Himachal (Gaston & Pandey 1988), W Gangetic Plain; also reported Assam.' Though no specimens exist from the region, past reports indicate that it may be a widespread vagrant in northern India, but not all records (**Table 7**), including the six reports from eastern and north-eastern India, are well-documented for an independent verification. This species does not regularly occur in South-east Asia (Robson 2008) but there have been four sight reports during 2008–2009 from neighbouring Bangladesh (Pender 2010) that are considered reliable (Paul Thompson, *pers. comm.*, September 2013), and hence some of the reports from

Table 7. Red-necked Grebe reports

Date	Location	Coordinates	Remarks	Reference
02 December 1985	Pong Dam, Himachal Pradesh	31°58′N, 75°56′E	Two birds in winter plumage–swimming and flying–with detailed notes. Possibly, the same record was referred to in den Besten (2004) as 'Sanjeeva Pandey, 1987'.	Gaston & Pandey (1988)
11 December 1986	Nyari Reservoir, Rajkot, Gujarat	22°14′N, 70°42′E	Two birds in winter plumage observed twice on the same day; identification based on yellow base of bill, and being intermediate sized between *P. ruficollis* and *P. cristatus*, both present for direct comparison.	Mundkur & Parvez (1990)
21 February 1989	Pong Dam, Himachal Pradesh	31°58′N, 75°56′E	15 birds reported in a paper on Pong Dam avifauna with no further details; Krishna & George (1990) pointed out the importance of this record and called for further confirmation.	Pandey (1989)
09 March 1991	Dhakuakhana, Lakhimpur District, Assam	27°10′N, 94°30′E	Observed a lone, silhouetted grebe, intermediate in size between *P. cristatus* and *P. nigricollis* on the Brahmaputra River. In hindsight, probably this species according to the author, and hence not considered here as a confirmed report.	Choudhury (1996)
1992–1993	Haduk Beel [sic. bee], Pobitora WLS, Assam	26°15′N, 92°03′E	Two birds photographed by C. R. Bhobora in winter; later identified as this species by A. U. Choudhury. The available photograph is not sharp enough for a certain identification though the bird seem to have white cheek and red neck.	Choudhury (1996)
16 January 1994	Keoladeo Ghana NP, Bharatpur, Rajastan	27°10′N, 77°31′E	Two birds seen during this period by multiple observers including Per Undeland, Paul Holt, and Patrick Bierens at least till 11 February.	Anonymous (1994); Robson (1994)

Table 7. Red-necked Grebe reports

Date	Location	Coordinates	Remarks	Reference
18 January 1996	Saraloni Beel, Laokhowa WLS, Assam	26°31'N, 92°44'E	Two birds in non-breeding plumage observed during AWC; identified using field guides. No photographs were taken, but observer confident about field identification (Hilloljyoti Singha, *pers. comm.*, August 2013). Field notes are inaccessible and hence independent assessment not possible.	Singha (1996)
23 January 1996	Umiam Lake, Meghalaya	25°40'N, 91°53'E	Eight birds with one flock of four and the rest single. Some of them were in partial breeding plumage enabling identification (Anwaruddin Choudhury, *pers. comm.*, December 2013). Though very much likely, the site being close to Bangladesh where the species is seemingly regular, further corroboration is desirable.	Choudhury (2003), Choudhury (in press)
January 1997	Pobitora WLS, Assam	26°14'N, 92°03'E	A single bird seen during AWC; no further details available.	Barua et al. (1998)
14 January 1997	Pariej Lake, Kheda District, Gujarat	22°33'N, 72°36'E	Five birds seen in direct size comparison with *P. cristatus*–yellow beak and grey neck noted–apparently in non-breeding plumage from the description.	Tatu (1998)
08 December 2002	Asan Barrage, Uttarakhand	30°26'N, 77°40'E	One in non-breeding plumage giving 'good telescope views of its diagnostic, straight yellow-based bill, white cheeks and dusky neck'.	Harvey (2002)
16–17 February 2003	Purbasthali, Bardhaman District, West Bengal	23°27'N, 88°19'E	Six birds in non-breeding plumage; but diagnostic details unavailable for independent assessment. Sharma (2004) commented that this record was not surprising as there are several published reports from eastern India–citing most of the references above.	Dasgupta (2003); Sharma (2004)
Undated	Tripura	NA	Listed in the Tripura checklist as an uncommon winter visitor with no further details. This apparently refers to a sighting made during AWC; but the details are untraceable (Anwaruddin Choudhury, *pers. comm.*, September 2013) and this record is treated as unconfirmed.	Choudhury (2010)
13 December 2010	Pong Dam, Himachal Pradesh	31°58'N, 75°56'E	One bird in non-breeding plumage, well photographed from a boat near Bathu temple (C. Abhinav & Devinder Singh Dhadwal *in prep.*)	Dhadwal (2014)
12 June 2013	Spituk, Leh, Ladakh	34°08'N, 77°30'E	One bird in breeding plumage seen and photographed by several people during this period at the same tank till 18 August 2013.	Khadilkar (2013)

Map: S. Subramanya

Fig. 4. Red-necked Grebe.

the eastern part of the country may be valid, though poorly documented. Unpublished AWC counts held every January over several years, (www.worldbirds.org), include 12 from Pong Dam, Himachal Pradesh (2004), one from Gayalabanko (Mahanadi-Sector), Odisha (2003), three from Sendha Reservoir, Chattisgarh (2002), two from Sankarpur Gangetic Complex, West Bengal (1999), 22 from Fateh Sagar Lake, Rajasthan (1999), and 25 from Naregal Tank, Karnataka (1998); but being unverifiable, these reports are not considered here. A record from Patna Wildlife Sanctuary (27°35'N, 78°45'E), Uttar Pradesh, on 07 January 1991 (Rahmani & Arora 1991), based on a sighting by the second author, stands withdrawn (Asad Rahmani, *pers. comm.*, September 2013). Though there are no specimens, birds in the region presumably belong to the nominate form. The species is unmistakable in breeding plumage, though not quite so in winter when it is easily confused with Great Crested Grebe *P. cristatus*. We include it in the India Checklist based on the well-documented observations from Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Gujarat, and the photographic evidence from Ladakh.

Slavonian Grebe/Horned Grebe *Podiceps auritus* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Not included in Hbk. BSA2 included it based on recent sight reports. BSA2 considered this species to be a 'winter vagrant to NW of region'. The first record for India was of a bird in non-breeding plumage on the Kosi River near Ramnagar (29°23'N, 79°08'E), Uttarakhand, on 28 December 1993 by Raf Drijvers, and subsequently by a few others who photographed it (Anonymous 1994; Drijvers 1995). Up to five Horned Grebes were present from 01 to 14 February 2001 at Harike (31°09'N, 74°58'E), Punjab, and were seen by several birdwatchers at different points of time (Robson 2002a; Prasad 2008c). This species is included in the India Checklist based on these two records, one of them supported with photographs; however, we believe it might be under-reported from northern, and north-western India due to its potential confusion with Black-necked Grebe *P. nigricollis*, particularly in its non-breeding plumage, as there are further reports from neighbouring Pakistan (Roberts 1991).

Red-throated Diver/Red-throated Loon *Gavia stellata* (Pontoppidan, 1763)

Provisionally included in Hbk based on the record from the Mekran Coast, Pakistan. This record is also included in BSA2 in addition to a recent sight report from Nepal. A fisherman killed

one off the coast of Ormara (25°16′N, 64°35′E), Balochistan, Pakistan, on 17 November 1901 and brought the dead bird to W. D. Cumming. According to the fisherman, several of the same species were seen at sea and a few visited the coast occasionally (Ticehurst 1927). However, there have been no follow up records of this species from anywhere along the western coasts of South Asia. A more recent sight report was of a bird in non-breeding plumage at Koshi Barrage (26°20′N, 86°46′E), Nepal, between 15 and 25 February 2002 (Robson 2002b; Tebb *et al.* 2004, Inskipp 2004). Apart from these two records, there are no other South Asian reports and none from India—hence the species is not included in the India Checklist.

Black-throated Diver/Arctic Loon *Gavia arctica* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Included in Hbk and BSA2 based on a single historical record from Western Yamuna [=Jumna] Canal, Jagadhri (30° 07′N, 77°18′E), Yamuna Nagar (erstwhile Ambala) District, Haryana, where a first-winter female was shot on 18 February 1922 by A. E. Jones and identified by Hugh Whistler at the BNHS (#19392) as *G. a. suschkini* (now subsumed within the nominate race) (Jones 1922). However, Ticehurst (1930), and Abdulali (1968) challenged Whistler's identification of race as it was based on a single specimen, and without recourse to comparison with other skins. Hence we do not ascribe a definite race to the Indian vagrants until the BNHS specimen is critically examined, though we consider it more likely the nominate form, given the taxon's known wintering range. Apart from this historical specimen, the only other record is of a single bird that flew high above the Jia Bhoroli [=Gia Bhorali] River on 01 January 2008 at Potasali (26°54′N, 92°50′E), Nameri National Park, Assam, and the accompanying photographs showed the prominent white flashes on the sides of the vent (Steijn & Vries 2009), confirming the identification. We include this species in the India Checklist based on these two well-documented records.

Pygmy Cormorant *Microcarbo pygmeus* (Pallas, 1773)

Hbk and BSA2 listed the record of a specimen (#15009) in BNHS collected by J. E. B. Hotson on 03 September 1917 from 'Gujar, Mashkai (?), south–southwest of Kalat, Balochistan'(Abdulali & Pereira 1966). BSA2 listed a few additional specimens from Afghanistan but there are no reports from Indian limits and hence we do not include this species in the India Checklist.

Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris* (Temminck, 1823)

The species account in Hbk (*'A. t. worcesteri'*) included records of both, Lesser- *Anous tenuirostris*, and Black Noddy *A. minutus*, as both species were earlier considered conspecific. BSA2 stated, 'Non-breeding visitor to Sri Lanka; several recent sight reports and at least one verified specimen (Colombo Museum). Evidently breeds in Maldives and definitely in Chagos but some reports of this may be of Black Noddy.' BSA2 also stated that old specimens from the Bay of Bengal, and another from off South Andaman (=Port Blair), examined and referred to as *A. senex* by Hume (1874, 1876), were actually *tenuirostris*, and the conclusion was based on Hume's detailed description of a lost specimen. The two specimens in BMNH have been re-identified as Black Noddy. The species is included in the India Checklist based on the lost, but well-described, specimen from Port Blair, and the two recent published photographs from southern India (**Table 8**). We do acknowledge that some of the past records for which photographs reportedly existed, but could not be verified by us, are likely authentic. Though the racial identity of the regional birds is unknown, they probably belong to the nominate taxon [Note that the form *worcesteri* is now assigned to *A. minutus* with the split].

Black Noddy *Anous minutus* Boie, 1844

Not included by itself in Hbk, but was included in the species account of *A. tenuirostris worcesteri*. BSA2 stated that several historical specimens of this species were erroneously assigned to Lesser Noddy in regional literature. For example, a BMNH specimen (BMNH 1891.5.20.754) taken near Minicoy (08°30′N, 73°00′E), Lakshadweep Islands, and another (BMNH 1878.2.13.41) taken just west of the Nicobars (08°N, 91°E; Robert Pŷs-Jones, *pers. comm.*, November 2013; Bourne 1997b) were previously attributed to Lesser Noddy. A third specimen from the mouth of the River Ganges, now in the ZSI Coll., (Gopinathan Maheswaran, *pers. comm.*, June 2014) is also this species as stated by Hume, 'The specimen in the Indian Museum, No. 1,716, entered as *tenuirostris* and from the mouth of the Ganges, is also clearly I think *leucocapillus* [=*A. minutus*].

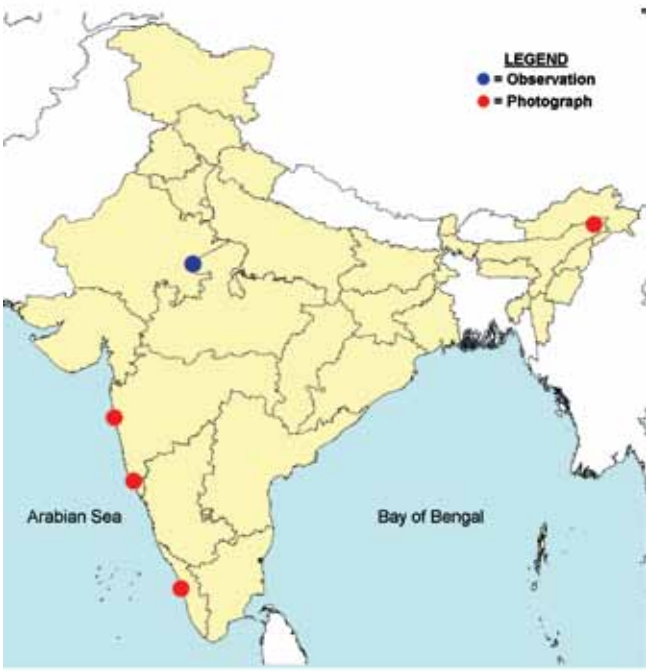
Table 8. Lesser Noddy reports

Date	Location	Coordinates	Remarks	References
Undated	Bay of Bengal	NA	Specimen(s) examined by Hume. Exact location unknown and hence unsure if it falls within Indian maritime limits.	Hume (1874, 1876)
Undated	Port Blair, Andamans	11°37′N, 92°45′E	Specimen 'known' to Hume; '…I have examined specimens from the Bay of Bengal, and I know of one specimen at any rate having been shot at Port Blair.'	Hume (1874, 1876)
23 December 1983	Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu	10°18′N, 79°51′E	Three birds observed closely by several people and apparently photographed. Published details do not eliminate *A. minutus*. Balachandran et al. (1986) suggested that Tony Diamond identified them from the photographs; but he, however, does not recall the record (Tony Diamond, *pers. comm.*, July 2013). Report, therefore, remains unverifiable.	Balachandran *et al.* (1986)
20 June 2004	Mumbai	19°02′N, 72°49′E	Rescued and successfully released; photographs unavailable for verification. No descriptions noted, and cannot be assessed independently.	Shashank Dalvi, *pers. comm.*, July 2013
24 July 2008	Marari, Alappuzha, Kerala	09°35′N, 76°18′E	A bird recovered and photographed by Shibu Bhaskar showing all diagnostic features.	Sashikumar *et al.* (2011)
07 September 2013	Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu	08°04′N, 77°33′E	A single bird photographed from boat and experts concur on the identification as this species.	Manivannan *et al.* (2014)

It has a bill nearly 1.9 in [=inches] length and blackish lores…' (Hume 1876). As per BSA2, recent sight records from Sri Lanka (De Silva 1992) were probably Lesser Noddy *A. tenuirostris*, and Black Noddy is listed in the list of unconfirmed reports of the Ceylon Bird Club (http://www.ceylonbirdclub.org/). BSA2 cautioned that exceptional views and careful study were needed in regional waters to separate this from Lesser-, and its dark lores (contra pale greyish lores of Lesser-) were considered diagnostic. We include this species in the India Checklist based on the three specimens collected, one each, from the Nicobars, the Lakshadweep Islands, and the mouth of the River Ganges; we recognise that the last location could also be in Bangladesh, and as such, we prefer to treat that specimen as a record for both countries. Race is probably *worcesteri* but requires confirmation. Apparently, there are no recent records of this species, even of suspected individuals.

Atoll Tern/White Tern *Gygis alba* (Sparrman, 1786)

Hbk included it as a breeding species for the Maldives, while the only regional record of interest being a specimen taken from the Bay of Bengal by Jean Jacques Dussumier (Hume 1878). BSA2 included this and another recent sighting from the Andamans, which probably refered to Yahya & Ahmad (2002). The exact location of the Bay of Bengal specimen, now mounted in the Naturalis Biodiversity Center at Leiden (RMNH.AVES.185127), the Netherlands, is not known as it only bears a tag 'Bengale' (Steven van der Mije, *pers. comm.*, September 2013); thus we cannot validate whether it falls within Indian waters. This must be the same specimen about which Hume said, 'There is a specimen of this species in the Leyden Museum, which was obtained by Dussumier, in the Bay of Bengal, and I myself have twice seen what I believe to have been this species…' (Hume 1878). Though reported from Narcondam Island on 06 March 2000, and from 'another island', which is near Narcondam (H. S. A. Yahya, *pers. comm*., July 2013), on 28 March 2000 (Yahya & Ahmad 2002), it is strange that no other observer has reported it since, despite the Andamans being reasonably well-visited in the last decade. The only other sighting report is from 160 km ('100 miles') west of Ratnagiri, reported in the 'BirdsofBombay' e-group on 27 April 2003 (Prasad 2006). The original description posted as 'The fairy like buoyant flight and pure white flash of wings, as it flew low over the sea surface was observed,' (Singh 2003) was found wanting in details and Prasad (2006) felt this record required further validation. The species breeds in the Chagos Archipelago, and Addu Atoll, Maldives, while it's rare in northern Maldives with just two records (Anderson 2007). The only Indian record with independently verifiable evidence was a storm-blown bird photographed at Athirapally (10°17'N, 76°34'E), Kerala, *c.* 45 km inland on 22 July 2013 (Jayson *et al.* 2013); the species is included in the India Checklist based on this record. Race, however, is not established.



Map: S. Subramanya

Fig. 5.Black-legged Kittiwake.

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Not included in Hbk. BSA2 listed a recent sighting from Goa. It has been photographed four times in India, all images being available on OBI. The first record was from Rajasthan in 2001, followed by one from Goa in 2005, and the remaining were in 2012–2013 (**Table 9**). All the birds were either in first winter- or juvenile- plumages. The species appears to regularly straggle to our region and birders should carefully check for it in flocks of

Table 9. Black-legged Kittiwake reports

Date	Location	Coordinates	Remarks	References
03 February 2001	Sangam, Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan	25°50'N, 76°33'E	A first winter bird seen and sketched.	Ullman (2014)
16–17 January 2005	Morjim, Goa	15°37'N 73°44'E	A first winter bird photographed.	Newsome (2005)
18 February 2008	Kadalundi–Vallikkunnu Community Reserve, Kerala	11°07'N, 75°49'E	One first winter bird photographed and reported in newspaper but not formally published; identification evidently made only after Das *et al.* 2013. Provenance of the photograph not fully established.	Anonymous (2013)
24 November 2012	Akshi, Alibag District, Maharashtra	18°36'N, 72°53'E	One first winter/juvenile photographed.	Rahane & Bramhankar (2013)
30 November 2012	Majuli Island, Assam	27°38'N, 95°16'E	One first winter/juvenile photographed.	Chatterjee (2012)
25 December 2012–01 February 2013	Puthankadapuram, Thrissur District, Kerala	10°35'N, 75°59'E	Two first winter birds seen for more than a month.	Das *et al.* (2013)

Table 10. Little Gull reports

Date	Location	Coordinates	Remarks	References
November 1909	Mumbai	18°52′N, 72°50′E	A very small gull which may have been this species.	Magrath (1910); Prasad (2006)
21 September 1936	Spituk, Ladakh	34°07′N, 77°30′E	Specimen of a juvenile female from the Koelz Coll. in FMNH has #229168. Ladakh (Pituk) in BSA2, Piting, Ladakh in Hbk, Ladakh, Pituk in Vaurie (1972), and Pitug, Himachal Pradesh in FMNH online catalogue, all probably referring to present day Spituk near Leh, Ladakh (Otto Pfister, *pers. comm.*, July 2013).	Vaurie (1972), Hbk, BSA2
April 1956, April 1957, March 1960	Great Rann of Kutch, Gujarat	24°02′N, 70°08′E	Distant flocks of 'puzzling gull', which could be this species.	Ali (1976)
January 1974	Great Rann of Kutch, Gujarat	24°02′N, 70°08′E	Most likely this species. A fairly large flock of small gulls, smaller than Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*, with dark bill, no fork on tail, darkish underwings, no black on primaries, tern-like flight, but identification not considered definite by the author in the absence of a specimen!	Ali (1976)
27–28 August 1980	Choglasmar, Ladakh	34°06′N, 77°34′E	A first winter bird included with detailed field description leaving little to doubt its identity.	Williams & Delany (1985); Pfister (2004); Delany et al. (2014)
29 August 1981	Tikse, Ladakh	34°03′N, 77°39′E	One juvenile; no other detail recorded in notes (Simon Delany, *pers. comm.*, July 2013) for independent assessment.	Delany *et al.* (2014)
27 November 1987	Rudramata dam, Gujarat	23°21′N, 69°42′E	One bird; no description available.	Bapat & Himmatsinhji (1992)
19 December 1989	Shinay dam, Gujarat	23°02′N, 70°03′E	Three birds; no description available.	Varu (1991); Bapat & Himmatsinhji (1992)
21 December 1989	Shinay dam, Gujarat	23°02′N, 70°03′E	One juvenile/immature, small size, tern-like habit of picking up food from surface of water, zigzag pattern on the wings, dark patch on the crown, no black feathers on under side of the wings, a black band at the end of the tail, dull red legs and feet, dull red beak with a dark tip.	Varu (1991); Bapat & Himmatsinhji (1992)
17 March 1991	D'Ering Memorial (Lali) WLS, Arunachal Pradesh	27°52′N, 95°25′E	A possible in flight with under wing dark greyish and a conspicuously black bill.	Choudhury (1994)
12 January 1992	Bhavnagar New Port, Gujarat	21°46′N, 72°11′E	Three birds along with Brown-headed Gulls–half their size with black bill, no wing bars, indistinct spot behind eye, light grey on wings and white rest of the body. One was a juvenile with a transverse black band.	Parasharya & Mathew (1993); Parasharya *et al.*(1994)
31 December 1992	Okhla Sailing Club, Delhi	28°33′N, 77°17′E	One adult bird reported by Paul Holt. Details unavailable.	Robson (1993a); Urfi (2003); Harvey *et al.* (2006)
19 March 1994	Sohola Beel (Agaratoli), Kaziranga NP, Assam	26°37′N, 93°31′E	An immature with no further details. Field notes not accessible at the moment.	Barua & Sharma (1999)
19 June 1995	Startsapuk-Tso, Ladakh	33°15′N, 78°02′E	One record (Otto Pfister, *pers. comm.*, July 2011). No description available.	Pfister (2001, 2004)
25 January 1996	Nalsarovar, Gujarat	22°48′N, 72°00′E	One bird among a foraging flock; diagnostic features unavailable.	Parasharya *et al.* (1999)
13 October 1996	Harike, Punjab	31°09′N, 74°58′E	A first-winter bird observed by Per Undeland; further details unavailable.	Robson (1997a)
29 December 1996	Okha port, Gujarat	22°15′N, 69°01′E	Four birds amongst 500 other gulls; diagnostic features unavailable.	Parasharya *et al.* (1999)
31 August 2002	Nirma Saltpans, Bhavnagar, Gujarat	22°49′N, 72°17′E	Single bird observed through spotting scope by B. M. Parasharya & I. R. Gadhvi.	B.M.Parasharya, *pers. comm.*, September 2013
25 January 2004	Nalsarovar, Gujarat	22°48′N, 72°00′E	One bird seen as a part of wetland survey with no further details.	Muni (2004)
Undated	Pong Dam, Himachal Pradesh	31°58′N, 75°56′E	Three sightings/numbers. Details unavailable.	den Besten (2004)
30 April 2012	Pong Dam, Himachal Pradesh	31°58′N, 75°56′E	A bird in breeding adult plumage photographed. Three more sight reports awaiting formal publication (C. Abhinav & Devinder Singh Dhadwal *in prep.*)	Dhadwal (2014)

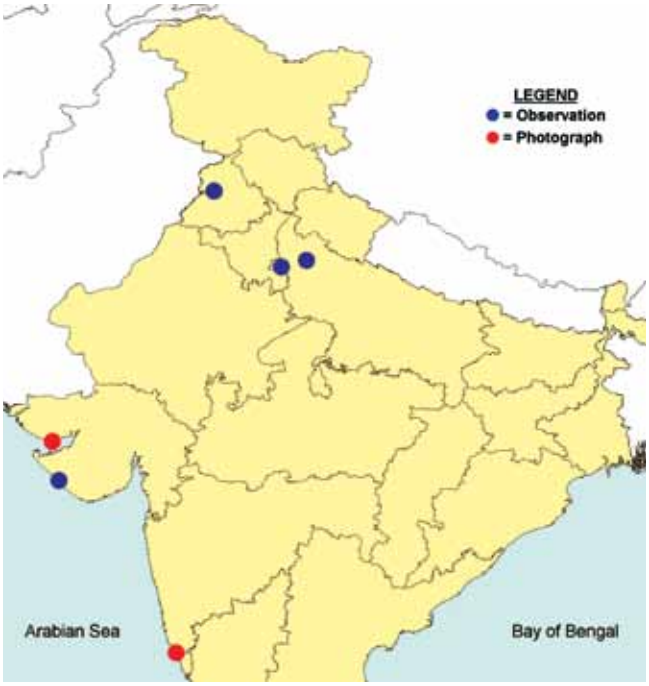
other gulls. The recent drop in Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus* sightings from the region, corresponding with increased sightings of this species, gives reason to suspect that some of the past Little Gull records could have been this species but misidentified (*see* under Little Gull), as older regional field-guides did not include it. Since no specimens have been taken, the racial status is unknown though likely to be the nominate form. The species is included in the India Checklist based on the basis of detailed field documentations including photographs.

Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini* (Sabine, 1819)

Recent record; not included in Hbk or BSA2. A single second summer bird was photographed at Puthankadapuram beach (10°35'N, 75°59'E), Thrissur District, Kerala, on 03–04 May 2013, showed all diagnostic features (Sreenivasan *et al.* 2013); those photographs are considered sufficient for the entry of this species into the India Checklist.

Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus* (Pallas, 1776)

Hbk and BSA2 included it for the region based on the sole specimen from Spituk, Ladakh, in the Koelz collection in FMNH. Ali (1976) documented sightings of flocks from the Great Rann of Kachchh, over four years, but treated his records as tentative for want of specimens (despite providing clear descriptions of the birds in the field). Though several subsequent sight reports exist from different parts of the country, BSA2 considered a majority of them unlikely. These include three autumn records from Ladakh indicating passage migration through the Indus Valley. It has been reported from the Gujarat region at least ten times between 1956 and 2004, apart from single sightings at Kaziranga, Harike, Delhi, possibly Arunachal Pradesh, and Mumbai (**Table 10**); almost all these records, though not verified, have been published in regional field guides. Amongst the records that are considered definite, we have only two cases where notes were published and are independently verifiable. One was of a juvenile (Varu 1991; Bapat & Himmatsinji 1992), while the other was a sighting of two adults and a juvenile (Parasharya & Mathew 1993; Parasharya *et al.* 1994). Unfortunately both the descriptions, counting on apparent small size and black bill of the species, are inadequate for positive conclusion. Considering



Map: S. Subramanya

Fig. 6. Mew Gull.

the multiple reports from Gujarat, it is likely that some birds do occur (or straggle) there. However, the state has been heavily visited in the last decade by resident and visiting birdwatchers and photographers alike but this species has not yet been documented reliably from there. It may also be true that the best sites for gulls and terns in Gujarat are less birded compared to other areas (Prasad Ganpule, *pers. comm.*, June 2013). The species is included in the India Checklist based on the FMNH specimen collected from Ladakh, and photographic record from Pong Dam, though we recognise that some of the sight reports from northern India could also be valid.

Franklin's Gull *Leucophaeus pipixcan* (Wagler, 1831)

Recent record; not included in Hbk or BSA2. A single adult in

Table 11. Sooty Gull reports

Date	Location	Coordinates	Remarks	References
Undated	Madras (=Chennai), Tamil Nadu	13°02'N, 80°17'E	A specimen of this bird, labelled 'Madras', is displayed in the local museum. Now re-examined and confirmed as this species. Its provenance is unknown but believed to be from the neighbourhood as most other specimens in the museum.	Dewar (1905); Satyamurti (1970); Kesavabharati (2014)
January 1875	Near Prongs Lighthouse, Colaba Point, Mumbai, Maharashtra	18°53'N, 72°48'E	Sight report by Hume. Details of identification not provided. But widely believed to be reliable given the author's experience with handling of the Karachi specimen.	Hume (1876); Aitken (1903); Prasad (2006)
24 January 2005	Sundarbans Delta, West Bengal	21°42'N, 88°51'E	Sight report with no photographs. Field description given is not verifiable to warrant a confirmation of this record so far east of its normal range.	Sharma (2006); Sharma & Zöckler (2007)
21 April 2005	Chapora Estuary, Goa	15°36'N, 73°44'E	Sight report of one in second-winter or non-breeding plumage, with no further details	Lainer & Alvares (2013)
22 March 2009	c. 27 km (15 NM) from Mumbai coast past Prongs Reef Lighthouse, Mumbai	18°49'N, 72°38'E	Sight report from boat documented with sufficient identification details.	Macker (2013)
09 November 2011	Between Gateway of India, Mumbai and Mandwa Jetty, Alibaug, Maharashtra	18°50'N, 72°51'E	Sight report from ferry documented with details of identification.	Macker (2013)

Table 12. Mew Gull reports

Date	Location	Coordinates	Remarks	References
19 January 1992	Yamuna River, Delhi	28°38′N, 77°15′E	A first winter bird seen by Per Alström and others.	Alström (1994)
05 March 1993	Gajroula, Uttar Pradesh	28°50′N 78°05′E	A second year bird seen by Paul Holt.	Robson (1993a)
09–15 January 1994	Harike, Punjab	31°09′N, 74°58′E	A first winter seen by Per Undeland.	Robson (1994)
14 December 1996	Morjim, Goa	15°37′N, 73°44′E	One first winter bird.	Holt (2008)
01–14 February 2001	Harike, Punjab	31°09′N, 74°58′E	Several independent sightings during this period.	Prasad (2008b); Robson (2001)
Undated	Pong Dam, Himachal Pradesh	31°58′N, 75°56′E	One sighting, details unavailable.	den Besten (2004)
21 January 2006	Navbandhar, Gujarat	21°26′N, 69°47′E	One bird recorded by K. M. Olsen as a part of a bird tour.	Olsen (2006)
02 February 2008	Morjim, Goa	15°37′N, 73°44′E	A well-photographed first winter bird shows all diagnostic details.	Tams (2008)
08 December 2011	Nainital, Uttarakhand	29°22′N, 79°27′E	A distant gull flock in flight identified to have one adult and one first winter.	Kennerley (2011)
30 January 2013	Bhuj, Gujarat	22°45′N, 69°35′E	One well-photographed first winter bird during a birding tour.	Eaton (2013)

winter plumage was seen thrice at different times of the day on 12 November 2012 from the mouth of Chapora River at Morjim, Pernem (15°36′N, 73°44′E), in Goa (Holt *et al.* 2014). Though a photograph was taken, it was of poor quality. Its different jizz compared to other Asian gulls, dark grey mantle, half hood on its head-rear, extensively blackish ear-coverts, bold white eye-crescents and broad white tips to several of its outermost primaries were noted by observers. This field description is considered detailed enough to eliminate all potential confusion species and hence it is included in the India Checklist.

Table 13. Recent changes in the species limits of 'large white-headed' gulls, and their implications for South Asia (Dickinson & Remsen 2013)

Species	Subspecies	Status in India	Previous / alternative treatments
Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus*	Five races normally recognised; but revision awaited	Extralimital	*L. fuscus dominicanus*
Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus*	*graellsii*	Extralimital	
	intermedius	Extralimital	
	fuscus	Unconfirmed record	
	heuglini (incl. *taimyrensis*)	Confirmed records (*heuglini* sensu stricto)	*L. affinis* *L. argentatus heuglini* *L. heuglini* *L. fuscus taimyrensis* *L. heuglini taimyrensis* *L. taimyrensis*
	barabensis	Confirmed records	*L. cachinnans barabensis* *L. argentatus barabensis* *L. heuglini barabensis* *L. barabensis*
['European'] Herring Gull *L. argentatus*	*argenteus*	Extralimital	
	argentatus	Extralimital	
Armenian Gull *L. armenicus*	Monotypic	Records withdrawn	*L. argentatus armenicus* *L. cachinnans armenicus*
Yellow-legged Gull *L. michahellis*	*atlantis*	Extralimital	*L. fuscus atlantis* *L. cachinnans atlantis* *L. argentatus atlantis*
	michahellis	Extralimital	*L. argentatus michahellis* *L. cachinnans michahellis*
Caspian Gull *L. cachinnans*	Monotypic	Unconfirmed records	*L. argentatus cachinnans*
American Herring Gull *L. smithsonianus*	*vegae* ['Vega Gull']	Extralimital	*L. argentatus vegae* *L. vegae*
	mongolicus ['Mongolian Gull']	Confirmed records	*L. argentatus mongolicus* *L. vegae mongolicus* *L. cachinnans mongolicus* *L. mongolicus*
	smithsonianus	Extralimital	
Great Black-backed Gull *L. marinus*	Monotypic	Unconfirmed records	

White-eyed Gull
Ichthyaetus leucophthalmus (Temminck, 1825)

Not included in Hbk. BSA2 considered this hypothetical for South Asia as the immature specimen (Salvadori & Giglioli 1888) collected in June 1879 from the Maldives was probably ship-borne and not a genuinely wild vagrant. Notably, the species is confined to Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, both a key passage to South Asia for sea vessels from the west. An adult captured and well photographed (Tim Inskipp, pers. comm., September 2014) in 1983 from an unknown locality in the Maldives, and references to more individuals being captured every year by fishermen or brought to the isles by sailors (Ash & Shafeeg 1991), were also treated as records of unknown provenance or ship-borne by BSA2. No reports from India and hence not included in the India Checklist.

Sooty Gull *Ichthyaetus hemprichii* (Bruch, 1853)

Hbk and BSA2 included it based on several well-documented specimens from the Pakistan coast where the species is reportedly an abundant winter visitor, while the only record from India is an old sight report from Mumbai. BSA2 additionally indicates the presence of a nineteenth century specimen from Chennai. Dewar (1905) recognised this specimen, labelled 'Madras', in the Chennai Museum; it is still on public display. Though chemical preservatives have distorted its plumage, the photographs showing its comparative size and shape are diagnostic enough to identify it as this species (Kesavabharati 2014). Apart from these, there are three recent sight records, two from the Mumbai coast, one from Goa, and one from the Sundarbans Delta—the last being open to question. It has also been recorded from Sri Lanka (Warakagoda 1993), and the Maldives (Ash & Shafeeg 1991), though the provenance of the records from the latter area, though well photographed (Tim Inskipp, *pers. comm.*, September 2014), is 'unknown' or 'shipborne'. We accept this species into the India Checklist based on the verified specimen at Chennai, and well-documented sight reports from Mumbai (**Table 11**).

Mew Gull *Larus canus* Linnaeus, 1758

Not included in Hbk. BSA2 considered it a winter vagrant to the region with no specimen records. At least six records, including two photographic reports (**Table 12**), are known from north-western, northern, and western India since 1992; a handful of records from Pakistan, Nepal, and Bhutan also exist (Prasad 2008b). Since almost all the sightings are made by experienced birdwatchers with sufficient corroborative information including photographs, the species is included in the India Checklist. No specimens have been taken and racial status of the regional taxa is unknown.

Large White-headed Gulls

The taxonomic treatment of this group has been in flux in the past and still remains so. Contemporary treatments differ markedly in the number of species they recognise. **Table 13** lists all the taxa involved, their alternative treatments and their implications for South Asia. However, it is to be noted that research on systematics of this group is ongoing and species limits are likely to change in future. We evaluate only full species and hence the Indian records of nominate and *taimyrensis* races of the Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus* are not discussed here as the species itself, with two widely wintering subspecies, is not a rarity.

Kelp Gull
Larus dominicanus M. H. C. Lichtenstein, 1823

Not included in Hbk or BSA2. However there is a record of a bird from Nelsons Island, Chagos Archipelago on 07 February 1975 (Baldwin 1975). Though published description is brief, it is apparently considered adequate to conclusively identify this distinctive species (Carr 2011). However, this has not been reported from anywhere in India and hence not included in the India Checklist.

['European'] Herring Gull
Larus argentatus Pontoppidan, 1763

Hbk, following the taxonomy prevalent in the late twentieth century, treated both *heuglini* and *mongolicus* (=*barabensis* vide BSA2) under *L. argentatus*. This has since been followed in several regional publications. As such, all the records of *argentatus* from India, some explicitly, and others implicitly, referred to the occurrence of either *heuglini* or *barabensis* (e.g., Abdulali 1970; Breeden & Breeden 1982; Balachandran 1995b; Lainer 1999; Sinha *et al*. 2010).

Both *heuglini* and *barabensis* are now considered subspecies of Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus* following the revision of species limits (**Table 13**) in the *argentatus* and *fuscus* complex (Sangster *et al*. 2007; Collinson *et al.* 2008; Dickinson & Remsen 2013). There are no known records of *L. argentatus sensu stricto* from the Indian Subcontinent. We, therefore, remove *L. argentatus* from the India Checklist as it no longer refers to the taxa recorded from India.

Armenian Gull *Larus armenicus* Buturlin, 1934

Not included in Hbk. BSA2 treated it as hypothetical as the recent sight reports, and inconclusive photographs from Harike Lake, Punjab, evidently require corroboration. The species is almost identical to the *barabensis* form of Lesser Black-backed Gull in all its plumages, and this extreme similarity poses a great challenge in the field. Reports of the species from Harike, Punjab, and Yamuna, Delhi (Harvey *et al.* 2006), including photographs of an individual taken in February 2002 from Harike, all now stand withdrawn, as these were most probably *barabensis* (Bill Harvey, *pers. comm.*, July 2013). Hence, the species is removed from the India Checklist as there are no other claims to even consider this as hypothetical.

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* Pallas, 1811

Included in Hbk based on the taxonomic arrangement that was prevalent then. BSA2 treated it as hypothetical as all specimens were evidently re-identified as *barabensis*. [There is, however, an interesting specimen in the BNHS collections, labelled '*Larus argentatus mongolicus*', from Chitral (NWFP, Pakistan); it is evidently very pale-mantled and with short and slender bill (Abdulali 1970). Bill length (51 mm) and paler mantle indicate that it could be a female *Larus cachinnans* (*see* Panov & Monzikov 2000; Gibbins *et al.* 2010); specimen needs close re-examination]. There are also several photographs of pale-backed, large white-headed gulls from India identified as this species on various image resources on the Internet, including OBI. All these photographs were pooled, and expert opinions sought, to confirm if these were indeed *cachinnans*. However, a vast majority of them were identified with certainty as *barabensis* while a few of

them, notably from Kachchh, Gujarat (photographed by Prasad Ganpule), and Harike (photographed by Atanu Mondal), could not be assigned to any particular taxon and may have been an intergrade of *barabensis* and *cachinnans* (Hans Larsson, *pers. comm.*, July 2014). Hence, there are no well-known and definite records of *L. cachinnans* from within Indian Territory and so we do not include the same in the Indian Checklist.

American Herring Gull *Larus smithsonianus* Coues, 1862 ['Mongolian Gull' *L. [s]. mongolicus* Sushkin, 1925]

Not included in Hbk; what was described as *L. argentatus mongolicus* in Hbk, was evidently *L. fuscus [heuglini] barabensis*, vide BSA2 (but see the account of Caspian Gull above for one possible *cachinnans* from Pakistan). We believe it is a case of misclassification rather than misidentification since *barabensis* was described as a distinct race of *L. cachinnans* (Johansen 1960) only around the same time as the *Synopsis* (Ripley 1961), the taxonomic basis for Hbk, was published. Curiously, Indian birds were originally attributed to *cachinnans* (Ripley 1961) before they were re-assigned to *L. argentatus mongolicus*. We suspect a similar case in Roberts (1991) as well, but *mongolicus* records from Pakistan are now rejected as the claim's basis was solely on bare-part colouration, a character of little or no diagnostic value (Yésou & Hirschfeld 1997; Yésou 2001). The lack of taxonomic clarity over *mongolicus* from the Indian Subcontinent would mean that all the previous records purported to be of this taxon probably referred to Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus barabensis*. There seems to be no trace of any old documentation of 'true' *mongolicus* from India. However, an individual was photographed recently at Chilika Lake (19°30'N, 85°05'E), Odisha, in January 2013 and identified as *mongolicus* (Dutta 2013). A year later, another individual, very likely this species (Hans Larsson, *pers. comm.*, July 2014) was photographed at Balasore, Odisha, on 02 February 2014 (Sarkar 2014). There may be more photographs of the species from India (e.g., Gupta 2012) that need confirmation and formal publication. On the basis of the confirmed Odisha record (Dutta 2013), we include this species in the India Checklist. Though the taxon, along with the extralimital *vegae*, is currently treated as a race of the polytypic American Herring Gull (vide Sangster *et al*. 2007), both *vegae* and *mongolicus* are potential splits in future.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus* Linnaeus, 1758

A markedly extralimital species that breeds along the Atlantic coasts of eastern North America and western Europe, wintering further down to the Caribbean Sea and Iberia. It was included in Hbk on the basis of Richard Meinertzhagen's claim of having shot an individual at Deoli Tank in Nasirabad District, Rajasthan, on 16 November 1899 (Meinertzhagen 1900). The specimen was, however, not preserved, as Meinertzhagen, reportedly, did not realise the significance of the record for the Indian Subcontinent. Bourne (1997a) questioned the identification on account of the wing-length (the only attribute given in the original description), which matched that of Heuglin's [Lesser Black-backed] Gull *L.* [*fuscus*] *heuglini*, and the fact that the bird, normally a coastal species, was shot far inland. BSA2 rejected the species on those grounds, and Meinertzhagen's notorious reputation of specimen fraud and falsification of data (Knox 1993; Rasmussen & Collar 1999).

Two recent reports from the Indian Subcontinent—one from Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary, Gujarat (Kumar *et al*. 2007), and another from Sindh, Pakistan (Rais *et al*. 2008)—are discounted here as neither gave details to clinch identification. We strongly suspect that Great Black-headed Gull *L. ichthyaetus*, a fairly common winter visitor to the region, but missing from both lists, was instead intended. Or, this could also be the result of a nomenclatural mix-up while drafting the reports. Rais *et al*. (2008: 24), e.g., gave *L. marinus* the English name 'Great Black-headed Gull', and Balachandran (1995b) called *L. fuscus*, 'Great Black-backed Gull'—both, perhaps victims of transcription errors. In view of these facts, and in the absence of any further records, we exclude the species from the India Checklist.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* (Linnaeus, 1758)

One of the most contentious species recorded in India. Hbk based its inclusion on a sight report from Delhi (Alexander 1950). BSA2 admited the tern could be a very rare visitor to the Indian Subcontinent, yet treated it as hypothetical for want of proper corroboration. BSA2 also pointed to a misidentified specimen from southern India in the BNHS collection; this must have been acquired after the early 1970s, as Abdulali's (1970) catalogue recorded no specimens. Abdulali & Ambedkar (1984) reported an old BNHS correspondence between P. B. Shekar,

Table 14. Black Tern reports

Date	Location	Coordinates	Remarks	References
October 1949	River Yamuna, Delhi	28°40'N, 77°14'E	Sight report. Identification was based on a dark patch (not solid) on the sides of upper breast. This bird was in moult and its tail square-shaped. Since moulting White-winged Tern is known to sport a brownish breast patch and a noticeably squarer tail, we cannot rule out the possibility of it being the latter as has been pointed out elsewhere *(see* Ganguly 1975).	Alexander (1950)
December 1970	Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu	10°18'N, 79°51'E	A Moscow ring, claimed to have been placed on a juvenile Black Tern from Turkmenistan, recovered. Morphometrics presented tend to match Whiskered Tern that breeds extensively at ringing site. Black Terns are known to breed further north. Identity remains inconclusive.	Abdulali & Ambedkar (1983)
?	River Yamuna, Delhi	28°40'N, 77°14'E	Sight report of an adult. Unpublished report. No substantiation as to the identity provided.	Tostain & Balança (1985)
December 1988	Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu	10°18'N, 79°51'E	Ringing record of two adults and one juvenile. Identification questionable. Birds reportedly had silvery grey mantle and slate-grey rump, which are actually more typical of Whiskered Terns (Alexander 1950; Cramp 1985). Morphometrics of the two adults do not match those of Black Tern (especially, tail fork, bill length, and tarsus length–traits diagnostic of Black Tern) as given in Cramp (1985). On the contrary, these measurements fall in the range for White-winged Tern! But see Balachandran (1995a) who also classified them as Black Terns (probably in error).	Natarajan & Balasubramanian (1991)

Table 14. Black Tern reports

Date	Location	Coordinates	Remarks	References
May 1989	Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu	10°18′N, 79°51′E	Rescued bird. Apparently identified by BNHS staff. But morphometrics far exceed the range of any of the marsh terns. Balachandran (1995a) rejected the identification as Black Tern and inferred that it could be a Common Tern *S. hirundo*.	Menon (1992)
October 1990	Pulicat Lake, Andhra Pradesh	13°33′N, 80°12′E	Ringing record. Identification based on dark shoulder patch on the sides of the upper breast. Morphomerics, however, largely overlap with those of other two marsh terns and a key variable (i.e., tail-fork) is missing for clear conclusion over species identity. Included in checklists of Pulicat since then (Kannan *et. al*. 2009; Guptha *et al.* 2011).	Mohapatra & Rao (1994);
March 1991	Kaliveli Tank, Near Pondicherry	12°07′N, 79°51′E	Ringing record. Out of 51 terns ringed, seven were identified as Black Terns. Also indicated that the species was regular in Point Calimere with 25 birds ringed during 1990–1992. No further substantiation as to the identity of the species is provided. Apparently one breeding plumaged bird was photographed during this ringing exercise; the slide is unfortunately misplaced (S. Balachandran, *pers. comm.*, June 2014) and hence could not be verified.	Balachandran (1994)
August–September 1991	Vastrapur, Ahmedabad, Gujarat	23°04′N, 72°53′E	Sight report, by Ketan Tatu, of two individuals in a flock of Whiskered Terns. Field descriptions were sketchy and do not completely rule out immature / first-winter Whiskered Terns.	Anonymous (1991)
November 1991	Thol Lake, Ahmedabad District, Gujarat	23°08′N, 72°24′E	Sight report of three individuals foraging. Identification based on field-characters. Substantiation inadequate.	Tatu (1992)
1989–1991	Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu	10°18′N, 79°51′E	Commented on Menon 1992. Indicated that 48 individuals of Black Tern were ringed at Point Calimere during 1989–1991. Reasons for identification not substantiated. Compared morphometrics of previous Indian records with those given in Cramp (1985). However measurements attributed to Cramp (1985) in Balachandran (1995a) varied from original text in Cramp (1985) and measurements of Indian birds also did not completely match with the latter.	Balachandran (1995a)
November 1993	Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu	10°18′N, 79°51′E	One sight report and one ringing record. Identification based on dark patch on sides of lower neck. Curiously, the morphometrics given for the netted individual matched those of White-winged Tern rather than Black.	Sangha (1994)
07 May 1996	Harike, Punjab	31°09′N, 74°58′E	One in summer plumage with White-winged Terns observed by Per Undeland. No further details available. BSA2 treats it as 'best considered hypothetical until proven'.	Robson (1996)
September 1998	Okhla Barrage, Delhi	28°33′N, 77°18′E	Sight report of two birds. Field characters described in detail were typical of Black Tern for at least one individual. Record is, however, treated here as tentative, on par with other sight reports.	Vyas (2002)
October 1998	Pulicat Lake, Andhra Pradesh	13°33′N, 80°12′E	Ringing record. One individual was netted and ringed. But details on identification were not given.	Sangha (1999)
13 September 1999	Divar Island, Goa	15°31′N, 73°54′E	Sight report. A juvenile. No further details on identification given.	Lainer (2004)
15 October 1999	Chapora Estuary, Goa	15°36′N, 73°44′E	Sight report. A juvenile. No further details on identification given.	Lainer (2004)
26 January 2000	Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu	10°18′N, 79°51′E	One seen during a birdwalk from 'pump house to beach' and an unknown number ringed on the same day by Chris Hassell. No further details recorded in field notes (Chris Hassell, *pers. comm.*, September 2014). This record was also communicated to us by S. Balachandran (S. Balachandran *pers. comm.*, August 2014).	Chris Hassell, *pers. comm.*, September 2014
April 2002	Lingambudhi Lake, Mysore, Karnataka	12°16′N, 76°36′E	Sight report of one adult in full breeding plumage. Report not considered substantiated.	Thejaswi (2005)
27 October 2003	Chapora Estuary, Goa	15°36′N, 73°44′E	Sight report by Anand Prasad. No further details published. White-winged Terns were also present for comparison on multiple days in September-October 2003 and another possible Black Tern was seen on 16 October at the same site. However, original field notes are not accessible at this point in time (Anand Prasad, *pers. comm.*, August 2014) and hence could not be verified.	Robson (2004a)
October 2009	Bhaskarpura marsh, Surendranagar District, Gujarat	22°55′N, 72°03′E	Photographic record. Three individuals seen along with Whiskered Terns. Apparently, photographs presented were of multiple birds and some of them are actually Whiskered Terns *C. hybrida*. The pictures are, however, not sharp enough to identify the terns with any certainty and there are no further images. Record under scrutiny as expert opinion is divided.	Tatu (2010); Harvey (2013); Tatu (2013)
August 2011	Bhavnagar, Gujarat	21°45′N, 72°15′E	Photographic record of one individual. Image is unclear and species identification indeterminate though Tatu (2013) suggested it was very likely this bird.	Varu (2012)
17 May–21 June 2014	Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary, Gujarat	22°49′N 72°02′E	A first summer bird conclusively photographed. The bird was present at the location for an extended period of time with several sightings.	Bhatt *et al.* (2014)

who had recovered a specimen, bearing a ring from Moscow, at Point Calimere on 07 December 1970, and the USSR Academy of Sciences, which informed that the ring was placed on a juvenile Black Tern at Gyzyletrek (37°21′N, 53°56′E), a.k.a. Kyzyl-Atrek (=Artek, Krasnovodkii), on the banks of Atrek River, western Turkmenistan (=Turkmen SSR, USSR) on 18 July 1970. It is not clear whether the ringed bird was captured alive and released, or obtained dead, at Point Calimere. If it was indeed the latter, current whereabouts of the specimen are not known. The wing length measurement (221 mm) provided is beyond the range for

juveniles of both Black- (201–215 mm), and White-winged- Tern *C. leucopterus* (198–216 mm), but falls within that of Whiskered Tern *C. hybrida* (*c*. 8 mm less than the adult range 228–250 mm) (morphometric data from Cramp 1985).

Black Tern is restricted to the extreme south-east of Turkmenistan and only Whiskered Tern is known to breed regularly along the Atrek River near the Caspian Sea coast (Cramp 1985; Burger & Gochfeld 1996). Dementiev & Gladkov (1969) reckon that the Black Tern probably breeds along the lower Amu-Darya in the south-eastern part of the country (with unconfirmed records from lower Atrek, Karadegish), while Ayé *et al.* (2012) allude to only post-breeding movements through the eastern part. The fact that the bird was ringed in mid July [too early for a juvenile to pass through as adults start dispersing only towards July end much before the immature birds (Dementiev & Gladkov 1969)] means that the bird was most probably ringed at its nesting quarter. Incidentally, Cramp (1985), and Burger & Gochfeld (1996) showed a small breeding population of White-winged Tern along the south-eastern coast of the Caspian Sea in western Turkmenistan (in contrast to Ayé *et al.* 2012). To sum up, Whiskered is the only marsh tern recognised by all the authorities as a regular and common breeding visitor to Atrek Basin, where the Point Calimere bird was reportedly ringed, and hence in all likelihood, this 'Black Tern' record was a case of misidentification.

The Bird Migration Project of the BNHS has reportedly captured and ringed several birds from the south-eastern coast of India, notably Point Calimere and Pulicat, since the 1990s (Balachandran 1995a). More recently, two reports from Gujarat, along with photographs purported to be of this species, have been published, and one was conclusively photographed at Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary (Bhatt *et al*. 2014). A summary of all the records of Black Tern from India is presented in **Table 14**.

The controversy over its inclusion is largely because of the rather equivocal manner in which the species is generally diagnosed and reported in India. For example, the dark-patches on the sides of the upper breast / lower neck (a standard field-character of non-breeding Black Terns according to regional field-guides) can also be shown, albeit to a lesser degree in hue and extent, in juvenile and first-winter transition plumages of both Whiskered Tern, and White-winged Tern (Cramp 1985: 141, 162). Though morphometric measurements (particularly tail fork, bill length, and tarsus length) are more valuable in distinguishing non-breeding adults of Black Terns from those of White-winged Terns, inclusion of juvenile measurements in the overall diagnostic range of species morphometry can potentially lead to misclassification.

Notwithstanding these caveats, we do acknowledge that some of the earlier Black Tern records from India, e.g., Tatu (2010), are likely to hold. However, we prefer to include this species solely based on the photographs from Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary (Bhatt *et al*. 2014) as the first confirmed record for the country as it is exemplarily well-documented, peer-reviewed, and readily verifiable. The only other well-documented record of this species from South Asia was of two individuals in near-breeding plumage photographed on Chagos Islands on 26 July 2010 (Carr 2013).

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* Pontoppidan, 1763

The only record for India, which was the basis for its inclusion in Hbk and BSA2, was an individual in full breeding plumage collected at Zuildo, below Rangdum Gompa (34°03'N, 76°19'E), along Suru River in Zanskar Valley, Ladakh, Kashmir, on 02 July 1928 (Whistler 1936); the specimen is now at BMNH. BSA2 also mentioned several sight reports of birds in breeding plumage in August from Chagos and these must have been referring to observations by Peter Carr who first recorded Arctic Terns in non-breeding plumage on 27 March 1996 followed by a few birds in breeding plumage in August 1997 (Carr 2011). Eight more putative sightings from Chagos since then, between 2005 and 2011, exist (www.worldbirds.org) but photographs supplied (Peter Carr, *pers. comm.*, August 2014) for some of those records were actually of Common Terns *S. hirundo*. The species is included in the India Checklist based on the specimen from Ladakh. We suspect that it is probably overlooked in Indian waters during its migration.

Table 15. Summary of Decisions

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*	Included
Tundra Swan *C. columbianus*	Included
Whooper Swan *C. cygnus*	Included
Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis*	Included
Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens*	Excluded
Pink-footed Goose *A. brachyrhynchus*	Excluded
Bean Goose *A. fabalis*	Included
Lesser White-fronted Goose *A. erythropus*	Included
Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*	Included
Velvet Scoter/White-winged Scoter *Melanitta fusca*	Excluded
Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*	Excluded
Chinese Spot-billed Duck *Anas zonorhyncha*	Included
Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata*	Included
Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*	Included
Slavonian Grebe/Horned Grebe *P. auritus*	Included
Red-throated Diver/Red-throated Loon *Gavia stellata*	Excluded
Black-throated Diver/Arctic Loon *G. arctica*	Included
Pygmy Cormorant *Microcarbo pygmeus*	Excluded
Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris*	Included
Black Noddy *A. minutus*	Included
Atoll Tern/White Tern *Gygis alba*	Included
Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*	Included
Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini*	Included
Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*	Included
Franklin's Gull *Leucophaeus pipixcan*	Included
White-eyed Gull *Ichthyaetus leucophthalmus*	Excluded
Sooty Gull *I. hemprichii*	Included
Mew Gull *Larus canus*	Included
Kelp Gull *L. dominicanus*	Excluded
['European'] Herring Gull *L. argentatus*	Excluded
Armenian Gull *L. armenicus*	Excluded
Caspian Gull *L. cachinnans*	Excluded
American Herring ['Mongolian'] Gull *L. smithsonianus* [*L.* [*s*]. *mongolicus*]	Included
Great Black-backed Gull *L. marinus*	Excluded
Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*	Included
Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*	Included

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Seabird observations off the western coast of India

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Historically, the oceans have been one of the least explored avian eco-systems in India. Until recent times, what little we knew of our seabirds, was based on records of birds blown ashore by monsoon winds, observations made during a few expeditions to the islands, and observations made from ships at sea (Praveen 2013). However, most observations from the merchant navy vessels from the Indian seas were made prior to 2000 or perhaps even a couple of decades earlier as reflected in the online database of Royal Naval Bird watching Society (RNBWS; www.rnbws.org.uk). Though there have been significant advances in our knowledge of seabirds in the last three years through sustained off-shore boat trips (Karuthedathu *et al.* 2013; Praveen 2013), paucity of information from slightly deeper waters (*c.* 50–200 km) prompted me to write about my experiences on board *Gulf Cobalt*, an oil tanker, where I worked as Chief Officer and spend five months at sea from November 2013 to April 2014. Most of the seabird observations I managed to document below add to our existing knowledge of seabirds.

Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*

While on a voyage from Sikka, Gujarat, to Singapore, we were about 40 km from Goa (15°25′N, 73°33′E) on 13 December 2013, when an adult Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* joined us and perched on the ship's stern light. Identification was fairly straightforward, as I have seen all three boobies previously during my voyages from western coast of India. Incidentally, an adult Brown Booby *S. leucogaster* was also around at this point but it soon disappeared. After taking photographs [**156**], I reconfirmed the identification using Grimmett *et al.* (1999) and it was quite interesting to note that the bird shared the bunk with an Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* for almost two days. This raptor-booby pair sailed with us almost till Kochi (10°10′N, 75°60′E) in Kerala till we moved closer to the coast on 15 December 2013. The booby was repeatedly seen diving after flying fish, which abound in the waters off India's western coast. As the ship cruised forward, the wash it created was a perfect setting for the flying fish, which in turn were an easy catch for the booby. Though the dive of the booby is a spectacular sight, it is very difficult to capture the moment on camera as the bird plunges at tremendous speed.

Red-footed Booby is documented as the rarest of the three boobies from the Indian Subcontinent with just one prior confirmed record of a dead bird from West Bengal (Karmakar *et al.* 2011). All historical records from the Bay of Bengal are considered suspect (Praveen *et al.* 2013). Hence, interestingly, this would be the first confirmed record of a live bird in the field for the Indian Subcontinent though I myself have observed this species a few times from the western coast, and rarely south of Sri Lanka. Record-wise, this can be treated as a first record for Goa, Karnataka, and Kerala as the ship's course was within 200 nautical miles from the western coast of all these states.

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*

A single adult Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* was photographed [**157**] 80 km off the Goa coast (15°14′ N 73°32′E) on 05 February 2014. Though Praveen (2013) & Karuthedathu *et al.* (2013) indicate that the Masked Booby *S. dactylatra* is the commonest of this genus on the western coast of India, I personally have more than ten observations of the former and this accounts for more than my Masked Booby sightings – I must say here that I am aware of the juvenile plumages of Masked Booby and have ensured that no identification issues have arisen due to this. This appears to be the seventh Indian record of this species (Praveen *et al.* 2013), the second record for Goa (Lainer 2004), and for documentation purposes, I have ignored my undated sightings seen during my earlier voyages.

Photos: Anuj Gandhe

156. Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*.

157. Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*.

Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*

Contrary to other studies from India (Sashikumar *et al.* 2011; Karuthedathu *et al.* 2013; Praveen 2013), I found this species rarer than the Brown Booby. However, my observation of this species has generally been of multiple birds, and in terms of sheer numbers, I might have seen more of these than the Brown Booby. Observation details and counts were not recorded meticulously to be entirely sure of this statement and these impressions are from my memory. The only photograph I have is of an adult bird taking off [**158**] from about 70 km (15°14'N, 73°20'E) off the coast of Goa. Compared to studies from India, De Silva (2011) indicates that Brown Booby is more regular along the coasts of Sri Lanka, perhaps even more regular than the Masked Booby, as sightings of the latter appear to be meagre near Sri Lanka.

158. Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*.

?Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor*

On 11 December 2013, a single *Fregata* species was photographed [**159**] from the ship at a point *c.* 100 km (12°48'N, 73°51'E) west-southwest of Mangalore. The harsh lighting and the distance do not allow for conclusive identification. The all-dark body tilts the identification heavily towards an adult male *F. minor* with the prime assumption that any white body parts (of *F. ariel*) should have stood out in the photograph even in this light. Interestingly, all the frigatebird records from the south-western coast have been during the monsoon months (Sashikumar *et al.* 2011; Praveen J., *pers. comm.*, May 2014) and this would be the first winter record of either species from the south-western coast of India. It is also noteworthy that in the offshore studies of Karuthedathu *et al.* (2013), and Praveen (2013), they have not come across this species at all; presumably the greater distance from the coast, of our ship, enabled us to spot this species.

159. ?Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor*.

Photos: Anuj Gandhe

160. Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*.

Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*

On 20 December 2013, a single sub-adult Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus* was photographed **[160]** 50 km from the coast of Kachchh (22°38'N, 68°28'E) while on a voyage towards the Middle East. Identification was tricky from the photograph, the heavy orangish bill with dark cutting edge, all dark outer primaries, and black mottling on the rump (at this age) enabled separation from White-tailed- *P. lepturus*, and Red-tailed- *P. rubricauda* Tropicbirds. Red-billed Tropicbirds breed on the islands of Arabia (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), and the sighting of a sub-adult bird is quite likely in Gujarat. However, there appears to be just one prior record of this species from Gujarat, which is of three to four birds seen by Captain E. A. Butler between 'Kutch' and Karachi in March 1877 (Gibson-Hill 1950). However, Gibson-Hill (1950) errs in the location he quotes from Butler (1877) as all of Butler's sightings were between Karachi and Oman. Hence, this appears to be the first 'real' record for Gujarat.

In summary, my observations indicate that exploring deeper waters (50–200 km) may probably be needed to understand the abundance of certain species that may be rare in offshore waters closer to the mainland (<50 km). This is was the first time I managed to take photographic equipment out to sea. I hope to add more records of seabirds off the coast of India in the future.

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Sighting of Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* from the Nubra Valley, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, and a review of previous records from the Indian Subcontinent

Siddharth Damle & Tim Inskipp

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The Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* is a small passerine bird that was formerly classed as a member of the thrush family Turdidae, but is now more generally considered to belong to the Muscicapidae, Old World flycatchers and chats. It is the most widespread member of the wheatear genus *Oenanthe* in Europe and Asia. Both sexes have a white rump and tail, with a black inverted T-pattern at the end of the tail. The plumage of the summer male has grey upperparts, buff throat and black wings and face mask. In autumn it resembles the female apart from the black wings. The female is pale brown above and buff below with darker brown wings. The male has a whistling, crackly song. Its call is a typical chat *chack*.

It is a migratory insectivorous species breeding in open stony country in Europe and Asia. It typically nests in rock crevices and rabbit burrows. All birds of the species winter in Africa and it is considered a passage migrant through Pakistan, and a vagrant elsewhere in the Indian subcontinent.

This article describes the sighting of a Northern Wheatear pair from Nubra Valley (34°36′N, 77°42′E), Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir.

I was on holiday with my family in Ladakh after my 10th std exams. It was basically a sight-seeing trip. On 14 May 2013 we visited the Nubra valley to see the Double-humped camel *Camelus bactrianus*, which is a speciality of the area. The Nubra valley is a cold desert with diverse landscapes. On our way to the sand dunes for a camel ride I saw a female wheatear near a stream, sitting on a thorny shrub. However, I was not able to take any photographs at that time as the vehicle was moving. On reaching the destination I went in search of the wheatear. As soon as I crossed the stream near the parking lot, I saw the same female sitting on a rock beside the shrub. It chased a male Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* that was sitting on a nearby rock and then came back to the original rock. Not knowing which species of wheatear it was I made some images from a distance. Satisfied with the record shots I decided to close the gap and started crawling on the ground and reached quite close to the bird. The female did not fly off and was quite tolerant towards me. It allowed me to take some images **[161-163]** with my pro zoomer camera. Suddenly, a male came from behind the female and on seeing me flew off quickly. On sensing the alertness of

Table 1. Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* reports from the Indian Subcontinent, listed chronologically

Locality	State/Province & Country	Details	References	Remarks
Mhow, Indore	Madhya Pradesh, India	'I got a specimen near Mhow, in the cold weather'. Pre 1863.	Jerdon (1863), Hume (1881), Oates (1890), Ripley (1982), Ali & Ripley (1998), Kazmierczak (2000) - mapped, Grimmett *et al.* (2011) - mapped, Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) - mapped	Specimen ascribed to this species, but discounted conclusively as *O. isabellina* by Hume (1881): 'Under these circumstances I have not the least doubt that, be the sources what they may from which he compiled his curt and by-no-means satisfactory description, the bird he intended to represent under his 491 was really *isabellinus*'. This latter conclusion was repeated by Oates (1890) but overlooked by most subsequent authors.
Sukkur	Sind, Pakistan	Specimen in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History, collected by F. Day, undated [?1870s]	ORNIS	Not listed or mapped by Roberts (1992) or Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) and therefore treated here as unconfirmed until the identification and other details have been checked.
Gilgit	Kashmir	Specimens: 2 ♂♂ in the collection of The Natural History Museum, Tring, UK. Sight records: '..about half a dozen others observed' in March 1878; also '…in small numbers from the 20th of March to the 22nd April' 1878 or 1879	Biddulph (1881), Hume (1881), Scully (1881), Oates (1890), Baker (1924), Ripley (1982), Roberts (1992), Ali & Ripley (1998), Kazmierczak (2000) - mapped, Grimmett *et al.* (2011) - mapped, Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) - mapped	Identification of specimens confirmed by Roberts (1992).
Drosh	Chitral, Pakistan	Specimens: 2 in the collection of the Bombay Natural History Society. Sight records: 'Not common. First seen 2nd April [1903]. One pair nested on the Lower Drosh farm about 4,200 feet [= 1280 m].' No further details provided.	Perreau (1910), Baker (1924), Ripley (1982), Abdulali (1988), Roberts (1992), Ali & Ripley (1998), Kazmierczak & van Perlo (2000) - mapped, Grimmett *et al.* (2011) - mapped, Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) - mapped	Identification of specimens confirmed by Abdulali (1988). The breeding record was not mentioned by Baker (1934) or Ripley (1982). However, Ali & Ripley (1998) included it without expressing any doubt, whereas Roberts (1992) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) both referred to possible breeding.
Wardwan Valley	Kashmir	Specimen: September 1907	Ward (1908), Baker (1924), Ripley (1982), Ali & Ripley (1998)	Authenticity doubted as specimen not traced and excluded from some subsequent publications (e.g. Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

Table 1. Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* reports from the Indian Subcontinent, listed chronologically

Locality	State/Province & Country	Details	References	Remarks
Quetta	Balochistan, Pakistan	Specimens in the collection of The Natural History Museum: 'An adult male was obtained at Quetta on 17.iii. [1913 or 1914] and an adult female on 18.x. [1913 or 1914]. Not otherwise observed.'	Meinertzhagen (1920), Baker (1924), Christison & Ticehurst (1942), Roberts (1992)	As with all Meinertzhagen's specimens the true origin of these may be suspect (see Rasmussen & Anderton, 2012: 30). Christison & Ticehurst (1942) stated that it was 'reported to pass through Quetta between 17th March and 18th October, but this is clearly a misinterpretation of Meinertzhagen's text.
Jhelum District	Pakistan	Sight record: a wheatear noted as 'perhaps S. oenanthe' seen on 31 August 1914.	Whistler (1914)	No description provided and clearly not not considered as definite anyway.
Chagai	Balochistan, Pakistan	Specimen: '*Œnanthe leucomela*…The Siberian, pale race of Common Wheatear'	Christison (1941), Ripley (1982), Ali & Ripley (1998)	Refers to Pied Wheatear *O. pleschanka* rather than *O. oenanthe*.
Nushki	Balochistan, Pakistan	Specimen: 14 November [1938-1941]	Christison & Ticehurst (1942), Roberts (1992), Kazmierczak (2000) - mapped, Grimmett *et al.* (2011) - mapped, Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) - mapped	The current whereabouts of the specimen is not known and therefore the identification cannot be confirmed. However, Christison collected six other species of wheatears in the area and was probably well versed in the intricacies of their identification.
Seenu Atoll	Maldives	Sight record: 1-3 October 1970	Strickland & Jenner (1978), Ash & Shafeeg (1995), Kazmierczak (2000) - mapped, Grimmett *et al.* (2011) - mapped, Rasmussen & Anderton (2012)	No description provided and therefore not independently verifiable.
Meghauli	Nepal	Sight record: ♂ on 1 April 1983	Byers & Adams (1983), Inskipp & Inskipp (1991), Grimmett *et al.* (2011) - mapped, Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) - mapped	Detailed description provided. Considered an acceptable record.
Kyangjin	Nepal	Sight record: 18 April 1984	Inskipp & Inskipp (1985), Inskipp & Inskipp (1991)	Inskipp & Inskipp (1985) incorrectly ascribed the record to this species but Inskipp & Inskipp (1991) corrected the error.
Ladakh	Kashmir	Sight records: ♂ on 19 June 1986 at Rangdum Gompa-Yuldo; ♂ on 22 June 1986 at Parkachik-Panikar; possible record of ♀ on 12 June at Tikse-Shey	Goodwin (1986)	No descriptions provided and therefore not independently verifiable. However, the observer would have been very familiar with the species in Europe.
Bridge Lake	NWFP, Pakistan	Sight record: ♂ on 25 April 1990	Kylänpää (2000)	No description provided and therefore not independently verifiable. However, it is likely that the observer would have been very familiar with the species in Europe.
Kota	Rajasthan, India	Sight records: frequently seen in small numbers	Vyas (1992), Kazmierczak (2000) - mapped, Grimmett *et al.* (2011) - mapped, Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) - mapped	Suspected to refer to *O. isabellina*, which is missing from the species list.
Muzzafarabad	Kashmir	Sight records: common winter visitor 2000-2001; summer visitor 2007-2008	Awan et al. (2004), Awan *et al.* (2010)	Unlikely to be common or occur either in winter or in summer. Other expected congeners are missing from the species lists.
Shivpuri	Madhya Pradesh, India	?	Chandra & Singh (2004)	No details of the record(s) provided, which would be necessary for general acceptance.
Thar Desert	Rajasthan, India	Sight record: 2 recorded 2000-2003	Sivaperuman et al. (2005), Tak *et al.* (2009)	No details of the record provided, which would be necessary for general acceptance.
Nagwada, Little Rann of Kachchh	Gujarat, India	Sight record: photographed, October 2008	Vyas (2009) & copies of 2 original photographs	The original photographs appear to show a Desert Wheatear *O. deserti*.
Tal Chhapar	Rajasthan, India	Sight record: photographed, ♂ on 10 October 1990	Devasar (2009)	Photo ascribed to this species, but later changed to Isabelline Wheatear *O. isabellina*.
Tunganath	Uttarakhand, India	Sight record: photographed, ♂ on 1 May 2013	Mondal (2013)	Photographed but not described.
Nubra Valley, Ladakh	Kashmir	Sight record: photographed, pair on 14 May 2013	Damle	Photographed and described.
Madayippara	Kerala	Sight record: photographed, ♀/imm. on 16-17 October 2013	Chovva (2013)	Photographed but not described by P. C. Rajeevan, and seen also by K. Chovva and J. Thomas on the following day.
Ghasa, Mavli Tehsil, Udaipur	Rajasthan, India	Sight record: photographed, ♀ on 1 December 2013	Sangha (2013), Shekhawat (2013)	Photographed but not described.

Text in orange colour= confirmed record.

the male, the female flew with him and the pair perched on top of a tall shrub. Unsure of the species I did not pay much attention to them and carried on with my birding. On my way back, I spent some time at the airport searching for the ID of this species on the internet as I did not have a field guide at that time. I searched in the wheatears section on www.orientalbirdimages.org where I saw images very similar to the bird I had seen. The blue-grey upperparts and black mask matched the images of the male Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*. The female was olive-brown in colour and lacked the rufous ear-coverts that most wheatears have, making it a good fit for a female Northern Wheatear. I made some phone calls and asked some birding experts what were the chances of seeing this bird. However, no one was sure about its distribution as there had been very few Indian records. At home I uploaded the image on the Indian Birds facebook group (https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=57

161. Northern Wheatear pair

162. Male Northern Wheatear

Photos: S. Damle

163. Female Northern Wheatear

0102816346478&set=gm.10151402178952411&type=1&theater) and experts there confirmed the identification.

All records of this species from the Indian subcontinent are summarised in Table 1, with those regarded as acceptable in bold typeface.

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Sighting of Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* in Gujarat, India, with notes on identification of marsh terns occurring in western India

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Introduction

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* is one among the four species of 'marsh terns' of the genus *Chlidonias*. It has a Holarctic breeding distribution, with the nominate race occurring from southern Scandinavia south to southern Spain, and east through eastern Europe and western Asia to Lake Balkhash and the Altai Republic; it winters in Africa (Gochfeld & Burger 1996).

Its status in India is unclear, being treated variously as a 'rare visitor' (Grimmett *et al.* 1998), a 'vagrant' (Ali & Ripley 1981; Kazmierczak 2000; Grimmett *et al*. 2011), or considered 'hypothetical' (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

We report here the sighting of a first summer Black Tern from Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary, Gujarat.

Observation

On 17 May 2014, two of us (NB, GV), with a few friends, went birding at Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary (22°49'N 72°02'E; Gujarat, India) to observe and photograph White-winged Terns *Chlidonias leucopterus* in breeding plumage. Within the first few minutes, we photographed four White-winged Terns in breeding plumage. Then we moved to a different location in the sanctuary where we had previously noticed roosting Whiskered Terns *C. hybrida*. As we began photographing a group of Whiskered Terns in breeding plumage, we noticed a different tern roosting with the group, which was relatively smaller than them, and with a finer bill. We managed to take some photographs of this bird, roosting **[164, 165]**, as well as in flight **[166, 167]**.

165. First summer Black Tern showing grayish upperparts.

166. First summer Black Tern in flight showing dark, large breast patch and typical head pattern.

Photos: N. Bhatt

164. Black Tern. First summer bird showing typical head pattern, slender bill and grayish mantle with dark wing-bar.

167. First summer Black Tern in flight showing dark wing bar, different generation of feathers, slender bill and grayish rump.

Description

The bird in question seemed rather short-legged. Its head had extensive dark markings with a dark crown and nape.It had dark ear coverts contiguous with the crown and nape, with black on ear coverts extending below its eyes. Its mantle was grayish. Some brownish feathers, indicative of a juvenile bird, were seen in its wing coverts and scapulars. A dark bar was visible on its wing. Its bill was black, long and slender. In flight, a prominent black shoulder patch was seen on the side of its breast. It had a grey rump, and a squarish tail. Its legs were black. When compared with Whiskered Terns, its finer bill, shorter legs, head pattern, and very dark shoulder patch became apparent. The bird had moulted its primaries, while the moult of its secondaries had just begun **[167]**.

We (NB,GV) initially suspected that the bird was a White-winged Tern in non-breeding plumage, but were puzzled by the prominent black 'patch' on the shoulder. We sent the images to PG for identification. PG suspected it to be a Black Tern in first summer plumage, as he had prior experience of different plumages of Whiskered Terns and White-winged Terns in Gujarat. PG had also studied cases where Whiskered Terns sport a shoulder patch akin to a Black Tern, though much fainter. After checking further references (Olsen & Larsen 1995; van Duivendijk 2011), it became apparent that the bird indeed was a Black Tern. The head pattern of a White-winged Tern or a Whiskered Tern is quite different from that on the bird in question, with both of the former birds never showing such dark, prominent, shoulder patches. The slimmer bill and shorter legs were typical of a Black Tern. The dark and uniform upperparts fit Black Tern as both Whiskered- and White-winged Terns have much paler grayish upperparts.PG sent the images to Klaus Malling Olsen, Norman Deans van Swelm, Ian Mckerchar, and Bill Harvey for their opinions. They confirmed it to be a Black Tern in first-summer plumage, based on the dark wing-bar, status of primary moult, different generation of feathers on wings and mantle, and other plumage features like dark, uniform upperparts.

NB and PG re-visited the area on 07 June 2014, but despite an extensive search, were unable to locate the bird. However it was seen again on 14 June 2014 by NB and on 21 June 2014 by PG at the same location. A sighting of this tern was also reported on 25 May 2014 (S. Bramhankar, *in litt.,* email dated 02 July 2014). NB visited the same area on 10 July 2014 but could not locate the bird and it was reported that the bird was not seen subsequently (Kasam Sama, *pers.comm.*, verbally). Thus this individual was seen for duration of more than one month at this location.

We also saw and photographed several first summer, and adult, White-winged Terns and Whiskered Terns in various plumages during our visits. A first-summer White-winged Tern was photographed here on 07 June 2014 **[168]**, and the differences between first summer plumages of Black Tern and White-winged Tern became quite clear when these images were seen and compared. The White-winged Tern had a different head pattern, shorter bill and longer legs, grayish plumage, and lack of visible dark shoulder patch in flight. A White-winged Tern in breeding plumage **[169]**, photographed on 17 May 2014, is also quite distinct from a Black Tern in similar condition. It shows a 'jet-black' body contrasting strongly with white shoulders and wing coverts. In flight, black underwing coverts are distinctive. A Black Tern has a grayish-black body, and in flight, gray underwings.

Photos: N. Bhatt

168. First summer White-winged Tern (with Whiskered Terns). Note typical head pattern, long legs, short bill and dark wing bar and compare with First summer Black Tern.

169. Adult breeding White-winged Tern showing 'jet black' head and body with white lesser coverts.

Detailed identification features of Black-, White-winged-, and Whiskered Terns are given in Alström (1989), Olsen & Larrson (1995), van Duivendijk (2011), and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012). These works cover aspects of field identification of all three species in their various plumages.

However, based on our observations of Whiskered Terns and White-winged Terns in Gujarat, we present here some additional characters that may prove useful in their field identification.

Whiskered Tern: Our observations of this bird indicate that the dark grayish shoulder patch is often present in many individuals, both first-winter and adults, which is congruent with Olsen & Larsson (1995). Though these patches are generally grayer and weaker than those on Black Terns, some birds have patches prominent enough to be easily discernible in flight. One such individual was photographed by PG in the Little Rann of Kachchh on 09 January 2011**[170]**. In such instances, confusion with Black Tern is possible. For Whiskered Tern, the shoulder patch is said to be 'grayish, but more diffuse, paler and weaker than on Black Tern' (Olsen & Larsson 1995), and, 'usually not so large and distinct, and probably never so dark as on Black Tern' (Alström 1989). Thus it is possible that some Whiskered Terns may show a fairly prominent, but smaller dark shoulder patch. Identification in such cases would require a detailed scrutiny of other features like head pattern, bill, and overall plumage.

White-winged Tern: Though our observations of White-winged Tern are limited since they are uncommon in Gujarat, we have made detailed notes of more than 20 individuals in various plumages over the past three years. Of particular interest were three birds, noted by NB, with prominent dark shoulder patches on 14 June 2014 at Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary **[171, 172,**

Photo: P. Ganpule

170. Adult Whiskered Tern in winter showing grayish 'black tern like' patch but note different head pattern and thicker bill.

173). As can be seen from the images, the shoulder patch is large, dark, and prominent in two of these birds. This kind of plumage can lead to confusion with the Black Tern. The birds in the photographs are beginning to moult into breeding plumage, with the moult starting from the head, shoulder patches, and underwing coverts. However the black on the underwing coverts is diagnostic for White-winged Terns, making identification easy. For the third bird, as can be seen from **[171,172]** for the bird in front, the shoulder patch looks dark when seen at certain angles and the underwing coverts are white. The head pattern is characteristic for White-winged Tern and this seems to be a first-summer bird based on the dark lesser covert wing-bar. For first-summer birds 'elements of black may be present on body and under-wing coverts' (Olsen & Larsson 1995); however, the illustrations in this work (Pl. 40, fig. 6) do not show dark patches on side of breast for first-summer birds. Hence this could lead to confusion with Black Tern, but other features like head pattern, white rump, grayer upperparts, and shorter bill are useful for identification. First winter White-winged Tern is said to normally stay in its winter range in summer (van Duivendijk 2011), and it is possible that these birds may spend the summer here. Sightings in June are indicative of this and further observations would confirm whether these birds do stay back.

Photos: N. Bhatt

171. First summer and adult White-winged Tern showing 'black tern like' patches (with Whiskered Terns). Head pattern and bill typical of White-winged Tern, adult bird in moult with moult starting from head, shoulder patches and underwing coverts. First-summer bird with dark wing bar.

172. Same birds as **171**. Note diagnostic black underwing coverts for the adult White-winged Tern. For first-summer bird, shoulder patch looks fainter, head pattern and bill typical of White-winged Tern.

173. Adult White-winged Tern in moult with extensive dark shoulder patch and black underwing coverts.

Discussion

The Black Tern has been widely recorded in India, but every record has been contested. It was first recorded from Delhi in 1949 (Alexander 1950) but was discounted by Ganguli (1975). A set of unverified ringing and sight records exist from the south-eastern coast of India: Abdulali & Ambedkar (1984), Natarajan & Balasubramanian (1991), Menon (1992), Balachandran (1994), Sangha (1994), Mohapatra & Rao (1994), Sangha (1999), and Kannan *et al*. (2009); however, Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) have rejected all the records of the species from South Asian limits as unsubstantiated claims on grounds of misidentification. In fact, Rasmussen discounts the Black Tern skin in the BNHS collection as being misidentified (*ibid*.). Robson (1996) lists a sight record from Harike by Per Undeland but Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) treat this as 'best considered hypothetical until proven'. Other Indian records from Gujarat (Anonymous 1991; Tatu 1992), Goa (Lainer 2004; Robson 2004), Mysore (Thejaswi 2005), and Delhi (Vyas 2002) receive no specific mention in Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), who treat this species as hypothetical for South Asia. A recent photographic record of three–four birds from Gujarat (Tatu 2010) was challenged by Harvey (2013), but Tatu (2013) stands by his identification of three individuals as Black Terns (including the one reported subsequently by Varu 2012), though he agrees that one bird may have been misidentified. In summary, the status of this species is still uncertain and contentious with most authorities, including Harvey (2013), preferring to exclude the species from the South Asian list. Hence, this record comes at the right time to remove the long-standing ambiguity over the occurrence of the species in India.

This sighting from the third week of May till June end suggests either a first summer bird spending the summer months here, or a bird in an extended spring passage migration. Almost all the previous (contested) records have been during autumn or winter months. It is thought that most first winter birds remain in western African waters in summer (Cramp 1985; van Duivendijk 2011). The nominate race of *C. niger* often disperses north after breeding, with sometimes very large concentrations e.g., in the southern parts of North Sea, migrating in huge numbers through the Mediterranean, and also across northern Africa (even over deserts), to its main wintering grounds on the tropical coasts of western African, from Mauritania to Namibia, some reaching South Africa, while some winter in the Nile Valley; adults begin their southward migration by August, juveniles about a month later (Gochfeld & Burger 1996). Harrison (1983) states that post-breeding migration is through the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, to the Atlantic Ocean, with peak passage through the Straits of Gibraltar in August–September to the main non-breeding area off West Africa; the northward departure from its wintering grounds is along the same route beginning in March for spring migration. The Black Tern is considered a vagrant even to eastern Africa (Stevenson & Fanshawe 2002), and only a single record exists, in 14 years, from Ethopia and Eritrea (Ash & Atkins 2009).Thus India, and South Asia, is not in its known migratory path, both during spring and autumn migration.

However, vagrancy has been recorded for the nominate *C. niger* (Cramp 1985). There is a record of Black Tern from the Chagos Islands in late July (Carr 2013) despite the Indian Ocean being outside its normal migration route. Though it is premature to discuss the status of Black Tern in Gujarat, it is worthwhile investigating the possibilities for its occurrence, particularly when the argument lingers that some of the prior records, though ill-documented and questionable, may have indeed been Black Terns.

Inclement weather may force some birds to deviate from their normal migration route and is a cause for vagrancy. However, there appears to be no recent case of turbulence in the Indian Ocean to have enabled this bird to come up the wrong ocean from the South African coast. Having noted the presence of migrating White-winged Terns along with this bird, one possibility is that this Black Tern migrated south-eastward (instead of south/south-west) from its breeding grounds, along with White-winged Terns, and post winter, might return with the same group. If this were to be true, it would mean that observers need to closely watch flocks of migrating White-winged Tern for a possible disoriented Black Tern. However, if we receive more supporting records of adults and juveniles in subsequent years from careful observers, it could mean that such aberrant Black Terns in fact constitute a small easterly wintering population, migrating through South Asia. Alternatively, it could also be the case that some birds may be migrating in spring via an easterly route through eastern Africa and South Asia to return to their breeding grounds—a case of loop migration. Black Terns are known to breed as far east as Baikal Lake; it is unclear where these birds winter. If their wintering destination is in southern Africa, surely the shortest passage route must cross over north-western India. It could be argued that the tall Himalayan and Karakoram ranges will hinder this apparently short route, but it has also been recently suggested that the Himalayas are perceived as an exaggerated barrier to bird migration (Delany *et al.* 2014). However, the lack of records from eastern Africa is puzzling, since this route would be through eastern Africa. This would suggest that birds wintering in southern Africa may be migrating over the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. Whether Black Terns undertake such a migration is not known, though the Chagos Island record seems to support this. But that record was in July, which would indicate an early autumn migration by an easterly route, if it is the nominate *niger*. These hypotheses, if proven with more records, would bring up the obvious question that at least some of the past disputed records may have been correct. Lack of specimens during the nineteenth, and the early twentieth centuries may point to a fairly recent change in its migratory pattern, or lack of further records may prove that the Black Tern is a genuine vagrant to the Indian Subcontinent.

Conclusion

This record proves the occurrence of the Black Tern from India. Since the sighting was in May and June, it is possible that this particular bird was either in an extended spring passage migration, or was a summer migrant. As per the above discussion, the Black Tern is, at present, best considered a rare vagrant to India, but observers must keep a close watch during migration for this species, particularly along with White-winged Terns.

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The first breeding record of the Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug milvipes* for the Indian Subcontinent in Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir

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A great favourite with falconers, the Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* is a large, powerful bird of prey with an exceptionally broad wingspan for its size. It was used for hunting hare (*Lepus* species) and Macqueen's Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueenii*, and quite exceptionally flown at gazelle (*Gazella* species) and eagles (*Aquila* species) (Osman 2001).

Falco cherrug occurs in a wide range across the Palearctic region from eastern Europe to western China, breeding in Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, Turkey, Iraq, Armenia, the Russian Federation, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and China, and at least formerly in Turkmenistan and probably Afghanistan, possibly India (Ladakh), with wintering or passage populations occurring regularly in Italy, Malta, Cyprus, Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Sudan, South Sudan, Tunisia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, U.A.E., Bahrain, Kuwait, Iran, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Afghanistan, and Azerbaijan, with much smaller numbers or vagrants reaching many other countries (BirdLife International 2014; Global Raptor Information Network 2014).

The species has declined in numbers and has been up listed to Endangered category because a revised population trend analysis indicates that it may be undergoing a very rapid decline. This negative trend is a result of an unsustainable trend to capture the birds for the falconry trade, as well as habitat degradation and the impacts of agrochemicals. The rate of decline appears to be particularly severe in the species' Central Asian breeding grounds (BirdLife International 2014).

In Ladakh, Saker Falcon was reported by Mallon (1987) during consecutive winters (1980–1984), 'in very small number', around plantations and at villages along the Indus Valley, but he did not specify any location. One was recorded at Pannikhar, Suru Valley on 11 July 1977 (Williams & Delany 1979 in Holmes 1986). Rishad Naoroji and HSS observed it a few times during seven summer trips to Ladakh between 1997 and 2003, at Chushul, Mahe, Hanle road, Hanle-Chumur road, and Dungti

(Sangha & Naoroji 2006; Naoroji 2007). Based on these sightings its status was described in Ladakh as mainly a passage migrant, and 'possibly a scarce summer breeder' (Naoroji 2007). Kovács *et al*. (2014) do express that there is a 'possibility of breeding in Ladakh' for this falcon.

In this century it has been sighted in Ladakh at Hanle in August 2008 and Tso Kar in August 2013 (Orientalbirdimages).

While birding near Tso Kar on 27 June 2014, we noticed one Saker Falcon in flight. However, it soon flew away towards the Tso Kar Marsh and was lost. When we were about to leave the area, HSS heard the call of chicks, and after a quick scan of the mountain face, a nest was discovered with four chicks! The nest was in a crevice below the topmost ridge of an overhanging rock. It comprised branches and twigs of *Caragana versicolor* and a wide array, unfortunately, of easily available man-made items, among which were cotton and woolen rags, and wires/cables. The rock below the nest was liberally spattered with the bird's chalk-white droppings. The nest contained four chicks **[174]**, and an adult was noticed flying twice to the nest with food. As the bird flew in from the direction of the marsh, it might have brought vole (*Alticola* sp.) to the young. The nest was observed for *c*. 30 minutes. Prolonged observations were not possible.

Discussion

Besides the breeding bird described above we encountered one more adult Saker Falcon at Tanglang La, 5328 m on 24 June 2014 **[175]**. This bird resembled the bird observed near Tso Kar. Both the birds had a darkish crown, a pale rufous cap, and a contrast between evenly barred flanks and pale unpatterned breast. We identified the birds as Eastern Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug milvipes* and later shared the images with Dick Forsman and Igor Karyakin.

Forsman said that it would be best to call them *milvipes*, which seems to be the preferred name for the eastern birds. Karyakin described them as Tibetan Saker Falcons *Falco cherrug hendersoni* that live at the highest altitude inhabiting Tibet. 'It is similar to *progressus*, but with wider stripes on back, dark head, horizontal stripes on the undertail and pants' (Igor Karyakin *in litt.,* August 2014).

Photos: Sandeep Dhuma

174. Saker Falcon chicks near Tsokar, Ladakh, 27 June 2104. A first breeding record for the Indian Subcontinent.

175. Saker Falcon, Tanglang La (5328m) Ladakh, 24 June 2014.

Eastern Saker Falcon is sometimes known as Shanghar Falcon (Ali & Ripley 1978; Kazmierczak 2000). In its main range it is found in montane areas and may be highly distinct genetically from the nominate race (Wink *et al*. 1998; in Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), and also differs from it markedly in overall shape and appearance. The sight records enumerated above, and the breeding record from Tso Kar area, probably indicate that Eastern Saker Falcon is a scarce breeding resident in Ladakh.

Due to the great extent of individual and geographic variation, it is extremely difficult to classify the separate Saker populations into distinct subspecies without a large series of museum specimens. All in all, Saker taxonomy is far from clear and more work is clearly needed. Some authors recognise several subspecies (Dementiev & Gladkov 1966; Dickinson & Remsen 2013), while more recent works recognise just two: *Falco cherrug cherrug* in Europe and western Russia, from the Altai Mountains to China, from northern Mongolia east and *Falco c. milvipes* in southern Central Asia (del Hoyo *et al* 1994; Forsman 1999). Fergusson-Lees & Christie (2001) recognise two subspecies, although *altaicus* is cautiously treated as a separate species.

The subspecies of the Ladakh birds is not conclusively known, but they are, in all probability, the same as that of the Tibetan facies in south-western China *F. c. hendersoni*, sometimes subsumed under *F. c. milvipes*.

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A Record of Lesser- *Anser erythropus* and Greater-White-fronted Geese *A. albifrons* from Gujarat, India

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On 14 December 2013, one of us (SMV) accompanied a group of birders and photographers to the Nava Talav area (23°12'N, 71°44'E) of the Little Rann of Kachchh, on a birding and photography tour. As SMV approached the lake, he came across five foraging geese of the *Anser* species that seemed to resemble Greylag Geese *A. anser* from a distance. As the group neared the geese, a few things struck SMV as odd. The geese were much smaller in size than a typical *A. anser*. All of them had a faint white mark at the base of their beaks. One of them had a golden eye-ring, and the colour of their legs was orange. That is when SMV realised that they were looking at the much rarer white-fronted geese. After photographing the birds **[176, 177]**, they went back to Grimmett *et al.* (2011) and identified the geese they had seen as four adult Greater White-fronted Geese *A. albifrons*, and one adult Lesser White-fronted Goose *A. erythropus*. There was a separate gaggle of *c.* 20 Bar-headed Geese *A. indicus* with which these white-fronted geese were loosely associating.

Photos: Arpit Deomurari

176. Left- *A. albifrons* and Right *A. erythropus*.

177. First two – *A. albifrons* and Last one *A. erythropus*.

SMV informed AD about the sighting, who visited the same place on the morning of 25 December 2013 along with Kunan Naik, Yogendra Shah, and Krinal Hedau. AD also observed these five birds foraging on the lakeside in marshy vegetation, for a full day.

Many photographers have also photographed these birds in January 2014. There were two Lesser White-fronted Geese on 07 January 2014 (Ganpule 2014), and six birds on 27 January 2014 (Cullen 2014).

Though white-fronted geese are generally easy to differentiate from Greylag Geese, identification to species level can be problematic when seen individually or in large mixed flocks. The Lesser White-fronted Goose, as its name suggests, appears slightly smaller than the Greater White-fronted Goose, when both of them are seen together. An adult Lesser White-fronted Goose has a diagnostic half-moon white patch on its forehead, a more sloping forehead and a smaller head, a short pink bill, and a golden eye-ring as shown in our pictures; all these features being absent in Greater White-fronted Geese.

Both species are migratory. The Greater White-fronted Goose is apparently a regular winter visitor to the northern plains, from the Indus Valley to eastern Uttar Pradesh, with scattered records elsewhere (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It has been recorded twice in Gujarat (Ali 1954; Kaushik 2009); this record appears to be the third. The Lesser White-fronted Goose is even rarer, being considered a winter vagrant (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). From India, it has been recorded from Jammu & Kashmir, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, and Assam (Rahmani 2012), with no records from Gujarat. Hence, this appears to be the first for the state.

According to BirdLife International (2014), the Lesser White-Fronted Goose is listed as Vulnerable in the IUCN Red List because its key breeding population in Russia has suffered a rapid population reduction, and an equivalent decline is predicted to continue. The Fenno-Scandinavian population also has undergone a severe historical decline, and has not yet recovered (Rahmani 2012). Hence, this from the Little Rann of Kachchh is noteworthy for the conservation policy makers of the state, and the country.

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European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* at Pong Lake, Himachal Pradesh, India

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In April and May 2013 we frequently visited Nagrota Surian, an area of Pong Lake in Himachal Pradesh, India, for observing late spring migration of birds. On 28 April 2013 at 0850 hrs, a *Pluvialis* plover was observed and photographed by CA on the shore of Pong Lake (32°03'N, 76°06'E, *c.* 400 m asl). The first impression of the bird was of a 'stocky' Pacific Golden Plover *P. fulva* that had started moulting into its breeding plumage. The bird was observed for *c.* 15 min. The bird was seen again at 1250 hrs., on the same day. On the basis of his observations and photographs CA identified it as an European Golden Plover *P. apricaria*. The images were sent to Bill Harvey who later confirmed this (*in litt.,* email dated 05 May 2013).

On 05 May 2013, the same plover was sighted again about 250 m away from the original place of sighting. The bird was observed for about an hour. It was not interacting with other waders present in the vicinity. We observed it extracting insect larvae from the grass and from cattle dung.

While CA was prone on the ground, trying to photograph the bird, it came as close as 10 m to him before being disturbed by a grazing buffalo. It flew some distance and settled close to a Pacific Golden Plover. It clearly showed dominance over the latter and chased it away whenever it came too close. While the two species were feeding close to each other, the differences between them were observed carefully. The European Golden Plover was significantly larger and bulkier than Pacific Golden Plover, with a comparatively smaller bill, and finer golden markings on its wings **[178, 179]**. At 1150 hrs we spotted one more European Golden Plover. Both the birds were silent throughout the observation. They remained in the area for at least eight days.

Description

The main features that we noted are as following:

The first bird was in partial breeding plumage with discontinuous black running from breast to belly. Its face did not have black except for a smudge **[180]**. The second bird had almost moulted into its breeding plumage, with white stripes on either side continuing up to neck, supercilium, and forehead. The crown, hindneck, and upperparts were blackish, spotted with gold. Almost unbroken black underparts indicated the possibility

178. European- and Pacific- Golden Plover.

181. The other individual of the European Golden Plover.

179. European- and Pacific- Golden Plover.

182. European Golden Plover showing characteristic white underwing coverts and axillaries.

180. European Golden Plover.

Photos: C. Abhinav

Table 1. Records of the European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* from the Indian Subcontinent

Year	Location	Details	Remarks	References
Undated	Dibrugarh, Assam	Two specimens by E. C. Stuart Baker	Specimen untraceable (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) and hence not independently verifiable	Baker 1931
Undated	Unknown	Single specimen was obtained by Capt. Hanna	Record not verifiable	Baker 1931
1872	Gwadar, Balochistan, Pakistan	Single specimen by Blanford in January 1872	Specimen presently in B.M.N.H. (Natural History Museum, London)	Blanford 1898
1876	Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan	Sight record by Blanford	Unconfirmed as per observer himself	Blanford 1898
1877–1878	Sehwan, Sindh Pakistan	Single specimen procured by Mr Brooks	Specimen presently in B.M.N.H.	Blanford 1898
1880	Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh	Reid (1887) mentions a skin of this species in the Provincial Museum (=Lucknow State Museum) that he re-identified as this species. There is no location mentioned.	It is assumed that the bird must have been shot in the Lucknow area. This is probably the same record mentioned by Blanford (1898), and Baker (1931). Rasmussen & Anderton 2012 could not trace this specimen. Probably the same is still in the Lucknow State Museum and requires re-examination.	Reid (1887)
1919	Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan	One female collected on 07 January 1919	Presently in the collection of the Bombay Natural History Society (B.N.H.S.)	Abdulali 1969
1990	Kutch, Gujarat	A single bird was caught and ringed on 14 November 1990	Biometrics available, and match with this species'. Authors mention a prior record from Kutch but that record was actually of Pacific Golden Plover *P. fulva.* (Ali 1945).	Akhtar & Tiwari 1991
1996	Harike, Punjab	A first winter bird was recorded by an unknown observer on 01–08 December 1996	Unconfirmed sight record as per compiler himself.	Robson 1997
2001–2003	Chilika Lake, Orissa	Six birds in January 2001, 50 in January 2002, and 53 in January 2003; listed without any species description.	Record ignored. This seems to be an unreliable source, listing unlikely species, e.g., Long-billed Plover, from the same location.	Nayak 2006
2005	Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, Assam	One bird on 28 August 2005 listed without any species description.	Record withdrawn. (Ranjan Kumar Das, *in litt.*, email dated 24 June 2014).	Das 2006
2007	Sagar Island, Paraganas district; West Bengal	Five birds listed without any species description during a survey from 07 to 13 January 2007.	Record ignored. This seems to be an unreliable source listing unlikely species, e.g., Solitary Snipe, from the same location.	Sharma 2008

of it being a male. Its face was not completely black and had some white spots **[181]**. We also saw both birds in flight, when the white axillaries and underwing coverts were clearly visible **[182]**. The legs of these birds didn't extend beyond their tails in flight.

Discussion

The European Golden Plover breeds on Arctic and sub-Arctic Tundra in Iceland, northern Scandinavia, Finland, northern Russia (*altifrons*), and Britain (Chandler 2009). It is a vagrant to the Indian Subcontinent (Kazmierczak 2000), from where there are not more than nine confirmed records **(Table 1)**. The present sighting of the European Golden Plover at Pong Lake probably represents a first record for Himachal Pradesh, and the first photographic record, for the Indian Subcontinent. The species is 'so easily passed over but also so unmistakable' (Finn 1906), as it is easily mistaken for Pacific Golden Plover. Therefore, birdwatchers should keep an eye for the bird.

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Taiga Flycatcher *Ficedula albicilla* in Gujarat: Status and distribution, with notes on its identification

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Introduction

The Taiga Flycatcher *Ficedula albicilla* is a winter migrant to India. Its winter distribution is mainly to north-eastern, eastern, and central India, and the Eastern Ghats, reaching up to western Maharashtra, and Goa (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005; Grimmett *et al*. 2011). No sightings from Gujarat are given in these texts, but it has been reported from Morbi, Gujarat (Ganpule 2013), with the sighting of an adult male in April 2011.

Observations

I always suspected that the Taiga Flycatcher was more common in Gujarat than previously expected, and it could have been overlooked since it was considered a subspecies of the Red-breasted Flycatcher *F. parva*, and had only recently been split (Rasmussen &Anderton 2005).

I carried out surveys in many areas in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat during the winter of 2013–2014. I contacted birdwatchers here for their sightings of *F. parva* / *F. albicilla* and also looked at images on the Internet (www.orientalbirdimages.org, www.indianaturewatch.net, www.ibc.lynxeds.com) for reports/images from Gujarat.

Results from my surveys, and other records, of Taiga Flycatcher from Gujarat are presented below **(Table 1)**.

Two individuals recorded in Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary on 06 April 2014 (G. Bagda, *in litt.*, email dated 07 April 2014) in the same area where I noted five individuals on 22 March 2014, were probably the same birds. All five individuals that I noted were adult males, either in breeding plumage or moulting into breeding plumage, and birds noted later in the same area were also in breeding plumage.

The record from Thol, near Ahmedabad (Maheria 2014), identified as an Asian Brown Flycatcher *M. dauurica* is actually a *F. albicilla*.

Identification

Since it is now established that *F. parva*, *F. albicilla*, and the Kashmir Flycatcher *F. subrubra* occur in Gujarat (Grimmett *et al*. 2011; Ganpule 2012), identification and separation of the three in first winter plumage is quite challenging. Cederroth *et al*. (1999) deal with the identification of *parva* and *albicilla*. For the identification of first winter *F. subrubra,* see Ganpule (2012). Some additional notes on identification of first-winter *F. albicilla* are presented below:

1. Some first-winter males may show a small red throat patch in the winter. Some adult males also retain this red patch on throat. Compare with Cederroth *et al*. (1999) who remark that 'most (all?)' adult male *albicilla* moult into a female-like plumage in winter (p. 465, pl. 8).This could lead to possible confusion with *parva*. A first winter male was wintering near Morbi and I was able to observe it for three months. It moulted into breeding plumage **[183, 184, 185, 186]** by March end. Note progression of moult **[184, 185, 186]**, which seems complete on 27 March 2014. It showed a red throat patch throughout winter, as can be seen from the images. What percentage of males show this red throat patch in winter is not known and requires further study.
2. It is difficult to identify *albicilla* only on plumage characters. Shape, colour of bill, and call are the easiest way to separate *albicilla* from *parva* and *subrubra*.
3. In a first-winter *albicilla*, the tertials pattern may be worn by

Table 1. Sight records of Taiga Flycatcher *Ficedula albicilla* in Gujarat

Date	Place	Remarks	Observer
25 January 2006	Gir National Park	Olsen 2006	K.M.Olsen
February 2013	Sagai, Rajpipla, South Gujarat	–	A.Mashru *(in litt.)*
March 2013	Gir National Park	–	A.Mashru *(in litt.)*
13 October 2013	Morbi	–	Author's sighting
27 October 2013–30 March 2014	Morbi	Wintering bird – probably first winter female	Author's sighting
15 November 2013	Rajkot	–	A.Mashru *(in litt.)*
10 December 2013–27 March 2014	Morbi	Wintering bird – first winter male	Author's sighting
06 March 2014	Thol Wildlife Sanctuary, Near Ahmedabad	Maheria 2014	P.Maheria
22 March 2014	Near Bordevi, Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary	Five Individuals seen in the area	Author's sighting

183. December 2013

185. March 2014

184. March 2014

186. March 2014

Photos: P. Ganpule

February–March and seem similar to *parva*, unless closely seen. This feature is useful for identification only in early winter when the birds are in fresh plumage.

4. From first week of March onwards, male Taiga Flycatchers are either in moult or may be in breeding plumage and identification is easier if seen in this plumage, since *parva* and *subrubra* do not show this character.
5. For identification of adult and first-winter female *albicilla*, tail colour and uppertail coverts are usually more jet black, but it is difficult to rely on this single plumage feature. Bill colour, shape, and call are the best way to separate it from *parva* and *subrubra*. Plumage characters can be indicative but are not conclusive for identification.
6. Tail colour/uppertail coverts in some first-winter male *parva* and *subrubra* also look as black as in *albicilla*. In such cases, a combination of other characters is necessary to separate *albicilla* from the other two.
7. I was able to observe the two individuals wintering near

Morbi, for an extended time period. The behaviour of *albicilla* is similar to *parva* and *subrubra*. However the tail fanning behaviour of a *subrubra* (Ganpule 2012) was not observed in the other two.

Discussion

Looking at the above records from Gujarat, it is quite possible that the Taiga Flycatcher may have been overlooked in the past for the more common and similar looking Red-breasted Flycatcher. Even now, it is easily misidentified, as seen above.

Kannan & Santharam (2013) expressed doubts regarding the reported range extension based on a single sighting (Ganpule 2013). Certainly single sightings cannot be range extensions, but for similar looking birds that tend to get overlooked, single sightings could be an indicator of them being more widespread than previously thought. The fact does remain that the Taiga Flycatcher was only recently elevated to full species status, and hence previous sightings may have been reported as Red-breasted Flycatcher, without specifying whether they were *parva* or *albicilla*. Thus in cases where there have been taxonomic updates, it would be advisable to reassess the status and distribution.

Conclusion

The Taiga Flycatcher is a passage, as well as winter, migrant to Gujarat. Wintering birds have been noted in the Morbi area. It is quite possible that Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary and Gir National Park are areas where Taiga Flycatchers winter, since they were noted in the same area twice. Further surveys are needed to confirm this. It seems to be widely distributed with sightings from the Saurashtra region and southern Gujarat, and it is probably common in the Gir and Girnar areas, either as a passage migrant or winter visitor, as five individuals were seen in a single day. Thus its status can be described as 'uncommon winter visitor' and 'passage migrant'. A detailed survey in suitable areas will be helpful to understand its status and distribution in Gujarat.

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Recent sighting of Amur Falcons *Falco amurensis* near Soheldev Wildlife Sanctuary, Uttar Pradesh

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Recent instances of large-scale, localised hunting of Amur Falcons *Falco amurensis* in parts of north-eastern India, particularly Nagaland through which the species undertakes fall migration every year, have been a serious conservation issue (Dalvi & Sreenivasan 2012). According to Rasmussen & Anderson (2012) the Amur Falcon is a 'fall passage migrant' through central and eastern Himalayas, southern Assam hills (Cachar, Eastern Meghalaya, Manipur), and the Peninsula.

The Bombay Natural History Society has been given a one year project by Sarus Sanraskshan Samiti and Uttar Pradesh Forest Department to document and study the avifaunal diversity of Soheldev (or Sohelwa) Wildlife Sanctuary located at Tulsipur Tehsil of Balrampur District, and Bhinga Tehsil of Saravasti District along the Indo-Nepal border. While on way for our first winter transect to the Poorvi (East) Sohelwa range from Bhinga on 09 November 2013, we recorded at 1620 hrs more than 150 Amur Falcon, about 10 km before the Poorvi Sohelwa forest rest house (27°48'N, 82°02'E).

We first sighted the falcons from the road, perched *c.* 300 m away on electric wires passing over a harvested paddy field

Photo: Rajat Bhargava

187. Amur Falcons *Falco amurensis* on electric wires of paddy fields.

[187]. While we counted more than 100 falcons perched on the wires, we could also see about 40–50 falcons flying overhead. As we moved towards the falcons, most birds flew away and finally settled on the electric wires. We did not go much nearer fearing that the birds may desert the 'roost' and since it was getting dark we moved to the forest rest house in Poorvi Suhelwa. During the following week we went around the same place in the evening but did not encounter any falcons suggesting that the birds were there for a short period, probably a night halt.

The sighting of Amur Falcon near Soheldev WLS is the first record of this species from Uttar Pradesh (Rahmani *et al*. 2011).

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First record of the Chinese Thrush *Turdus mupinensis* from the Indian Subcontinent

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During a recent visit to Namdapha National Park (27°64'N, 95°92'E), Arunachal Pradesh, India, RR was walking along a trail at *c.* 500 m in tropical evergreen forest between Haldibari and Hornbill camp, on 17 November 2013, accompanied by Dattakiran Joshi, Sangeeta Joshi and a guide, Asam Moshang, when an unidentified bird was seen and photographed, at about 1400 hr.

The bird was noted flying for a short distance and then perching on the ground, foraging among the leaves. It was shy and kept a distance of 60–70 m from the observers. For most of the time it kept on the main path, perching on elevated objects such as fallen logs, or on the ground when a log was not available. The bird's brown colour against the sand and leaves on the ground, as well as pockets of light shining through the forest thickets, made it exceedingly difficult to obtain a good photograph. The bird was observed with 8x42 binoculars, and several photographs were taken with a Canon EOS 7D camera and 400 mm zoom lens. The bird moved in front of the observers for about one kilometer before disappearing into the adjoining forest. It was seen again the following afternoon in the same area but no further photographs were possible.

There were no other birds close enough to assess its size by direct comparison, but it was thought to be between an Oriental Magpie Robin *Copsychus saularis* and a Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus* in size. The photographs **[188, 189, 190, 191]** show that the bird was a thrush *Turdus/Zoothera*, with a greyish-brown crown, back, and tail. The face is fairly pale with two dark vertical stripes, the first extending down from the side of the crown through the dark eye to the lower edge of the ear-coverts, and the second along the rear edge of the ear-coverts. The wing shows two distinct pale wing-bars: a short one on the median coverts and a longer one on the greater coverts, and also a suggestion on the tertials of dark outer webs and brighter, olive inner webs. The underparts are not very clear in the relevant photographs (Figs. 3,4) but there are numerous large, round dark spots visible on the breast, and others can be made out

Photos: R. Rajagopal

188. Chinese Thrush *Turdus mupinensis*: Face.

189. Chinese Thrush *Turdus mupinensis*: Back view.

190. Chinese Thrush *Turdus mupinensis* : Belly spots and face pattern.

191. Chinese Thrush *Turdus mupinensis*: Side view also showing belly spots and face pattern.

extending down to the belly. The legs appear pale and the bill grey. The bird was silent throughout the periods of observation.

Identification as a Chinese Thrush *Turdus mupinensis* is based mainly on the distinctive face pattern and the heavily spotted underparts, which eliminate most other similar species. The Spot-winged Thrush *Zoothera spiloptera*, a Sri Lankan endemic, has a similar face pattern but is distinguished by having much sparser spotting on the underparts, and the larger Mistle Thrush *T. viscivorus* has a less distinct face pattern and wing-bars. Two other superficially similar species, with uniform upperparts and heavily marked underparts, Plain-backed Thrush *Zoothera mollissima* and Long-tailed Thrush *Z. dixoni*, have been recorded in Namdapha National Park. Unlike this bird both have dark half-moon shaped scaling on the breast rather than dark round spots, and lack the sharply defined, thin, vertical dark bar below the eye. Some individuals of these species show a thicker, diffuse vertical line below the eye but Plain-backed can be eliminated by the presence in this bird of two conspicuous wing-bars, and Long-tailed Thrush typically shows a narrower bar on the greater coverts. In addition, both species have narrow, rounded tails compared with the fuller, square-ended tail of this bird.

T. mupinensis is an endemic breeding species in China, occurring in a band from Inner Mongolia in the north to Yunnan in the south **(Fig. 1)**, where it is described as uncommon to locally common (Clement & Hathway 2000). Although described as almost entirely resident (Cheng 1987), it occurs as a scarce or rare spring and autumn migrant on the coast of Hubei at Beidaihe (39°50'N, 119°29'E; Clement & Hathway 2000). Further sources of information with localities and dates (Global Biodiversity Information Facility; eBird 2013 map; Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University; China Ornithological Society 2004–2008; Paul Holt, *pers. comm*., email dated 17 December 2013) show that the species has been recorded widely in China outside of the breeding season. Chinese Thrush has also been recorded four times as a vagrant in Hong Kong (Carthy 2009; Carey & Lockey 2010; Lewthwaite 2013; Wong & Wong 2014), twice in South Korea (Moores 2007), four times in Taiwan, including most recently on 27 October 2013 (Trabalon 2013), and four times in Vietnam (Pilgrim *et al.* 2009; GBIF: eBird). It seems likely that the northern population is a summer visitor to the breeding areas and moves south in the winter. It is also possible that at least some southern birds are subject to post-breeding dispersal, which could account for records of some individuals. Note that Namdapha National Park is only 295

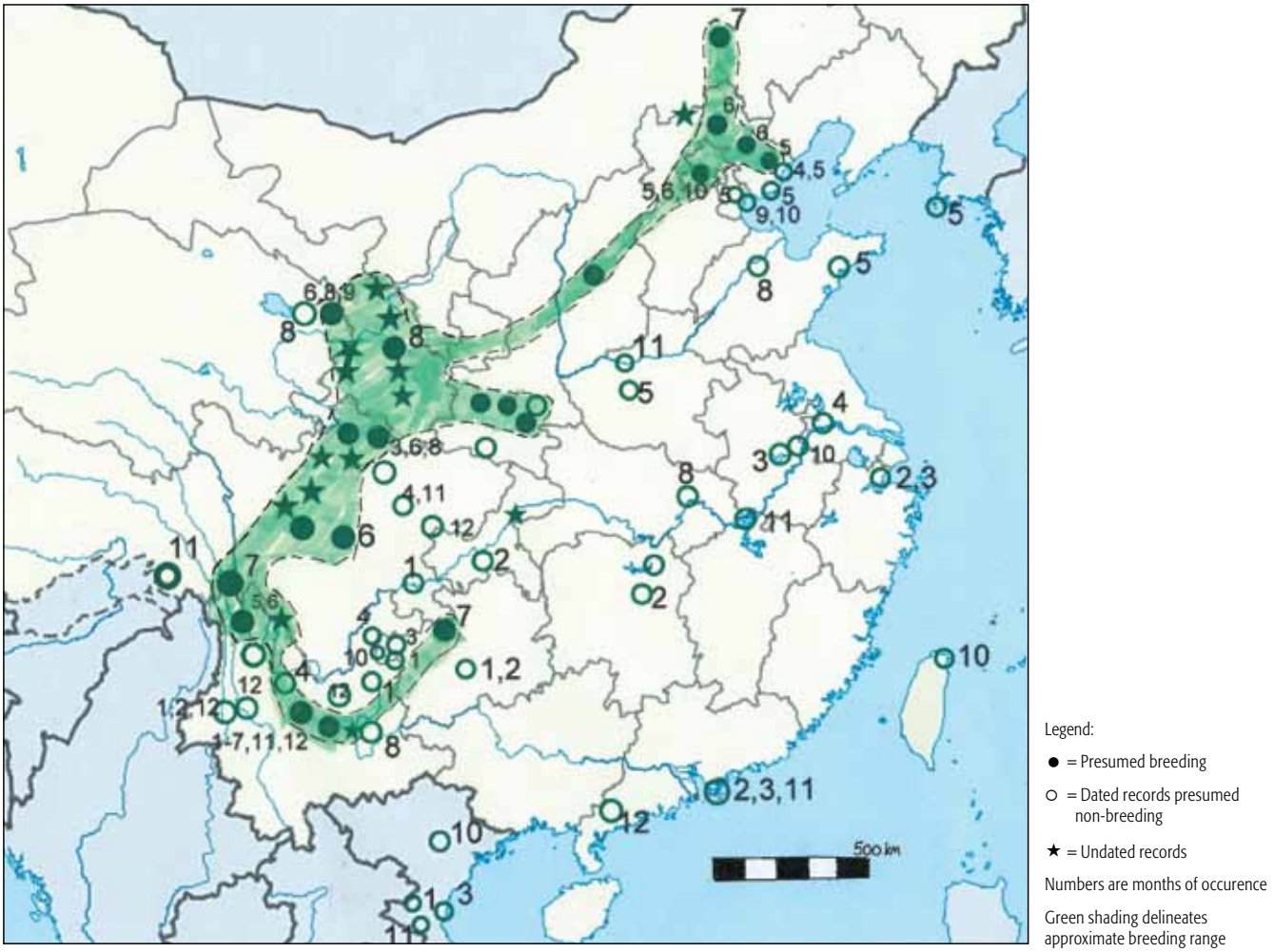

Fig 1. Chinese Thrush *Turdus mupinensis* distribution map.

km west of a locality in Yunnan (28°28'N, 98°49'E) where the species was recorded on 12 July 2005 (eBird 2013).

The present record in Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh is apparently the first record of Chinese Thrush in India, and for the Indian Subcontinent.

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Status of Red Avadavat *Amandava amandava* in Goa, India

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The Western Ghats, a UNESCO World Heritage Site (UNESCO 2012), are one among eight biodiversity hotspots of the world (Radhakrishnan & Rajmohan 2012). Goa, one of the smallest of Indian states, is a part of these biologically rich Western Ghats and consequently has an unique avifauna. Compared to other parts of the Western Ghats, the compilation of a comprehensive avifaunal inventory for Goa took place only in the recent past through the works of Grubh & Ali (1972), Rane (1982), Saha & Dasgupta (1992), Lainer (1999, 2004), and Lainer & Alvares (2013). These studies have documented the status and distribution of nearly all the birds of Goa and the total number of birds in the Goa checklist stands at 462 (Lad & Rangnekar 2011). There is still a steady flow of new birds being reported from the state (Mahabal & Patil 2008; Holt 2009; Rangnekar & Lad 2009; Lad & Rangnekar2011).

In this note, we record the presence of the Red Avadavat *Amandava amandava* in Goa. This species was previously reported as a vagrant / escapee based on a single sight record in Lainer (2004), and subsequently ignored in the revised version of the same work (Lainer & Alvares 2013).

We observed the Red Avadavat at Navelim Wetlands (15°32′N, 74°00′E) and at Shirgao Wetlands (15°36′N, 73°4′E), both in Bicholim Taluka, Goa. These sites have tall grasses growing near the water source, which concurs with the typical habitat of the Red Avadavat (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). At both these sites, this species has been observed since 2012 **(Table 1)**. The birds have also been photographed several times **[192-194]**. Shirgao Wetlands were monitored more closely during 2014 **(Table 2)** and the highest count recorded there was of 36 individuals on 15 April 2014. At Navelim Wetlands, except for two sightings, one each in 2012 and 2013, all the other encounters were based on calls from the flock, where at an average, calls from three–four individuals could be detected at every encounter. In Shirgao Wetlands, there has been a steady increase in the number of these birds encountered each month.

The only report of the Red Avadavat from Goa, till recently, was of a single bird from Sinquerim Marsh on 16 November 1996 (Lainer 2004). Maps in various ornithological works on India do not correctly reflect the current distribution of this species in southern India. Ali & Ripley (1987) included the entire Deccan region, and most of the western coast, almost till Malabar, while Rasmussen & Anderton (2005, 2012) included the entire western coast ('moist areas in south India'), and excluded most of the Deccan! Grimmett *et al.* (1998, 2011), and Kazmierczak (2000) excluded the entire western coast, except for the single Goa record.

The Red Avadavat is categorised as 'uncommon' in the Konkan region, though several recent sightings are documented (Prasad 2005). It is unlisted from southern coastal Karnataka (Achar & Shivashankar 2012), and was historically absent in Kerala (Ali 1969), though now thought to be 'uncommon' from there (Neelakantan *et al.* 1993; Sashikumar *et al.* 2011). This suggests a likely westward extension in recent years in the distribution of

Table 1. Summary of observations from 2012–2014

Year	Navelim Wetlands		Shirgao Wetlands	
	No of sightings	Average flock size	No of sightings	Average flock size
2012	1	6	1	1
2013	1	3-4*	0	-
2014	1	3-4*	8	20

* Estimate from calls heard

Table 2. Summary of 2014 observations from Shirgao Wetlands

Months	No of sightings	Average flock size
January	1	5
February	4	18
March	0	0
April	3	27
May	0	0
June	0	0

Photo: P. Baidya

192. Red Avadavat pair at Navelim wetland on 5 December 2012.

193. Red Avadavats in Shirgao wetland on 1 February 2014.

Photos: C. Pinto

194. A flock of Red Avadavat in Shirgao wetland on 23 February 2014.

Red Avadavat in its southern Indian range, including Goa. This species is known to occur in adjoining Belgaum, Karnataka, and could have been the source population (Sant 2005; Mallya 2011). Alternatively, Red Avadavat is an extremely popular cage bird and these could be escapees from the bird trade.

Continuous sightings of Red Avadavat from these two locations lead us to conclude that there is a stable, possibly breeding population of this species in the state. Future reports through online forums like eBird (www.ebird.org) will help us understand seasonal / population trends better. We propose to add the Red Avadavat to the main checklist of birds of Goa and elevate its position from that of a 'vagrant' to a 'possible resident'. This takes the Goa Checklist to 463.

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Records of Indian Blue Robin *Larvivora brunnea* from Gujarat, India

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Mashru, A., 2014. Records of Indian Blue Robin *Larvivora brunnea* from Gujarat, India. *Indian BIRDS* 9 (5): 160–161.
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The Indian Blue Robin *Larvivora brunnea* breeds from May–September in north-eastern Afghanistan, Safed Koh and Himalayas of northern Pakistan to Bhutan (and probably Arunachal Pradesh), and in the southern Assam hills (breeding at least in Nagaland, and occurring in Meghalaya and Manipur), 1600–3500 m. The species winters in hilly country from lowland to 2100 m, primarily in the Western Ghats and Sri Lanka. However migrant records exist throughout peninsular India and Assam, as do scattered records in the Himalayan foothills from Nepal eastwards (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).Several records exist from the Eastern Ghats in Andhra Pradesh as well, as reported by Ali & Ripley (1996).

There seem to be no records of the species from Gujarat, prior to Khacher's (1996) sighting. Dharmkumarsinhji (1955) does not include it in his work, while Parasharya *et al.* (2004) include it in theirs. Grimmett *et al*. (2011), and Kazmierczak (2000) indicate its presence in Gujarat as a summer passage migrant.

On Sunday, 27 March 2013, accompanied by Darshak Karia, Bhavna Mashru and Neeta Karia, I visited the Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary, near Junagadh city, Junagadh District, Gujarat. At 1330 hrs, we visited an artificial water tank with a mill installed by the state forest department. Water brimming over had rendered the surrounding area damp, and overgrown with grass. Many winged insects were hovering over this patch. Here, I photographed a bird **[195]** that looked like a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis tickelliae* hopping across and sipping water off the ground. Upon zooming into the image later, I found it to be a different species, with a white eyebrow and an orange-buff colour spreading from its throat to the lower underparts. With the help of field guides, the bird was identified as a male Indian Blue Robin. Gaurang Bagda saw it at the same place on 04 April 2013 (*pers. comm.*).

A handful of records of the Indian Blue Robin are presented from Gujarat **(Fig. 1; Table 1)**. The species seems to be recorded in the state mostly as a passage migrant during the onward and return leg of its journey, between the months of October–November and March–April.

Photo: A. Mashru

195. Indian Blue Robin *Larvivora brunnea* in Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary, Gujarat.

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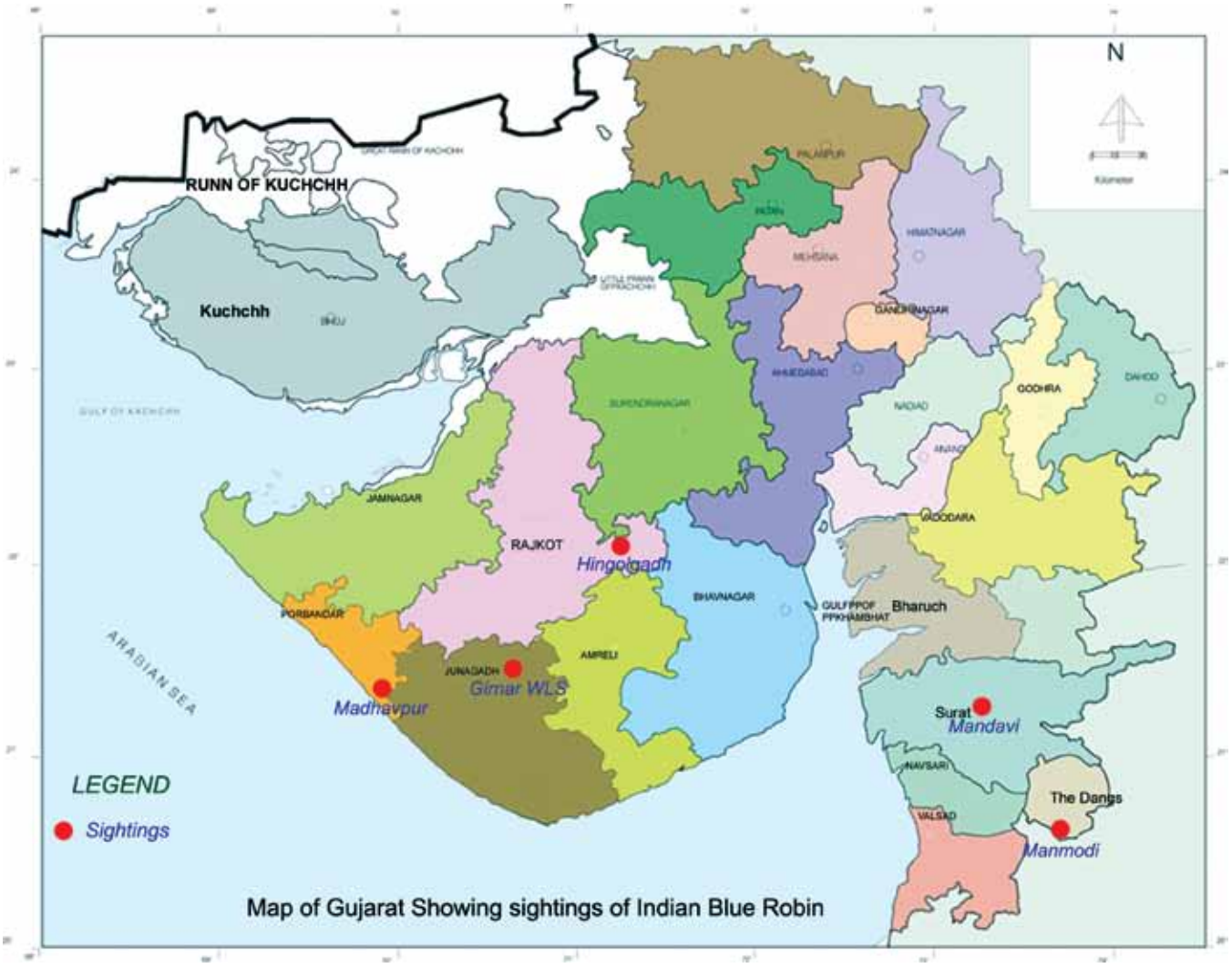
Table 1. Records of the Indian Blue Robin *Larvivora brunnea* in Gujarat

Location	Date of sighting	Observer	Source
Hingolgadh Forest, near Jasdan, Rajkot District	Late September, year unmentioned	Lavkumar Khacher	Khacher 1996
Malmudi, near Saputara, Dang District	25 February 2007	Rajani Trivedi	*Pers. comm.,* verbally (photo)
Mandavi Forest, near Mandavi, Surat District	March 2011	Jayant Bhojavala	Bhojavala 2011
Madhavpur, Porbandar District	November 2012	Trupti Vyas	Website (photo)
Girnar WLS, near Junagadh, Junagadh District	27 March 2013	Ashok Mashru & Darshak Karia	Author's sighting
Girnar WLS, near Junagadh, Junagadh District	04 April 2013	Gaurang Bagda	*Pers. comm.,* verbally (photo)



Map: S. Subramanya

Fig. 1. Sighting locations of Indian Blue Robin *Larvivora brunnea* in Gujarat, India.

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First report of Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* from the Vidarbha region, Maharashtra, India

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Wadatkar, J. S., & Wagh, G. A., 2014. First report of Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* from the Vidarbha region, Maharashtra, India. *Indian BIRDS* 9 (5&6): 162.

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The Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* is a summer visitor up to eastern Afghanistan, is found sporadically in Baluchistan, and resident in modern day eastern Iran. It winters in northern and eastern Afghanistan, southern Sind, in provinces that are part of erstwhile eastern Punjab, currently in Pakistan, up to the Assam Valley. It extends down to Chilka Lake, Odisha, and has been reported from northern Maharashtra (Rasmussen *et al*. 2012).

Malkhed Reservoir (20°84′33″N, 77°91′89″E), is located in Pohara Malkhed Reserve Forest in Amravati District, Maharashtra, and is 25 km from Amravati city. We visited the reservoir on 09 January 2011 for a casual birding trip. While observing a flock of Ruddy Shelduck *T. ferruginea*, one differently coloured individual caught our attention. We took a photograph for the record, and carefully resumed observation through binoculars. The bird was about the size of a Ruddy Shelduck, but was coloured white with a black head, a chestnut breast band, had a red bill with a frontal knob, and had pink legs and feet. We identified the bird as an adult Common Shelduck (Ali & Ripley 1969; Grimmett *et al*. 1999; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) **[196, 197]**.

Photos: Gajanan Wagh

196. Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* at Malkhed Reservoir.

197. Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* in flight at Malkhed Reservoir.

The species has not been reported previously from central India—spanning the regions of Vidarbha, the states of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh (D'Abreu 1935; Anon 2009; Wadatkar *et al*. 2010). We felt the sighting, being a first for not only Amravati District but also for Vidarbha in central India was noteworthy.

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198. Greylag Goose *Anser anser.*

Sighting of Greylag Goose *Anser anser* in Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

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The Greylag Goose *Anser anser* breeds in the Palearctic, mainly at boreal and temperate latitudes across Europe and Asia, and winters in northern Africa, West Asia, India, and southern China (Rahmani & Islam 2008). In India it is found in Kashmir, Punjab, in small numbers in Rajasthan, northern Gujarat, the Gangetic plain towards Assam, and in Manipur. It is abundant on the Chilika Lake, Odisha, in some winters (Ali & Ripley 1983).

This bird was not listed in Abdulali's (1981) checklist. Ali & Ripley (1983) did not record it from Maharashtra, and stated that it was virtually absent in the Deccan and southern India. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), also did not show its distribution in Maharashtra. However Grimmett *et al*. (2011) showed it wintering in Thane District.

There are some records from Maharashtra, which are not well documented. These include Sunjoy Monga's report of three birds flying over Gorai, near Mumbai, on 16 December 2000 (Prasad 2004). One bird was sighted on 16 February 2010 at Bhigwan, by Jyoti Amit Rane (*pers. comm*., 2014). Rohan Kamath and Mihir Barve spotted an adult Greylag in a flock of *c*. 108 Bar-headed Geese *A. indicus*, at Veer Dam in Satara District in 2011 (*pers. comm*., 2014).

However, there are also a few documented records of the species from the state. Kasambe *et al.* (2008) reported 11 birds from Pandhari Reservoir near Warud in Amravati District on 31 October 1993. They also reported a flock of 90–100 Greylag Geese from Shiregaon Bandh reservoir near Navegaon Bandh Sanctuary in Gondia District in eastern Maharashtra on 31 December 2006. This species was also reported from Jayakwadi bird sanctuary in Aurangabad district (Anonymous 2013). Gogate (2013) recorded it in Nandur Madhmeshvar Bird Sanctuary, Nashik District. Vagrant Greylag Geese have been recorded from as far south as Tamil Nadu (Elamon 2013).

On 17 November 2013, we visited a wetland near Belpada Village in Navi Mumbai, where we sighted one unusual bird amongst a flock of ducks. We used a field guide (Grimmett *et al*. 2011) and identified it as Greylag Goose. It was seen feeding on *Cynodon dactylon* grass. Sometimes the bird was seen in flocks of Garganey *Anas querquedula*, Northern Pintail *A. acuta*, Indian Spot-billed Duck *A. poecilorhyncha*, and Cotton Pygmy Goose *Nettapus coromandelianus* **[198–199]**.

We noted that the bird limped while walking. No external wound was visible. The bird was also able to fly efficiently when disturbed by local fisherman or cattle. Probably this Greylag Goose, which was seen here till 20 December 2013, was a vagrant.

Photos: M. Prabhu

199. Greylag Goose *Anser anser* at Navi Mumbai.

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The Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens japonicus* at Tal Chhapar, Churu District: A new species for the Thar Desert, Rajasthan


200

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Poonia, S. S., Sangha, H. S., Sridhar, S., & Sharma, M., 2014. The Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens japonicus* at Tal Chhapar, Churu District: A new species for the Thar Desert, Rajasthan. *Indian BIRDS* 9 (5&6): 164–165.
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The Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens* possibly forms a clade with *A. pratensis*, *A. roseatus*, *A. cervinus*, *A. spinoletta*, and *A. petrosus*, and was, until recently, treated as conspecific, with the last two. Four subspecies are recognised, of which *A. r. japonicus* winters in South Asia (Tyler 2004).

It 'breeds in north-eastern Russia: from Chukoskiy Peninsula, Kamchatka and the northern and western shores of the Sea of Okhotsk, west to south-eastern Taymyr and Krasnoyarskiye kray…south to Baikalskiy Khrebet, Khrebet Khamar Daban… and Stanovoy Khrebet, as well as on Komanddorskiye…Islands, Sakhalin, and the Kurilskiye Islands…'. It 'winters in Asia, mainly in Japan…South Korea…and south-eastern China…common in eastern Chang Jiang valley (sic), becoming rarer towards the coast, with a handful of records in Hong Kong…less commonly or rarely also in Taiwan…north-westernmost Vietnam…northern Myanmar…central Nepal…north-western India…northern Pakistan…Uzbekistan…and southern Israel' (Alström & Mild 2003).

The Buff-bellied Pipit is an uncommon winter visitor to Pakistan (Kohat, Bannu, and the plains of the Indus south to Karachi), Nepal, Darjeeling, and Manipur (Ali & Ripley 1998), and 'generally rare' but more frequent in north-central Pakistan (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

Roberts (1992) treated it as a subspecies of the Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*, and stated, 'some individuals have fleshy brown legs particularly the Japanese sub-species *A. spinoletta japonicus* which also occurs in Pakistan'. It is described as rare for India (Grimmett *et al*. 1998; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), vagrant for Bhutan, with two records (Spierenburg 2005), and 'probably a rare winter visitor and migrant in Nepal' (Grimmett *et al*. 2000). Very few sightings are shown on the map for the Indian Subcontinent (Kazmierczak 2000; Grimmett *et al*. 2011).

On migration, and in winter, it is found in a variety of open, often wet, habitats such as damp grasslands, stubble and ploughed fields, meadows, sea- and lake- shores, mudflats, river courses, *etc*. (Alström & Mild 2003). Therefore, the presence of Buff-bellied Pipit at Tal Chhapar, a dry grassland, was unexpected. The bird was first seen in December 2011 and regularly seen from 20 January to 22 February 2012 **[201]** at Tal Chhapar Wildlife Sanctuary, Churu District, in Rajasthan. It was not seen, or

201. Buff-bellied Pipit, February 2012.

Photos: Sharad Sridhar

202. Buff-bellied Pipit, December 2012.

perhaps missed, for some days but again sighted on 06 March 2012.

Next winter about eight birds were sighted on 01 December 2012 **[200, 202]** at an area where some water seepage occurred, in the sanctuary. On 23 March 2013 two birds were recorded and thereafter there were no sightings. The species was sighted again on 20 November 2013 and *c.* 30–40 birds were present in different parts of the sanctuary. Later, by the end of December 2013 fewer birds were sighted and they seemed to have dispersed to other areas. By mid January 2014 *c.* 10–15 birds were sighted.

Pipits are dull and somewhat cryptically plumaged, being generally plain brown with dark streaks above and below. Many of the species look rather alike, differing in only small morphological details that make them difficult to separate in the field (Simms 1992). However, the identification of the species at Tal Chhapar was straightforward. The bird gave good views, was well observed, photographed, and later unambiguously identified through the detailed descriptions in Alström & Mild (1996), Beaman & Madge (1998), and French (2006).

Field notes

Generally, the Buff-bellied Pipits looked a touch slimmer and smaller than Water Pipits *A. spinoletta* present in the area. Moreover, darker legs of latter also helped in separating the species. Its upper parts were brown with no streaking, but prominent buff lines were visible on its mantle, and it had a very faintly streaked crown. The wing-bars were clear-cut and prominently white. Being in winter plumage the bird was easy to identify, as it showed considerably large, and more clear-cut streaks on the breast and underparts. These streaks extended for the full length of the flanks, becoming fainter towards the undertail coverts. The underparts were whitish. The face of the pipit was very distinctive with a bold, and complete white, eye-ring standing out, as did the pale lores, distinctly dark moustachial stripe and buffish supercilium merging with the eye-ring and broader behind the eye. The cheeks were grey-brown. Of the bare parts, its bill was pale with a dark tip, and its fineness was apparent. The legs were reddish-brown or flesh coloured **[200, 202]**.

By late February the pipit looked quite different; the streaks became much fainter and orange buff appeared on the breast. The facial pattern became indistinct and the clear-cut wing-bars of the winter plumage were lost **[201]**.

Behaviour

At the time of arrival in early winter Buff-bellied Pipit were generally in mixed flocks with Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* which are commonly seen in the sanctuary. Later they kept to themselves and were mostly seen at well-watered grassy areas, with small puddles around leaking water supply pipes in the sanctuary.

A brief account of some aspects of the behaviour of a single Buff-bellied Pipit observed in January–March 2012 is as follows:

The bird was regularly observed foraging on the edges of the man-made water hole surrounded by grassland of the sanctuary. The water-hole being quite frequently used for drinking water and bathing by the diurnal raptors during the day, probably kept the pipit away. In the evening the pipit was observed energetically moving around the small man-made water hole wagging its tail regularly while picking aquatic prey from above and below the water's surface. The pipit usually picked insects from the surface of the water. At times it would wade in water to pick insects. It was regular to this foraging location.

Conclusion

Apparently the species has occurred at Bharatpur in eastern Rajasthan. Both Kazmierczak (2000), and Grimmett *et al*. (2011) show isolated record(s) but the source/s of Bharatpur records cannot be traced. There is a recent confirmed record of the species from Ranthambhor where one bird was observed on 30 and 31 December 2013 (Sangha *in press*). However, there is no record of the species from the Thar Desert in Rajasthan. Thus the Tal Chhapar bird constitutes the first confirmed record from the Thar Desert supported by photographs.

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Leg colour in Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

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Identification of wagtails (Motacillidae) is not easy. In Gujarat, all the six species of wagtails reported from India are recorded, with Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* occurring as a winter migrant (Kazmierczak 2002; Grimmett *et al*. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

Leg colour is an important character in the identification of Grey Wagtail, which has pink or brownish-pink legs. We have observed more than 50 different individuals in the past ten years and specifically noted the leg colour of these birds **[203]**. We have also looked at various images on birding websites from India to check and confirm this characteristic. Grey Wagtails *always* show pink or brownish pink legs. This is a critical diagnostic for identification as Yellow Wagtail *M. flava*, Citrine Wagtail *M. citreola*, White Wagtail *M. alba*, and White-browed Wagtail *M. maderaspatensis*, show dark blackish legs. Forest Wagtail *Dendronanthus indicus* has pink legs but its plumage is uniquely different from other wagtails and unmistakable. Amongst the confusing wagtails, it is possible to separate Grey Wagtail from the others based upon leg colour alone in first-winter, and adult, plumages. Hence in addition to other identification characters, leg colour can be used to separate the Grey Wagtail from other wagtails.

Photo: G. Bagda

203. Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* showing pinkish-brown legs at Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary, Junagadh, Gujarat, on 06 April 2014.

This feature is often overlooked and not shown in several works (Grimmett *et al*.1998, 2011; Kazmierczak 2000; Ali & Ripley 2007; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) notes in the text that leg colour is 'horny brown' in Grey Wagtail. This is correctly given in text in Alström & Mild (2003), who state for the Grey Wagtail, 'The legs are pale pinkish, unlike in all other wagtails in post juvenile plumages, except Mountain Wagtail *M. clara*' (which does not occur in India). Taylor (2004) also gives leg colour as 'pinkish-brown or dark flesh-brown'. Illustrations in Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) show brownish legs, and those in Grimmett *et al*. (1998, 2011), black, which is erroneous. However, the illustration in Kazmierczak (2002) correctly shows pinkish legs.

Thus leg colour can be used as an important identification tool for Grey Wagtails.

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Sighting of Yellow-bellied Warbler *Abroscopus superciliaris* in Odisha, India

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Yellow-bellied Warbler *Abroscopus superciliaris* is known to be a resident in Himalayas from Central Nepal to Arunachal Pradesh, South Assam Hills, and north-eastern and south-eastern Bangladesh; It breeds in the foothills up to 2200 m (900–1800 m in S Assam hills), wintering down to adjacent plains; also found in south-eastern Tibet, and south-western China, up to western Indonesia (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005).

This short note presents, with photographic documentation **[204, 205]**, a record of this species from Satkosia Tiger Reserve (20°25′–20°45′N 85°35′–86°5′E), Angul District, Odisha, India.

204. Yellow-bellied Warbler *Abroscopus superciliaris*.

Photos: D.K. Singh

205. Yellow-bellied Warbler *Abroscopus superciliaris*.

The field site in Satkosia Tiger Reserve, Kantarsingha Game Tank (20°38′N 84°59′E; 445 m asl), near Labangi, is located towards the northeastern boundary of the reserve. It is about 13 kms from Pampasar, the main entrance into the reserve from the north.

On 03 May 2009 at 1045 hours, a Yellow-bellied Warbler was spotted from the Kantarsingha Game Tank watchtower. The bird was near the base of a bamboo clump, foraging in dried bamboo leaf litter and moving on the dried branches of the clump. It was observed till 1100 hrs.

The bird's distinct white supercilium, white throat with yellow underparts, and yellowish-olive mantle ruled out any confusion with a Grey-hooded Warbler *Phylloscopus xanthoschistos* (which is again unrecorded in the area).

This is the first confirmed record, with photographic evidence, of a Yellow-bellied Warbler from Odisha. There are no known breeding/wintering sightings of this bird within a radius of *c.* 650 kms around Satkosia Tiger Reserve towards its northern and north-eastern sides. This record suggests that the bird might winter sporadically in the northern Eastern Ghats, possibly as far south as northern Andhra Pradesh, where similar habitat and terrain are present. In all likelihood, this bird might have been on its return migration from areas further south of Satkosia. Further observations may be necessary to study potentially larger extent and abundance of migration of this species in the moist deciduous and semi-evergreen habitats of the Eastern Ghats and Chota Nagpur Plateau.

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Charcoal usage in nesting by Red Munia *Amandava amandava*

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Mahajan, A., 2014. Charcoal usage in nesting by Red Munia *Amandava amandava*. *Indian BIRDS*. 9 (5&6): 168.
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I observed the nesting behaviour of Red Munia *Amandava amandava* from 2007–2010 in a patch of thorn scrub forest on the Ordnance Factory premises in Varangaon Taluk (Jalgaon District, Maharashtra). The nesting season of the Red Munia ranges from September to January in Jalgaon District.

On 15 December 2007, and on 10 January 2010, I examined two abandoned nests and found that both had 15–20 small pieces (5–10 mm) of charcoal. The nests were merely two inches above the ground in the bush and were well hidden. The nests were small, globular structures of grass, and from inside they were lined with soft feathers or silk floss. They were 17 cm long, 11 cm in diameter, and weighed roughly 36 gm. The most probable reason behind the collection and placement of charcoal in the nest by the munia could be to absorb moisture (to manage humidity), and mask the odour of faeces.

A quick literature search revealed that Ali & Ripley (1987), and Khan (2005) did not report such behaviour in the Red Munia. Trigunayat & Navrang (1998) studied the eco-biology of the species but didn't note this behavior either. Usage of charcoal in nest building to mask odours and camouflage eggs was reported in Australian grassfinch species by Forshaw *et al*. (2012), but not yet in a species from the Indian Subcontinent.

The closest nest sanitation behaviour in a species from the Indian Subcontinent was recorded in the Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyceros birostris,* a cavity nester, where the female seals herself inside a tree cavity, and the male continuously supplies pieces of bark to the inmates, to facilitate removal of excess water from excrement, by absorption and adsorption, probably helping maintain the micro-climate inside the nest (Charde *et al*. 2011).

Further observations are required to ascertain the role of charcoal in munia nests.

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SAVE 3rd meeting updates vulture priorities

Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction (SAVE) is a consortium of thirteen organisations with agreed shared goals to enhance the conservation status of the four critically endangered Asian vulture species through scientifically justified actions. It is chaired by one of the world's leading raptor experts, Professor Ian Newton. The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) is one of the core members and the Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) has recently become a formal member. There are two sub-committees and the annual meetings generate a summary report.

Fifty delegates from the SAVE Partnership of four South Asian countries, plus Cambodia, and for the first time, Myanmar, converged on Alipurduar in West Bengal for the third annual meeting during 7–9 November 2013. Delegates including many government representatives, all paid a visit to the nearby BNHS/West Bengal Forest Department's Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre at Rajabhat Khawa. The three-day meeting was also formally attended and closed by Mr Hiten Barman, the Honourable Minister-in-Charge, Environment and Forests, West Bengal. One important element of the meeting was the drafting of a 'Blueprint for the Recovery of South Asia's Critically Endangered Gyps Vultures' that details all actions required for each country until 2025 and is now available.

The meeting reported a huge body of progress in all countries represented, and this has now been compiled into a 101-page report that can be freely downloaded from the website resources page www.save-vultures.org along with the Blueprint. The report includes the revised priority actions still required to save these species, which were agreed by the meeting. These call for:

- An immediate ban of diclofenac manufactured for human medicine in vials or ampoules larger than 3 ml.
- An effective system of regulation of veterinary drugs, based upon safety testing on vultures (protocol already agreed for India) initiated and underway for painkillers (NSAIDs) already in and entering veterinary practice.
- Veterinary licenses to be withdrawn for two drugs—ketoprofen and aceclofenac—based on the good existing evidence that they are unsafe for vultures.
- Improve the availability of more effective meloxicam formulations thereby facilitating take up by veterinary practitioners
- Major efforts urgently needed within South Asia to address the immediate and increasing gap in funding for vulture conservation, which now jeopardises the programme.
- Promotion and expansion of network and approach of 'Vulture Safe Zones' across South Asia.
- Maintain and support the existing vulture conservation breeding programmes throughout South Asia.
- Prepare for first soft releases of captive bred vultures into Vulture Safe Zones by 2016.
- Link SAVE activities and meetings to closely support the 'Regional Steering Committee' in order to facilitate the urgent implementation of the 2012 Delhi Regional Agreement.

More details available at: www.save-vultures.org
Contributed by Chris Bowden – SAVE Programme Manager (and RSPB).

Snapshot sightings

Siberian Rubythroat at Gir National Park, Gujarat

Leio De Souza & Jennifer De Souza


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Our bird group photographed an adult male Siberian Rubythroat *Calliope calliope* on 05 December 2013 while birding in Gir Forest National Park (21°07'N, 70°49'E), Gujarat. This seems to be the first report of this species from the state (Parasharya *et al.* 2004; Grimmett *et al.* 2011).

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Red Turtle Dove from Haripad, Kerala

Harikumar Mannar & Devi Ambika S


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On 14 July 2014, a couple of small doves were seen in fading light at Haripad (9º15'N, 76º27'E), Alappuzha District, Kerala. We photographed them the next day along with Vipin V. Nath and they turned out to be the first Red Turtle Doves *Streptopelia tranquebarica* for Kerala (Sashikumar *et al.* 2010; Praveen & Narayanan 2014). Of the 13 birds present, eight were males; some birds are still present at the time of writing. Birds were wary, kept a distance of nearly 100 m and took to flight when disturbed. Clipped wings were not noticed, and hence the chances that these are of captive origin seem unlikely.

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Little Bittern from Virajpet, Karnataka

Bishan Monnappa


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An adult male Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* was photographed near Virajpet (12°11'N, 75°48E), Kodagu District, Karnataka, on 02 July 2014. This species is a rare vagrant to southern India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011) and the only prior report is from Bengaluru (Krishna *et al.* 2004). However, the actual details of that record are unknown. This is also the first photograph from southern India and its presence here in mid-summer is intriguing.

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Collared Pratincole from Bengaluru, Karnataka

Alwan Sadagopan


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A single Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* was recorded at Thippagondanahalli Reservoir (12°58'N, 77°20'E), Bengaluru on 01 Februay 2014. Identification was confirmed from its tail length (longer than tips of folded wings) and the presence of 'slit' nostrils. The bird was not observed a week later, and hence might have been on migration This is the first record for the Bengaluru area (Krishna et al. 2004). Though the western coast of India is indicated as its range (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), this may be the first documented record for Karnataka (Grimmett *et al.* 2011)

305, Vascon Pristina 29/2, Doddakanalli Chikkanayakanahalli Road, Landmark: Primus School Road, Bengaluru 560035, Karnataka. Email: alwan_go@yahoo.com

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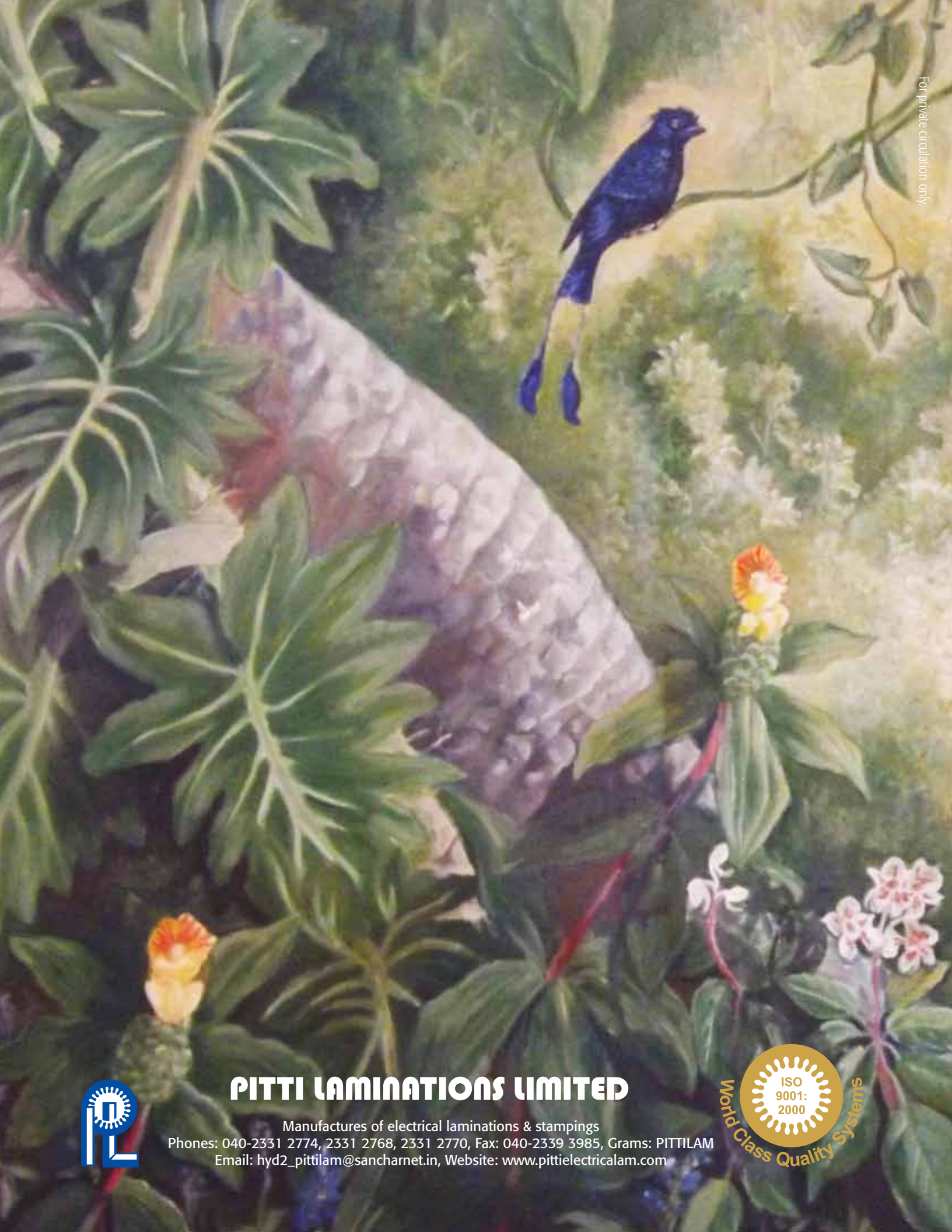

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