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Netrani Islands
EHA's *Common birds*

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Photographer: Clement Francis

Birds of the upper catchment of Ravi River, Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh, India

Arun P. Singh

Singh, A. P., 2011. Birds of the upper catchment of Ravi River, Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh, India. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (4): 97–103.
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Manuscript received on 28 January 2010.

Introduction

Early records of Chamba's ornithology come from papers by Marshall (1884), and Littledale (1898). The latter recorded the Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* in June while camping at Hul *c.* 25 km above Chamba. He had also recorded the nesting of Eurasian Griffon *Gyps fulvus.* Both, Marshall, and Littledale recorded a number of game birds in Chamba: Cheer Pheasant *Catreus wallichii* (Vulnerable; IUCN 2009), Western Tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus* (Vulnerable: IUCN 2009), Himalayan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus*, Koklass *Pucrasia macrolopha*, Kalij Pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos*, and Chukar *Alectoris chukar*. More recently, Tak (1987) recorded five individuals of Western Tragopan on 19 September 1987 in Saho-Sara Reserve Forest (2,425–3,100 m; Fig. 1) lying 30 km north–east of Chamba town. Marshall's (1884) list includes *c.* 260 taxa from Chamba. Mahabal (1993) listed 98 species of birds from Chamba district during a monsoon survey (July 1990) based on the altitudinal distribution of birds from Sultanpur, Chamba town, Chaned, Sahoo, Ranikhet, Dalhousie, Bharmour, Hadsar, Dhancho, and Mani Mahesh **(Fig. 1)**, areas lying mainly along the Ravi River catchment. The list included unique sightings of White-rumped Vulture *G. bengalensis* (Critically Endangered; IUCN 2009), Black-billed Magpie *Pica pica*, and White-winged Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogaster.* Later, Thakur *et al*., (2002) surveyed the birds of Kalatop-Khajjiar Wildlife Sanctuary (20.69 km^2; 1,185–2,768 m alt.) located in the south–western part of the district, twice, during September 2001, and May 2002, and listed 66 species including Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus* (Near-threatened; IUCN 2009), and White-cheeked Nuthatch *Sitta leucopsis*. Saikia *et al*. (2008) made preliminary observations on the avifauna of Pangi valley, in the northern part of Chamba district **(Fig. 1)**, along the Chandrabhaga River, located in the north–western part of the district, and listed 62 species including the uncommon Orange Bullfinch *Pyrrhula aurantiaca,* a species endemic to the Western Himalayas. In addition there are some more records of pheasants from Chamba district (Jandrotia *et al*. 1995; Katoch *et al.* 1997; Bashir 2000; Kaul *et al*. 2001).

Study area

Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh (HP) state, India, (32°11′30°–33°13°6°N, 75°49′–77°3′30°E) is surrounded by Jammu & Kashmir state on its north–west, Lahaul and Spiti district (HP) on its north–east and east, Kangra district (HP) on its south and south–east, and Gurdaspur district (Punjab) on its south–west **(Fig. 1)**. It covers an area of *c.* 6,528 km^2 (11.72% of HP). The entire district has catchments of two major rivers. The Ravi River flows east–west in the Punjab, covering nearly two-thirds of the district. Chandrabhaga (Chenab) River also flows east–west into Jammu & Kashmir, but in the northern part of this district. The climate is sub-tropical to sub-arctic. The mean annual rainfall in the district is *c.* 1,485 mm (Mahabal 1993), which falls mainly during the monsoon, and winter, when most of the higher reaches remain under snow cover.

As per Champion & Seth (1968) the vegetation in the area is mainly 'Moist Deodar Forest12/C1(c)'; 'Western Mixed Coniferous Forest 12/C1 (d)' interspersed with 'Alpine Pastures 15/C3' at higher elevations. deodar *Cedrus deodara* and blue pine *Pinus wallichiana* are dominating tree species that occur intermixed with horse chestnut *Aesculus indica*, rhododendron *Rhododendron arboreium*, oak *Quercus ilex*, *Pyrus* sp., walnut *Juglans regia*, *etc*. The shrub layer comprises *Berberis aristata, Prinsepia utilis, Rosa moschata, Rubus* sp., *Daphane* sp., *Cannabis sativa, etc*. Further up these conifer species are replaced by Himalayan silver fir *Abies pindrow* and yew *Taxus baccata* that are more common. Stands of *Alnus nitida* dominate the eroded riverbanks of Ravi in this area.

The environmental parameters recorded during the study period are presented below. The weather during May was dry, while it was wet during September and the area received winter rains and snow during February.

Methodology

An ornithological survey was conducted along the upper Ravi River, between coordinates 32°18.15′N–32°27.94′N, 76°31.85′E–76°39.00′E, at an altitudinal gradient between 1,730–2,700 m during three seasons: summer (14–17 May 2008), late monsoon (11–14 September 2008), and peak winter (5–8 February 2009). The survey area included villages: Kuther–Batola–Holi–Deol–Nayagaon (up to Ilake-wali-mata temple where the road ends), and adjoining mountain slopes located on the left bank of Ravi River. This area lies in the south–eastern part of Chamba district, south of Mani Mahesh and Kukti Wildlife Sanctuary and north of the Dhauladhar Range, which runs parallel to Ravi River.

Environmental parameters	14–17 May 2008	11–14 September 2008	5–8 February 2009
Relative humidity (%) (day)	47.0–61.7	58.1–67.7	51.0–94.2
Temperature (°C) (day)	20.5–27.4	21.7–27.0	3.0–11.1
Wind speed (m/s) (day)	0.3–0.4	0.4–0.8	0.4–6.4

Map: Arun P. Singh & S. Subramanya

Fig. 1. Map of Chamba district depicting the study area and locations of sites as mentioned in the text.

Photo: Arun P. Singh

Results & Discussion

A total of 103 species (see Appendix) were recorded during the study of which 47 spp., are common with Mahabal (1993); 43 spp., are common with Thakur *et al*. (2002), and 40 spp., with Saikia *et al*. (2008). Whereas, 16 spp., marked with an asterisk in the Appendix, have not been reported by the earlier authors from Chamba district. Numbers of species observed were highest during May (63), followed by September (54), and were the least in February (43).

Of these 16 new records for the district, seven are worth mentioning as they were recorded at the western-most limits of their distribution range in the Himalayas. These species were Nepal Wren Babbler, *Pnoepyga immaculata*, Chestnut-tailed Minla *Minla strigula*, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher *Ficedula strophiata*, Yellow-bellied Fantail *Rhipidura hypoxantha*, Chestnut-headed Tesia *Tesia castaneocoronata*, Ashy-throated Warbler *Phylloscopus maculipennis*, and Upland Pipit *Anthus sylvanus*.

The record of Nepal Wren Babbler is a range extension as there are very few records of this species from Himachal Pradesh and none from Chamba district. It was observed at Holi and Deol villages in 'nullahs' along the streamlets leading into the Ravi River and was identified by its high a rapidly uttered vocal note, 'ti-ti-ti-ti-ti-ti-ti-ti-ti,' descending slightly in tone (Kazmierczak 2000). The annotated checklist for Chamba district now touches 289 species.

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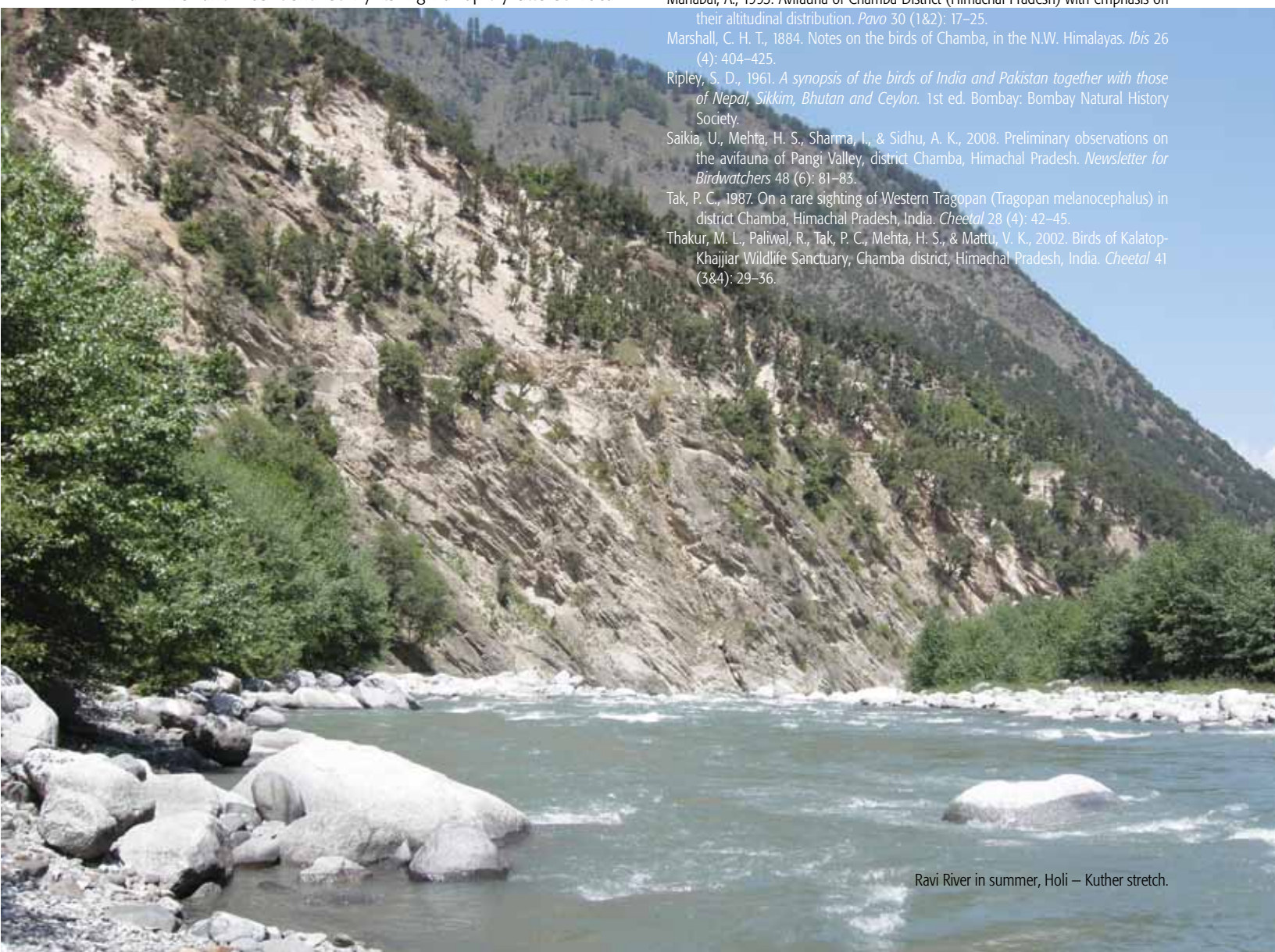

Ravi River in summer, Holi – Kuther stretch.

Appendix: Checklist of birds recorded on the Kuther–Batola–Holi–Deol–Nayagaon route in Chamba, Himachal Pradesh, during three season surveys (2008–2009), and other records from the district

S. No	Species	May 2008	Sep. 2008	Feb. 2009	Relative Abundance
1	Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*	–	–	+	U
2	Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis*	+	+	–	U
3	Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis*	+	+	+	C
4	Eurasian Griffon *G. fulvus**	–	–	+	U
5	Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*	–	–	+	U
6	Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*	+	–	–	U
7	Hill Partridge *Arborophila torqueola*	+	–	–	U
8	Chukar *Alectoris chukar*	+	+	–	FC
9	Himalayan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus*	–	–	+	R
10	Kalij Pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos*	+	+	+	C
11	Koklass Pheasant *Pucrasia macrolopha*	–	+	–	R
12	Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*	+	+	–	C
13	Snow Pigeon *Columba leuconota*	–	–	+	R
14	Rock Pigeon *C. livia*	+	+	–	U
15	Speckled Wood Pigeon *C. hodgsonii**	+	–	–	U
16	Slaty-headed Parakeet *Psittacula himalayana*	+	+	–	C
17	Himalayan Swiftlet *Collocalia brevirostris*	+	+	–	U
18	Alpine Swift *Apus melba*	+	+	–	FC
19	Great Barbet *Megalaima virens*	+	–	–	U
20	Hoopoe *Upupa epops*	+	+	–	U
21	Brown-fronted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos auriceps*	+	–	+	C
22	Himalayan Woodpecker *D. himalayensis*	+	+	+	C
23	Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*	+	+	–	C
24	Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*	+	–	+	C
25	Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*	+	–	–	U
26	Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*	+	+	–	C
27	Black-headed Jay *G. lanceolatus*	+	+	–	C
28	Yellow- billed Blue Magpie *Urocissa flavirostris*	+	+	+	C
29	Grey Treepie *Dendrocitta formosae*	+	–	–	U
30	Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*	+	–	+	U
31	Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*	–	–	+	U
32	Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*	+	+	+	C
33	Long-tailed Minivet *Pericrocotus ethologus*	+	+	–	FC
34	Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes leucocephalus*	+	+	+	C
35	Himalayan Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys*	+	+	+	C
36	Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes**	–	+	–	U
37	Nepal Wren Babbler *Pnoepyga immaculate**	–	+	–	U
38	Black-chinned Babbler *Stachyris pyrrhops*	–	–	+	U
39	Chestnut-tailed Minla *Minla strigula**	–	–	+	U
40	Rufous Sibia *Heterophasia capistrata*	+	–	–	U
41	Whiskered Yuhina *Yuhina flavicollis*	–	–	+	U
42	Streaked Laughing Thrush *Garrulax lineatus*	+	+	+	C
43	Variegated Laughing Thrush *G. variegatus*	–	+	+	C
44	Dark-sided Flycatcher *Muscicapa sibirica*	–	+	–	FC
45	Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula superciliaris*	+	–	–	U
46	Slaty-blue Flycatcher *F. tricolor*	–	–	+	U
47	Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher *F. strophiata**	+	–	–	U
48	Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis*	–	+	–	C
49	Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassina*	+	+	–	FC
50	Asian Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*	+	–	–	U
51	White-throated Fantail *Rhipidura albicollis*	–	+	–	R
52	Yellow-bellied Fantail *R. hypoxantha**	–	+	–	U
53	Grey-hooded Warbler *Seicercus xanthoschistos*	+	+	+	C
54	Whistler's Warbler *S. whistleri*	+	–	–	U
55	Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*	–	–	+	R
56	Chestnut-headed Tesia *Tesia castaneocoronata**	+	+	–	U
57	Brownish Flanked Bush Warbler *Cettia fortipes*	+	+	–	FC
58	Striated Prinia *Prinia criniger*	+	–	+	U
59	Tickell's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus affinis**	+	–	–	U
60	Hume's Warbler *P. humei*	+	–	–	C
61	Western-crowned Leaf Warbler *P. occipitalis**	+	+	–	C
62	Greenish Warbler *P. trochiloides*	+	+	–	U
62	Ashy-throated Warbler *P. maculipennis**	–	–	+	U
64	Large-billed Leaf Warbler *P. magnirostris*	+	–	–	R
65	Lemon rumped Warbler *P. chloronotus*				C
66	White-tailed Rubythroat *Luscinia pectoralis*	+	–	–	U
67	Indian Blue Robin *L. brunnea**	+	–	–	FC
68	Blue-capped Redstart *Phoenicurus caeruleocephalus**	–	–	+	FC
69	Plumbeous Water Redstart *Rhyacornis fuliginosus*	+	+	+	C
70	White-capped Water Redstart *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*	+	+	+	C
71	Spotted Forktail *Enicurus maculatus*	+	–	–	U
72	Little Forktail *E. scouleri*	–	+	–	U
73	Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii*	+	–	+	FC
74	Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*				U
75	Grey Bush Chat *S. ferrea*	+	+	–	C
76	Blue-capped Rock Thrush *Monticola cinclorhynchus*	+	–	–	U
77	Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus*	+	+	+	C
78	Dark-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis*	–	–	+	FC
79	Green-backed Tit *Parus monticolus*	+	+	+	VC
80	Black-throated Tit *Aegithalos concinnus*	+	+	+	FC
81	Spot-winged Tit *Parus melanolophus*	–	+	+	U
82	Grey-crested Tit *Parus dichrous*	–	–	+	R
83	Bar-tailed Treecreeper *Certhia himalayana*	–	–	+	C
84	White-cheeked Nuthatch *Sitta leucopsis*	–	–	+	R
85	Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*	–	–	+	C
86	Upland Pipit *Anthus sylvanus**	–	+	–	U
87	White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*	–	+	–	C
88	Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*	–	+	–	C
89	Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus*	+	+	–	U
90	Fire-breasted Flowerpecker *Dicaeum ignipectus*	+	+	–	U
91	Russet Sparrow *Passer rutilans*	+	+	–	C
92	House Sparrow *P. domesticus*	+	+	–	C
93	Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris**	–	–	+	U
94	Plain Mountain Finch *Leucosticle nemoricola*	–	–	+	FC
95	European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*	–	–	+	C
96	Yellow-breasted Greenfinch *Carduelis spinoides*	–	+	–	C
97	Fire Fronted Serin *Serinus pusillus*	–	–	+	FC
98	Red-headed Bullfinch *Pyrrhula erythrocephala*	–	–	+	U
99	Black and Yellow Grosbeak *Mycerobas icterioides*	–	+	–	U
100	Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*	+	+	–	U
101	Pink-browed Rosefinch *C. rhodochrous**	+	–	–	U
102	White-capped Bunting *Emberiza stewarti*	+	+	–	C
103	Rock Bunting *E. cia*	+	+	+	C

Other species recorded from other areas of Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh	References
104 Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*	Ma
105 Little Cormorant *P. niger*	Ma
106 Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*	Ma
107 Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*	Ma
108 Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*	Ma
109 Gadwall *A. strepera*	Ma
110 Eurasian Wigeon *A. penelope*	Ma
111 Mallard *A. platyrhynchos*	Ma
112 Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*	Ma
113 Common Teal *A. crecca*	
114 Ferruginous Pochard *Aythya nyroca* (Near threatened-IUCN)	Ma
115 Black Kite *Milvus migrans* (*lineatus & govinda*)	Ma; Mh; S
116 Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*	T; S
117 White-rumped Vulture *Gyps benghalensis*	Mh
118 Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus*	Ma; T
119 Red-headed Vulture *Sarcogyps calvus*	Ma
120 Crested Serpent-Eagle *Spilornis cheela*	Ma
121 Shikra *Accipiter badius*	Ma
122 Eurasian Sparrowhawk *A. nisus*	Ma
123 Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*	Ma
124 Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*	Ma
125 Imperial Eagle *A. heliaca*	Ma
126 Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*	Ma
127 Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus*	Ma
128 Mountain Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus nipalensis*	Ma; S
129 Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*	Ma
130 Himalayan Snowcock *Tetraogallus himalayensis*	Ma
131 Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus*	Ma
132 Western Tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus*	Ma; L; Tk; B; K
133 Jungle Bush Quail *Perdicula asiatica*	Ma
134 Cheer Pheasant *Catreus wallichii*	L; Ri
135 Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus*	Ma
136 Button Quail *Turnix* sp.	Ma
137 Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*	Ma
138 Common Coot *Fulica atra*	Ma
139 Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus*	Ma
140 River Lapwing *Vanellus duvaucelii*	Ma
141 Red-wattled Lapwing *V. indicus*	Ma
142 Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*	Ma; L
143 Solitary Snipe *G. solitaria*	Ma
144 Wood Snipe *G. nemoricola* (Vulnerable-IUCN)	Ma
145 Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*	Ma
146 Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*	Ma
147 Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*	Ma
148 Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*	Ma
149 Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*	Ma
150 Hill Pigeon *C. rupestris*	Ma; S
151 Yellow-eyed Pigeon *Columba eversmanni*	Ma
152 Common Wood Pigeon *C. palumbus*	Ma
153 Spotted Dove *S. chinensis*	Ma
154 Red Collared-Dove *S. tranquebarica*	Ma
155 Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*	Ma
156 Wedge-tailed Green-Pigeon *Treron sphenurus*	Ma; T
157 Rose-ringed Parakeet *P. krameri*	Mh
158 Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*	Mh; T
159 Large Hawk Cuckoo *Hierococcyx sparverioides*	Mh
160 Eurasian Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*	Ma; T
161 Indian Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea*	Mh
162 Indian Cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus*	Ma
163 Sirkeer Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus leschenaultii*	Ma
164 Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis*	Ma
165 Mountain Scops Owl *O. spilocephalus*	Ma
166 Oriental Scops Owl *Otus sunia*	Ma
167 Collared Scops Owl *O. bakkamoena*	Ma
168 Dusky Eagle Owl *Bubo coromandus*	Ma
169 Brown Wood Owl *Strix leptogrammica*	Ma
170 Asian Barred Owlet *Glaucidium cuculoides*	Ma; T
171 Collared Owlet *G. brodiei*	Ma
172 Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*	Ma

Other species recorded from other areas of Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh	References
173 Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus*	Ma; T
174 Savannah Nightjar *C. affinis*	Ma
175 Common Swift *Apus apus*	Ma; S
176 Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*	Ma
177 Fork-tailed Swift *A. pacificus*	S
178 House Swift *A. affinis*	Ma; T
179 Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*	Ma
180 White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*	Ma; Mh
181 Crested Kingfisher *Megaceryle lugubris*	Ma
182 Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*	Mh
183 Blue-throated Barbet *Megalaima asiatica*	Ma; Mh
184 Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*	Ma
185 Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos macei*	Ma
186 Yellow-crowned Woodpecker *D. mahrattensis*	Ma
187 Grey-crowned Pigmy Woodpecker *Picoides auriceps*	Mh
188 Scaly-bellied Woodpecker *Picus squamatus*	Mh ; T; S
189 Grey-headed Woodpecker *P. canus*	Mh; T
190 Black-rumped Flameback *Dinopium benghalense*	Ma
191 Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*	Ma
192 Eurasian Crag Martin *Hirundo rupestris*	Ma
193 Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*	Mh
194 Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*	T; Ma
195 Wire-tailed Swallow *H. smithii*	Ma
196 Northern House Martin *Delichon nipalensis*	Ma
197 White-browed Wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis*	Ma
198 Citine Wagtail *M. citreola*	Ma
199 Yellow Wagtail *M. flava*	S
200 Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus*	Ma
201 Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*	Mh
202 Tree Pipit *A. trivialis*	Ma
203 Water Pipit *A. spinoletta*	Ma
204 Black-winged Cuckooshrike *Coracina melaschistos*	Ma
205 Small Minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*	Mh
206 Scarlet Minivet *P. flammeus*	Mh; S
207 Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*	Ma; Mh
208 Bay-backed Shrike *Lanius vittatus*	Ma; S
209 Grey-backed Shrike *L. tephronotus*	Ma
210 Southern Grey Shrike *L. meridionalis*	Ma
211 Altai Accentor *Prunella himalayana*	Ma
212 Rufous breasted Accentor *P. strophiata*	Ma
213 Chestnut-bellied Rockthrush *Monticola rufiventris*	T
214 Blue Rock Thrush *M. solitarius*	Ma
215 Orange-headed Thrush *Zoothera citrina*	Ma
216 Plain-backed Thrush *Z. mollissima*	Ma
217 Small-billed Mountain Thrush *Z. dauma*	Mh
218 Tickell's Thrush *Turdus unicolor*	Ma
219 White-collared Blackbird *T. albocinctus*	Ma; T
220 Grey-winged Blackbird *T. boulboul*	Ma; T
221 Eurasian Blackbird *T. merula*	Ma; Mh
222 Mistle Thrush *T. viscivorus*	Ma; T
223 Orange-flanked Bush Robin *Tarsiger cyanurus*	S
224 Golden Bush Robin *T. chrysaeus*	Ma
225 Oriental Magpie Robin *Copsychus saularis*	Mh
226 Indian Robin *Saxicoloides fulicata*	Mh
227 Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*	Mh
228 White-winged Redstart *P. erythrogaster*	Ma; Mh
229 Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata*	S
230 Variable Wheatear *Oenanthe picata*	Ma
231 White-throated Laughingthrush *Garrulax albogularis*	Ma
232 White-crested Laughingthrush *G. leucolophus*	Ma
233 Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush *G. rufogularis*	Ma
234 Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush *G. erythrocephalus*	Ma
235 Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus erythrogenys*	Ma
236 Red-billed Leiothrix *Leiothrix lutea*	Mh
237 Whiskered Yuhina *Yuhina flavicollis*	Ma
238 ?Hill Prinia *Prinia atrogularis*	Ma
239 Rufous-fronted Prinia *P. buchanani*	Ma
240 Graceful Prinia *P. gracilis*	Ma

Other species recorded from other areas of Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh	References
241 Pale-footed Bush Warbler *Cettia pallidipes*	Ma
242 Grey-sided Bush Warbler *C. brunnifrons*	Ma
243 Paddy-field Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*	Ma
244 Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius*	Ma; Mh
245 Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*	Mh; T
246 Yellow-browed Warbler *P. inornatus*	Ma
247 Greenish Warbler *P. trochiloides*	Ma
248 Blyth's Leaf Warbler *P. reguloides*	Ma
249 Yellowish-bellied Warbler *Abroscopus superciliaris*	Ma
250 Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*	S
251 Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa latirostris*[1]	Mh
252 Snowy-browed Flycatcher *Ficedula hyperythra*	Ma
253 Little Pied Flycatcher *F. westermanni*	T
254 Rufous-bellied Niltava *Niltava sundara*	Ma
255 Blue-throated Flycatcher *Cyornis rubeculoides*	Ma
256 Fire-capped Tit *Cephalopyrus flammiceps*	Ma
257 Rufous-naped Tit *Parus rufonuchalis*	S
258 Great Tit *P. major*	T; S
259 Black-lored Tit *P. xanthogenys*	Ma; S
260 Yellow-browed Tit *Sylviparus modestus*	Ma
261 Kashmir Nuthatch *Sitta cashmirensis*	Ma
262 White-tailed Nuthatch *S. himalayensis*	S; Ma
263 Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*	S
264 Pale-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*	Mh
265 Purple Sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica*	Ma; Mh
266 Crimson Sunbird *Aethopyga siparaja*	Ma; Mh
267 Fire-tailed Sunbird *A. ignicauda*	Ma
268 Crested Bunting *Melophus lathami*	T
269 Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*	Ma

Other species recorded from other areas of Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh	References
270 Spectacled Finch *Callacanthis burtoni*	Ma
271 Dark-breasted Rosefinch *Carpodacus nipalensis*	S
272 Red-fronted Rosefinch *C. puniceus*	Ma
273 Orange Bullfinch *Pyrrhula aurantiaca*	Ma; S
274 Spot-winged Grosbeak *Mycerobas melanozanthos*	Ma; Mh
275 Red Avadavat *Amandava amandava*	Mh
276 Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata*	Mh
277 Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*	Ma
278 Chestnut-shouldered Petronia *Petronia xanthocollis*	Ma
279 Brahminy Starling *S. pagodarum*	Ma; Mh
280 Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*	Ma
281 Jungle Myna *Acridotheres tristis*	Ma; Mh; T
282 Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*[2]	Ma; Mh
283 Black-Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*	Mh; T
284 Ashy Drongo *D. leucophaeus*	Ma
285 Red-billed Blue Magpie *Urocissa erythrorhyncha*	T
286 Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*	Mh
287 Black-billed Magpie *Pica pica*	Ma; Mh
288 Yellow-billed Chough *Pyrrocorax graculus*	S
289 House Crow *Corvus splendens*	Mh

Abbreviations: B=Bashir 2000; C=Common; FC=Fairly common; K=Katoch *et al.* 1997; L=Littledale 1898; Ma=Marshall 1884; Mh=Mahabal 1993; R=Rare; Ri=Ripley 1961; S=Saikia *et al*. 2008; T=Thakur *et al*. 2002; Tk=Tak 1987; U=Uncommon; VC=Very common; ?= identity doubtful

1 *M. dauurica*; 2 ?*Oriolus kundoo*

Upland Pipit *Anthus sylvanus*

Photo: Arun P. Singh

A moist temperate forest with Himalayan silver fir *Abies pindrow* in the study area in May 2008.

Photos: Arun P. Singh

Yellow-bellied Fantail *Rhipidura hypoxantha*

Chestnut-headed Tesia *Tesia castaneocoronata*

Avifaunal survey of South- and Middle-Andamans, November 2009

Satish Pande, Niranjan Sant & Shivkumar Pednekar

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Introduction

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are located in the Bay of Bengal (06°45'N–13°30'N, 92°20'E–93°56'E). The Andaman group comprises islands of North-, Middle- and South Andamans, Baratang, Rutland, and other smaller islands and also Little Andaman, the latter being 65 km south of South Andaman **(Fig. 1)**. In our earlier survey of this archipelago (Pande *et al*. 2007) we had not visited the Middle Andaman group of islands. In this paper we present a report of our survey encompassing South and Middle Andaman Islands during 15–20 November 2009. For a detailed bibliography of the ornithology of Andaman and Nicobar Islands see Pittie (2007).

Methodology

We surveyed Port Blair town and surroundings, Chidiyatapu, garbage dump and Mt. Harriet in South Andaman on 15 and 16 November 2009 by road. Further, the survey was continued in Middle Andaman. The visual survey of birds coming to Parrot Island, Middle Andaman was done on 17 November in the evening, from a boat anchored in the creek at a distance of about 50 m from the island. The survey of Baratang, including the region around Mud Volcano and the area around India Gate cave in Middle Andaman was done by road on 17 and 18 November. We returned to South Andaman and surveyed Ross Island, Manjiri, and Wandoor on 19 and 20 November. All the surveys, except on Parrot Island, were carried out by the non-intersecting line transect method.

Observations

At least 2,493+ birds belonging to 95 species in 72 genera and 38 families were recorded during this survey. 90 spp., were recorded in South Andaman, and 57 in Middle Andaman. The overall higher abundance in Middle Andaman (1,800+) is due to the roost of parakeets (1,402+) on Parrot Island.

A total of 18 spp., that were recorded in our previous survey (Pande *et al*. 2007) were not observed in the present survey (Table 1); however, 17 spp., recorded during the present survey in South and Middle Andaman Islands were not observed in South Andaman in 2007. Other noteworthy observations during the present survey were Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*, Andaman Nightjar *Caprimulgus andamanicus*, and Great Thick-knee *Esacus recurvirostris*, observed in the mangroves at Wandoor. We did not observe any terns or gulls during the survey. During the present survey we recorded 13 Andaman endemics, marked with an asterisk (*) against the common name of the species (Jathar & Rahmani 2007); and eight Near-threatened spp., marked with a double asterisk (**) against the scientific names of species (Threatened Birds of India, IUCN/Bird Life International, 2010).

Ecological notes

At least 1,402 parakeets, particularly Red-breasted- *Psittacula a. abbotti*, Red-cheeked- *P. longicauda*, and Alexandrine- *P. eupatria* arrived to the roost site of Parrot Island within a span of 25 minutes between 1700 and 1725 hrs on 17 November. Blue-tailed Bee-eaters *Merops philippinus* were also roosting with the parakeets on this island. Parrot Island is an important traditional roosting site of the parakeets and Blue-tailed Bee-eaters.

We saw a mixed flock of Asian Fairy Bluebirds, Hill Mynas *Gracula religiosa*, Andaman Wood Pigeons *Columba palumboides*, and Andaman Green Pigeons *Treron chloropterus* feeding on ripe figs of a large *Ficus* tree close to the sea at Wandoor. The Andaman Serpent Eagle *Spilornis elgini* was seen feeding on crabs and prawns on the ground. The endemic Hume's Hawk Owls *Ninox obsolete* were seen hawking insects at night in the light of street lamps on roads running through paddies. The activity was significant between 2000 and 2300 hrs. The Andaman Woodpecker *Dendrocopos hodgei* and Spot-breasted Pied Woodpecker *D. analis* were seen to execute the same beat together while pecking at wood and eating insects. The presence of the Andaman Woodpecker was betrayed by its resonant 'wood-pecking.' Andaman Flowerpeckers *Dicaeum vincens* were seen in pairs in the canopies of trees, looking for insects under leaves. White-headed Starlings *Sturnus erythropygia* were seen clinging vertically to trunks of trees, dislodging loose bark, and eating the exposed insects. We observed a pair of Andaman Nightjar in the mangroves and when disturbed they flew in a slow flight and alighted under the thorny bushes. The plumage of the birds was particularly noticeable since it was dark brown.

The Greater Racket-tailed Drongos *Dicrurus paradiseus* gave vociferous warning signals in the form of harsh calls for over ten minutes when a Changeable Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus limnaeetus* came and perched on the ground and the drongos subsequently mobbed the eagle. The raptor did not pay any attention to this mobbing. We noted two White-bellied Sea Eagles *Haliaeetus leucogaster* carrying nesting material in their talons, and also noted a few birds eating fish perching on snags of palms submerged in salt water marshes that were created due to the tsunami of 2004. At least five immature White-bellied Sea Eagles were seen and we observed one young bird uttering begging calls.

A pair of Collared Kingfishers *Todiramphus chloris* was seen in breeding display with one of the birds displaying while

Table 1. Birds recorded on South and Middle Andaman Islands during 15–20 November 2009. (Abbreviations: MA=Middle Andamans; SA=South Andamans.)

Species	Nov. 2009		Jan. 2007
	SA	MA	SA
ARDEIDAE			
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*	8	2	12
Pacific Reef Egret *E. sacra*	2	-	7
Intermediate Egret *Mesophoyx intermedia*	20+	2	6
Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola g. grayii*	15+	6	24
Little Green Heron *Butorides s. podiogaster*	1	1	2
Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*	2	-	2
Chestnut Bittern *I. cinnamomeus*	2	-	-
Black Bittern *Dupetor flavicollis*	2	-	-
ANATIDAE			
Lesser Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna javanica*	50+	-	-
ACCIPITRIDAE			
Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*	2	5	4
White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*	12	6	16
Crested Serpent-Eagle *Spilornis c. davisoni*	2	-	1
Andaman Serpent-Eagle* *S. elgini***	2	2	-
Changeable Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus l. andamanensis*	1	1	1
PHASIANIDAE			
Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus*	1	-	1
Indian Pea Fowl *Pavo cristatus*	1	1	-
RALLIDAE			
Andaman Crake* *Rallina canningi***	1	-	-
White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*	2	-	1
Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* (*orientalis*?)	6	6	14
JACANIDAE			
Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus*	2	-	-
CHARADRIIDAE			
Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*	3	-	26
Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*	-	-	6
Lesser Sand Plover *C. m. atrifrons*	2	2	13
SCOLOPACIDAE			
Pintail Snipe *Gallinago stenura*	1	-	12
Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata***	5	-	-
Whimbrel *N. phaeopus*	2	3	10
Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*	25+	4	-
Green Sandpiper *T. ochropus*	5	-	2
Wood Sandpiper *T. glareola*	-	1	2
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*	5	2	4
Little Stint *Calidris minuta*	2	-	6
BURHINIDAE			
Great Thick Knee *Esacus recurvirostris*	1	-	-
COLUMBIDAE			
Blue Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*	65+	20	100
Andaman Wood Pigeon* *C. palumboides***	5	8+	4
Red Collared-Dove *Streptopelia t. humilis*	10+	2	12
Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps i. maxima*	-	2	2
Andaman Green-Pigeon* *Treron chloropterus*	15	15+	18
Imperial Green-Pigeon *Ducula a. andamanica*	25+	10+	16
PSITTACIDAE			
Indian Hanging Parrot *Loriculus vernalis*	3	2	8
Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula e. magnirostris*		140+	6
Red-breasted Parakeet *P. a. abbotti*	6	840+	30
Red-cheeked Parakeet *P. longicauda***	2	422+	-
CUCULIDAE			
Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus saturatus*	2	-	4
Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea*	6	4	14
Brainfever Bird *Hierococcyx varius*	1	10	-
Andaman Coucal* *Centropus andamanensis*	6	1	6
STRIGIDAE			
Hume's Hawk Owl* *Ninox obsoleta*	6	-	-
Andaman Scops-Owl* *Otus balli***	1	2	3
Oriental Scops Owl *O. s. modesta*	5	-	-
CAPMRIMULGIDAE			
Andaman Nightjar *Caprimulgus andamanicus*	2	-	-
APODIDAE			
White-bellied Swiftlet *Collocalia e. affinis*	35	14	70+
Common Edible-nest Swiftlet *Aerodramus f. inexpectata*	-	4	20+
Brown-throated Needletail Swift *Hirundapus g. indica*	12	10	12+

Species	Nov. 2009		Jan. 2007
	SA	MA	SA
ALCEDINIDAE			
Small Blue Kingfisher *Alcedo a. bengalensis*	2	-	12
Stork-billed Kingfisher *Pelargopsis c. osmastoni*	1	2	2
White-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon s. saturatior*	20+	20	14
Black-capped Kingfisher *H. pileata*	1	-	6
Collared Kingfisher *Todirhamphus c. davisoni*	4	3	12
MEROPIDAE			
Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus*	12	6	10
CORACIIDAE			
Oriental Broad-billed Roller *Eurystomus o. gigas*	1	-	2
PICIDAE			
Spot-breasted Pied Woodpecker *Dendrocopos analis* [*D. m. andamanensis*]	2	4	2
Andaman Woodpecker* *D. hodgei***	1	4	-
HIRUNDINIDAE			
Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica*	6	-	-
Barn Swallow *H. rustica*	20		40
MOTACILLIDAE			
Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*	12	-	16
Yellow Wagtail *M. flava*	2	-	-
CAMPEPHAGIDAE			
Large Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina macei*	2	1	-
Andaman Cuckoo-shrike* *C. s. dobsoni*	1	1	4
Small Minivet *Pericrocotus c. vividus*	6	4	8
Scarlet Minivet *P. speciosus* (*P. f. andamanensis*)	2	16	4
MONARCHIDAE			
Black-naped Monarch *Hypothymis a. tytleri*	2	-	4
PYCNONOTIDAE			
Andaman Bulbul* *Pycnonotus fuscoflavescens*	3	-	16
Red-whiskered Bulbul *P. j. whistleri*	30	14	70+
LANIIDAE			
Philippine Shrike *Lanius c. lucionensis*	2	2	13
Isabelline Shrike *L. isabellinus*	1	-	-
Brown Shrike *L. cristatus*	6	-	-
TURDIDAE			
Orange-headed Thrush *Zoothera c. andamanensis*	1	-	2
Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus s. andamanensis*	2	1	7
Andaman Shama* *C. albiventris*	1	-	4
MUSCICAPIDAE			
Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*	2	2	14
SYLVIIDAE			
Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*	1	-	-
DICAEIDAE			
Andaman Flowerpecker* *Dicaeum vincens*	4	6	18
NECTARINIIDAE			
Olive-backed Sunbird *Cinnyris j. andamanica*	20+	16	50+
ESTRILDIDAE			
White-rumped Munia *Lonchura s. fumigata*	20+	-	4
PASSERIDAE			
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*	20	6	20
STURNIDAE			
White-headed Starling *Sturnus erythropygia*	2	7	4
Common Hill-Myna *Gracula r. andamanensis*	20+	2	8
Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*	2	-	-
ORIOLIDAE			
Indian Golden Oriole *Oriolus kundoo*	4	-	4
Black-naped Oriole *O. chinensis andamanensis*	2	3	6
IRENIDAE			
Asian Fairy-Bluebird *Irene puella puella*	10+	100+	6
ARTAMIDAE			
White-breasted Wood-swallow *Artamus leucorynchus*	-	16	-
DICRURIDAE			
Andaman Drongo* *Dicrurus andamanensis***	15+	2	30+
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *D. p. otiosus*	4	10+	15+
CORVIDAE			
Common Crow *Corvus splendens*	2	-	-
Jungle Crow *C. macrorhynchos*	30	10	50+
Total	**693+**	**1800+**	**974+**

perching on a snag with partially extended wings and uttering calls incessantly for more than an hour. Its mate remained at a distance and seemed not to pay any attention to the displaying bird. The display eventually culminated in offering food by the displaying bird to the other bird when the attention of the latter was successfully drawn by the prolonged display of the former. Both the birds then flew to a mud bank and started excavating a tunnel. After some time they again took their previous perches and the display resumed.

One endemic Andaman Coucal *Centropus andamanensis* was found dead on the road due to collision with road traffic. The India Gate cave in Middle Andaman was found to be devoid of any Common Edible-nest Swiftlet *Aerodramus fuciphaga*. However in the India Gate cave, we recorded a small colony of about 20 intermediate horseshoe bats *Rhinolophus affinis*. We learnt from the local people that poaching of Common Edible-nest Swiftlet nests was ongoing.

First Report of Pheasant-tailed Jacana

We recorded the Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* during this survey, which is a first record for the Andaman Islands. Two birds were seen at the waterbody behind the aerodrome at Port Blair. They were seen with Pond Herons *Ardeola grayii*, Lesser Whistling Ducks *Dendrocygna javanica*, Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis* and Common Moorhens *Gallinula chloropus*.

Results

The birds observed in the avifaunal survey in South and Middle Andaman during November 2009 are given in **Table 1**. Observations from our previous survey in January 2007 are also incorporated for comparison the same table.

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Avifaunal survey of Netrani Island, Karnataka, and importance of offshore islands for bird life

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Introduction

Netrani Island (14°59'N, 74°19'E) is an offshore island in the Arabian Sea, in Uttar Kannada district, and is about 19.6 km from the coastal town of Murudeshwar in Karnataka **(Fig. 1)**. The island has an area of about 4.2 km^2 and the altitude ranges from seashore to a maximum of 77 m above msl. It is covered with dense evergreen vegetation and *Ficus* sp., are dominant. There is no wetland on Netrani. The island is uninhabited, but there is an annual religious pilgrimage when thousands of, mainly fishermen, devotees visit it and worship the local deities of several religions. Earlier the Indian Navy controlled Netrani, when bombing practice from ships used to be conducted with the island as the target, and therefore the island was out of bounds for civilians. We found a few empty bombshell cases on the island.

There is no landing jetty on Netrani, and its coast is rocky with coral shingles and boulders. We recorded reptiles like calotes and skinks, crustaceans like crabs, and also spiders and butterflies on the island. Marine life in the clear waters around the island is rich, and we observed various species of corals, crustaceans, squids, molluscs, fishes, sea snakes, and mammals, particularly dolphins. This rich marine life has attracted eco-tourism, and we saw Indian and foreign tourists snorkeling and scuba diving near the island.

Methodology

We reached Netrani Island on motorized boats hired at Murudeshwar, and conducted the avifaunal survey during 22 and 23 November 2008. We explored the entire island and conducted a visual survey for birds and any nests, by walking.

We also circum-navigated the island by boat and looked for any pelagic birds around the island. We photographically documented the birds seen on the island.

Observations & results

At least 300 birds belonging to 40 species, in 32 genera, 27 families, and 10 Orders were recorded over the coastal waters and on Netrani Island during the survey period (Table 1). In all, seven species of raptors were recorded on the island, of which two, White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* and Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*, were found nesting, and indulging in aerial displays. Other raptors recorded were the migratory Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*, Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*, and the resident Shaheen Falcon *Falco peregrines peregrinator*, a species found in the Western Ghats. Indian Swiftlets *Aerodramus (Collocalia) unicolor* are known to breed in the cave on Netrani Island (Jerdon 1862; Pande 2005; Mahabal *et al*. 2007). We spotted, from the boat, *c.* 25+ swiftlets flying in and out of the cave. We did not enter the cave during the survey and hence could not estimate the number of nests in the cave. We did not find any evidence of recent breeding, in the form of old nests, eggshells, or incarcerated dead birds, of any of the tern species, though these terns were recorded on the waters around the island.

Out of the 40 species that we recorded, 16 are winter migrants, and the remaining 24, residents (Table 1). Our records of the pelagic Arctic Jaeger *Catharacta parasiticus* and Pomarine Jaeger *Stercorarius pomarinus* around Netrani Island are significant since these are rare winter migrants to India (Grimmett *et al*. 1999). These birds were observed flying over the sea, and occasionally landing on the water. Terns and gulls accompanied them. 22 Pomarine Jaegers were reported in 2002 near Burnt Island, Vengurla Rocks, Maharashtra flying southwards; various species of terns were also reported nesting on that island by Pande (2002a).

Offshore islands are present in the Gulf of Kutch, Pak Bay, Gulf of Mannar (Venkataraman & Alfred 2001) and also along the western coast of India in the Arabian Sea. Avifauna of Pirotan Island (Khachar 1982), and other islands in the Gulf of Kutch (Abdulali, 1962 1964; Bhatia 1982), Palk Bay, and Gulf of Mannar (Balachandran 1995; Sangha 1995), is well documented. In general, however, the avifauna of offshore islands along the western coast of India is poorly studied. The avifauna of Burnt Island, Vengurla Rocks, Maharashtra, was recorded by earlier observers (Hume 1876; Abdulali 1940; Pande 2002a, b; Islam & Rahmani 2004; Pande 2005; Mahabal *et al*. 2007). Pande (2005) reported avifauna from *around* offshore islands, and the western coast of India, particularly, Gull Island off Mandve, Elaphanta Island, Khanderi Island, Korlai Rocks, Harne Fort, Suvarnadurga Fort, Burnt Island, and Sindhudurga Fort, all in Maharashtra; Grandi Island, St. George Island, Anjadeep Island, and Mugaregudda–Devgudda Islands, all in Goa; Netrani Island, and Coconut Island, in Karnataka.

As mentioned earlier, preliminary work indicates that these offshore islands are important nesting places for Indian Swiftlets, White-bellied Sea-eagles, Brahminy Kites, and various species of terns. Several other bird species are also seen on the islands. However, the offshore islands are difficult to survey due to logistics problems, and the difficulty of landing on them. There is need to prepare inventories of the avifauna present on each offshore island and on the waters around them. Information is also needed on the daily activity or seasonal movements of resident birds between islands and the nearest coast, and also about the use of islands as roosting, nesting, and feeding grounds. Further, offshore islands are important wintering grounds for several species of migratory coastal birds. These islands can also be used as survey stations from where waters around them can be monitored to study rare, wintering pelagic bird species like storm-petrels, shearwaters, jaegers, boobies, terns, and gulls, about which our knowledge is inadequate.

Repeated visits to all the offshore islands can be useful from the conservation point of view, since poaching of nests of Indian Swiftlets has been previously reported from Burnt Island, Vengurla Rocks, Maharashtra, and Netrani Island, Karnataka (Abdulali 1940; Pande 2002a; Mahabal *et al*. 2007). Presently, removal of nests of Indian Swiftlets is legally banned and now controlled. Indian Swiftlets are also protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 as amended in 2003. Islands present fragile, ecologically sensitive, and bio-geographically significant ecosystems (Das 2001), hence, the study of birdlife on all these offshore islands is important.

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Table 1. Birds recorded in marine waters around Netrani Island, and on the island, during 22–23 November 2008. (Species marked with * are winter migrants).

CICONIIFORMES
Ardeidae
Western Reef Heron *Egretta gularis* 3
Indian Pond-Heron *Ardeola grayii* 1
Anatidae
Common Teal *Anas crecca* 2
FALCONIFORMES
Accipitridae
Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* 22+
White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* 42+
White-eyed Buzzard *Butastur teesa* 1
Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* 1
Falconidae
Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* 1
Shaheen Falcon *F. peregrinus peregrinator* 1
Eurasian Hobby* *F. subbuteo* 1
CHARADRIIFORMES
Scolopacidae
Common Sandpiper* *Actitis hypoleucos* 3
Stercorariidae
Arctic Jaeger* *Catharacta parasiticus* 4
Pomarine Jaeger* *Stercorarius pomarinus* 10+
Laridae
Black-headed Gull* *Larus ridibundus* 20+
Brown-headed Gull* *L. brunnicephalus* 12+
Sternidae
Large Crested Tern* *Sterna bergii* 30+
Sooty Tern* *S. fuscata* 2
Bridled Tern* *S. anaethetus* 8
Little Tern *S. albifrons* 2

Table 1. Birds recorded in marine waters around Netrani Island, and on the island, during 22–23 November 2008. (Species marked with * are winter migrants).

COLUMBIFORMES
Columbidae
Blue Rock Pigeon *Columba livia* 12
CUCULIFORMES
Cuculidae
Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea* 1
CAPRIMULGIFORMES
Caprimulgidae
Nightjar *Caprimulgus* sp. 1
APODIFORMES
Apodidae
Indian Swiftlet *Aerodramus (Collocalia) unicolor* 25+
CORACIIFORMES
Alcedinidae
White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* 2
Coraciidae
Indian Roller *Coracias bengalensis* 1
PICIFORMES
Picidae
White-naped Woodpecker *Chrysocolaptes festivus* 1
PASSERIFORMES
Hirundinidae
Barn Swallow* *Hirundo rustica* 20+
Motacillidae
White Wagtail* *Motacilla alba* 6
Grey Wagtail* *M. cinerea* 11
Pycnonotidae
Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* 8
Cisticolidae
Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis* 1
Sylviidae
Hume's Leaf Warbler* *Phylloscopus humei* 5
Muscicapidae
Verditer Flycatcher* *Eumyias thalassina* 1
Monarchidae
Asian Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi* 1
Emberizidae
Red-headed Bunting* *Emberiza bruniceps* 4
Zosteropidae
Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus* 10+
Oriolidae
Golden Oriole *Oriolus kundoo* 2
Dicruridae
Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus* 5
Corvidae
House Crow *Corvus splendens* 2
Indian Jungle Crow *C. culminatus* 15+

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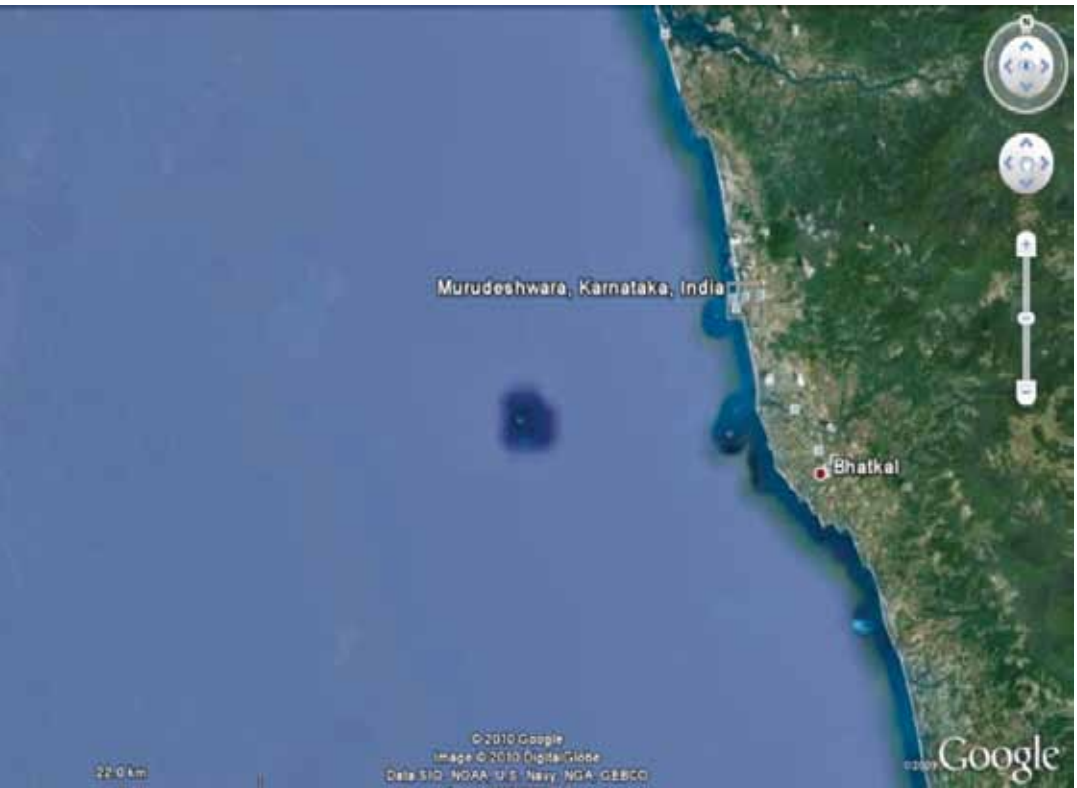

Fig. 1. A satellite image showing the west coast of Karnataka and the Netrani Island. (From Google 2009).

Sighting of Red-naped Shaheen *Falco peregrinus babylonicus* in Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat

Prasad Ganpule

Ganpule, P., 2011. Sighting of Red-naped Shaheen *Falco peregrinus babylonicus* in Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (4): 109.
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On 18 November 2008 I was on a short birdwatching trip to the western corner of the Little Rann of Kachchh in Gujarat, near the village of Venasar (23°08′58″N, 70°56′48″E). There is a freshwater lake in the western part of the area and water from a creek floods the area from the northern part making it an ideal bird watching site.

While scouting the landscape I noticed a pale falcon-like bird sitting near a small stream (a run-off from the lake), on the ground, at a distance of about 50 m. It was large in size (relative to a Red-headed Falcon *Falco chicquera*, or Merlin *F. columbarius*), had pale bluish-grey upperparts, whitish underparts, thin moustachial stripe, and barring on tail. I took a record photograph (Fig. 1) and referred to the field guide and identified the bird as a Red-naped Shaheen *F. peregrinus babylonicus*. Unfortunately it flew away on closer approach, as I was on foot. I then noticed another bird and the pair started hunting together. I could not follow, as the Rann was still wet. After coming home, I referred to the books and confirmed its identity.

A further visit to the site on 3 January 2009 was unsuccessful.

I revisited the site on 18 January 2009, early in the morning, and located the falcon almost immediately at the same place (Fig. 2). This time I could get much closer and obtained good photos including flight shots. The barring on the underparts, and the rufous-coloured nape and crown could be clearly seen.

The Red-naped Shaheen is known as an uncommon/rare winter visitor to our area with a possibility of its breeding in western Gujarat (Grimmett *et al*. 1998; Kazmierczak 2000; Naoroji 2006). I am not aware of recent records for Gujarat but as per my personal communication with senior birdwatchers here, it is very rare now with no records in the last few years.

Photos: Prasad Ganpule

Fig. 1. Red-naped Shaheen *F. p. babylonicus* (18.11.2008).

Fig. 2. Red-naped Shaheen *F. p. babylonicus* (18.01.2009)

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Common Coot *Fulica atra*: first report for Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary, Western Himalaya, Uttarakhand, India

Ishwari D. Rai, Sabuj Bhattacharyya & Bhupendra S. Adhikari

Rai, I. D., Bhattacharyya, S., & Adhikari, B. S., 2011. Common Coot *Fulica atra*: first report for Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary, Western Himalaya, Uttarakhand, India. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (4): 110.

Ishwari D. Rai*, Sabuj Bhattacharyya, Bhupendra S. Adhikari: Wildlife Institute of India, P.O. box # 18, Chandrabani, Dehradun. *Email: *ishwari.rai@gmail.com*

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On 14 March 2008, at 1805 hrs, we observed a Common Coot *Fulica atra* being chased by a flock of Large-billed Crows *Corvus macrorhynchos* in the bouldery subalpine forest gap near Tungnath area (3,000 m asl; **Fig. 1**) of Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary (30°29.22'N, 79°11.95'E). We rescued the bird, as it appeared injured, and had a broken claw **(Figs 2 & 3)**. It was unable to fly and kept dropping to the ground, and in the process appeared to be further injuring itself. We applied some antiseptic ointment that we were carrying, to its wound and released it immediately.

Common Coot are both, resident, as well as partly migratory, in India, and have been reported breeding up to 2500 m in the Himalayas (Ali & Ripley 1978). Their population in India swells up with migrating birds during winter, with the influx of birds from Central, and western Asia. The bird is a reluctant flier, and if it has to fly a short distance, will skitter along the water, half running, half flying.

There is no previous record of Common Coot from the Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary. After interviewing the villagers we realised that it was not a common bird for that area.

This observation indicates the possibility of a migratory route, or habitat, of Common Coot in the sanctuary area. The species may be using this range of sanctuary for nesting or migration, both of which are possible due to the presence of a large number of high altitude lakes in the area. It is reported that during winter Common Coots are subjected to heavy predation by several raptor species (Ali & Ripley 1978) and the bird we caught may have been a victim of such an incident.

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Fig. 1. The Chopta–Tungnath area (foreground) of Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary, Uttarakhand.

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Photos: Ishwari D. Rai

Figs 2 & 3. Characteristic red eye and, lobed, membrane fringed toes of the Common Coot *Fulica atra*.

First record of Siberian Blue Robin *Luscinia cyane* from Nagpur, central India

Parag Deshmukh

Deshmukh, P. 2011. First record of Siberian Blue Robin *Luscinia cyane* from Nagpur, central India. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (4): 111.
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The Siberian Blue Robin *Luscinia cyane* is a winter vagrant with records from Shimla, central Uttaranchal, central Nepal, western Assam, western Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, and South Andaman (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). The distribution map in Grimmett *et al.* (2000) does not show any sighting records from central India. There are no published records of this species from peninsular India, Madhya Pradesh, or the Vidarbha region (D'Abreu 1923).

In the evening of 20 April 2008 I heard a bird call in my backyard in Nagpur city (Maharashtra, India), and realised that it was different from those he heard regularly. But I did not pay much attention to it. For some days I kept hearing that call in the late evenings, after sunset, and then one day I spotted the bird at around 1700 hrs. It was hopping on the moist ground and feeding under a curry leaf *Murraya koenigii* tree. At this time the low light conditions did not allow photography, and the bird itself was quite flighty in my presence, flying away whenever I approached it. The bird did however drink water from a saucer I had put out for birds.

It had blue upperparts, a black mask, and a black stripe down the side of its breast. Its under parts were white. It had a habit of shivering its short tail, and made a sound like "chuk…chukk…chukkk…" I identified it with the help of the Grimmett *et al*. (2000) as a Siberian Blue Robin *Luscinia cyane*.

The Siberian Blue Robin interacted with a male Indian Robin *Saxicoloides fulicatus* while the latter foraged nearby. It would follow the Indian Robin and shared its feeding area, though they sometimes dodged each other.

The Siberian Blue Robin was also sighted in the early morning, but never during the hot daytime.

I saw the Siberian Blue Robin daily till the first week of May 2008 in my backyard. By 29 April the bird had become accustomed to my presence, and I was able to sit on a stool and take photographs while it hopped barely three meters away.

Most intriguing was its occurrence till the first week of May.

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Photos: Parag Deshmukh

Siberian Blue Robin *Luscinia cyane* in Nagpur.

Photographic record of Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda* feeding on Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*, and bat (Chiroptera)

Rohit Ganpule

Ganpule, R., 2011. Photographic record of Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda* feeding on Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*, and bat (Chiroptera). *Indian BIRDS* 7 (4): 112.
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Manuscript received on 7 August 2010.

Location: Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (20°15'N, 79°25'E), near Nagpur, Maharashtra, India.

Fig.. 1. Rufous Tree Pie *Dendrocitta vagabunda* feeding on Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*.

On 9 June 2010 I spotted a Rufous treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda* feeding on a Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus* **(Figs. 1-2)**. The kill looked fresh and there were no other birds or mammals around at the time. While I did not see the Rufous Treepie actually kill the drongo, I inferred that the bird must have done so since no other predators were present at that time and the bird looked freshly killed and was not decomposed. Fig. 1 shows the treepie eating the drongo.

Fig. 2. The tail streamers of the Drongo are partially visible.

Fig. 3. Rufous Tree Pie about attack the bat.

On the morning of 10 June, and at almost exactly the same place, I witnessed a fascinating battle between a Rufous Treepie and a bat (Chiroptera) **(Figs. 3-7)**. I do not know the species of the bat. It was not the pipistrelle. Its body was about 7.5–10 cm long with a wingspan of 15–18 cm. It had a cream coloured abdomen. The Rufous Treepie attacked the bat ruthlessly, using its feet, and beak, to deliver blows. It was repeatedly striking the bat on its neck while the bat was trying to save itself by biting the bird. The whole attack lasted for three minutes till the treepie caught the bat around its neck and held on to it for a further five minutes till the bat stopped moving. I took images of the entire episode.

Figs. 4 & 5. Rufous Tree Pie attacking bat.

Fig. 6. The Rufous Treepie using its feet to grasp the bat.

Fig. 7. Rufous Treepie gripping the bat on its neck.

Photos: Rohit Ganpule

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* and Jerdon's Baza *Aviceda jerdoni* in Saiha, Mizoram

Nimesh Ved & T. John

Ved, N., & John, T., 2011. Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* and Jerdon's Baza *Aviceda jerdoni* in Saiha, Mizoram. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (4): 113–114.
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Introduction

North-eastern India, comprising the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Tripura, forms part of a rich biogeographic unit and is among the biodiversity "Hotspots" of the world (Choudhury 1999; Myers *et al*. 2000; Ved & Lalramnuna 2008). Within the hotspot our efforts are concentrated in the state of Mizoram. Mizoram (21°58'N–24°35'N, 91°15'E–93°29'E) covers an area of 21,081 kms^2 (Anonymous 2006). In broad terms, the forests of Mizoram are classified as 'Cachar Tropical Evergreen (IB/C3),' and 'Cachar semi evergreen (2B/C2),' by Champion & Seth (1964). Its land and people have a tendency to being somewhat detached, obscure, and unknown, finding scarce mention in literature, whether historical, anthropological, or ecological (Singh 1996).

Saiha district, located in extreme southern Mizoram, covers an area of 1,965.81 kms^2 and its headquarters are situated at an altitude of 1,226 m (Anonymous 2005). 42 mammalian spp., were recorded during recent wildlife surveys, at three sites within Saiha (Datta-Roy *et al*. 2007). Palak Lake, locally referred to as *Pala Tipo (*Ved *et al.* 2008) is an Important Bird Area *(*IBA) (BirdLife International 2008). The forests around Palak Lake are rich in palms, rattans, dense cane-brakes, and reeds along the lake margin. Nine amphibian spp., and 21 reptiles were recorded in the vicinity of the lake during the course of a survey by Pawar & Birand (2001).

Saiha shares a northern boundary with Lawngtlai district. Some of the best rainforest of north-eastern India is found in southern Mizoram, covering parts of the districts of Lawngtlai and Saiha (Choudhury 2006). The forest cover offers contiguity with the Blue Mountain National Park (BMNP). The BMNP is located in south-eastern Mizoram at 22°39'N, 93°02'E, close to the Myanmar border and the Chin Hills. The total area of the park is 50 km^2 (Ghose 2002).

Species

We undertook a survey during February and March 2009 in an area south of Palak Lake in Saiha. During this survey we recorded both these birds.

One Steppe Eagle was noticed on 25 February 2009 at Khaiky village (22°01'03"N, 92°55'35"E). It was around 0900 hrs on a clear day and we were about to begin our walk for the day. The bird had a loud infrequent call that was heard as it flew above the village. It was visible on and off for about 30 min., before we walked away from Khaiky. While the bird remained unphotographed we were able to notice a white band placed between two colours very clearly.

The Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* is a widespread winter migrant and prefers wooded hills, open country, and lakes (Grimmett *et al*. 1998). It is a large heavy-set raptor with a prominent yellow and fleshy gape that extends almost beyond its eye. In wintering haunts it is not territorial, its movements and numbers being governed solely by the search for food. It is attracted to abundant food sources such as poultry farms, garbage dumps, *etc*., (Naoroji 2006).

One Jerdon's Baza was spotted on 4 March 2009 near Lomasu village (22°06'10"N, 92°51'48"E), on the banks of Kolodyne River (22°13'43"N, 92°50'12"E). It was around 1100 hrs on a clear day and we were moving from Lomasu to Tuidang village when we saw it perched 10 m up a tree on the riverbank. We slowed down, stopped the boat, and observed it for 20 min., as it perched motionless, before we rowed on **(Fig. 1)**.

Jerdon's Baza *Aviceda jerdoni* is resident, prefers broad-leaved evergreen forest (Grimmett *et al*. 1998), is rare, endangered, shy, and crepuscular (Ali 2002). It has a rufous-brown head, a strongly streaked back, is a sluggish flier, and hunts from ambush. Its northern race *A. j. jerdoni* ranges from north-eastern West Bengal (Mahananda and Buxa Reserves), Sikkim, Assam, and associated north-eastern hill states to Arunachal Pradesh, seasonally frequenting moist-deciduous to evergreen forest in the foothills from 150 m upwards, mainly between 350 and 1,800 m (Naoroji 2006).

In their bird lists for Mizoram, Zonunmawia & Pradhan (2004) have listed 201 species while Choudhury (2008) has listed 479. Neither of them lists Steppe Eagle, while Choudhury (2008) records Jerdon's Baza as an uncommon resident; the location of this sighting however is not mentioned. Pawar & Birand (2001), in their survey around Palak Lake, and Dutta-Roy *et al*. (2007) in Saiha, have not listed both these species. Ghose (1999) does not list the two taxa in his survey at Blue Mountain National Park, while Naoroji (2006) has marked the area overlapping Mizoram as, "presence suspected," for Jerdon's Baza, and, "rare winter visitor," for Steppe Eagle.

Photo: Nimesh Ved

Fig. 1. Jerdon's Baza *Aviceda jerdoni* in Saiha.

Conclusion

These sightings confirm the presence of these rare birds in Saiha, Mizoram. Hunting is culturally sanctioned and widely practiced in Saiha and impacts birds in a negative fashion. Select myths and beliefs that exist in the local society exacerbate the pressure on wildlife. We therefore believe that regular communications focusing on natural values occurring in a region are pertinent towards wildlife conservation in these remote, forested lands (Ved & Lalramnuna 2008).

Acknowledgements

We are thankful for the all round support provided by the forest department of Mara Autonomous District Council. Special acknowledgements are due to Pu Thaly Azyu and Pu N T Sanga for sharing their vast knowledge of the region, its wildlife, and help with the survey. Sincere gratitude is due to the donors who supported Samrakshan's efforts in Mizoram: Columbus Zoo, Kidendran Nature Conservation Fund, Rufford Small Grants and United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Yash Shethia and Justus Joshua we thank for help with identification of the bird in the photograph. Colleagues accompanying us on the survey and people giving us place in their houses during the survey we shall ever be indebted to.

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Plumage description of the juvenile White-bellied Shortwing *Brachypteryx albiventris*, and a note on its phenology

V. V. Robin

Robin, V. V., 2011. A description of the juvenile White-bellied Shortwing *Brachypteryx albiventris*, and a note on its phenology. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (X): 115–116.
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The White-bellied Shortwing[1] *Brachypteryx albiventris* is one of the endangered (BirdLife International 2010), endemic birds of the Indian Subcontinent. Until recently there was very little information on the biology of the species, with less than 100 sightings in the last 120 years (Robin & Sukumar 2002; Robin *et al.* 2006). However, recent studies have raised the level of information available on this species. Even so, the juvenile of the species has so far not been described (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005).

Here I characterise the plumage of the juveniles of this species based on data from four years of mistnet-based captures from 2004 to 2008. I have also tried to include some key descriptions to identify the juvenile of this species from that of other confusingly similar species.

This study was conducted at Grasshills National Park, in the Anamalai Hills of the Western Ghats, between 2004 and 2008. Birds were captured using mistnets placed on natural trails in the forest. These nets (12mx2m) were placed at a density of 10 nets per hectare in each plot. The nets were kept 'open' to capture birds, from the break of dawn (0550 to 0600 hrs) for five hours each sampling day. Each net was visited at least every 30 mins in a cyclic manner so that birds do not remain in the net for long. Birds were transferred from the net to individual, dark-coloured cotton bags till they were tagged with numbered metal bands. A total of 149 birds were captured during the study.

Ten of these were juveniles, which were captured from across the study period. For every individual captured, bill, and tarsus lengths were measured with a digital vernier calliper (Series 500, Mitutoyo Corp., USA), flattened chord wing, and tail, lengths with a wing rule (WING15ECON, Avinet Inc., USA), and body mass with weighing scales (30g, Pesola AG, USA) (De Beer *et al.* 2000; Ralph 1999).

Plumage & morphology

The plumage colour of a juvenile is slaty-blue, like an adult shortwing, but with mottled brown plumage. The amount of mottled brown on an individual varies **(Figs. 1–3)**, perhaps indicating difference in age, and changes from more blotchy young individuals to more blue older individuals. The colour of the irides is grey in juveniles, and not the deep-brown, or reddish-brown colour irides of an adult bird.

A summary of key quantitative morphometric characters is provided in Table 1. Clearly there is variation in the size of juvenile birds, once again, perhaps depending on the age of the individual bird.

1. A.k.a., White-bellied Blue Robin

Photos: V. V. Robin

Fig. 1. White-bellied Shortwing juvenile with greyish iris. All photos: V. V. Robin.
Fig. 2. A highly mottled juvenile White-bellied Shortwing.
Fig. 3. A midly mottled White-bellied Shortwing juvenile.

Photo: Divya Mudappa

Fig. 5. Landscape of Shola habitat where endemic birds including the White-bellied Shortwing are found.

Photo: V. V. Robin

Fig. 4. A juvenile Nilgiri Flycatcher *Eumyias albicaudata*.

It must be noted that a juvenile White-bellied Shortwing resembles a juvenile Nilgiri Flycatcher *Eumyias albicaudata* **(Fig. 4)** in its plumage colouration. Juveniles of both the species are slaty-blue. Nilgiri Flycatcher being the lighter of the two, with mottled brown plumage. The distinguishing character between these two species may be the longer tarsii of the shortwing, while the flycatcher has a more erect stance, and additionally, white at the base of its tail feathers, which latter is a known diagnostic character of the Nilgiri Flycatcher. It can be reliably used to distinguish a juvenile as well.

Timing of breeding

Juvenile shortwings were captured across the year, in April (1 bird), July (4), September (1), October (1), and November (3). It may be noted that the sampling effort was not equal across different months. Hence these data cannot be interpreted across months, nor can they be used as an indicator of breeding intensity. It does, however indicate that the timing of breeding is indeed variable in the species, spanning almost eight months of a year. This was also noted while conducting a study on the breeding song of this species. This result could also be possible from multiple breeding bouts, for example a peak during the south-western monsoon, and another with the retreating monsoon later in the year.

While this study provides some preliminary information on juveniles, and phenology of the White-bellied Shortwing, a more detailed study that examines individuals from the egg stage to adulthood will throw more light on the biology of the species. More intensive monitoring all through the year may also be required to understand phenology and its drivers of this threatened endemic.

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Table 1. Morphometric measurements of the juvenile White-bellied Shortwing

	Right tarsus (mm)	Right wing (mm)	Tail (mm)	Bill (mm)	Weight (gm)
N	6	10	9	6	8
Mean	27.12	76.1	65.22	16.94	22.5
Max	29.4	78	86	17.8	25.75
Min	20.9	72	60	16	19

Hornbills in southern Mizoram: history, beliefs, and recent sightings

Nimesh Ved

Ved, N., 2011. Hornbills in southern Mizoram: history, beliefs, and recent sightings. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (4): 117–119.
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Manuscript received on 13 September 2010.

"Chika … Chika … ," the tea-stall owner called out with a '*puri*' (deep fried Indian bread) in her hand, and out of nowhere a hornbill appeared on the counter and noisily took the puri in its beak. I gobbled up the puri I was eating in wide-eyed silence. The tea-stall owner did not divulge much about the hornbill but the staff at the Tourist Lodge at Chaltlang (23°45′14″N, 92°43′30″E), shared later in the day, that the 'fellow' had been there for more than a year and was very smart. It was partial to fruits (and fruit vendors) and, according to the locals, did not waste its energies by flying in the city—it travelled atop city-buses! Sharing the pictures with Aparajita Datta the very next day helped erase confusions I had about the species—a female Wreathed Hornbill *Aceros undulatus*. However, it rekindled my curiosity to know more about this stunning species in the part of Mizoram where I used to have my home and field base. Southern Mizoram spans two districts, Saiha (22°29′15″N, 92°59′08″E), and Lawngtlai (22°30′59″N, 92°53′28″E), and is referred to by Choudhury (2006) as having some of the best remaining rainforests in north-eastern India. This contiguous landscape also houses Ngengpui Wildlife Sanctuary, Blue Mountain (Phawngpui) National Park, Tokalo Wildlife Sanctuary (proposed), and Palak Dil (or lake; 22°12′04″N, 92°53′29″E). I had come across hornbills during my stay in these parts and was keen to know more of the species that I had seen first in Balpakram National Park (Garo Hills, Meghalaya), the noise of whose wings I had excitedly heard while screening Shekar Dattatri's film, 'Silent Valley,' in villages within the Garo Hills Elephant Reserve.

My mishaps with local languages precede my interest in birds and this led to my initiating efforts with compilation of local names of hornbills. Two languages are primarily in use in the landscape—Mizo and Mara (Saiha is also referred to as Maraland). Zonunmawia & Pradhan (2004) enlist flora and fauna of the state and give the Mizo names of four hornbills (in bold): Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*—**Vapual**, Wreathed Hornbill—**Kawlhawk**, Brown Hornbill *Anorrhinus tickelli*—**Vangai**, and Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris*—**Vahai**. A publication by the state forest department (Anonymous 2006) corroborates this listing. In his seminal work, *The Lakhers*, Parry (1932) says, "Vahia is the name of the small hornbill, and the village took that name as it is a favourite haunt of these birds." [*Maras were also referred to as Lakhers*.] I gladly recalled my trips to Vahai (or Vahia; 22°13′17″N, 92°56′36″E). I recall my interactions with village council members at Tuipang (23°19′02″N, 93°01′26″E) during September 2008. We had three gatherings during the visit in course of our efforts in conservation education. In each of these we put bird field guides to good use and had them interact with us about the birds in the guide. They pointed to Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis* and said they had seen around their village!

Since I moved to Mizoram I have been fortunate to have the inclination and energy to read more on the region, particularly books by commissioners and missionaries who visited these lands some decades ago. Parry's (1932) is one of the more amazing books I have come across in terms of addressing details. In his description of tribes, he states,

> "The Mihlong clan claim to be descended from the Great Indian Hornbill. No member of this clan may kill a hornbill, as they say that if they ever ate Hornbill's meat it would be equivalent to eating their father and mother. The Mihlong, however, do not offer any sacrifice to the hornbill."

While describing beliefs prevalent in the society he goes to painstaking details,

> "It is '*ana*' (prohibited) however to shoot the cock bird of any of the four kinds of hornbill found in the hills during the nesting season which lasts from March to July. When the hen hornbill hatches out her eggs and brings up her young inside a hollow tree, she never moves out until her nestlings can fly, when the cock removes the clay which encloses her in the nest and lets her out. Meanwhile she is entirely dependent on the cock for all her food. For this reason Lakhers believe that if they shoot the cock, Khazangpa (*God*) will be angry and punish them, as the hen and her young will inevitably die; hence it is an *ana* to kill a cock hornbill at this season. Lakhers, however, have no scruple whatever about killing and eating a hen and her young. As soon as a man has marked down a hornbill's nest, he reserves it for himself by driving a bamboo or wooden stake into the trunk of the tree. This is called *pahaw*. When the young have grown large enough to be worth eating, the finder of the nest robs it and kills and eats the hen and her young. When any one robs a hornbill's nest, he must place a short piece of bamboo or stick in the nest before he leaves it. This is called *masongpa*. The belief is that when the cock comes home and finds his family gone, he picks up the piece of stick in his beak, carries it off to the King of Hornbills and tells him that his family has been killed with this stick. The King of the Hornbills, seeing that the hen and her brood have not died because the cock had neglected to feed them, gives the widower another wife. Next year the cock brings his new wife to make a nest in the same hollow tree, and thus affords another feed to the man who has reserved the nest. Once a man has reserved a nest it is his forever, and he believes that so long as he puts a piece of stick in the nest after robbing it, he can take the nest every year with impunity, as the hornbill will always find another mate."

As I write I recall another incident concerning hornbills in Baghmara, South Garo Hills (Meghalaya) (25°07′37″N, 90°23′36″E). We had screened a wildlife film and were in the

middle of post screening interactions when participants shared their views and reactions. An old lady shared a Garo saying which compared lazy women to hornbills, for the latter do not move for months on end while their spouses get food for them!

Other than a handful of surveys, southern Mizoram has remained in the proverbial rain shadow of wildlife research. Going through them did throw some light. Pawar & Birand (2001) in their seminal work on north-east Indian birds (where two of the sites surveyed by them were in south Mizoram) mentioned Oriental Pied Hornbill at Palak Dil and Great Hornbill, Wreathed Hornbill, and Oriental Pied Hornbill at Ngengpui Wildlife Sanctuary. Ghose (1999) did not report any species of hornbills from his survey at Blue Mountain National Park. Choudhury (2006, 2008) wrote of having seen Oriental Pied Hornbill at Ngengpui Wildlife Sanctuary, Palak Dil, between Laty and Phura (Saiha), and of having heard their calls in Blue Mountain National Park. He came across old casques of Wreathed Hornbills at Sangau and Thaltlang (Lawngtlai) near Blue Mountain National Park. He presumed that the Great Hornbill was once common based on the number of preserved casques he saw in villages but says that the species has now become extremely rare and locally extirpated owing to hunting and habitat loss. We listed the Great Hornbill among the avifauna of Palak and adjoining forests in our contribution to Islam & Rahmani (2008).

In Mizoram I have been fortunate in experiencing some special moments when I came across hornbills. Oriental Pied Hornbills seem to have the least problem with my savouring the sight of their grandeur. First (27 May 2008) I saw this species when returning from Palak Dil to Phura (village nearest to Palak Dil; 22°19′52″N, 93°02′35″E). It was perched on top of a dead tree in the valley to our right and was calling loudly. I was part of the team that surveyed the proposed Tokalo Wildlife Sanctuary and had the opportunity to walk through some amazing forests on the India–Myanmar border. As we began our exercise (12 February 2009) we saw two of them between Phura and Tokalo (22°10′26″N, 92°53′25″E). Strange noises from the vehicle had forced this stop and I was loitering around when both birds fluttered and flew towards the adjacent secondary growth. Prior to the moment I had not seen them from so close and it was one of those occasions where I have been happy with the vehicle not functioning properly. During the survey we walked streams marking the boundary of the sanctuary with posts and set up temporary camps each evening. The ambience in these camps was amazing: banana leaves formed the bed, tea was served in bamboos cut up and used as cups (some images from the survey can be found in: http://mizoram-samrakshan.blogspot.com/2009_03_01_archive.html), and one of us was assigned duty each evening to ensure the shoes of the team got dry enough with the heat. As I woke up lazily in one such camp I was stunned to see (20 February 2009; 2201′18″N, 92°52′23″E) seven hornbills flying over us, with two leaders, three in the middle and two in the rear. They were snow-white when seen from below, and exhibited amazing grace as they flew. It was surely a dramatic way to wake up and finally I understood the difference in the tail markings (*vis-á-vis* the Great Hornbill); the black band was clearly missing today. I had yet another exciting sighting during my last trip to Palak Dil (24 January 2010). Five of them flew out of the canopy very near to Palak Dil as we entered the gate. The last sighting (31 March 2010; 22°22′58″N, 92°47′53″E) was at our camp in Ngengpui Wildlife Sanctuary. On 23 December 2009 I was distressed to see one displayed for being sold at the New Saiha market in

Chika, the female Wreathed Hornbill *Aceros undulatus*, in Aizwal, Mizoram. Photos: Nimesh Ved.

List of Important Bird Areas and protected areas		
Name	Link	Citation
Balpakram	http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/sitefactsheet.php?id=18283	BirdLife International (2011) Important Bird Areas factsheet: Balpakram Complex. Downloaded from http://www.birdlife.org on 05/12/2011
Ngengpui	http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/sitefactsheet.php?id=18322	BirdLife International (2011) Important Bird Areas factsheet: Ngengpui Wildlife Sanctuary. Downloaded from http://www.birdlife.org on 05/12/2011
Blue Mountain	http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/sitefactsheet.php?id=18318	BirdLife International (2011) Important Bird Areas factsheet: Blue Mountain (Phawngpui) National Park. Downloaded from http://www.birdlife.org on 05/12/2011
Palak	http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/sitefactsheet.php?id=18323	BirdLife International (2011) Important Bird Areas factsheet: Palak Dil. Downloaded from http://www.birdlife.org on 05/12/2011

Saiha. This was just before Christmas when people were on a buying spree. It looked very sad and even had small shiny stickers on its casque.

I came across the Great Hornbill (19 February 2009; 22°01′21″N, 92°52′08″E) during the above-mentioned survey. I recall talking to myself then, "Gosh, it has such a charisma, it's the tiger of birds!" We saw (31 March 2010) another near the base camp at Ngengpui Wildlife Sanctuary on an overcast day just before it rained heavily.

I sighted two Wreathed Hornbills (01 December 2010) at the Blue Mountain National Park and this was memorable. We looked down from the peak into the valley that appeared like a green carpet and saw them gracefully moving as if two white patches glided from right to left till they disappeared from our view.

The final sighting was the Brown Hornbill (30 March 2010) just before we reached Bungtlang (22°21′16″N, 92°46′30″E) with colleagues from the Mizoram Forest Department. The hornbill sat on a tree beside the road in the misty evening. The thrill of having seen it silenced me for a while. We were to participate in the tiger census at Ngengpui Wildlife Sanctuary and the sighting provided a wonderful impetus to the exercise.

The century-old practices presented in this article give a glimpse of the wildlife hunting– conservation scenario at that time plus the knowledge the tribes possessed of the species. The forests of southern Mizoram offer opportunities for conservation of Hornbills and other forest birds and warrant long-term protection efforts. Local teams should be assembled and encouraged to take part in research and surveys of these species. These teams could further help in propagating the need to conserve them by virtue of their membership in youth associations and other social institutions, e.g., family and church.

Acknowledgements

I am thankful for the wonderful support provided by the Mizoram State Forest Department and the Forest Department of the Mara Autonomous District Council; Pu Tlana in particular for his encouragement and the energies he brought in the efforts. Colleagues accompanying us on the survey, people sharing their rich knowledge of the region and warmly inviting us in their houses (for tea, meals and stay). I shall ever be indebted to Aparajita Dutta for help with species identification,Samrakshan Trust, the organization I was then associated with and the donors who supported Samrakshan's efforts in Mizoram, Columbus Zoo, Rufford Small Grants, Kidendran Nature Conservation Fund, and United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Thanks are also due to the editor of Indian Birds and an anonymous referee for their invaluable help.

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Website links

A pet hornbill was shot in Aizawl and culprits arrested: http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-02-14/wild-wacky/28546814_1_hornbill-jail-custody-pet.

Aizawl, which has quite a few bloggers, also did talk about the bird ~ http://mizohican.blogspot.com/2011/02/chp-336-rip-zika.html.

This is from my blog: http://mizoram-samrakshan.blogspot.com/2010/09/they-say-she-is-smart.html.

Bibliographic notes on EHA's 'The common birds of Bombay'

Aasheesh Pittie

Pittie, A., 2011. Bibliographic notes on EHA's '*The common birds of Bombay.*' *Indian BIRDS* 7 (4): 120–122.
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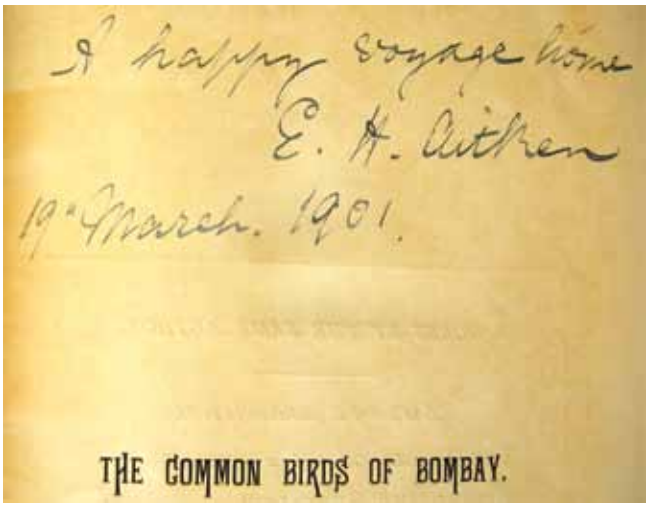
The works of Edward Hamilton Aitken (1851–1909[1]), popularly known as EHA, have a cult following that defies time. Among ornithologists, his '*The common birds of Bombay*' is like gold dust. His works were published at the turn of the twentieth century, and ever since the enthusiasm of his fans has remained unabated. Sálim Ali, no ordinary writer himself, speaks with deep veneration of EHA's prose, in the volume of *Common birds* that he edited in 1947.

Despite the popularity of this work, we do not know the dates of publication of its first two editions[2]. It is widely believed that since EHA's newspaper articles appeared in the *Times of India* prior to 1900, the first edition must have appeared in that year, or soon afterwards. However, no one is certain (Mengel 1972).

In trying to establish a date of publication of EHA's *The common birds of Bombay* I do not seek to execute a bibliographic coup, for indeed the work does not contain anything that would overturn scientific ornithology: no dating or priority issues, no new names proposed or ornithological theories propounded, no '*Mihi*' moments. I simply take this opportunity to try and add to the pleasures of EHA fans by unravelling the journey of his endearingly celebratory record of Indian birdlife and birdlore.

A book is 'dated,' in one of several ways. The easiest is when the publisher prints the year of publication either on the title page, or in the imprint page, behind it. Sometimes, one finds a later, or even an earlier date than the one mentioned on the above two pages, inside the book, either at the end of a preface, or a foreword. This date, if later, is then taken as the year of publication; if earlier, it might be useful for other points of research.[3] When none of these forms of dating is present to be followed, then one begins to scout around for clues from the book world: library catalogues, reviews in journals, bibliographic records, *etc*., intending to arrive at an approximate date of publication. Probing deeper, one searches for hints dropped by the author or his friends and acquaintances: journal entries, private correspondence, presentation copies, inscribed copies, *etc*.



Photos: Aasheesh Pittie

Fig. 1a. EHA's inscription in the 1st ed., presentation copy of *Common birds*.

The 1st edition

Recently I acquired a volume of EHA's *Common birds* that is, hold your breath, a presentation copy from the author to an unknown person. It is inscribed by him on the half-title page, "A happy voyage home," signed, "E. H. Aitken," and *dated* "19th March. 1901," **(Fig. 1a)**. This might be the earliest dated copy of EHA's book yet recorded. It might also be a first edition, first printing. I will describe the book first and then show why I claim this.

The volume is bound in cloth on boards, a rich navy blue in colour, with the title reverse-embossed in gild in the upper left hand corner. The author's popular pen name, EHA, is similarly reverse-embossed on the lower right hand corner of the upper board. The rounded spine carries the title in its upper side, also in gilt. The front cover is plain, i.e., un-illustrated **(Fig. 1b)**. The endpapers of this volume have a delicate floral pattern (aka:

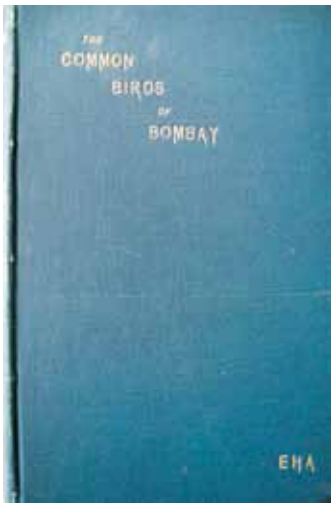


Fig. 1b (L). Cover of 1st ed., of *Common birds*.
Fig. 1c (R). Fleuron-patterned endpaper of 1st ed., of *Common birds*.

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Hamilton_Aitken [downloaded 3 Nov 2011.]
2. Edition: "Strictly speaking, an edition comprises all copies of a book printed at any time or times from one setting-up of type without substantial change (including copies printed from stereotype, electrotype or similar plates made from that setting of type); while an impression or printing comprises the whole number of copies of that edition printed at one time, i.e. without the type or plates being removed from the press" (Carter & Barker 2004).
3. A good example is the 1947 ed., of Common birds, which Sálim Ali edited. His preface dated from January 1945, in which he speaks of the 1st ed., being published, "In the 40 odd years since the articles were first published in the Times of India …" (p. v).

Fig. 2a. Gift inscription on free front endpaper of 2nd impression of 1st ed., of *Common birds*.

fleurons) in a faded lilac hue **(Fig. 1c)**. There is no date given anywhere in the book. This volume matches exactly, well, almost, with another that has been digitised and uploaded on the www.archive.org[4] website. So why do I claim this to be a 1st ed., 1st printing?

In my library is another specimen of this book which is also inscribed, this time on the free front endpaper with the words, "Rex from Maude," and dated, "30th August 1903," **(Fig. 2a)**.

Someone who has not seen the earlier version could consider this example to be from a first edition. Almost everything in its geography and bibliographic detailing is similar to the above-described volume, except for the following:

1. It has a different cover. This one also is bound in cloth on boards, but the cloth is greyish in colour. The title is in black ink in the top third of the cover, and the author's initials, EHA, are in the bottom left corner. In the centre is reproduced EHA's inimitable sketch of a Black Drongo, with an insect in its beak, perched upon a bare branch **(Fig. 2b)**.
2. The endpapers are of plain paper.
3. The fore edge of the cloth binding, at least in my copy, extends beyond the edge of the boards, forming a loose (not stiff) edge **(Fig. 2c)**.
4. The title on the spine is all along it and running vertically upwards.

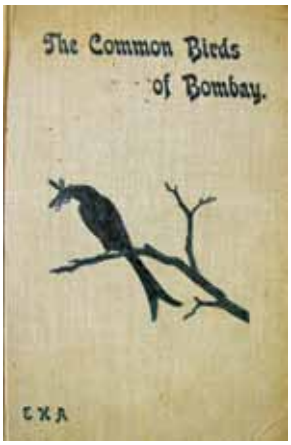


Fig. 2b. Cover of 2nd impression of 1st ed., of *Common birds*.

Fig. 2c. Loose fore-edges of upper and lower boards.

This volume seems to be a second impression[5] of the first edition, published with a different cover after the first lot sold out by 1903, or perhaps a little earlier. It employs the same type as the earlier volume, and so could be a reprint that used the original standing type, or it could be that the first impression was rebound with a different cover. It is the existence of this volume that prompted me to claim the earlier one as a 1st ed., 1st impression.

After reading this note, my friend Humayun Taher, pursued the mystery of the undated first edition, till he dug up evidence of its publication in 1900 (pers. comm., vide email dated 22 November 2011). This was in the introduction to EHA's posthumously published Concerning animals and other matters (1914), wherein Surgeon General W. B. Bannermann wrote, "In 1900 was published The Common Birds of Bombay," (?p. 7). This I believe confirms my copy to be from that 1900 printing.

The 2nd edition

But there *was* a second edition. This was also published with no dated title page. Its title page carried the epithet, "2nd Edition" **(Fig. 3a)**. There are several changes visible in this volume.

1. The cover remains cloth on boards. However the illustration and type used for the title differ from the earlier volume **(Fig. 3b)**.

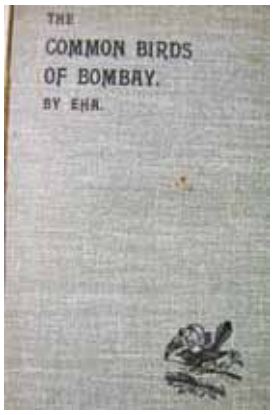


Fig. 3a (L). Title page of 2nd ed., of *Common birds*. Fig. 3b (R). Cover of 2nd ed., of *Common birds*.

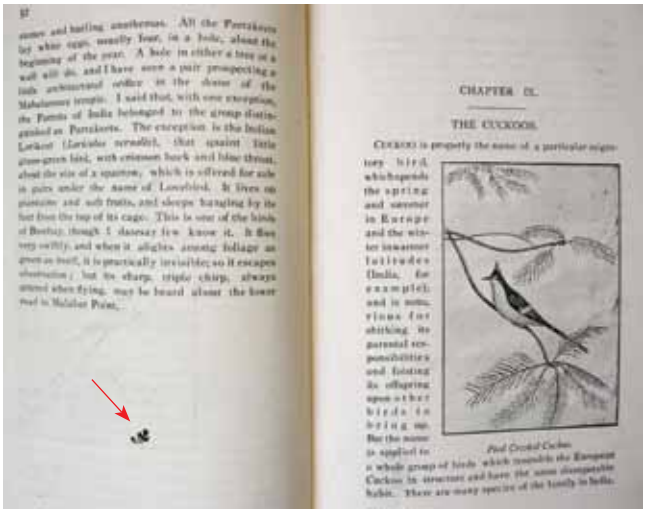
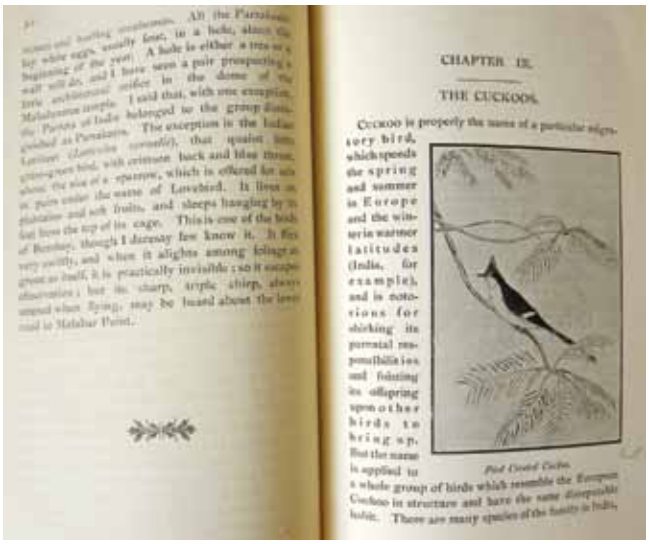


Fig. 4a. Vignette on p. 52 of 1st ed., of *Common birds*.

4. http://www.archive.org/details/commonbirdsofbom00aitkrich
5. Impression: "The number of copies of an edition printed at one time …" (Carter & Barker 2004).


CHAPTER IX.

THE CUCKOOS.

Cuckoo is properly the name of a particular migratory bird, which spends the spring and summer in Europe and the wintering warmer latitudes (India, for example), and is notorious for shirking its parental responsibilities and foisting its offspring upon other birds to bring up. But the name is applied to a whole group of birds which resemble the European Cuckoo in structure and have the same disreputable habits. There are many species of the family in India.

Pied Crested Cuckoo.

Fig. 4b. Vignette on p. 52 in 2nd ed., of *Common birds*.

Fig. 5. Dust jacket of the 3rd ed, of *Common birds*. Artist unknown, but perhaps EHA himself, as the initials appear in small print on the artwork.

2. The spine carries the title in the upper part (or head), and the publisher's name near the lower end (or tail).
3. Pagination remains the same, as does the type used for the text block.
4. All vignettes (aka: glyphs or ornaments) used as tail-pieces of chapters differ from those in the earlier two volumes, which were identical **(Fig. 4a & 4b)**. This is the critical element that demonstrates that it is, as claimed, a second edition. It would take a great deal more study to be sure that no corrections have been made in the text used for the first edition.

The 3rd edition

As far as I know, the edition published after this is the one edited by Sálim Ali and dated 1947 (Fig. 5). It carries the epithet, "3rd Edition," on the title page and on the imprint page, and the latter includes, "Published 1947."

In the final analysis, we find evidence that the first edition was probably published in 1900 and that it was certainly in existence as a published work in March 1903; we trace an hitherto unknown second impression of that edition; and we confirm the existence of an undated second edition. For the time being we must be content with the result of our bibliographic research, but further material may surface in the future. For an annotated bibliography of EHA's "*Common birds*" see Pittie (2010).

Now to hold the volume that EHA himself held and inscribed, and sink into his incomparable prose, and think on remaining questions such as: to whom did EHA present this copy? Why were they going home? Where was "home"? Did he present it at a sending off party, or was it thrust into a hand in the nick of time, as its recipient boarded the ship?

EHA's correspondence, and diaries beckon!

A view of the spines of various editions of *Common birds*.

Acknowledgements

My deep thanks to Humayun Taher for whetting this note, and for ultimately locating evidence for the first edition's publication date and to Edward Dickinson for improving its readibility.

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Story of a bird book: it's journeys and owners—a postscript

Lieut General (Retd) Baljit Singh

Singh, B., 2011. Story of a bird book: it's journeys and owners–a postscript. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (4): 123.
Lieut General (Retd) Baljit Singh, House No. 219, Sector 16-A, Chandigarh 160015, India. Email: *naturefan3@gmail.com.*

> *"This is a partly historical, partly fictional recreation of the history of a book's journeys in South Asia. The meetings between Walton and Whistler, and Whistler and Jones, are a presumption by the author derived from the recorded dates of movements of Walton to UK and within India as also of Whistler between 1909 and 1920,"* Indian Birds Vol. 6 No. 6.

I had lived with the story of that Bird Book, day and night, for a better part of nearly six years before setting it in text. The more it churned in my mind the more I believe in the textual authenticity of my narrative. So, when the ever so meticulous and "correct" editor of *Indian BIRDS* proposed the above re-produced foot-note to the article, I did feel dejected but in no way convinced of the editorial interjection!

But I was elated when within a few days of its publication, there arrived a letter from quarters totally unknown, namely Ralfe Whistler from The Dodo House, Caldbec House, Battle, East Essex, dated 10th January 2011.

"Dear General Singh,

I was most interested to read your recent article in the Indian Bird Magazine, about the travels of that Bird Book and the mention of my father and the Jones, etc. It's nearly 100 years ago when it all happened; I am 80 and my father Hugh Whistler died when I was 12. But I was lucky to have met here so many of the great Ornithologists such as Salim Ali, Hutchesuka, Stresmann, Ticehurst (*Surgeon Captain*, *The Indian Army*), and the head of the Smithsonian Museums etc etc. I knew the Jones daughter, Silvia Jones, who came to live with my mother after Partition, and latter she and her two brothers migrated to Western Canada where I met her too. I have spent 7 months collecting birds and snakes for The Natural History Museum in Northern Australia. So can skin birds too, am by no means a very good ornithologist.

Many of my ancestors served in India and I know of 7 who are buried there; some were in the Army, others teachers. Hugh Whistler's cousin, Lushemir Whistler was the last British General in charge in India, and I knew him very well. I have only been there twice, but did manage a great pony trek from Kashmir to Leh in Ladarkh (spelling), which was most interesting. I wonder if you served there as there were a lot of soldiers from India there confronting possible threats from China.

I was brought up with some 40,000 Indian Stuffed birds in the museum here, before they all ended up in the Natural History Museum. So I got to know a little bit about the families and Orders of Indian and Sri Lankan birds.

If you ever come to England do come and see me here, it's only one and a half hrs by train, from London and I have a large collection of artifacts of the Dodo, bird of Mauritius which became extinct in about 1680; in fact about 700 articles, such as books, pictures, sculptures, textiles etc etc., which I lend out to Museums from time to time.

Good Luck,
Sd-
Ralfe Whistler."

What a pity that Surgeon Captain Ticehurst should have passed away a few years too soon before Hugh Whistler's dream project to write a definitive book on Indian birds in collaboration with his friend, could fructify. A greater pity is that there is no Hall of Fame dedicated to our ornithologists.

Letters to the Editor

Birds of Nainital District

I was shocked to read the article, "Birds of three different forest habitat in Nainital district (Western Himalaya), Uttarakhand, India," by Kamal Joshi & Dinesh Bhatt, in *Indian Birds* 7 (2): 33–37. This paper contains erroneous and misleading information about species that have no possibility of occurring in the area. The Common Golden-backed Woodpecker *Dinopium javanense*, resident in hills of south-western and north-eastern India has been included as a summer visitor in the list of birds recorded in this paper. Similarly the Bar-bellied Cuckooshrike *Coracina striata* that is resident in Andamans has been recorded as a winter visitor. Some time back, Yellow-cheeked Tit *Parus xanthogenys* was split into two species namely Black-lored Tit *Parus xanthogenys* and Yellow-cheeked Tit *Parus spilonotus*. Whereas a subspecies of the former, *P. x. xanthogenys* occurs in the area and is recorded by the authors, the latter species occurring in the eastern Himalayas and the north-eastern Indian hills has also been recorded. Black-throated Prinia *Prinia atrogularis*, a species found in the eastern Himalayas and north-eastern Indian hills also figures on the list of species recorded in the study.

District Nainital is blessed with amazing bird diversity and there would probably be more than 550 species that have been recorded from this area. In a span of two years, by recording just 160 species, the authors have not justified the funds raised for their project from the UGC-SAP grant. Besides these, there are other technical problems with the paper. The status of many species is given incorrectly. Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*, a winter visitor to the area is shown as resident. Eastern Skylark *Alauda gulgula*, a resident, is shown as winter visitor. Eurasian Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*, a winter visitor is recorded to be resident. Long-tailed Minivet *Pericrocotus ethologus* is altitudinal migrant in the district of Nainital. It occurs in the foothills during winters & goes to higher elevations to breed in summers. The status of this species is given as winter visitor. Bulbuls are known to feed on a wide variety of foods, including fruit, seeds, nectar, small insects and other arthropods and even small vertebrates. The status of four species of bulbuls recorded in the study is given as 'frugivore.' I am amused to learn that all the Corvids on the list are classified as 'frugivore' except, for some unknown reason, the Black-headed Jay *Garrulus lanceolatus* and Jungle Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos* that are mentioned as 'omnivore'. Blue-headed Rock-thrush *Monticola cinclorhynchus* breeds in the area during summers. In winters it migrates to the Western Ghats. But it is treated as a winter visitor to the area by the authors. Oriental Magpie Robin *Copsychus saularis* is a resident of district Nainital but is shown as a summer visitor. Here I have just given a few examples , whereas the list of species with wrong status is long. The authors have used Grimmett *et al*. (1998), a modern-day field-guide showing status & distribution, yet they have erred in many places.

What surprises me even more is that how could the authors, in a span of two long years, miss out some of the most common species of the area. I would like to name a few such species here. Hill Partridge *Arborophila torqueola* can commonly be heard in areas in the immediate vicinity of Nainital town. Red-breasted Parakeet *Psittacula alexandri* is a common resident of lower foothills around Haldwani. Common Hawk Cuckoo *Hierococcyx varius* is one of the most vocal birds in areas around Haldwani from March to September. Common birds like Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyceros birostris* (common around Haldwani), Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops (*breeding resident), Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis* (common at lower elevations), White-browed Wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis* (common breeding resident), and House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* (common at lower elevations) do not figure in the bird list at all.

The authors failed to find a single species of kingfisher during their two-year study whereas species like Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* can be seen foraging on the shores of Naini Lake in the middle of Nainital town. Other common species of kingfishers found on River Gola flowing next to bustling twin cities of Kathgodam and Haldwani are White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis,* Crested Kingfisher *Megaceryle lugubris* and Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis.* Similarly none of the bee-eaters, swifts, owls, nightjars, rails & crakes, snipes, waders, gulls, terns, grebes, cormorants, egrets, herons, storks, pittas, leafbirds, shrikes, dippers, martins & swallows, tesias, wren-babblers, leiothrixes, shrike-babblers, accentors, munias, finches and buntings have been recorded during the study. The authors can claim that since the study was focused on species dependent upon forests, certain groups of birds like egrets and cormorants could afford to evade their attention. Here I would like to point out that in habitats like Haldwani, these birds can easily be seen on open rivers like Gola that are bordered on both sides with thick forest. However, I am surprised at entries like Lesser Coucal *Centropus bengalensis,* Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis* and Eastern Skylark *Alauda gulgula* that are not found in forest habitats but are grassland species.

Indian BIRDS is a journal of international repute. Lot of hard work, on part of the editorial team and various authors, has gone in to attaining this reputation. Publication of loose material is detrimental to the repute of the journal. It seems that the authors had taken upon themselves, a task they were not capable of carrying out. This paper is like a virus in the Indian ornithological literature. Now that it is published, it remains as a blot on Indian Ornithological literature, and extremely difficult to rectify. I urge you to be more vigilant in the future, and request you to kindly look into how such major lapses were allowed to be published.

– Manoj Sharma
Village Shankarpur, Ramnagar,Dist. Nainital, Uttrakhand 244715, India.
E-mail: treeswift@gmail.com

Response of authors

With reference to the letter written by Mr Manoj Sharma regarding the article 'Birds of three different forest habitats in Nainital district (Western Himalaya), Uttarakhand,' [*Indian BIRDS* 7 (2): 33–37] I would like to submit the following:

Previous reports from this region indicated either 127 [Tak, P. C., 1995. Aves. In: *Himalayan ecosystem series fauna of western Himalaya, Uttar Pradesh*. Part I (Ed. Director) Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta, pp. 169–200], or 81 avian species [Sultana, A.,

& Khan, A. J., 2000. Birds of oak forest in the Kumaun Himalaya, Uttar Pradesh, India. *Forktail* 16: 131–146], and not 550 species as mentioned by Mr Sharma. Rather, a total of 623 species have been recorded from the entire Uttarakhand (Narwade, S. S., Jathar, G. A., & Rahmani, A. R., 2006. Bibliography of the birds of north India. *Buceros* 11 (1): 2 pp., 1–144. (Pp. 120–122).

I would appreciate if Mr Sharma brings out a list of 550 bird species from Nainital district in the form of scientific publication. In the first instance, on the Internet, I could not come across any such avian list/report published by any author from this region.

Based on my sightings I understand that some populations of Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*, Eastern Skylark *Alauda gulgula*, and Eurasian Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* may be resident or winter visitors in this region.

The main feeding guild of bulbuls is frugivore [sub feeding guild- frugivore-insectivore, please see Table 5 (p. 36) of the article].

Other species such as Common Hawk Cuckoo *Hierococcyx varius*, Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyceros birostris*, Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops,* Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis*, White-browed Wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis*, House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, kingfishers, waders, gulls, terns, grebes, cormorants, storks, *etc*. are generally found in urban/rural areas or riverine habitats and hence were not included in the list of the forest bird species (as this study focused on the forest birds).

Lesser Coucal *Centropus bengalensis,* Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*, and Eastern Skylark *Alauda gulgula* were sighted at the edges of the forest habitat and hence included in the forest bird list.

I deeply regret the wrong identification, in case of Common Golden-backed Woodpecker *Dinopium javanense*, Bar-bellied Cuckooshrike *Coracina striata*, and Black-throated Prinia *Prinia atrogularis*, and typographical errors (at my end) regarding inclusion of some species of corvids under frugivore category, and for wrongly showing Blue-headed Rock Thrush as winter visitor and Magpie Robin as summer visitor.

I am grateful to Mr Sharma for reading my article carefully and pinpointing the problems of the paper. I apologise for these mistakes (inadvertently) committed by me. I apologise to my co-author for submitting the manuscript directly to *Indian BIRDS* (IB), and responding to comments from reviewers also without consulting him.

– Kamal Joshi
School of Allied Science, Graphic Era Hill University,
Dehradun, Uttarakhand